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# URBAN CONTRADICTIONS IN SIMILAR PROJECTS: THE CASES OF ALPHAVILLE AND URBANOVA AT THE ORIGIN OF CONTEMPORARY DISPERSED BRAZILIAN URBANIZATION

## CONTRADIÇÕES URBANÍSTICAS EM PROJETOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS: OS CASOS DE ALPHAVILLE E URBANOVA NA ORIGEM DA URBANIZAÇÃO DISPERSA NO BRASIL

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Received: 06/0/2024

Accepted: 12/31/2025

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## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the differences expressed in contemporary and seemingly similar urbanization programs. It considers the case of the initial Alphaville experience in Barueri, in the São Paulo Metropolitan Region, in comparison with Urbanova, in São José dos Campos, in the current Metropolitan Region of Vale do Paraíba and Litoral Norte. Despite originating in the same period, the 1970s, the time of the “Brazilian miracle,” their processes followed distinct contexts, leading to discrepant results. This article aims, through the comparison of these two original experiences, to contribute to the critique of the current vogue for contemporary urbanization in its dispersed form, composed of exclusionary spaces represented by gated communities and horizontal condominiums, mainly in metropolitan regions. The study relies on official documents from the developing companies, urban planning projects, field research, and government actions of the municipalities involved, as well as press material to compose a comparative analysis of the planning processes, showing how the complexity of urbanization projects can shape different urban models and social configurations. It was possible to conclude that both projects, although having distinct trajectories, reinforced the postmodern model of dispersed and exclusionary urbanization, highlighting the dominant role of the real estate market in the production of space, especially geared towards local economic elites, resulting in socio-spatial configurations shaped by contemporary neoliberal logic.

**Keywords:** urban and regional planning; Urban contradictions; Alphaville; Urbanova; Metropolitan regions.

## RESUMO

O presente artigo aborda as diferenças expressas em programas de urbanização contemporâneos e aparentemente semelhantes. Considera-se o caso da experiência inicial de Alphaville, em Barueri, na Região Metropolitana de São Paulo em comparação com Urbanova, em São José dos Campos na atual Região Metropolitana do Vale do Paraíba e Litoral Norte. Apesar das origens no mesmo período, a década de 1970, momento do “milagre brasileiro”, seus processos seguiram por contextos distintos acarretando resultados discrepantes. Este artigo tem como objetivo, a partir da comparação dessas duas experiências originais, contribuir para a crítica à atual urbanização contemporânea em seu modo disperso, composto por espaços excludentes representados por loteamentos fechados e condomínios horizontais, principalmente nas regiões metropolitanas. O estudo se apoia nos documentos oficiais das empresas empreendedoras, nos projetos urbanísticos, nas pesquisas de campo e nas ações de governo dos municípios envolvidos, além de material de imprensa para compor a análise comparativa dos processos de planejamento para mostrar como a complexidade dos projetos de urbanização pode moldar diferentes modelos urbanos e configurações sociais. Foi possível concluir que ambos os empreendimentos, embora tenham trajetórias distintas, reforçaram o modelo pós-moderno de urbanização dispersa e excludente, evidenciando o papel dominante do mercado imobiliário na produção do espaço, especialmente voltado às elites econômicas locais, resultando em configurações socioespaciais moldadas pela lógica neoliberal contemporânea.

**Palavras-chave:** Planejamento Urbano e Regional; Contradições Urbanísticas; Alphaville; Urbanova; Regiões Metropolitanas.

## INTRODUCTION: HOW THE STUDY IS JUSTIFIED IN THE FIELD OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Some experiences of Brazilian urbanization, when compared in their processes, may present common characteristics that often lead us to erroneous generalizations. The following study starts from the analysis of two apparently similar projects: on the one hand, the case of Alphaville, in Barueri in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, and on the other, Urbanova in the current Metropolitan Region of Vale do Paraíba and Litoral Norte, also in São Paulo state. Both are the result of the same historical moment, the beginning of the 1970s; they are urbanization projects proposed for the proximity of expanding centers; they intended to insert themselves into the economic dynamism characteristic of that time; they were strategically located on the margins of important national road axes; they presented original urban planning projects, relatively independent of the centers of origin and indicated the possibilities of metropolitan dispersion that would become one of the main hallmarks of contemporary Brazilian urbanization. Such proximity, in itself, already constitutes sufficient provocation for analysis and comparisons. However, as will be demonstrated, this is only a starting point. From another angle, they represent the transition between two models that were opposed as theoretical proposals and ideology.



Thus, this article aims, through the comparison of these two urbanization programs, to contribute to a critique of contemporary urbanization in its dispersed mode, composed of exclusionary spaces represented by gated communities and horizontal condominiums, mainly in metropolitan regions. This comparative analysis is justified within the scope of the discussion on regional development because it highlights how two different institutional arrangements, which relied on business strategies and public management decisions, shaped urban processes and reconfigured territories, producing lasting socio-spatial inequalities. By examining how these two models of urbanization and gated residential enclaves emerged, consolidated, and influenced distinct metropolitan trajectories, the article contributes to understanding territorial dynamics that went beyond traditional urban planning, discussing the role of the real estate market, the articulation between actors, and the impacts on the social and environmental cohesion of the territory.

## **METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES USED IN THE INVESTIGATION OF THE URBAN PROCESSES STUDIED**

The following article relies especially on the analysis of the historical process of the economic, social, and political conditions that marked these experiences. It is not intended here to develop proposals for theories on comparative and critical urbanism, as proposed by the works of more recent authors, such as Jennifer Robinson, which are valid in giving voice to previously disregarded social groups, in experiences that innovate and critique old canons of urban studies. However, for the case discussed here, precisely because of its framing within a period marked in Brazil by the prohibition of social participation, we are obliged to consider the means available at that time, as they are more suitable for the analysis of the period in question. This more modest goal is directed towards observation related to the morphology resulting from the historical and aesthetic evolution, comparative and descriptive of each case, here supplemented by in situ contact with the study areas, such as helicopter overflights, fundamental actions for a better understanding of the morphological whole. In part, this stance is justified by the intention that this article not be restricted to the academic community, but also question those who adhere to current urbanization models in a way that is more directly linked to the interests of real estate capital.

Many recent studies have addressed the topic of dispersed urbanization and gated communities. Although this is not such a recent phenomenon, with examples dating back to the 1920s, the cases studied here are remarkable for pointing to a paradigm for urbanization projects to the liking of an upper-middle class that is beginning to seek the fringes of many Brazilian cities. This is a wealthy periphery, far from the common concept of impoverished edges, as the current notion of this term usually suggests. In other words, the duality of Brazilian urban peripheries is confronted here, that is, “rich and poor, each in their place,” as Baltrusis and D’Ottaviano (2009) say.

For this analysis, in addition to a literature review on the subject, materials produced by those responsible—government and investors—for each of the projects were used, as well as the media coverage of each step at the time. Although the limitations of this approach are acknowledged, they are justified by the absence of criticism imposed by censorship on the press, but mainly on debate and social participation when the concepts of development dictated by the central government were questioned. As a common procedure, politicians and businessmen met and decided, beyond any occasional and rare participation from society, on actions aligned with the national ambitions emanating from Brasília, often far removed from local analyses that would, in principle, be more accurate.

Thus, the decisions of municipal governments, despite the original similarities between the two projects, also contributed to these experiences, leading to very different, perhaps even opposite, results. It should also be noted that at that time, urban planning projects were carried out under scarce regulation, practically restricted to a few local norms that varied greatly from municipality to municipality. Indeed, the legal framework that would regulate the subdivision of urban land on a national scale, Federal Law 6766, known as the “Lehmann Law,” only emerged at the end of 1979, when the programs discussed were already in an advanced stage of implementation. Furthermore, the secondary and subservient role of municipalities to the federal and state levels, as established in the then-current Federal Constitution of 1967, must be added, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study. More than a simple comparison between such cases, the analysis reveals a moment that is at the origin of dispersed and exclusionary urbanization, which spread from that time and is still expanding as a desire of a middle and upwardly mobile social stratum, identified with the individualism characteristic of the neoliberal order.

## METROPOLITAN DYNAMICS OF SÃO PAULO AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW URBAN ENCLAVES

Our theoretical framework is guided by Milton Santos's (1993) study on the contradictions and peculiarities of urbanization in Brazil. Santos argues that Brazilian urbanization does not follow a homogeneous pattern, but rather a logic that produces inequalities. It results from the articulation between dependent capitalist development, selective modernization, certain state policies, and the actions of large national and foreign companies. According to Milton Santos, another characteristic resulting from these contrasts is what the author called "corporate urbanization," in which decisions by large economic groups structure the territory. According to Santos:

Legitimized by the ideology of growth, the practice of modernization creates, throughout the territory, particularly in cities, the infrastructure, but also the norms indispensable to the victorious rational operation of large firms to the detriment of smaller businesses and the population as a whole. Hence, in a short time, concomitant results: the extraordinary generation of wealth, increasingly concentrated, is not contradictory to the enormous production of poverty, increasingly widespread, while new middle classes emerge (1993, p. 104).

In the mid-19th century, the arrival of immigrants was fundamental in creating the dynamics of industrialization based on the economy initially accumulated through coffee export agriculture, with considerable impacts on the development of São Paulo (Gala, 2005). The territorial basis of its growth was supported by the construction of a vast road network, initially with railroads that connected the capital to the interior of the state and were geared towards the flow of agricultural production. Economic development, which grew with the beginning of industrialization, contributed to a population influx towards the capital, which established itself as a national and South American metropolis. It was then that a road network was added to the railway network, reinforcing the urbanization process induced by the establishment of consumer goods industries, resulting in a nationwide migratory process.

The transition from the 1960s to the 1970s marked, in much of the West, the gradual shift from Keynesian public policies, characterized by the state's presence in coordinating the economy, to the economic and political model known as neoliberalism, which took hold in the final phase of this period. The so-called "Brazilian miracle" is part of this context and corresponds to the surge in economic growth that occurred between 1968 and 1973, characterized by the growth of the

Gross Domestic Product. This phase was characterized by increased industrialization, accompanied by a similar increase in urbanization and especially by programs that accompanied the euphoria encouraged by the political climate and inflation control. The macroeconomic situation created a favorable environment at the national level, as well as opening up to international investments, which translated into the inflow of dollars at advantageous rates. In a way, as traits of the Keynesian legacy, the State intervened in the economy in an effort to develop productive forces, even if through instruments of repression of labor movements and social expressions.

It was during the 1970s that a political will to accelerate and synchronize metropolitan and financial movements crystallized more clearly in Brazil. During this period, the country was immersed in a civil-military dictatorship whose political and economic orientation was developmentalism, originating in the thinking of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), which presupposed industrialization as an anchor, but which, at that moment, was undergoing reformulations (Furtado, 1974, p. 61). Thus, a new regionalization began to be shaped according to the political and economic needs that were configured in the Second National Development Plan of Brazil (II PND - 1975-1979), resulting in the creation of the first Metropolitan Regions. As Maria Adélia de Souza observes, at that time the vision of the city was functionalist, and urban growth was understood as a result of the development of industrial functions (Souza, 1999, p. 118).

It was in this scenario that the Alphaville and Urbanova developments were born. The two cases are contemporary and similar, insofar as their original projects proposed the creation of new urban centers focused on economic activities that were relatively independent, or autonomous, from the structure and morphology of the host municipalities that would house them.

However, the developmental euphoria of this kind of state-incentivized capitalism rested on quite vulnerable foundations, since they were supported especially by the inflow of foreign currency investments, mainly US dollars, and therefore subject to the fluctuations of the complex international situation that would later result in a significant increase in external debt. Thus, with the crisis of the Fordist model at the end of the 1960s, exacerbated by the sudden variation in the price of oil in 1974, a fundamental item for that model, the economic situation projected by both the Brazilian government and the market in general was progressively reversed, with particular implications for

the fall in real estate capital investments. In the new context, the experiences under analysis would be explored in depth regarding their differences, showing, in time and space, unforeseen variations that contributed to each case taking sometimes opposite directions.

This period, according to Diniz and Campolina (2007), is considered the moment of greatest industrial concentration in the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP). In 1970 alone, it held 34% of the country's occupation and 42% of its industrial production, which, from that moment on, boosted the growth of other metropolitan regions, other cities and regions, consistent with the process of expansion of the urban-industrial network and the deconcentration of industrial polarization (idem, p.28). In 1980, the RMSP's occupation rate had fallen to 29%, and industrial production also declined to 33%.

In terms of space, the Fordist system, based on agglomeration economies, showed signs of exhaustion when confronted with the socioeconomic transformations of the period. In the specific case of São Paulo, high real estate market values and a lack of infrastructure hindered its operation. This fact, partly common to agglomerations, ended up producing diseconomies caused by its typicality, breaking the balance necessary for the system (Lipietz, 1983). In the case of São Paulo, this situation led many companies based in the RMSP to seek new production spaces, a process that would later lead to the globalization of markets and economies, implying a profound interdependence of economic processes, affecting companies, countries, and individuals.

The economic expansion of the RMSP was affected, in a way, by its geophysical characteristics, which constituted the main conditions of its spatial organization, and by the geoecological conditions from which road trunks developed that led to metropolitan expansion along various axes. One of these was the connection of the São Paulo Metropolitan Region (RMSP) with Rio de Janeiro, reinforced by the duplication of the Presidente Dutra Highway (1967), incorporating the Paraíba Valley – and especially São José dos Campos – into the expanding metropolitan complex. Also in the direction of the interior, the Presidente Castelo Branco Highway (1968) was inaugurated, linking the capital to the cities of northwestern São Paulo and northern Paraná, with three lanes and a speed limit raised to 120 km/h, unprecedented standards for Brazil at the time. In the following decade, new highways would connect the capital to other points in the interior and, under new conditions,

to the Baixada Santista region. These events would contribute to altering the spatial configuration of the metropolis, creating several microregions within a radius of less than 100 km from the center of the municipality of São Paulo, bringing a new configuration to the industrial implantation of these regions (Diniz and Campolina, 2007, p. 31).

## THE NEOLIBERAL URBAN LOGIC AND THE EMERGENCE OF ALPHAVILLE

The conception of Alphaville coincides, on the one hand, with the consolidation of an urban system that in 1973 evidenced the first Brazilian metropolitan regions, but, on the other hand - and in the specific case of São Paulo - brings the affirmation of a circulation and logistics network with the implementation of new road axes that modernized and dynamized this system with the opening of new vectors.

Initially conceived only as an industrial center, the Alphaville project arose from the opportunity to purchase part of the Tamboré Farm, a plot of land of approximately 5,000,000 m<sup>2</sup> belonging to the heirs of Count Álvares Penteado, in Barueri, completed by the Albuquerque Takaoka Construction Company. As Renato Albuquerque, then managing director of the construction company, recounts, "there was not yet any intention to build a residential development, much less to build the 14 residential buildings and all the structure that would come later" (ALPHAVILLE, 2003, p. 10). According to Alphaville, "the initial intention was to create a center for non-polluting industries, on land with all the necessary infrastructure – paved roads, water, electricity, telephone, things that didn't exist back in the 1970s" (ibid.). The company's own statements, then a construction company still far from the urban developer it would later become, reveal how much it saw itself as part of the industrial expansion process that the São Paulo metropolis was undergoing, without, however, taking into account the complexity of the decentralization process that was taking shape. Alphaville is an example of a development that adapts to the needs of the real estate market by taking advantage of the potential of a plot of land that was initially idle to establish an industrial center. Indeed, the first companies to set up in the development corresponded to the promises of the industrial center: Hewlett Packard (HP), Sadia, DuPont, and Confab, all in 1974. With these clients, the program began to include exclusive areas for offices, in addition to the initial project, that is, the market's interest in offices 23 kilometers from the center of São Paulo. At that moment, the then industrial center was transformed into Alphaville Industrial and Business Center (ibid. p.16).

For Leopoldo, the emergence of Alphaville is conceived and produced as one of the unfoldings of the emergence of the metropolitan-financial era, being a real estate product that represents and accompanies, in the national territory, “the transition from urban to metropolitan, the pioneering production of gated communities, the modernization of the metropolitan region, regional fragmentation, and local homogenization” (2018, p.96). The project’s implementation was linked to two main factors: escaping the congested space of the capital city, coupled with the growing production of an increasingly segregated and exclusionary land occupation model, very much to the liking and culture of the rising urban elites who were then asserting themselves. Supported by proximity and ease of commuting time, “twenty minutes from Faria Lima,” as the advertising of the time stated, the Alphaville Industrial and Business Center would be followed, in 1975, by the first Alphaville Residential. Thus, the project would also introduce apartment towers compatible with the housing developments, permanent residences appealing to residents who would have a relationship with nature, in a setting quite different from that found in the capital (Ivan, 2003).

These justifications, however, did not respond solely to pragmatic needs, but were part of a more complex movement. The beginning of the 1970s already indicated, especially in an economy in crisis like Brazil’s, a break with the governmental presence as seen in Fordism. As Pedro Abramo says, “throughout the urban Fordist period, the market had a very important role in the production of urban materialities, however, this role was mediated by the State in defining the rules for land use (...) modern urbanism and decisions on state spending on infrastructure and urban equipment” (Abramo, 2007, p. 25). In that model, subjected to the constructivist rationalism of modern urbanism, the “return of the market” (Abramo, *ibid.*) was then imposed as a guiding element in the structural production of the neoliberal city.

Observing the proposed use and occupation of space in the early phases of Alphaville, the adaptations of its initial project to market demands in its subsequent phases become evident. While in the original project, Avenida Rio Negro defined the backbone of the street layout, in later stages, this logic was broken. The morphological base supported by industrial lots, office buildings, and apartments with access still open to public use was abandoned, giving way to the continuity of the walled “city.” The residential complexes that would be incorporated into the first Alphaville emerged according to laissez-faire demands, without even a group plan or master plan as identified in developments of this nature (Figure 01).

**Figure 01**



Alphaville and surrounding area (not to scale, created by the authors using Google Earth, 2023).

The final stretch of Avenida Rio Negro symbolically marks the limit of the public access area. At the point where the avenue is intersected by the entrance to Residential 1, the initial concept is abandoned, while the social segmentation of the space is proposed. In the conception and appeal of Alphaville, the disruptive space is intentional. It is no longer simply the lack of overall planning that establishes the new space with the implementation of large lots for single-family homes. As Janoschka observes, the processes of social polarization, the abandonment of the management and control of urban development by the State in Latin America, and its appropriation by private actors have reflected a new spatial distribution. In a clear redirection towards neoliberal logic, citizens increasingly seek private organizations, considered more efficient by the new order and located in neighborhoods that provide services that were previously public, such as schools, cultural and leisure facilities, commerce, hospitals, and security. This resulted in the emergence of new urban forms intended for the “winners of economic transformations,” who began to reside in suburban areas as part of a trend toward “secure housing” that would become decisive in the growth of metropolises (Janoschka, 2002, p. 12). Only in this circumstance can one interpret the desires of the societal model that was consolidating at that moment or, as the advertising for the launch of

yet another Alphaville Residential project proclaimed, “Sooner or later, all neighborhoods in São Paulo end up becoming a passage to other places. Except Alphaville” (ALPHAVILLE, 2003, p. 19). This quote reveals the explicit intention of the exclusionary segregation of interaction that characterizes urban life, previously restricted to privileged areas of the central region, but which at this moment advances to peripheral spaces well supplied with infrastructure and access, yet still unexplored.

Previous experiences with gated residential communities in the city of São Paulo date back to 1924 with the implementation of Chácara Flora. As observed in several examples from that time, there was a movement among the wealthy population to enclose themselves in certain neighborhoods, expressing spatial division and social disintegration through physical barriers and access limitations. This case, among other exclusive developments in the southern zone, already indicated the search for large tracts of land located between the center of São Paulo and peripheral municipalities. However, the reasons for this undertaking, being a development that proposed a pleasant location, then in the middle of the Atlantic Forest and far from the hustle and bustle of the city of São Paulo, did not have the complexity of Alphaville. It was the subsequent alterations of the original Alphaville, moving towards the first successful gated community development, from the point of view of real estate capital applications, that created the Alphaville brand, the signature of the lifestyle of an economically and socially ascendant bourgeois class, identified with the cultural values expressed by neoliberal stances that hide an exclusionary reality under the euphemism of “exclusive.” Thus, the lack of action by the State ends up enabling the creation of a new “constellation of powers,” by transferring the management of urban development to private investors when restricted access becomes a generalized phenomenon (Janoschka, 2002, p. 16).

In this new configuration, Alphaville becomes an increasingly financialized company, since little remains of the original Construtora Albuquerque Takaoka. Today, Alphaville Urbanismo S/A operates with capital from various investor groups and, in this way, its real estate product is immersed in a network of production and reproduction of financial capital articulated with mechanisms of exchange, production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of the real estate product in the regional metropolis (Leopoldo, 2018, p. 54).

## INDUSTRIAL DECENTRALIZATION IN THE GREATER SÃO PAULO METROPOLITAN REGION AND THE PARAÍBA VALLEY VECTOR

The largest urban center in the Paraíba Valley, São José dos Campos, has a peculiar history. From an indigenous settlement administered by Jesuits in the 16th century, it only became a town in 1767, about a century after the first occupations of the Paraíba Valley. However, throughout the 18th century and after being elevated to city status in 1864, it remained a simple and poor urban center, even during the golden age of coffee in the region. However, from 1920 onwards, the city began to seek alternatives that would allow it to retain an active population in that location and attract some investment. The solution was found in the alleged capacity of the municipality's climate to contribute to the treatment and cure of tuberculosis, a fact that allowed it to request its classification as a senatorial resort. According to the sanitary policy adopted by the State of São Paulo at that time, the intention was to segregate patients in centers near the capital. In this way, the city found in the disease the cure for its economic apathy. Designated in 1935 as a Climatic and Hydromineral Resort, it began to receive resources from the State that were directed towards investments in infrastructure. With the implementation of sewage networks, street paving, and lighting, the conditions that differentiated it from all other urban centers in the region were finally created. In a way, this would be the first step towards reaching a later stage when it would become known as an industrial city supported by a high-tech base.

As a sanatorium city, the urban space of São José dos Campos was conceived in 1932 with its pioneering territorial planning plan, when a type of zoning was developed that used the perspective of tuberculosis as a parameter to organize and order the sanatorium city (Zanetti, 2008). According to Simone Lessa (2002), from the 1930s and 1940s onwards, São José dos Campos became a laboratory city, willing to develop projects and experiments that changed its trajectory and its political, economic, and social relations.

The industrialization of São José dos Campos needs to be considered within a broad national process, based on the developmental project that was incorporated into the country from the 1940s onwards, with the state of São Paulo serving as a regulatory framework for the federal government's actions in favor of the country's industrial growth. The industrialization process of São José dos Campos can be divided into three phases. The first of these is situated between the years 1920 and the end of

1940, when the industries installed represented the ceramics and textile sectors. The second industrial phase was concentrated in the period from 1950 to the end of 1960, characterized at that time by the diversity of production and receiving the impetus of the creation of the Via Dutra highway, in addition to the Aeronautical Technical Center (CTA) and the Technological Institute of Aeronautics (ITA), all in 1950. From then on, large multinational industries began to arrive in the country, guided by the developmentalist policy promoted by the governments of Getúlio Vargas (1951-1954) with the installation of basic industries, mainly represented by the National Steel Company (Cia. Siderúrgica Nacional), in the Rio de Janeiro section of the Paraíba Valley, but substantially reinforced by the program to attract industries contained in the Goals Plan of the government of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) when the substitution of imports of durable consumer goods began. São José dos Campos, with its location on the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis, received industries such as General Motors, Eaton Yale & Towne, and Ericsson, among others. The third phase of industrialization in São José dos Campos began in 1970 and is characterized primarily by the development of a technological base. The creation of Embraer (1969) and the National Institute for Space Research INPE (1971) are good examples of this period.

In the Paraíba Valley, urbanization developed along the Via Dutra highway, impacting its largest urban centers, São José dos Campos and Taubaté, which in the mid-20th century would share the region's polarization. In this context, the diversification of São José dos Campos' industrial park was more dynamic, with better chances of growth, while Taubaté, with less industrial presence, relied on strong performance from tertiary activities of regional scope (Ribeiro-Moreira and Mello, 2010, p. 11). However, in the 1970s, the process of metropolization of the Paraíba Valley region changed, giving São José dos Campos the role of an "emerging metropolis" due to the regional character of the service sector and the commercial activities that were then reinforced.

In 1970, the cities of Caçapava, Jacareí, and Taubaté, near São José dos Campos, had 385 industrial establishments and employed 14,200 people, while São José dos Campos alone had 275 commercial establishments and employed 17,800 people (Costa, 2007, p. 29). At that time, there was a significant expansion of the industrial base in São José dos Campos, one of its main factors being the process of industrial deconcentration from the metropolitan region of São Paulo. Other aspects also contributed to this, such as the city's strategic location between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the emptying of the

countryside in Alto Vale and Southern Minas Gerais, in addition to the aforementioned ITA and CTA, which already indicated in 1970 the basis for the urban growth that would transform the municipality into one of the most important agglomerations in the country.

The population growth generated a new demand for housing, infrastructure, and services, causing a reshaping of the space in the municipality. During this period, all city planning began to be conceived with a view to economic development, since the municipality already had an urban-industrial spatial structure in an advanced stage of consolidation (Costa, 2007, p.97).

## THE URBANOVA CASE: THE PROPOSAL FOR A “NEW CITY” IN A CITY IN THE INTERIOR OF SÃO PAULO

The development policy of the government model at the time advocated for openness to investment programs and the attraction of foreign capital, which, starting in 1967, led to a significant increase in the presence of Japanese companies in Brazil (Uehara, 2006, p. 3). Thus, the 1970s became a period of entry for Japanese capital, seduced, in part, by the good performance of the Brazilian economy perceived internationally. The opening of the liberal credit policy of the so-called “Brazilian miracle” led to substantial GDP growth between 1969 and 1973, when it grew from 9.8% to 14% per year. In the search for new international spaces, shareholders of Fukuoka Jisho Bank opted, in 1973, to invest in Brazilian soil. According to Shigotaka Economoto, nephew of the group’s then-president, Shishima Hifumi, Brazil was chosen because of the country’s “financial leeway,” facilities, and political stability, despite the pessimism expressed by some European economists regarding vulnerable factors in the Brazilian economy, including the escalating inflationary process (Jornal do Brasil, 07/31/1977).

The choice of São José dos Campos was made considering the previous experiences of other Japanese groups in the country and of Fukuoka Jisho Bank itself, which is still active in real estate ventures today. After a sweep of a 100 km radius around São Paulo, interest in São José dos Campos quickly emerged. Shunji Ito, from “Consultrade - Consultoria e Assessoria,” visited the city accompanied by Fábio Yassuda, who had been Minister of Industry and Commerce in the government of Emílio Garrastazu Médici, and the broker Luziano Froés. In the city, they joined Col. Sérgio Sobral

de Oliveira, the mayor/intervenor appointed by the governor of São Paulo, who “provided all the information about the region” and, according to news from the time, even accompanied the Japanese businessmen on some overflights (Jornal do Brasil, 07/31/1977), a fact that reaffirmed the choice for this city.

The area acquired for the investments corresponded to 1,280.45 ha on the west side of the municipality, then belonging to Mantiqueira S.A. Agropecuária and Fazenda São José S.A., properties of the Olivo Gomes family, who had been president of Tecelagem Parahyba and were part of Fazenda Santana do Rio Abaixo, belonging to that business group. Thus, the commercial company that would confirm the name Urbanova was created, registered with the Ministry of Finance under CGC 44011690/0001 (Jornal do Brasil, 07/31/1977).

The goal was to create a new city, an urban development project that would promote the resizing of the then-promising São José dos Campos, a proposal that would justify the title and concept expressed in the project's name: Urbanova.

The proposal to create a new city reflected the culture and imagination of the time. In 1973, the most celebrated example of modern urbanism, Brasília, was still recent, although it already presented natural contradictions to innovative urban experiences. Among the criticisms of Brasília, the excessive rigor in the occupation of space and its zoning of functions, the dependence on individual and motorized transport, and the fact that its plan did not consider the regional insertion of the new capital stood out.

The Urbanova project implied something ahead of the Brasília Pilot Plan. Its urban plan was contracted to Jorge Wilheim Arquitetos Associados, associated with COPLASA - Engenharia de Projetos S.A., PLANASA - Planejamento e Assessoria S.A., and Rosa Grena Kliass - Paisagismo, Planejamento e Projetos LTDA. Its more flexible urban plan, respecting the terrain and consistent with the natural environment, was the result of a team that included, in addition to Wilheim, who had extensive experience in public planning and participated in the Brasília competition, renowned professionals such as Aziz Ab'Saber and Csaba Deák, among others (URBANOVA, 1975, p.105).

The plan contained a complete diagnosis of the entire region, a physical, socioeconomic, and market survey, and created alternative urban structures in conjunction with the city's urban

area. 515.8ha were planned as residential area (36.7%); green areas (17.8%); road system and parks (38.1%); industrial area (6.7%), and 14.5% for “eventual needs for city expansion” (Jornal do Brasil, 07/31/1977). It guaranteed the construction of a shopping center and residences for consumers with incomes above 14 minimum wages, but also the construction of houses for low-income families, with 148.49 hectares reserved for 4,184 residential units financed by official entities such as CECAP - Companhia Estadual de Casas Populares (State Housing Company), COHAB - Companhia de Habitação (Housing Company), and INOCOOP - Instituto de Orientação às Cooperativas Habitacionais de São Paulo (Institute for Guidance to Housing Cooperatives of São Paulo) (idem).

Despite being linked to Fukuoka Jisho Bank, Urbanova was founded with a capital of only 2 million cruzeiros, with the funds used to purchase the land being raised in Europe by French and Dutch banks, with the guarantee of Fukuoka Bank, using the purchased land as collateral. The execution of the works would be the responsibility of Fukuoka Jisho S.A., Fukuoka Mutual Bank, one of the largest private banks in Japan, and Obayashi-Gumi S.A., one of the four largest construction companies in Japan. Financing from The Export-Import Bank of Japan and advice from JICA - Japan International Cooperation Agency, the latter working on several development programs in Brazil, also contributed (NOVAURBE, n.p., n.d.).

Urbanova's morphological proposal expressed the intention to balance new projects with the desires of the Brazilian tradition, where cities are consolidated in a historical and cultural process and not from a rigid and ready-made project. His Master Plan bore similarities to other urban plans insofar as it repeated the classic formula, *cardus et decumanus*, but adapted to the natural terrain. The reference point is adopted by the Urbanova project insofar as it cites the creation of the national capital as “the only precedent for an undertaking of this type (...) that meets the potential of the region, taking advantage of its momentum and contributing to the realization of this potential” (URBANOVA, 1975, p. 6). However, for the hills of Urbanova, Wilheim proposed a diversified occupation to follow the terrain and other natural elements, including the Paraíba do Sul River, which simultaneously limited and separated it from the urban area of São José dos Campos. Thus, parks emerged around the main natural landmarks, the commercial and business center, and residential occupations in group plans (Figure 02).

**Figure 02**



Urbanova Project, 1974 (JW Arquitetos Associados)

In the urban planning proposal, emphasis was placed on the concepts of the main city center, its secondary centers, and especially the concept that defined a new city as proclaimed in the original project. In this project, the locations for vertical sectors were studied in relation to the commercial and business center, including the originality of occupying the hillsides in ways uncommon in Brazil, for which a system of roads for motor vehicles was proposed, separated from non-motorized traffic.

## ECONOMIC CRISIS, URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS, AND THE DIVERGENT FATE OF THE ALPHAVILLE AND URBANOVA DEVELOPMENTS

As mentioned, in the early 1970s, São José dos Campos was part of the foreign capital investment movement due to its relative economic dynamism, and it was through this that it received new companies that led to the restructuring and expansion of its industrial park. However, the first oil crisis in 1973 significantly altered the international economic situation, interrupting the flow of foreign capital, which, added to national political and economic factors, sealed the end of the “economic

miracle" phase. These reasons, combined with local implementation problems, caused changes in the Urbanova project plans. Over the following years, the planned models and pace of implementation would prove unfeasible. More than the economic issues and their unfolding on the social level, the new configuration would directly affect the proposals contained in the concepts of the Urbanova project.

In the new context, now under the name "translated" to NovaUrbe S.A., the original plot of land was fragmented and dispersed among different developments, linked to local groups, subject to the logic and financial opportunities of the market. The new process of space production resulted in an urban structure devoid of holistic logic. Thus, a huge housing complex of gated communities and subdivisions, vertical or horizontal, aimed exclusively at housing, is progressively implemented. In this, the centralities, so dear to the original project and, above all, the proclaimed concept of the city, are disregarded. The current Urbanova, by inserting itself into the market production common to many Brazilian cities, hardly configures itself as a neighborhood, much less as an urban project. Produced by neoliberal logic, the new space confirms itself as its opposite, the negation of the city and urban life.

Data from the Municipality of São José dos Campos (2016) counted 52 gated communities, of which 31 were in the West region and 23 specifically in Urbanova (Costa, 2019, p. 104). The urban morphology of Urbanova as it is today constitutes an irregular mosaic of subdivisions and condominiums without connection between the plots, where large walled surfaces create "blocks" of up to three kilometers in length, control is implemented inside by gatehouses that restrict access to public areas, privatized by legal artifices, while the sum of the subdivisions intercepts any logic of mobility.

In general, gated communities lead to the use of individual transport, the typical form of displacement of liberal urbanization. In the case of Urbanova, however, this situation is aggravated since access is via a single road, Avenida Lineu de Moura, the location of the only bridge over the Paraíba do Sul River. The increase in the number of gated communities impacts its residents, the workers who serve them, the nascent local commerce, as well as employees and students of the University of Vale do Paraíba, UNIVAP (the only large institution in the region), and the incomplete public transportation options (Figure 03).

**Figure 03 |** Urbanova nowadays



(not to scale, cropped from a Google Earth image, 2023)

Returning to Alphaville, in 1974, the company established its Industrial and Business Center, and just two years later, launched the first “residential” area intended for executives who were already working in Alphaville at that time. In addition to the original center, today there are the campuses of Paulista University UNIP, Mackenzie Presbyterian University, and, in its surroundings, the Barueri Campus of the Pontifical Catholic University PUC.

In particular, regarding the original Alphaville project (1973), its proximity to the capital of São Paulo and the specific demands of that market should be emphasized, as the beginning of the decentralization of urban activities was based on the interconnection vector between the capital and the interior of the Presidente Castelo Branco Highway. In four decades, Alphaville has incorporated new areas and functions that today extend to Santana de Parnaíba. The feeling conveyed is that of being in a São Paulo neighborhood, with buildings characteristic of different eras, as it should be for a project that is already forty years old and with large plots of land. The residential developments, initially proposed for the executives of the Business and Industrial Center, ultimately defined a way of occupying the land that would become the company's trademark.

## CONSIDERATIONS ON THE PRESENT: DISPERSED URBANIZATION, TERRITORIAL ENCLAVES, AND THE NEOLIBERAL PRODUCTION OF SPACE IN THE LOGIC OF THE MARKET

One of the action strategies of real estate market actors is the purchase of land with its conversion into gated communities as a form of speculation to foster the “land market” and insert it into the logic of capital accumulation in metropolitan environments (Lima, 2014, pp. 19-26). What made Alphaville different from previous experiences is the possibility not only of offering “high-standard” residences, but also the diffusion of a new conception of the periphery. To this end, it initially relied on tax incentives offered by the Municipality of Barueri for the transfer to the new development of companies already established in the capital, in expedients that would generate many disputes over the years in the so-called tax wars, issues unrelated to this article. In São José dos Campos, supported by similar perspectives, Japanese investors uncovered this same niche, thinking about a similar investment, a “new city,” but with reference to the American suburban model. However, São José dos Campos presented different particularities in relation to Barueri and the outskirts of the capital.

When Fukuoka Jisho Bank chose São José dos Campos to host its new venture, there were already signs of the financial exhaustion of that model: inflationary pressures were increasing, there was a shortage of labor and rising wages. Furthermore, the oil crisis that occurred in the same year, which hit Brazil, a major importer of that product, was harder on Japan, a country with a total shortage of fossil fuels, forcing a revision of its plans. In 1979, with the second shock of the oil crisis, the Brazilian economy entered a new period of crisis, with a deterioration in its foreign trade relations. The Japanese, interested in stable countries, began to feel discouraged from continuing their investments in the country (Uehara, 2006, p.16).

It is true that attributing the results of the failure of the original Urbanova project to the decline in economic dynamism in the 1970s and 1980s or to the low activity in the interior of the Paraíba Valley compared to the São Paulo Metropolitan Region does not fully explain its failure. Nor can its strategic location between the most populous Brazilian metropolises, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, be disregarded, so much so that despite the time lag, the urban and population growth of

the São José dos Campos region has remained at levels higher than those of these capitals (IBGE, 2021). It is more accurate to realize that neither geographical nor economic conditions at the local or national scales account for such answers, but these will only be found when all their factors are combined.

The evolution of events demonstrated that Urbanova, planned as a central hub equipped with all the required attributes and an exemplary case of urban and regional planning, was part of a Fordist utopia that was no longer sustainable. Beyond strictly economic issues, its location, about 100 km from the capital, may not have been evaluated at the time. In the last three decades, what has been observed is the transformation of Western São José dos Campos into a large dormitory town. In fact, the effective center of tertiary activities serving this region is located about six kilometers from the residential area. It is there that the “shopping center” is located, where the main schools serving the children of Urbanova are located, and where the hotels and supermarkets are. The profound alterations to the original project have caused the area to transform into a large, wealthy periphery. Wealthy in terms of the income bracket of its population, the highest in São José dos Campos, expressed in the aesthetics of the buildings and the market values realized there, but peripheral due to the deficiencies of its infrastructure, extremely dependent on the central region of the city.

This peripheral model is precisely the target of the interests of the current formation of Alphaville Urbanização. Thus, the expansion of the company's business would finally reach São José dos Campos when, unsurprisingly, the so-called “upper middle class” witnessed its launch in São José dos Campos. Today, the Alphaville brand is linked, in the common imagination, to the model of occupation of gated communities, reproduced by almost all states of Brazil, even when it arrives precisely on the remaining lands of Urbanova.

As seen, urbanization processes similar in their origins may diverge under certain circumstances to meet again later. More than a simple meeting of trajectories, it is proof of the vigor of the real estate market in the production of postmodern and liberal space. Alphaville reveals the model of the dispersion of gated communities victorious over business centers and replicates them in the most diverse cases of cities that maintain a sufficiently well-paid social stratum to

amalgamate, as in the case of São José dos Campos, this model with what remained of the Urbanova project. Characterized by the occupation of a social and economic elite elevated by high salaries in the cutting-edge industry, e-commerce, the provision of specialized services, agribusiness investments, or capital itself, including its niche in real estate. What we see today are cases defined by the idiosyncratic socioeconomic composition of each municipality, but which are found in the postmodernity of the neoliberal world where the space produced could not be different from its own cultural expression.

By comparing these two experiences of contemporary urbanization, we were able to obtain results that contribute to the literature on regional development, demonstrating how urbanization models produced by private actors were articulated with economic, political, and territorial dynamics, even in distinct scenarios, shaping urban configurations in a way that expresses how socio-spatial inequalities are inherent to Brazilian neoliberalism. Alphaville and Urbanova, urban development projects conceived under similar matrices, resulted in divergent trajectories within their specific territorial contexts, marked by the increasing neoliberalization of space production. It was possible to understand how the real estate market and regional conditions shaped these projects, which needed to articulate metropolitan dynamics, business strategies, and local socio-economic structures. It was also possible to reinforce the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in the study of contemporary territorial transformations. By illuminating the mechanisms through which different regional contexts either enhance or hinder urban projects, we were also able to offer critical insights for the debate on dispersed urbanization, territorial enclaves, and their impacts on regional development.

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V.22, N°1, Jan-Abr/2026 | <https://www.rbgdr.net/>

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