ISUF2021 GLASGOW

XXVIII International Seminar on Urban Form
URBAN FORM AND THE SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS CITIES
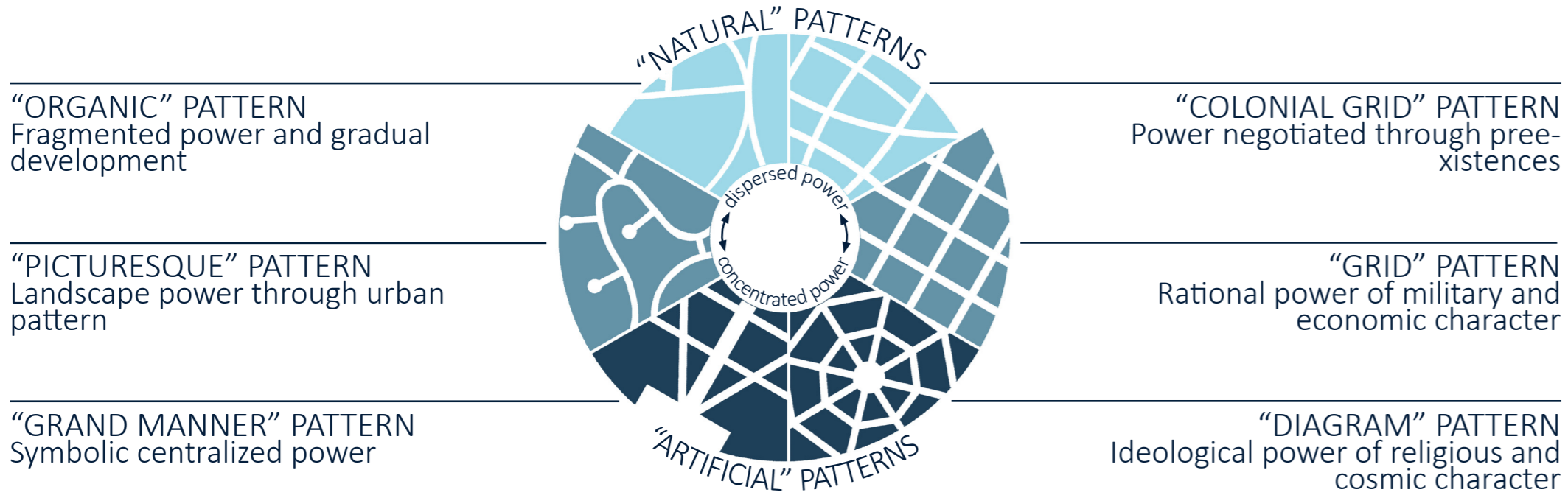29th June - 3rd July 2021 - Glasgow

10 UTOPIAN CITIES IN THE CINEMA: A READING OF POWER REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH URBAN FORM AND COLOR SYMBOLISM

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

When someone thinks about the future of cities and urban forms, it's intuitive to imagine a situation of an ideal and utopian place; or even another extreme, a dystopian condition. These landscapes that come to mind are often creations of cinematography, which, in general, expose issues of nostalgia to the obsolete past compared to technological development. From this, the typical power relationship represented in the works is evident while watching dystopian films: who dominates and who is dominated. Thus, this is why such duality - materialized by Foucault's panopticon (1975) by exerting power effects- ends up essentially linked to spatial/territorial issues, since, "there is no space touched by human beings, on the surface of the planet, that do not denote any strategy for occupying the territory. [...] Hence the proximity of cities and urbanism, with power" (MONTEIRO, 2017, p. 27).

Thus, the research starts from the observation that futuristic cinema uses its artistic freedom to create and illustrate utopian urban planning. Thereby, it's proposed to validate whether such urban illustrations follow the aforementioned discussion, in which urban forms have a political character, being "indicators of concentrated or dispersed powers" (MONTEIRO, 2017, p. 28). So, the relations of concentrated power with planned shapes, and of dispersed power with the community strategy idealized by Monteiro (2017) are the guiding axis of the research, while using the traditional city patterns of Kostof (1991) as a basis.

Figure 1 - Traditional urban patterns and its power relations

"ORGANIC" PATTERN
Fragmented power and gradual development

"PICTURESQUE" PATTERN
Landscape power through urban pattern

"GRAND MANNER" PATTERN
Symbolic centralized power

"NATURAL" PATTERNS
dispersed power
concentrated power
"ARTIFICIAL" PATTERNS

"COLONIAL GRID" PATTERN
Power negotiated through preexistences

"GRID" PATTERN
Rational power of military and economic character

"DIAGRAM" PATTERN
Ideological power of religious and cosmic character

Source: Diagram adapted by Coser through the concepts of Monteiro (2017) and the urban patterns of Kostof (1991).

Figure 2 - Set of images that represent urban patterns among the analyzed films

Source: Screenshots of the analyzed films. [1] Star wars I, II, III (USA, 1999-2005) representing the "diagram" pattern; [2] The fifth element (FR/USA, 1997) representing the "grid" pattern; [3] Black panther (USA, 2018) representing the "organic" pattern.
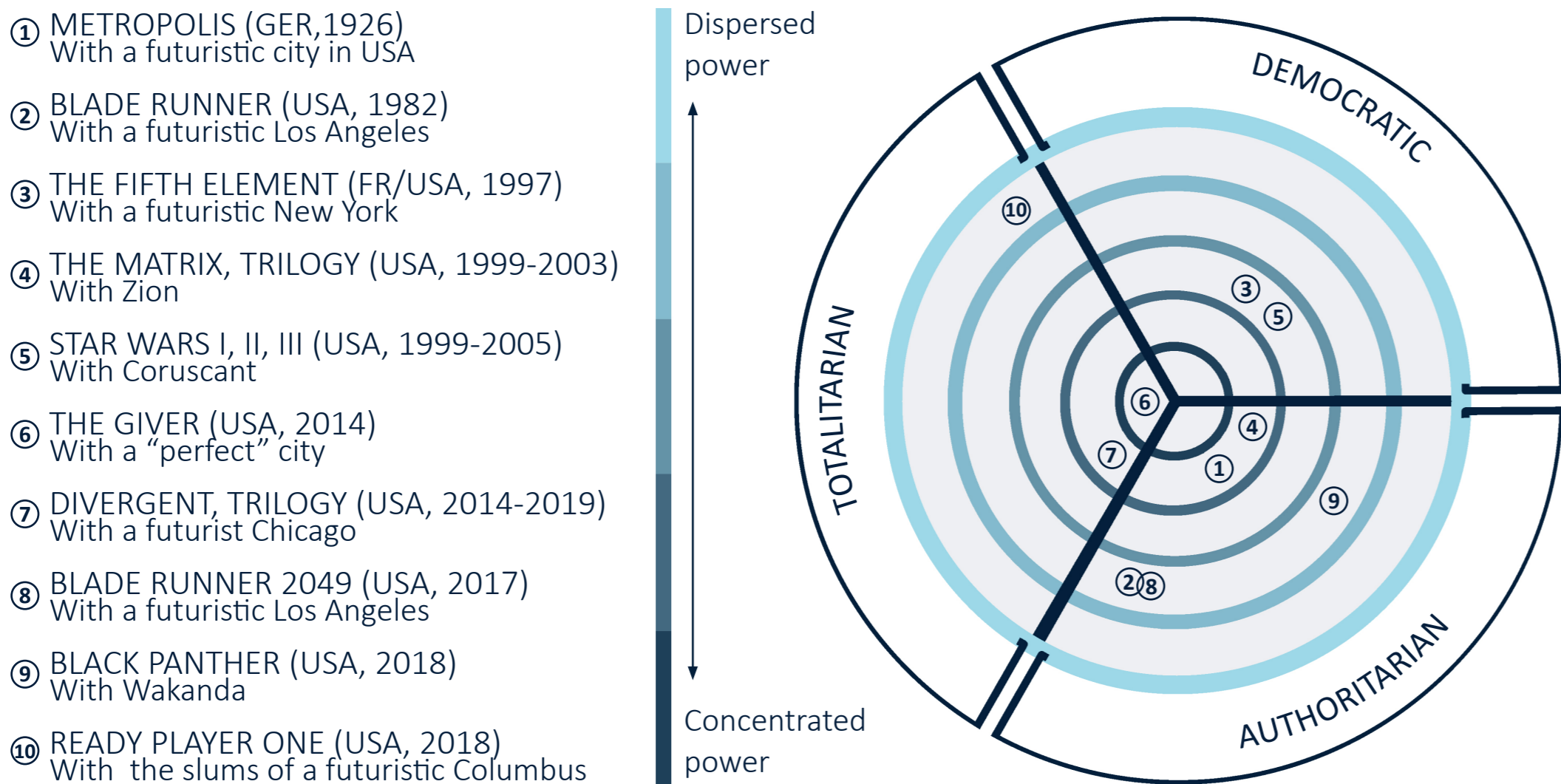
METHODOLOGY

The research begins with a [1] review of the works selected for comparative study, followed by two investigation fronts, [2.1] the survey of urban layouts presented in the selected films, and [2.2] the survey of the predominant colors used during scenes that show urban patterns of each analyzed films. Finally, it proposes an [3] organization and study of collected information in graphical representations.

RESULTS

Figure 3 - Relation of power concentration in the analyzed films based on the division into government regimes.
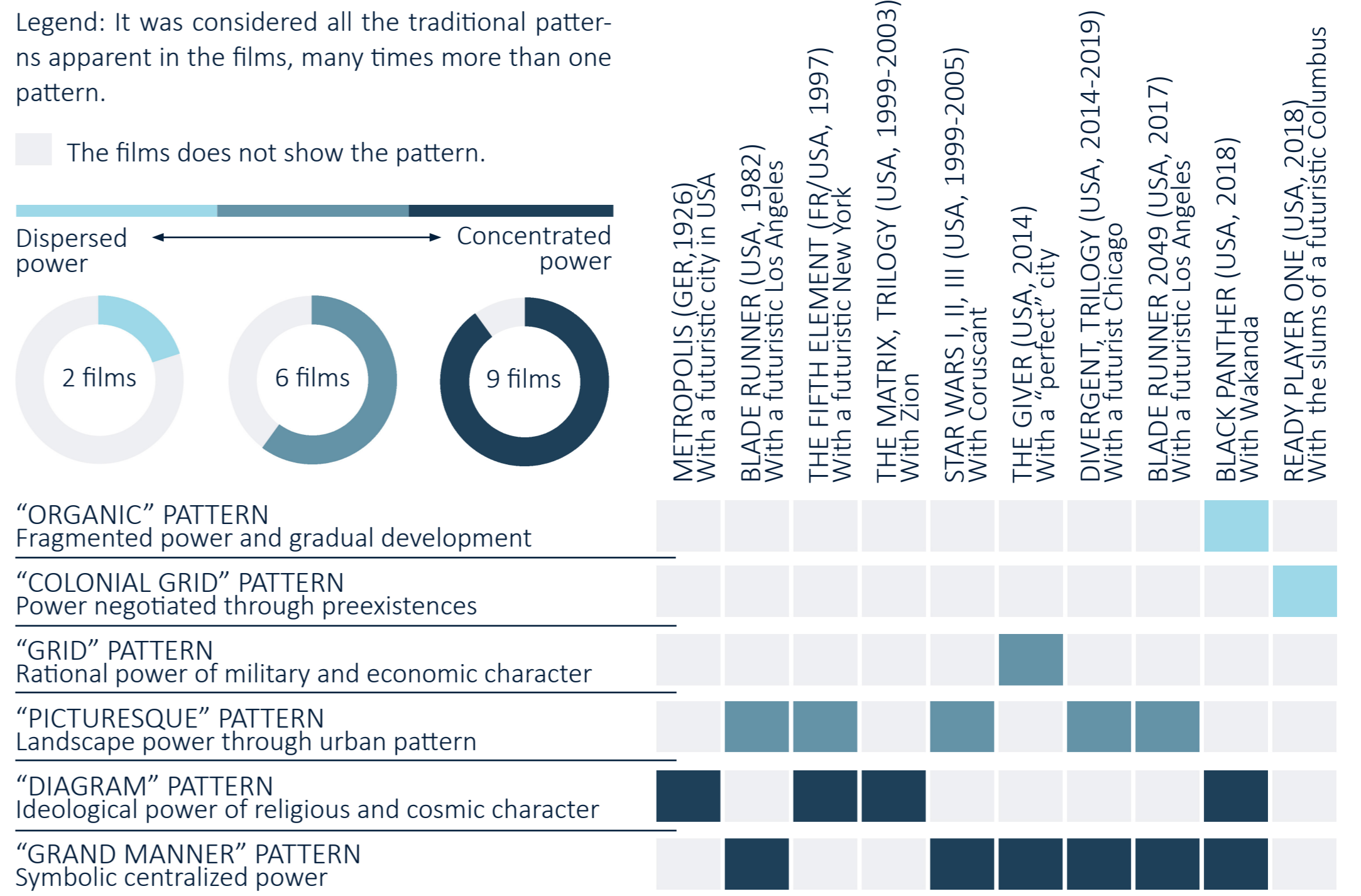
Legend: numbers 1 to 10 represent the respective films bellow. The films corresponding to numbers 2 and 8 listed are in the same position on the graph, as it present the same analysis conclusion.

① METROPOLIS (GER,1926)
With a futuristic city in USA

② BLADE RUNNER (USA, 1982)
With a futuristic Los Angeles

③ THE FIFTH ELEMENT (FR/USA, 1997)
With a futuristic New York

④ THE MATRIX, TRILOGY (USA, 1999-2003)
With Zion

⑤ STAR WARS I, II, III (USA, 1999-2005)
With Coruscant

⑥ THE GIVER (USA, 2014)
With a "perfect" city

⑦ DIVERGENT, TRILOGY (USA, 2014-2019)
With a futurist Chicago

⑧ BLADE RUNNER 2049 (USA, 2017)
With a futuristic Los Angeles

⑨ BLACK PANTHER (USA, 2018)
With Wakanda

⑩ READY PLAYER ONE (USA, 2018)
With the slums of a futuristic Columbus

Dispersed power
Concentrated power
DEMOCRATIC
TOTALITARIAN
AUTHORITARIAN

Source: The author. The government was based on the book "Law and the State as Structures and Systems", Araújo (2013).
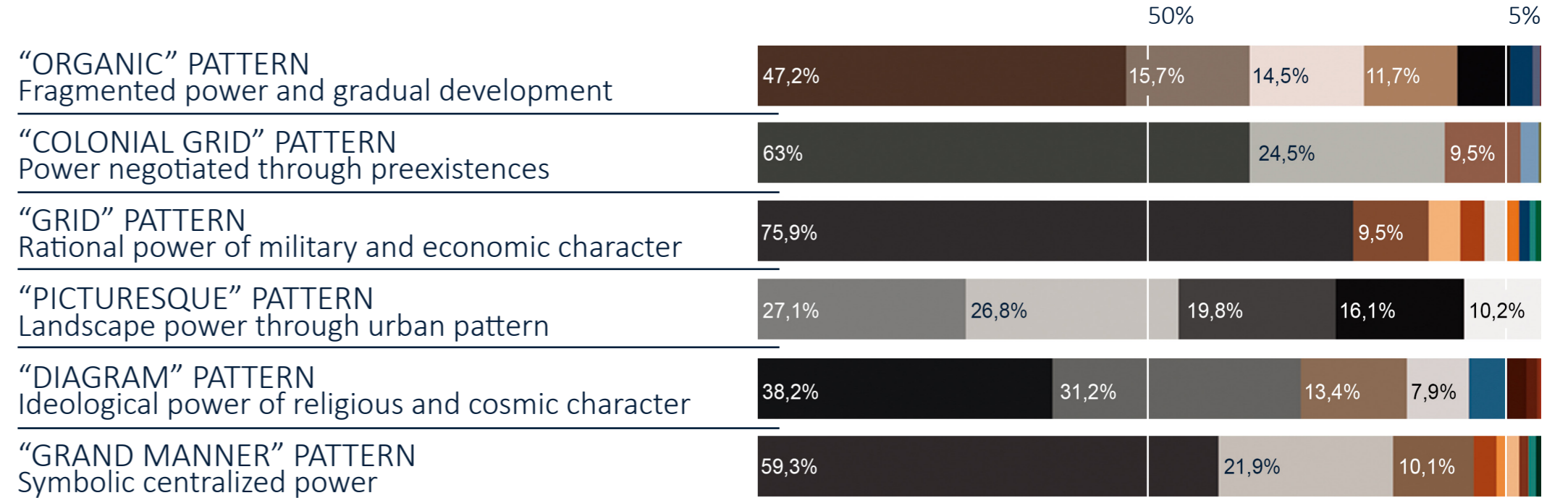
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Figure 4 - Application frequency comparison of each urban pattern in the analyzed films and its power relations

Legend: It was considered all the traditional patterns apparent in the films, many times more than one pattern.

The films does not show the pattern.

Dispersed power ← → Concentrated power

2 films   6 films   9 films

	METROPOLIS (GER,1926) With a futuristic city in USA	BLADE RUNNER (USA, 1982) With a futuristic Los Angeles	THE FIFTH ELEMENT (FR/USA, 1997) With a futuristic New York	THE MATRIX, TRILOGY (USA, 1999-2003) With Zion	STAR WARS I, II, III (USA, 1999-2005) With Coruscant	THE GIVER (USA, 2014) With a "perfect" city	DIVERGENT, TRILOGY (USA, 2014-2019) With a futurist Chicago	BLADE RUNNER 2049 (USA, 2017) With a futuristic Los Angeles	BLACK PANTHER (USA, 2018) With Wakanda	READY PLAYER ONE (USA, 2018) With the slums of a futuristic Columbus
"ORGANIC" PATTERN Fragmented power and gradual development									■	
"COLONIAL GRID" PATTERN Power negotiated through preexistences										■
"GRID" PATTERN Rational power of military and economic character						■				
"PICTURESQUE" PATTERN Landscape power through urban pattern		■	■	■		■	■			
"DIAGRAM" PATTERN Ideological power of religious and cosmic character	■				■				■	
"GRAND MANNER" PATTERN Symbolic centralized power		■		■	■	■	■	■		

Source: The author.

Figure 5 - Color representation in each urban pattern present in the analyzed films and its power relations.

50%   5%

"ORGANIC" PATTERN
Fragmented power and gradual development
47,2%   15,7%   14,5%   11,7%

"COLONIAL GRID" PATTERN
Power negotiated through preexistences
63%   24,5%   9,5%

"GRID" PATTERN
Rational power of military and economic character
75,9%   9,5%

"PICTURESQUE" PATTERN
Landscape power through urban pattern
27,1%   26,8%   19,8%   16,1%   10,2%

"DIAGRAM" PATTERN
Ideological power of religious and cosmic character
38,2%   31,2%   13,4%   7,9%

"GRAND MANNER" PATTERN
Symbolic centralized power
59,3%   21,9%   10,1%

Source: The author. Each color palette was generated separately online by the free website TinEye- Color extraction, available in < https://labs.tineye.com/color/>.

From the analysis of the chosen films and the graphics made, it was possible to note evident power issues in the representation of the cities' urban forms, whether fictitious or real. Then, it verified that urban patterns have a lot to show about the political organization of a territory: the cities' patterns solely enunciate the power concentration situation of the story, having proven the analysis validity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As proposed in the research, organic patterns have represented, in general, a disorganized and decentralized city, with gradual development, being normally represented by the shades of brown, the color of the commonness and insanity (HELLER, 2012, p.256); while in the most geometric shapes there are concentrated powers and planned cities, guided by the high use of gray, the cruelty and boredom color (IBIDEM, 2012, p.267). However, although the extreme configurations of these cities are frequent, the filmmakers, screenwriters and stage directors were assertive in exploring the possibilities of pattern combinations and its implications for the context, culminating in a more or less concentrated/organized government. Likewise, the feelings and qualities of Heller (2012) expressed by the colors in urban scenes still reinforce some peculiarities of the context and the power relationship of the city shapes.

Furthermore, with the research development, it has been possible to better understand the relationship of urban form with the power exercised in the territory, and, thus, it can be concluded that paying attention to the relationship of urban form with power when creating futuristic cities it's a good option, bringing to the city a more truthful character and closer to reality, whether because of the political/territorial aspects, the city's development process, or the cultural expression that the utopian layouts and urban landscapes represent. So, the research innovates by enabling, through cinematography, an increase in the visual repertoire of urban patterns linked to power strategies, even if linked to fictional cities. Because of this, in a way, methodological possibilities open up for narrowing the metaphorical connections between real spaces and fictitious cities, which can bring contributions to urbanism itself.

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Link to access the bibliography of analyzed films: < https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rB7GQEB9F5J2grWiMyni-ggk-h4LVe_RC/view?usp=sharing >