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Governing Cities in Africa
Panorama of Challenges
and Perspectives

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Executive Summary

By 2050, about 60% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa will live in urban areas. African cities, and especially medium-sized cities, will have to absorb more than 700 billion urban dwellers. Given these projections, urban growth in Africa has become a central concern of the international community, including experts from international organizations, researchers, aid agencies, and the private sector.

While expert meetings and research initiatives on the future of cities are accumulating, this study aims to take stock of the debate.

First, it provides an overview of the major issues that mostly policy-oriented research on cities in Africa has dealt with since independence. Based on this review, our paper builds on the concept of urban governance to approach the transformation and growth of African cities. Hereby we take into consideration the multiple actors (public, private, civil society, etc.), policy sectors (land, housing, infrastructure, etc.), and scales (local, national, international) that shape the political, economic, and social aspects of urban life. The paper also addresses African cities as part of a broader urban-rural continuum.

Second, this study proposes concrete avenues to contribute to ongoing research and technical initiatives on urban governance in Africa. More knowledge and data are needed to inform the debate on urban infrastructure financing and the role of intermediate cities in the broader urbanization process in Sub-Saharan Africa. We argue that a more detailed comprehension of land tenure systems is fundamental to understanding the challenges of future urban development in Africa.

Résumé

En 2050, environ 60 % de la population d'Afrique subsaharienne habitera en zone urbaine. Les villes africaines, et notamment les villes de taille intermédiaire, devront absorber plus de 700 millions d'habitants supplémentaires. Ces prospections de croissance ont transformé les enjeux urbains en Afrique en une préoccupation centrale des acteurs de la communauté internationale, y compris les experts des organisations internationales, les chercheurs, les agences d'aide ou encore le secteur privé.

Dans un contexte où les conférences d'experts et les initiatives de recherche sur le futur des villes s'accumulent, cette étude vise à prendre le pouls des débats.

Il s'agit, premièrement, d'offrir un panorama des grandes questions qui ont animé la production de la recherche, pour la plupart *policy-oriented*, sur les villes en Afrique depuis les Indépendances. Sur la base de cet état des connaissances, ce papier propose d'aborder les enjeux urbains en Afrique subsaharienne à travers le concept de la gouvernance. Cette approche permet d'intégrer dans l'analyse des villes la multitude d'acteurs (publics, privés, société civile, etc.), de secteurs (foncier, logement, infrastructures, etc.) et d'échelles (locale, nationale, internationale) qui façonnent les aspects politiques, économiques et sociaux de la vie urbaine. L'étude invite également à lire les villes non pas comme un espace cloisonné mais aux multiples interactions entre les zones urbaines et rurales (le continuum urbain-rural).

Deuxièmement, cette étude propose des pistes concrètes afin d'enrichir les initiatives de recherche et d'action en cours sur la gouvernance urbaine en Afrique. Plus de connaissances et de données sont nécessaires afin d'éclairer, d'une part, le débat sur le financement des infrastructures urbaines et, d'autre part, sur le rôle des villes dites intermédiaires dans les processus d'urbanisation en Afrique subsaharienne. Nous argumentons qu'une compréhension plus fine des régimes fonciers est fondamentale afin de saisir les enjeux du futur développement des villes africaines.

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Introduction

For several years, increasing attention has been paid to the demographic densification and spatial expansion of African cities. Debates between international experts and a new wave of research projects aim to shed light on the factors behind this "urban explosion in Africa"[1] and to understand their social and economic impacts. This interest in the development of African cities is linked, above all, to statistical forecasts of their future population growth based on current trends: whereas, in the period when a large number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) gained their independence, they still had a predominantly rural population, these trends have since been reversed. In 1960, just under 15% of the Sub-Saharan population lived in urban areas, but this proportion increased exponentially in the following years, and that growth has accelerated significantly since the 2000s: the proportion of the Sub-Saharan population living in urban areas was 27% in 1990, 33% in 2005 and reached 41% in 2020.[2] According to predictions by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, almost 60% of the population of SSA will be urban by 2050. In other words, between 2022 and 2050 there will be an increase of 781 million people living in urban areas.[3]

Some of this population growth is taking place in urban areas that are already well known, such as the megacities of Dar es Salaam, Kinshasa and Lagos. However, small and medium-sized towns, and also villages, are experiencing much higher growth rates.[4] Whereas the urban population is growing at an average rate of 3.9% per year across Africa, some cities in SSA are experiencing significantly faster population growth: cities with growth rates close to 7% for the period 2000 to 2020 include, for example, Gwagwalada in Nigeria (73,000 inhabitants in 2000 compared to 410,000 inhabitants in 2020), Kabinda in the Democratic Republic of Congo (91,000 inhabitants in 2000 compared to 466,000 inhabitants in 2020), Ruiru in Kenya (88,000 inhabitants in 2000 compared to 389,000

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1. "L'explosion urbaine en Afrique s'accélère", *Jeune Afrique*, July 17, 2021, www.jeuneafrique.com. Citations from works in languages other than English are provided in our translation.
2. This information is taken from the World Bank database "Urban population (% of total population) – Sub-Saharan Africa", https://donnees.banquemondiale.org [accessed February 14, 2022].
3. This information is taken from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' "World Urbanization Prospects 2018" database, https://population.un.org.
4. J. Agergaard, S. Kirkegaard and T. Birch-Thomsen, "Between Village and Town: Small-Town Urbanism in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Sustainability*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2021, pp. 1-21.

inhabitants in 2020) and Songea in Tanzania (90,000 inhabitants in 2000 compared to 353,000 inhabitants in 2020).[5]

Figure 1: Change in Urban Growth Rates in Different Regions of the World (1950-2015)
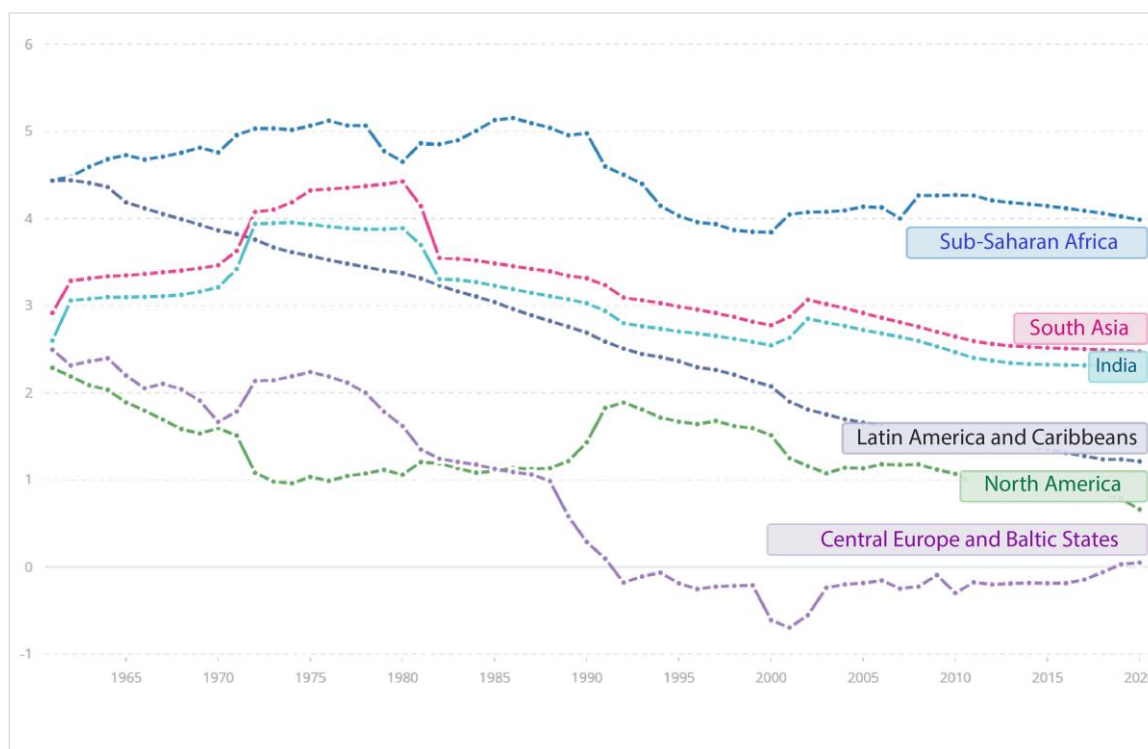
Source: World Bank, 2020.

The phenomenon of exponential urban growth is not limited to the African continent. These demographic and spatial changes, including those found in smaller and medium-sized cities, have occurred in all regions of the world. One specificity of urbanization in SSA, however, is the speed of its growth. With a mean urban growth rate of about 4% (2020), SSA is the region with the highest rate of urbanization in the world.[6] However, as the reports of major international organizations frequently point out, this growth is not accompanied by the kind of economic development that would make it possible to transform this urbanization process into a real driving force for development. SSA remains the poorest region in the world.[7]

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5. African Cities Research Consortium, "Africa's Fastest Growing Cities", 2020.
6. By comparison, in 2020, urbanization rates stood at 0.5% in Europe and Central Asia, 0.7% in North America and 1.3% in Latin America and the Caribbean. In India and South Asia, urbanization rates have been declining since the 1980s and in 2020 reached a new low, at 2.4% and 2.2% respectively; see https://donnees.banquemondiale.org.
7. According to the World Bank, SSA has 60% of the world's poor: M. Schoch, C. Lakner and M. Fleury, "Where the Poorest People Live", 2020, https://blogs.worldbank.org.

In order to avoid a situation in which African urban societies become poorer as cities grow, urban development has been placed at the top of the international aid community's agenda. The creation in 2015 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11, aimed at creating sustainable and accessible cities for all, was a key moment for the international governance of urban growth. Since then, many actors from civil society, research, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation organizations, as well as from the private sector, have mobilized, for various reasons, around the challenges of urban growth and have sought to understand its causes, parameters and potential effects in different urban sectors.

While this multi-stakeholder mobilization around African cities has increased considerably over the past decade, urbanization in Africa is not a recent phenomenon and has been accompanied by a significant production of knowledge and data.

Figure 2: The Urban Transition[8] in Different Regions of the World

Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2015. Graphic created by S. Schlimmer.

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8. "Urban transition" can be defined as the moment when a predominantly rural society becomes a predominantly urban society, i.e., when more than 50% of the population lives in urban areas.

In the present study we provide an overview of the main results of research on urban issues in Africa, and also demonstrate that "African cities" do not in themselves constitute either a research question or an object for development work. Through a governance approach, we argue that African cities take on diverse urban forms, which are shaped by multiple actors invested in different sectors and located at different levels of scale.

After setting out this governance approach, we present possible avenues of research centered around two major issues of urban governance: first, the response to infrastructure needs, and second, support for the growth of so-called secondary cities. We place particular emphasis on land policies, which, according to our analysis, constitute the foundation of all urban development interventions and function somewhat like a grammar of the city.

"African Cities": A Renewed Interest in a Longstanding Issue

The dynamics of urbanization on the African continent and their socio-economic consequences have given rise to an abundant literature, which is often situated at the interface between academic research and standard-setting approaches. Since the 1950s, urban issues have constituted an object of research that has particularly attracted the attention of researchers affiliated with European or North American universities.

The Binary Reading Used by Standard-Setting Work on Cities in Africa

From the 1970s onward, population growth in cities and its implications in terms of access to housing, land and basic services became a matter of concern for operational actors in the international community. This international concern took on an institutional form through the founding of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in 1978. Its actors are involved in the production of knowledge on urban growth, as well as contributing to the creation of standards and formulating recommendations with the aim of transforming the socio-economic potential of cities, including in Africa, into a "driver of development". These demographic and economic data, presented in the form of research reports, guidelines and technical guides, and disseminated in international forums, have long focused on issues of housing, informality and access to basic services.

While UN-Habitat is undoubtedly the flagship organization for urban issues,[9] other international cooperation actors have more recently integrated the subject of the growth of cities in Africa in their agendas: for example, the World Bank (2017) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) have recently published reports with similar objectives and approaches:[10] these studies start from the observation that urban agglomerations in Africa are experiencing

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9. See, for example, the latest in a series of reports on the major global issues of city growth: UN-Habitat, *The State of African Cities: The Geography of African Investment*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2018.
10. OECD, *Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2020: Africapolis, Mapping a New Urban Geography*, Paris: OECD, 2020; S. Lall, J. Henderson and A. Venables (eds.), *Africa's Cities: Opening Doors to the World*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2017.

exponential and unprecedented growth, update the statistical data using a range of approaches, and propose concepts, tools and methods for understanding and measuring these ongoing transformations. These policy-oriented works by experts on cities in Africa are built on a narrative that presents the risks and opportunities of urban growth.[11] This narrative is based on a binary presentation of the options available for the future of African cities: if urban growth is regulated, coordinated and planned by public authorities and their partners according to the principles of "good governance" then those cities can fulfill their role as catalysts for development. If, on the other hand, urbanization is not managed with adequate mechanisms and cities are "left to fend for themselves", their rapid and unplanned expansion runs the risk of further widening already glaring inequalities and increasing poverty rates.

This comparison between risks and opportunities is based on a set of dichotomous scenarios, issues and arguments that have shaped representations of African cities, with a particular focus on the juxtaposition of formal and informal economies. The literature frequently emphasizes the different types of informality that characterize urban life across the continent, which are especially to be found in economic activities (trade, transport, transactions, etc.) and housing (the creation of so-called "informal", poorly integrated neighborhoods, the expansion of shanty towns, etc.). This discourse is based on a lexical field referring to different crisis situations (environmental, economic, social, demographic, etc.).[12] It constructs an opposition between, on the one hand, an image of dangerous, chaotic, congested, polluted, "badly managed" (e.g. due to corruption) cities, stifled by the proliferation of informal housing, and on the other hand models of urbanism based on the concepts of regulation, planning, participation and a sustainable environment. Indeed, approaches to African cities are not only shaped by the dichotomous rhetoric of these international discourses, but they also construct these same cities as a terrain in which to apply, test and disseminate new models of urbanism that correspond to the standards set by the international community: green cities, smart cities and inclusive and innovative cities are the most recent examples of such formulas.[13]

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11. This tendency to construct binary assessments of development issues is not unique to the debate on urban growth. The opposition of positive and negative scenarios, for example, by juxtaposing the risks and opportunities presented by a given issue, is a recurrent discursive approach found in policy-oriented reports.

12. G. Myers and M. Murray, "Introduction: Situating Contemporary Cities in Africa" in: G. Myers and M. Murray (eds.), *Cities in Contemporary Africa*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 6.

13. In France, various institutions involved in the development sector have included the issue of urban growth in their agendas. The French Development Agency, for example, began to take an interest in urban issues in the early 2000s under the leadership of Jean-Michel Severino, after having focused for several years on development issues in rural areas.

Towards a Greater Recognition of the Complexity of Urban Life

The deconstruction of this binary presentation of urban issues in Africa has been the goal of a series of research works, often multidisciplinary in nature, rooted in the social sciences and African studies. Several works and edited collections coordinated by researchers in Europe and Africa have aimed to demonstrate the complexity, richness, depth and kaleidoscopic movements of urban life, whose various expressions cannot be easily classified into two abstract categories. These studies highlight the multitude of scales (households, neighborhoods, municipalities, the regional, the global, etc.), actors (private, public, political, individuals and groups, etc.), and gray areas[14] that are implicated in the governance of African cities.[15] Through a detailed analysis of daily practices and the interplay of actors, this research reveals the eminently political nature of urban life, which the technical debates of development experts sometimes tend to overlook. Some authors question the very relevance of the term "African city", given the diversity of the realities and nature of urban fabrics.[16] These works also demonstrate that the "African city" should not be approached as an analytical entity or an object of research in itself. Rather, it is a complex ecosystem,[17] which allows for the study of a multitude of social, economic, political and spatial phenomena, and which is not specific to "the African city" alone.

This series of works that have accumulated since the 2000s, primarily written in French and English, therefore constitute a critical response to the relatively recent increase in interest among international cooperation actors in urban issues in Africa. However, in order to understand these diverse urban fabrics, it is crucial to grasp the roots of their formation.[18] Although the establishment of colonial administrations was not the only catalyst for urban formation on the continent, it has left its mark on the urban planning of many African cities. For example, colonial urban policies have influenced the modalities of access to land and housing, and have created neighborhoods on the basis of ethnic and racial criteria that continue to shape contemporary urban life.[19] Finally, works that critique crisis narratives and catastrophizing

14. T. Förster and C. Ammann, "Les villes africaines et le casse-tête du développement: Acteurs et capacité d'agir dans la zone grise urbaine", *Revue internationale des études du développement*, Vol. 10, 2018, https://doi.org.

15. S. Bekker and L. Fourchard, *Governing Cities in Africa: Politics and Policies*, Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2013.

16. G. Myers, "Introduction" in: G. Myers (ed.), *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice*, London: Zed Books, 2011, pp. 1-20.

17. M. Miran-Guyon, "De la brique au numérique: Les terrains de la fabrique urbaine: Introduction thématique", *Afrique contemporaine*, Vol. 1-2, No. 269-270, 2019, pp. 11-12.
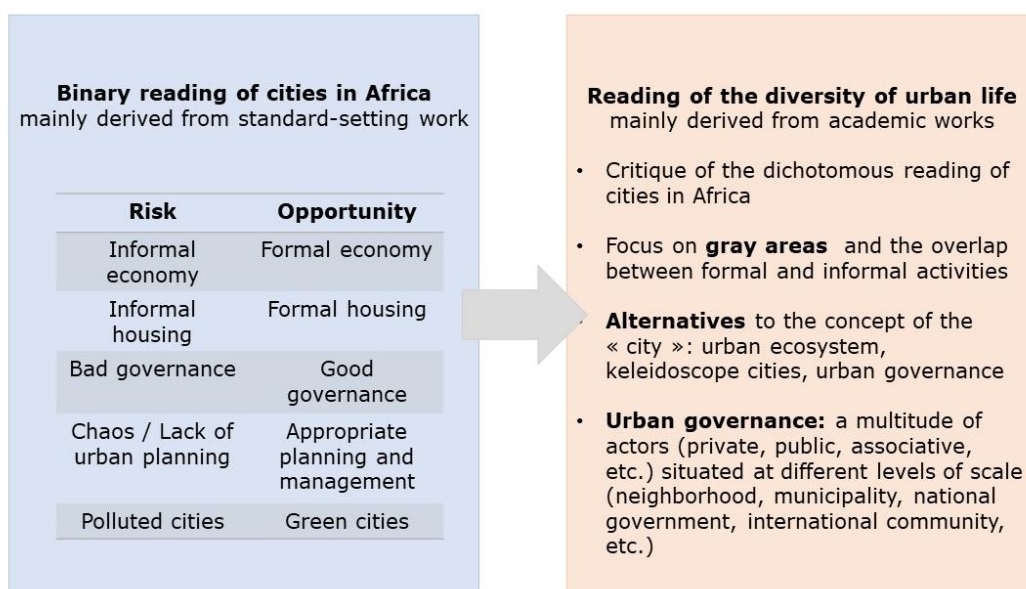
18 C. Coret, R. Zaugg and G. Chouin, "Les villes en Afrique avant 1900: Bilan historiographique et perspectives de recherche", *Afriques*, Vol.11, 2020, https://doi.org.

19. A. Ese and K. Ese, *The City Makers of Nairobi: An African Urban History*, London: Routledge, 2020.

readings of urban growth tend to dwell on an important methodological issue, namely the inadequacy of the Eurocentric analytical frameworks through which the evolution of urban forms in Africa has consistently been interpreted and judged. Often, discourse on the dysfunction, chaos or informality that are supposedly characteristic of African cities is based on an implicit comparison with the standards and models of urban planning that have accompanied the growth of Western cities.[20]

These studies therefore encourage the development of new independent and alternative approaches, in order to take into account both the multi-dimensionality of urban formations in Africa and the diversity of distinct trajectories that they can follow. Other works, particularly those at the intersection between research and policy, remain focused on the goal of understanding and measuring the quantitative and spatial dimensions of the growth and expansion of urban agglomerations. However, these initiatives, such as the Africapolis platform, use more flexible approaches to define urban spaces, which are then not limited, for example, to the administrative boundaries of cities. They thus take into account multiple urban formations and shift the focus from megacities to medium-sized or secondary cities, or even to urban formations in areas that are still predominantly rural.[21]

Figure 3: Towards a reading of the variety of urban configurations in Africa

Binary reading of cities in Africa
mainly derived from standard-setting work

Risk	Opportunity
Informal economy	Formal economy
Informal housing	Formal housing
Bad governance	Good governance
Chaos / Lack of urban planning	Appropriate planning and management
Polluted cities	Green cities

Reading of the diversity of urban life
mainly derived from academic works

- Critique of the dichotomous reading of cities in Africa

- Focus on **gray areas** and the overlap between formal and informal activities

- **Alternatives** to the concept of the « city »: urban ecosystem, keleidoscope cities, urban governance

- **Urban governance:** a multitude of actors (private, public, associative, etc.) situated at different levels of scale (neighborhood, municipality, national government, international community, etc.)

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20. See I. Lindell, "The Multiple Sites of Urban Governance: Insights from an African City", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 9, pp. 1879-1901.
21. See the Africapolis platform, supported by the OECD and the Sahel and West Africa Club: www.africapolis.org.

Urban Governance: A Continuum of Actors, Scales and Relationships with Rural Areas

The proliferation of debates, initiatives and writings on urban issues in Africa reflects the diversity of objectives and disciplinary backgrounds of the actors who contribute to this public action relating to cities. However, a certain consensus has been established around concepts that emphasize the social, economic, political and cultural heterogeneity and richness of urban dynamics across the African continent. Thus, works of research and expert analysis, as well as some initiatives with an operational purpose, recognize the diversity of actors (public, private, associative, political, etc.), fields and scales of intervention (local, municipal, national, international, etc.) that shape urban life and its regulation. In this perspective, the concept of an urban ecosystem, as defined by Marie Miran-Guyon, offers an understanding of African cities in the broadest sense, taking into account the different sectors (infrastructure, land, housing, waste management, environment, etc.), the materials of their constructed expressions (streets, buildings, walls, etc.) and the forms and tools of their organization (neighborhoods, planning, maps, division into lots, etc.).[22]

A more commonly used term for referring to the proliferation of actors involved in decision-making processes concerning urban life is "governance". Although the concept of urban governance seems to be used uniformly by both researchers and practitioners, such actors do not always associate the same meanings with it and may interpret it in different ways. For example, this polysemous concept appeared at the beginning of the 2000s in UN-Habitat reports that recognized the multitude of formal and informal processes, as well as the diversity of actors and institutions, both public and private, that are involved in the management and planning of urban affairs.[23] However, this organization uses the term in the context of a standard-setting approach that promotes transparency, horizontality and participation – principles inherent to the paradigms of neoliberalism and "good governance" promulgated by various international organizations

22. M. Miran-Guyon, "De la brique au numérique: Les terrains de la fabrique urbaine: Introduction thématique", *op. cit.*
23. W. Smit, "Urban Governance in Africa: An Overview", *International Development Policy Review*, Vol. 10, 2018, pp. 55-77.

since the 1990s. Academic works provide a critical reading of this approach, pointing out that it tends both to depoliticize the power relations between the different actors in the decision-making processes and to focus on those acting at the national level.[24]

The present study affirms the value of a governance approach for understanding the issues involved in the growth of African cities. We attempt to update the conceptual content of such an approach, based on the observation of three main elements: the fragmented nature of public action that is characterized by a multitude of actors and forms of intervention, the interplay between dynamics at the local, national and international scale, and, finally, a growing awareness of the numerous connections between urban and rural life.

A Mosaic of Actors and Sctoral Interventions

Many actors are involved in the web of urban activity. Urban governance is driven by a multitude of public actors (e.g. representatives of the central government, decentralized administrations and their technical services), political actors (elected officials, municipal representatives) and private actors (companies), but also actors from so-called civil society (associations, non-governmental organizations, "grassroots" organizations and citizen initiatives, etc.). This co-production of the city by a multitude of actors is central to the definition of the term "governance" in political science. In addition to the roles played by the classical organs of government, the concept of governance encompasses "the forms of steering, coordination and management of individuals, groups, sectors, territories and society"[25] in which non-state actors also participate. Although discussions around the concept of governance emphasize the horizontal forms of exchange between these different actors, they also demonstrate the interplay of actors and power struggles that frame their interactions.

The participation of a multitude of actors in the creation of standards and regulations governing the various sectors of urban development is not a phenomenon specific to Africa, and many studies have focused on the composite, multi-actor and multi-scale forms of cities in Europe[26] and other regions. Nonetheless, the configurations of actors in the governance of cities in Africa have some specific characteristics, and particularly involves the strong presence of international actors. The economies of many African countries depend on funding from bilateral and multilateral donors, which

24. S. Bekker and L. Fourchard, *Governing Cities in Africa: Politics and Policies, op. cit.*

25. P. Gales, "Gouvernance" in: L. Boussaguet, S. Jacquot and P. Ravinet (eds.), *Dictionnaire des politiques publiques*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2019, p. 297.

26. P. Le Galès, "De la gouvernance des villes à la gouvernance urbaine", *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1995, pp. 57-95.

is reflected in the participation of these actors in decision-making processes. Thus, access to loans and the provision of financial assistance is often conditional on the adoption of reforms based on the economic and political principles advocated by international financial institutions.

City Governance in Africa : A Mosaic of Actors and Initiatives

This influence and the strong presence of actors from the international community on public action in countries "under the aid regime"[27] are manifested through the circulation of ideas and through financial flows, but also through specific technical forms of action. The complex web of interventions in certain African cities is exemplary of this co-production of public action at different levels: in Kenya, for example, UN-Habitat is supporting the government in the adoption of a National Urban Policy. At the level of the city of Nairobi, UN-Habitat experts have contributed to programs for the upgrading of slums, the renovation of public spaces, the development of industrial zones and the preparation of development plans.

Like many other African cities, the Kenyan capital is the site of numerous urban development projects: in Kibera alone, one of the largest and most publicized shanty towns in SSA, there is a growing number of projects to regenerate neighborhoods, facilitate access to basic services, provide sanitation and develop information systems to better identify the inhabitants and their needs. While projects to upgrade slums are coordinated by the national agency KENSUP (Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme), other initiatives are led by associations and NGOs that are supposedly local, but which often depend on external funding.

In addition to this ecosystem of development actors, there are initiatives involving volunteers, decentralized cooperation, services provided by foreign private companies, and also citizen initiatives carried out by neighborhood residents to meet immediate needs. The overlapping of a multitude of programs and projects gives rise to the complex configurations of actors that are characteristic of urban governance. The coordination and organization of this plurality of actors seems all the more delicate in a context where the life span of initiatives is often limited and where urban development takes on the form of "governance by projects".[28] Rather than being a field of action orchestrated by a particular organization, urban governance is made up of a mosaic of transnational interventions conceived and carried out by a multitude of actors

27. R. Nakanabo Diallo, "Les paradoxes du régime de l'aide, entre injonctions internationales et logiques nationales: Le cas d'une enclave bureaucratique au Mozambique", *Mondes en développement*, Vol. 1, No. 165, 1995, pp. 51-63.
28. See, for example, P. Lavigne Delville, "Affronter l'incertitude?: les projets de développement à contre-courant de la 'révolution du management de projet'", *Revue Tiers Monde*, Vol. 3, No. 211, 2012, pp. 153-168.

and taking place in different time frames. We would therefore emphasize the fragmented nature of this urban action,[29] made up of interactions and entanglements, in which public actors, and especially state actors, are only one of many groups of stakeholders.

This conception of urban governance does not only reflect an erosion of the boundaries between public and private. The various actors also build bridges between the different sectors that make up the urban: urban life and its management consist of a range of fields of action, including transport and the mobility of people and goods, infrastructure (especially economic and road infrastructure), housing, land use planning, land tenure, industry and access to water and energy, as well as administrative reforms and processes of decentralization. The creation of access to markets, schools and public spaces, waste management and the provision of medical services are all issues that must be addressed by urban governance actors. The regulation of these urban sectors is handled by public actors such as municipal service providers and specialized ministries, but also by parapublic or private actors, such as specialized national or international associations. While the implementation of initiatives within these different sectors requires specific technical expertise (e.g. surveyors for drawing up plans for new land use, engineers for designing and building bridges and roads, construction companies for building housing, etc.), these sectors are interlinked and cannot be treated separately. Slum upgrading projects, for example, depend on the interaction of different groups of sectoral experts: tasks such as the regularization of the land situation, the construction of new housing, the installation of electricity connections or the building of roads involve different departments, ministries and technical experts, whose missions and interventions intersect and overlap. The concept of governance allows us to adopt a perspective that is more distanced from the specificities of each individual sector and thus to grasp the transversal and trans-sectoral nature of urban development projects.

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29. D. Darbon, R. Nakanabo Diallo, O. Provini and S. Schlimmer, "A State of the Literature on Public Policy Analysis in Africa", *Papiers de recherche de l'AFD*, No. 221, 2019.

Figure 5: The Central Position of Land Tenure in Urban Governance
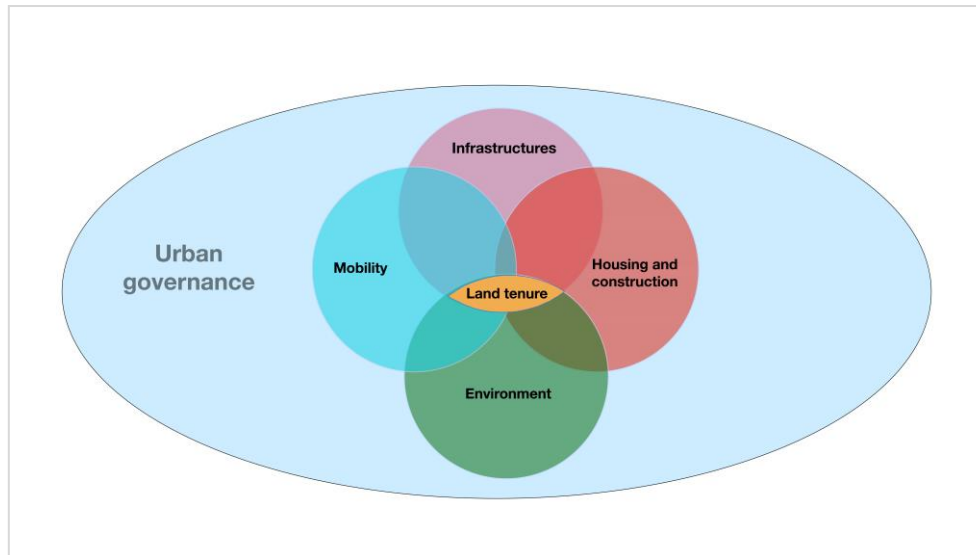
Concept: S. Schlimmer. Graphic created by D. von Büren (Ifri), 2022.

Multi-Scale Governance: From Neighborhoods to Globalized Systems

Interactions are found not only between the various urban sectors, but also between the different levels of scale – whether those scales are political or administrative, economic or spatial – that shape the governance of cities in Africa: "African urbanism therefore must be understood as a phenomenon involving the interrelationships between global forces, which influence development on a world-wide scale, and local reactions and initiatives that vary according to social, political and cultural patterns in a specific context and period of time".[30]

This interplay of scales is often viewed, at least initially, as an effect of globalization: indeed, cities represent spaces where levels of action intermingle and where the effects of globalization permeate and disrupt local social, health and economic dynamics. Increasingly strong economic links between cities are leading to the creation of truly interurban and globalized networks, fueled by capital flows and interdependent industries.[31] African cities, including economic hubs such as Nairobi or

30. F. Locatelli and P. Nugent, "Introduction" in: F. Locatelli and P. Nugent (eds.), *African Cities: Competing Claims on Urban Spaces*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, p. 4.

31. We refer here to works that have developed theories of globalized cities based on the theories of the French geographer Henri Lefèbvre, who, in his book *Le Droit à la ville* (1968), describes urbanization as a planetary phenomenon. Lefèbvre predicted that the advent of capitalist urbanization processes would

Lagos, remain largely absent from the rankings established by studies of the most connected cities. This result can be explained, according to the researcher Gareth Myers, by the use of narrow, Eurocentric economic approaches to globalization.[32] A landmark 2017 World Bank report on urban growth in Africa asserted that African cities would remain closed to the world because of their low level of contribution to regional and international markets for manufactured goods and services, and that the only way for them to "open their doors to the world" and join the cycle of investment and economic growth would be through planning, organization and economic intensification.[33] Such a perspective therefore views globalization and interaction with supra- and international scales exclusively through the lens of economic processes.

This view is challenged by works that examine the various expressions of linkages across scales – international, national and local – that can be observed in African cities, including but not limited to economic processes. Institutions, markets and citizens interact with other cities around the world, and these linkages are manifested through flows of information (including on social networks), financial transactions and institutional relationships.[34] Urban networks that transcend national borders are becoming denser, for example, through the establishment of regional corridors (composed of road, rail and air routes) which provide links between the major economic cities.[35]

The establishment of African cities as cosmopolitan places and points of connection to the international economic system is one of the goals of urban policies pursued by governments, city councils and other actors involved in urban development. These actors, motivated by a "fantasy of the global African city",[36] promote the development of showcase cities by carrying out modern urban projects that are compatible with international standards and that demonstrate innovation and economic growth: this

lead to the formation of a planetary urban fabric in which modern cities are interconnected. The works that study the links between urban development and globalization, such as those by Neil Brenner and Saskia Sassen, and are mainly based on the experiences of cities in industrialized countries of the so-called Global North. For a synthesis of the work of these authors, see, for example, N. Brenner and R. Keil, "From Global Cities to Globalized Urbanization", *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, Vol. 3, 2014, pp. 1-17.

32. G. Myers, "The Africa Problem of Global Urban Theories: Re-Conceptualizing Planetary Urbanisation", *International Development Policy Review*, Vol. 10, 2018, https://doi.org.

33. S. Lall, J. Henderson and A. Venables, *Africa's Cities: Opening Doors to the World, op. cit.*

34. A. Simone, "On the Worlding of African Cities", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2001, pp. 15-41.

35. For East Africa, for example, there are two main axes: the northern corridor, leading from Mombasa to Kampala, and the southern corridor, leading from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka. But there are also corridors formed by the development of conurbations, such as that which is found along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa, starting from Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire and leading to Accra in Ghana, Cotonou in Benin and Lagos in Nigeria.

36. J.-F. Steck, S. Didier, M. Morange and M. Rubin, "Informality, Public Space and Urban Governance: an Approach through Street Trading (Abidjan, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Lomé and Nairobi)" in: Bekker and Fourchard, *Governing Cities in Africa: Politics and Policies, op. cit*, pp. 145-167.

international-oriented urban planning includes the construction of large urban and peri-urban infrastructures that facilitate mobility and international transport (airports and international seaports), the establishment of special economic zones, and urban development projects that promote exchanges between public authorities and private (foreign) investors.

This interplay of scales in urban governance does not manifest itself only through financial flows, markets and infrastructure projects. It is driven by the people who live and move in urban spaces, by their encounters and interactions. African cities, especially economic capitals, are platforms where migrants from rural exodus, expatriates, transnational elites, members of the diaspora and diplomatic actors arrive, circulate, work, invest and leave. Regional megacities such as Abidjan, Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Johannesburg are home to the headquarters of UN agencies, subsidiaries of multinationals, offices of aid agencies, embassies and international NGOs, representatives of regional economic organizations, and delegations of organizations of decentralized cooperation and scientific diplomacy. Individuals from this international cosmopolitan elite contribute to constructing the multi-scale urban fabric through their housing, travel and consumption practices.

Finally, networks of daily interactions between the local, regional and international scales are created in the administrative and political spheres: decision-making processes concerning African cities often involve several types of authorities located at different scales of power: a redevelopment project may bring together customary neighborhood chiefs, agents of municipal services, representatives of the decentralized government and actors from a ministry. If the project involves external funding, technical experts from international companies or organizations may also be involved. This multi-scale governance sometimes results in overlapping areas of responsibility and the formation of administrative gray areas.

This blurring of responsibilities is even more pronounced in urban peripheries that are gradually being absorbed – spatially and administratively – by cities. The expansion of cities into these areas involves, to begin with, a conversion of land use from agriculture to residential and commercial uses, which is often accompanied by significant administrative changes: in Tanzania, for example, urbanization is leading to a transfer of power from village political bodies to municipalities and the central government. Village councils and chiefs find themselves having to gradually cede their authority over land issues to higher authorities, including the ministry in charge of land use.[37] These situations of administrative transition are inherent to the urbanization process. They

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37. S. Schlimmer, "Land Governance in the Outskirts of African Cities: Socio-Economic Challenges of Growing Peri-Urban Land Markets", *Briefings de l'Ifri*, Ifri, July 19, 2021.

create fertile ground for power conflicts between actors located at different scales, some of whom see their functions transformed and challenged.

The transformations that can be observed in peri-urban areas exemplify the multi-scale functioning of urban governance. Furthermore, they remind us that urbanization can be understood only by taking into consideration the numerous links that cities have with their peripheries, including the most remote areas.

Reading Cities in Terms of the Urban-Rural Continuum

African cities are by no means closed spaces. They are part of regional and international networks, but they are also defined by the constant interactions of their inhabitants and markets with rural areas. However, in research as well as in the domains of technical expertise and development in Africa, knowledge concerning rural "worlds" and urban development respectively has long been divided into two distinct fields. The recent interest in the topics of African cities, sustainable cities and smart cities tends to reinforce the idea of a separation between expertise on urban development and work on the rest of the territory.

Since the end of the 1990s, research has demonstrated the limits of this binary reading of urban and rural development, emphasizing the multiple links and flows that blur the boundaries between cities and their rural environments. These areas represent dynamic spaces marked by constant movement, for example through the circulation of market goods and people engaged in different livelihood strategies.[38] Urban and rural populations are dependent on each other: population growth in cities increases food needs that can be met by increased agricultural productivity in rural areas. Conversely, experts point out that a vibrant rural agricultural market requires the development of transport infrastructure, financing options and transfers of knowledge and technology that can be provided by urban actors.[39] Beyond the creation of markets and food security, these urban-rural linkages are fueled by the mobility of rural migrants who seek to build a future in the city while maintaining constant relations with their places of origin, by the transfer of money from urban dwellers to their family members living in the village, and also by the flow of information (concerning housing, land investment or educational opportunities), which is facilitated by increasingly efficient cell phone networks. The growing interdependence and social and economic interactions between rural and

38. K. van Gough, J. Agergaard, N. Fold and L. Moller-Jensen "Conceptualising and Performing Comparison of Rural-Urban Dynamics" in: J. Agergaard, N. Fold and K. van Gough, *Rural-Urban Dynamics: Livelihoods, Mobility and Markets in African and Asian Frontiers*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 9-22.
39. *Ibid.*

urban areas have led experts to develop the concept of the urban-rural continuum, which is manifested in changes to land tenure arrangements and land use (notably the conversion of agricultural land), the transformation of subsistence agriculture into a commercial sector, the diversification of livelihoods and economic activities in rural areas, an increased mobility of people and market goods, and the proliferation of social ties.[40] This concept is now being actively promoted by leading organizations with an interest in urbanization in Africa, such as UN-Habitat, which in 2019 formulated a set of guiding principles around rural-urban linkages in the context of its attempt to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals (which are themselves part of the goals set out in the UN's "2030 Agenda" resolution).[41]

This reading of urban-rural fluidity also makes it possible to take into consideration the growth of secondary cities and urban formations that serve as an interface between metropolises and the agricultural hinterland. Indeed, even the smallest cities, which are partly the product of this urban-rural continuum, are also integrated into the globalized economy and allow for the routing, relaying and sale of manufactured goods from international markets.[42]

One final observation regarding the urban-rural continuum highlights once again the relevance of approaching cities in terms of governance. The economic, administrative and social links between cities and the countryside take place on several local, national and international scales. They are also characterized by an overlapping of sectors: agriculture, land issues, infrastructure (economic, transport, etc.), employment policies, etc. are intimately linked and their connections are a driving force for the urban-rural continuum.

40. B. Charlery de la Masselière, F. Bart, B. Thibaud and R. Benos, "Revisiting the Rural-Urban Linkages in East Africa: Continuity or Breakdown in the Spatial Model of Rural Development? The Case of the Kilimanjaro Region in Tanzania", *Revue belge de géographie*, Vol. 1, 2020, pp. 1-25.
41. UN-Habitat, *Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2019.
42. S. Racaud, "Introduction: Connexions d'espaces intertropicaux à d'autres échelles: Lire des constructions sociales", *Cahiers d'outre-mer*, Vol. 2, No. 278, 2018, pp. 245-248.

Figure 6 : The Urban-Rural Continuum
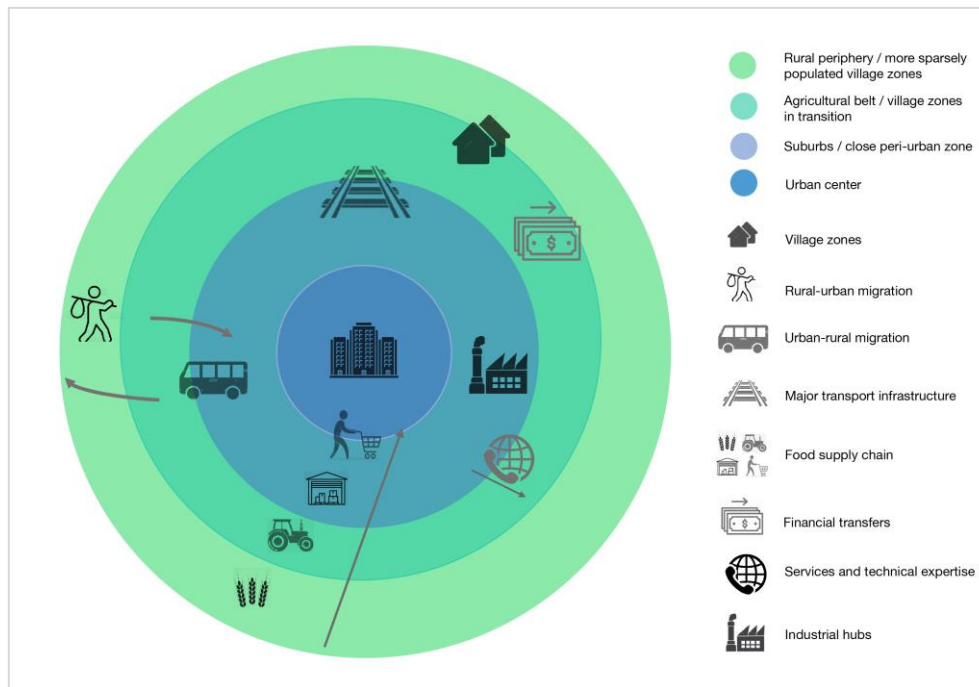
Concept: S. Schlimmer. Graphic created by D. von Büren (Ifri), 2022.

The analysis of African cities and the transformations linked to their rapid growth must therefore take into account the multitude of actors and sectors involved, the interplay of scales that is inherent to their governance and the interaction between cities and their corresponding rural environments. Based on this analytical framework, we propose a number of avenues for reinterpreting and synthesizing existing research results and for orienting reflection around new research initiatives. Urban infrastructure, land use and the development of secondary cities are priority issues that lie at the center of current expert debates on the future of urban worlds in Africa. We will next demonstrate how these issues are interrelated.

Research Perspectives on Key Challenges Facing African Cities

International awareness of the issues surrounding the rapid growth of cities in Africa has led to the formation of multi-stakeholder networks, the creation of research projects, and also the establishment of initiatives aimed at disseminating models and sharing expertise in the field of urban planning.[43] Although these programs have different formats and objectives, their actors share a common interest in accessing available data and knowledge and sometimes even participating in their production. At the end of the first part of the UN's 2030 Agenda resolution, debate around the major challenges of urban growth in Africa centered on several key questions: the first focus of discussion related to the gap between needs and availability with regard to urban infrastructure, and particularly the challenges linked to its financing. A second focus related to the management of intermediary cities and their role in the urban network. We will now propose avenues for reflection based on these new orientations in debates, while integrating our governance approach. We also argue that issues of land ownership and use are fundamental for analyzing these recent developments.

Financing Urban Infrastructure

Experts on urban issues in Africa are ringing alarm bells: a growing number of reports, after noting an unprecedented level of urban growth across the continent, are reframing the problem by emphasizing the lack of infrastructure and its financing. The African Development Bank, the OECD and the UNDP concluded in 2016 that, of the investments in urban infrastructure that are needed to accommodate the additional number of inhabitants expected in cities by 2050, two-thirds have yet to be made.[44]

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43. Various initiatives have been created over the last 15 years with the aim of elaborating and promoting mechanisms and concepts of urban governance, such as the concept of sustainable cities. At the international level, these initiatives include the Global Fund for Cities Development (GFCD) based in Paris and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) organization, both of which are multi-stakeholder networks bringing together representatives from different local governments around the world. In France, several initiatives have been promoted by the private sector to promote the "sustainable city", such as the association Rêve de scènes urbaines, chaired by the Vinci Group, and also the "sustainable city" task force of MEDEF International.

44. AfDB, OECD and UNDP, *African Economic Outlook: Special Theme: Sustainable Cities and Structural Transformation*, Abidjan/Paris/New York: AfDB/OECD/UNDP, 2016.

On the scale of the whole African continent, this gap corresponds to a deficit of $93 billion per year and concerns in particular the fields of water, electricity, sanitation and transport.[45] These alarming findings are accompanied by a certain vagueness with regard to the definition and types of urban infrastructure that are envisaged in these analyses.

Defining Urban Infrastructure

Behind this focus of standard-setting work on the "infrastructure finance gap" lies the assumption that infrastructure is a potential response to the challenges of urban growth. Infrastructure is thus seen as the backbone of efficient cities, determining not only the evolution of their economic performance, but also their urban form. Investment in the urban fabric and structure, including infrastructure networks, is presented as a condition for unlocking the potential of cities to produce manufactured goods and services and ultimately to contribute to the economic growth of the country as a whole.[46] This discourse is therefore focused on the economic issues of urbanization and aims to promote various forms of private and public investment in the very broad field of urban infrastructure.[47]

These results and recommendations have a standard-setting purpose and may give rise to ideological debates. However, the link between urban growth and infrastructure financing raises challenging research questions that feed into the urban governance approach. First, the term "infrastructure" (or "urban infrastructure"), as it is used in the reports cited above, seems to relate to a fully-fledged policy area with clear boundaries, yet in reality infrastructure encompasses a wide range of interventions that cut across public policy sectors (this is one aspect of the conceptual vagueness mentioned above). UN-Habitat, for example, uses the term "urban infrastructure" in relation to road construction and transport in general, and public infrastructure (basic services, including access to water, sanitation and electricity), but also waste management, economic infrastructure (e.g. wholesale markets), telecommunications and social infrastructure (e.g. hospitals and schools).[48]

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45. I. Turok, "Getting Urbanization to Work in Africa: the Role of the Urban-Land-Infrastructure Nexus", *Area Development and Policy*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2016, pp. 30-47.
46. *Ibid.*
47. See also V. Foster and C. Briceno-Garmendia, *Africa's Infrastructure: A Time for Transformation*, Washington: IBRD/World Bank, 2013.
48. See, for example, the various fields of action associated with the term "infrastructure" in the UN-Habitat Annual Report 2020, Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

Special Economic Zones: Infrastructure Cutting across Urban Sectors

The creation of industrial hubs and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) – an increasingly common model in Africa for promoting investment and industrialization[49] – demonstrates the interaction of different sectors when developing infrastructure near cities: in Tanzania, for example, an SEZ is being developed in the Bagamoyo district on the outskirts of the economic capital, Dar es Salaam. The Tanzanian government's objective is to make the Bagamoyo SEZ "a first choice for investment and trade in East Africa" by creating infrastructure that meets international standards.[50] On a plot of just over 9,000 hectares, the government aims to implement a satellite city project and promote investment activities in the sectors of tourism, trade, industry, housing and social services. The construction of a seaport and an international airport are the most prominent large infrastructure projects in the building program.

Land as the Foundation of Infrastructure Projects

These SEZ projects highlight the interweaving of sectors and the interaction between economic, social, road and energy infrastructures. An issue underlying all of these sectoral interventions and, more broadly, SEZ projects, is that of land use and ownership. Every infrastructure project is built on land whose access or occupation rights have been transferred, acquired or bought back. The implementation of investment projects (agricultural, residential, infrastructure, etc.) often causes disruption to pre-existing land relations and contributes to the development of a market in land rights. The announcement of one of these types of projects also attracts the interest of speculators, who consider that this increase in the economic value of land presents excellent opportunities for investment.[51] The confrontation of interests and ambivalent strategies for the acquisition and transfer of land to investors through the intermediary of government and administrative actors can lead to conflicts around land rights. It also contributes to the widening of inequalities, which manifests itself in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion around access to land and natural resources, involving, on the one hand, the new holders of land rights (the government, investors, speculators, etc.) and, on the other hand, those who have ceded or been dispossessed of those rights (e.g. populations of

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49. L. Cotula and L. Mouan, "Special Economic Zones: Engines of Development or Sites of Exploitation", IIED Briefing, 2018.
50. COWI, *Bagamoyo SEZ Master Plan: Final Report*, Copenhagen: Kongens Lyngby, 2013.
51. Sometimes the mere announcement of new infrastructure development, such as transport construction projects, can make the price of land triple or quadruple, especially in peri-urban areas.

peri-urban areas practicing subsistence agriculture and holding only customary land rights).

Land tenure provides the foundation of any urban infrastructure project. This intrinsic link therefore raises the question of land rights systems, which, in large parts of the countries of SSA, are characterized by the coexistence and overlapping of different types of land rights.[52] For several years now, the discourse on urban infrastructure in Africa has created a new link between the issue of its financing and the land sector. The argument is based on the fact that African governments depend largely on external donors to finance their infrastructure projects. China, for example, provided almost 20% of the total budget spent on infrastructure in Africa in 2017.[53] Experts consider this financial dependence on external investment sources to be an unsustainable solution that will not allow governments to meet the infrastructure needs of a growing urban population. They therefore promote the alternative of local financing solutions, which require a strengthening of the powers of decentralized governments. This involves developing new mechanisms for the generation of financial resources that involve local authorities in the processes of both creating and reinvesting these funds in urban infrastructure projects. To this end, taxes on land and real estate, calculated and levied directly by the relevant local government departments, are presented as a promising "tool".[54] These tools have particularly been adapted and promoted by organizations in the international community. They are intended to create approaches that first identify the different types of land rights that exist in contexts where the registration rate of land and real estate is low. Based on this information, the tax to be paid by the different individual and collective holders is calculated and levied. These taxes are then supposed to strengthen the financial capacities of local public actors, who often have meager budgets, to perform their functions as providers of social services. This approach of creating financial resources from property taxes is fully consistent with the promotion of sustainable urbanization through the decentralization of public functions. It also raises the question of the relationship of trust existing between the governors and the governed in

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52. This situation of the overlapping of so-called statutory rights (those that are recognized by written law) and customary rights is the consequence of the imposition of legal systems modeled on the regimes of property relations that were predominant in the colonizing countries.

53. See African Cities Alliance, *Infrastructure Financing in Africa: Overview, Research Gaps and Research Agenda*, Cape Town: African Cities Alliance, 2021. The authors explain that national governments are the main funders of infrastructure on the continent. However, it should be kept in mind that national public budgets are themselves partly composed of external contributions, including official aid.

54. The Global Land Tool Network, whose mission is to develop and promote tools that enhance land tenure security for all people, especially the most vulnerable, has included financing based on land tax in its list of tools. See GLTN, *Leveraging Land: Land-Based Finance for Local Governments: A Trainer's Guide*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat, 2016.

contexts where taxation mechanisms can be contentious – an area on which research is scarce.[55]

Finally, the debate on the financing of urban infrastructure also raises the question of the territorial distribution of investment and projects. Recent studies have noted a concentration of urban development initiatives and investment in capital and metropolitan cities. Consequently, secondary and intermediary cities, whose high growth rates were mentioned earlier, are then faced with even more limited access to social and physical infrastructure.[56] It is therefore one of the challenges of urban governance to address this imbalance. One of the tools promoted for this purpose is the extension and densification of infrastructure networks in order to facilitate the integration of the various urban centers – both large and medium-sized – into the territorial network.

The Governance of "Secondary Cities"

The role of secondary cities has increased since the 1990s, particularly as a result of the decentralization policies adopted in many African countries. However, it is only since the 2010s that experts and operational actors have been promoting their close integration into development approaches. Given the growth prospects of these cities and their increasing importance in the territorial network, it is essential to integrate them fully into the research questions concerning urban governance.

Figure 7: Change in the Share of Total Urban Population by Size of Urban Agglomeration
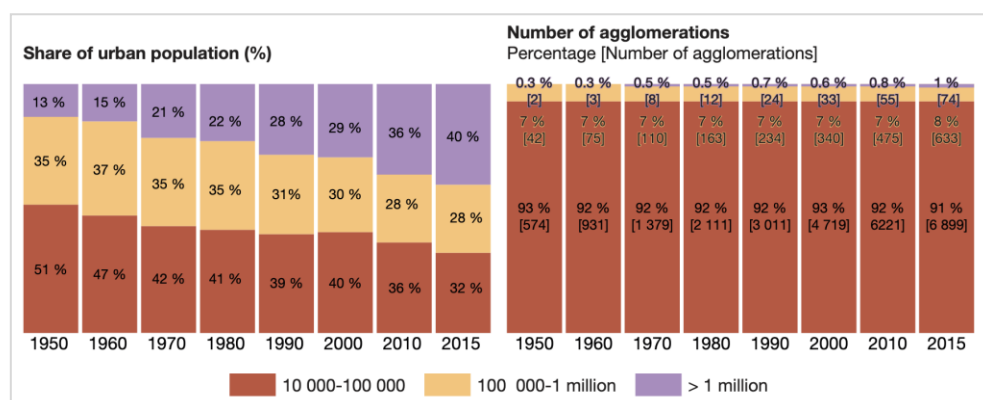
Source: OECD, Africapolis, 2020.

55. On the issues of taxation in Africa, see O. Owen and R. Schuller-Green, "Impôts et pratiques fiscales: Interroger la signification et les usages de la formalité", *Politique africaine*, Vol. 151, No. 3, 2018, pp. 5-15.
56. D. Githira, S. Takibi, I. Njuguna, G. Rae, S. Wandera and J. Ndirangu, *Analysis of Multiple Deprivations in Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Nairobi: UN-Habitat/UNICEF, 2020.

With growth rates sometimes ranging from 7% to 9% per year (see above), some of Africa's so-called secondary cities are growing faster than the capitals and metropolises. These urban agglomerations play multiple social, political and economic roles, but their population sizes, their forms and their positions within the territorial network vary. A first challenge for research in this area is to identify the different categories of cities aside from metropolises such as Abidjan, Accra, Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Nairobi. The relatively recent recognition of the issue of secondary cities by actors in the international community has resulted in a certain amount of definitional confusion: for example, works sometimes make consistent use of the terms "secondary city", "intermediary (or intermediate) city", "medium-sized city" or "satellite city", even though these concepts do not always refer to the same characteristics and types of cities. Satellite cities, for example, are urban agglomerations located in relative proximity (and this variable has yet to be determined) to metropolises, but they may be small or medium-sized, depending on the criteria set by the authorities of the city and of the country in question. In SSA, several projects for the construction of new districts have been launched with the aim of creating such satellite cities (e.g. Konza City in Kenya, Eco Atlantic City in Nigeria and Hope City in Ghana). Whether a city is considered small, medium or large usually depends on the number of its inhabitants. The adjective "intermediary" is sometimes used to refer to the demographic variable, and sometimes to emphasize its territorial role as a hub connecting large cities and rural areas.[57] Finally, there is no universal definition of the "secondary city". Authors sometimes refer to the number of inhabitants and sometimes to the simple fact that a given city is not the economic capital of the country. When considering current debates on these non-metropolises, it is important to be aware of the panorama of situations to which the concepts may refer. This wide range can encompass villages in the process of obtaining the status of a municipality, with a population of around ten thousand, and regional capitals with a population in excess of one million (e.g. Kisumu in Kenya).

Often, so-called secondary cities have the status of bridge cities between, on the one hand, rural areas and smaller towns, and on the other hand, regional and national capitals. They accommodate people on the move and commercial goods in transit and thus constitute socio-economic hubs. In some countries, they are the sites of decentralized political and administrative power and play a role in providing essential services, such as health services. As links in both trade routes and migratory routes, these growing cities highlight the overlap between the urban and the rural. As they are distinguished by the confrontation of urban characteristics (the

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57. H. Quénot-Suarez, "Villes secondaires d'Afrique: Une urbanité mal connue: Les villes moyennes sont des facteurs de développement et de recomposition des territoires" in: T. De Montbrial (ed.), *RAMSES 2016. Climat: une nouvelle chance?*, Paris, Ifri, 2015, pp. 110-113.

presence of markets, administrative services and, to some extent, road and energy infrastructure) and activities associated with rural life (the sale of seeds, fertilizers and other goods needed for agriculture), medium-sized cities are a manifestation of the concept of the urban-rural continuum. However, their function within the larger urban network is not limited to a role as "intermediary": medium-sized and secondary cities are characterized by their own urban forms, social relations and political and economic issues.[58]

The concentration of urban development programs around metropolises and capitals has produced socio-spatial inequalities to the detriment of the inhabitants of these secondary cities. For example, the challenges posed by informality are exacerbated by the often limited technical and financial capacities of decentralized administrations. In Kenya, informal employment rates are higher in the towns of Kisii (in the west), Nakuru (in the center-south) and Kilifi (in the east) than in the capital, Nairobi. Similarly, UN-Habitat experts note that there is more informal housing in the coastal town of Kilifi (90% of housing) than in Nairobi (about 60%).[59] Although care must be taken in analyzing different forms of informal economies and social situations, these results highlight the potential risk of a reproduction, in secondary cities, of the major urban problems observed elsewhere, particularly in capital cities.

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58. *Ibid.*
59. D. Githira, S. Takibi, I. Njuguna, G. Rae, S. Wandera and J. Ndirangu, *Analysis of Multiple Deprivations in Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, op.cit.*
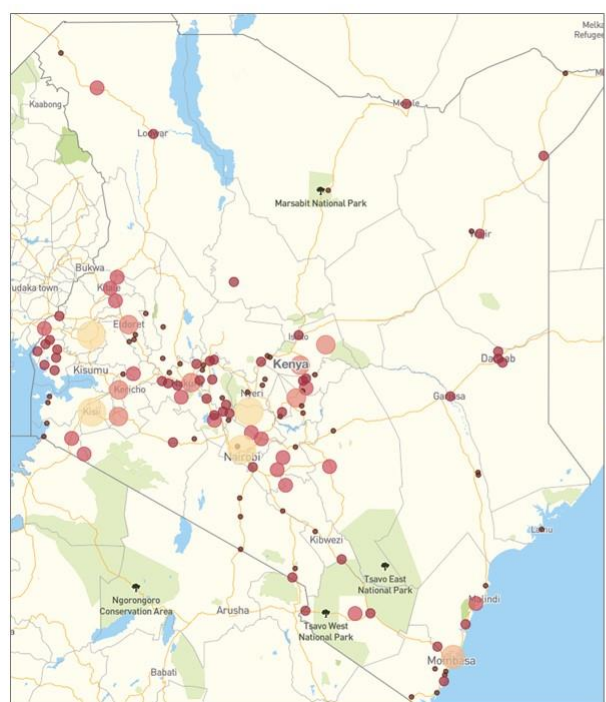
Figure 8: Urbanization in Kenya between 1960 and 2015

Level of urbanization in 1960

● 100 000 – 300 000: 2 cities (0.5m inhabitants)

● 30 000 – 100 000: 1 city (0m inhabitants)

• 10 000 – 30 000: 3 cities (0.1m inhabitants)

Level of urbanization in 2015

● Urban population < 3m: 3 cities (14.3m inhabitants)

● 1-3m: 2 cities (3.3m inhabitants)

● 300 000 – 1m: 7 cities (4m inhabitants)

● 100 000 – 300 000: 20 cities (3.5m inhabitants)

● 30 000 – 100 000: 44 cities (2.5m inhabitants)

• 10 000 – 30 000: 50 cities (1m inhabitants)

Source: Africapolis, 2022.

One way of approaching the cross-cutting issues of the growth of the various types of secondary cities is to examine land issues. Whether it is a matter of villages that are becoming urbanized, medium-sized towns near new road infrastructure projects or satellite cities, we can observe changes in relationships to land. Urbanization involves not only administrative changes but also a conversion of land uses. Agricultural land, whose use or ownership rights are rarely officially registered, is progressively subdivided into smaller residential (or commercial) plots and transformed in accordance with the new urban planning criteria. Through subdivision and the development of services, land increases in value. The prices of plots are multiplied when they are integrated into one of the various categories of the urban land market and when they are registered with a title of ownership.[60] This process of transforming customary agricultural land into urban land represents an attractive market for investors, speculators and numerous private, public and informal land professionals (surveyors, developers, real estate and land resale companies, brokers, etc.) who play a role in these land transactions. Peri-urban neighborhoods, which by definition are transitional zones subject to changes in land use, represent the most dynamic land markets in SSA.[61] These markets, which develop alongside urban infrastructure projects, are often not regulated by the public authorities and are driven by informal transactions, encouraged by the intervention of land agents and intermediaries. The illegal subdivision of land leads to situations that are often incompatible with planning standards and makes it difficult to ensure access to infrastructure and basic services after the fact. When experts encourage the financing of urban infrastructure in order to integrate secondary cities into the territorial network, it is important to consider the effects of these projects on land ownership and use, which form the foundation of the urban fabric.

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60. A. Durand-Lasserve, M. Durand-Lasserve and H. Selon, *Le système d'approvisionnement en terres dans les villes d'Afrique de l'Ouest: Le cas de Bamako*, Washington: World Bank/French Development Agency, 2015.

61. B. Wehrmann, "The Dynamics of Peri-Urban Land Markets in Sub-Saharan Africa: Adherence to the Virtue of Common Property vs. Quest for Individual Gain", *Erdkunde*, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2008, pp. 75-88.
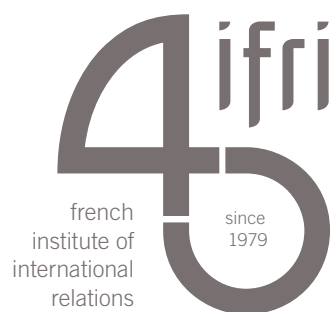
Conclusion

The rapid growth of African cities has been identified as a major issue on the international community's agenda. While debates on urban issues in Africa have long taken place within spaces of academic and technical expertise, statistical forecasts of urban growth have aroused more general interest in the subject. In France, the issue is now being addressed by the media and municipal actors, but also by private sector actors, who are creating spaces for exchange in order to reflect on both the challenges and the potential economic opportunities that the urban transition may represent.[62] Such prolific contributions to the debate represent a certain risk in terms of definitional rigor and the use of concepts. Depending on their interpretations and approaches, these actors may use key terms such as governance and urban transition, sustainability and the environment, infrastructure or secondary cities, to describe very diverse situations. Without a minimum level of agreement on the meaning of these terms, they can quickly become buzzwords, thereby undermining the substance of the debate. Nonetheless, this broader awareness of the challenges of urban growth in Africa reaffirms the importance of approaching cities through the concept of governance: urban development is conceived, invested in, debated and implemented by a plurality of public and private actors, specialized in different sectors and located at different scales. These actors have different interests, perspectives and understandings of the issues at stake, which are valuable sources of information for understanding the content of urban governance.

In the present study we emphasize that "African cities" are not an object of research in themselves. Rather, they constitute a subject of interest that can be approached through different research questions. By updating the concept of urban governance, we propose to focus attention on the actors and sectors that drive this governance, on the scales (local, national, international) on which it is produced, and also on the multiple links between cities and rural environments. Using this approach, we suggest certain avenues of research that could be the subject of multi-stakeholder initiatives on the future of urban governance in Africa: the financing of urban infrastructure and the management of so-called secondary cities, which are experiencing considerable rates of growth, are subjects that require the production of more knowledge and data. However, the links between the construction of infrastructure and the development of these

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62. For example, a series of debates was organized by the Veolia Institute in collaboration with *Le Monde*, entitled "Demain, la ville africaine", in November and December 2021 in Rabat and Abidjan.

secondary cities cannot be understood without taking into account the various land issues at stake. The integration of land policies in this research approach is thus necessary to provide a basis for informed and forward-looking thinking on the future of urban development in Africa.