

Jérôme Chenal

# THE WEST AFRICAN CITY

URBAN SPACE AND MODELS OF URBAN PLANNING



EPFL Press

Distributed by Routledge



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The African city exists! This idea – archaic, overused, and not really in keeping with the zeitgeist of globalization – is nevertheless the one we will develop here. According to today's ambient urban theories, the African city has not existed for decades – or more precisely, the decades since independence (five in the case of Abidjan<sup>1</sup> and three in the case of Harare). Or it exists, but as a city in 'decline' or 'crisis' at best. Whatever the case, this city is merely a product of Northern culture – mixed, hybridized and creolized, though it is also defined by models that, for it, are exotic: the European city.

In this perspective, the African city is closer to a non-city (once again defined relative to the European city). We imagine these neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the outskirts whose borders are both urban and global, populated by new arrivals from rural areas that have come to join the ranks of urban misery. We needn't go further in order to understand the imagery conveyed in this Northern view of a South that is too informal and too illegal to merit consideration.

The archaic idea of 'looking for the African city' is based on the supposition that the city still exists, despite rumours of the death of cities and the new reign of the urban (CHOAY 1994), and that cities are still linked to the specific context, place, history and culture of a given region, territory, or state. Of course, caramel-coloured soft drinks are the same all over, from the streets of Addis Ababa to the boulevards of Abu Dhabi, but a city is defined by its lifestyles, forms, and economic and symbolic positioning on the international scene, not by consumer practices, financial flows and the movements of the hyper-mobile elite. The city is defined – among other things – by its inhabitants, their aspirations and desires, and how they see their city.

Lagos, Kinshasa, Monrovia, Freetown, and Abidjan are frightening; they evoke images of civil war, vagrancy, famine, corruption, and other illicit practices. Beyond the negative stereotypes it has been saddled with, the African city is, above all, the home of half of the continent's population (and a large portion of the planet's poor). It is effectively the 'city of slums,' but it is also the popular city of mixed functions (and even outrageousness, if its name is Yamoussoukro). It is the city of colours, smells, contrast, and inequality – in brief, a multi-faceted city that we are still trying to understand.

We have begun theorizing this resolutely altermodern African city:

as we see it today,<sup>2</sup> this African city is in transition, constantly changing, diverging from the European model (in terms of architecture and planning), and, like every other city in the world, heading in unknown directions. This city has (temporarily?) taken the form of a hybrid ensemble that we could call altermodern – that is, a modernity different from that of industrialized, progressive, Western countries; altermodernity is no longer the product of a blend of a white colonial model and black indigenous practices, but one that results from another trajectory and vernacular, one that is establishing its own rules and resolutely affirming this ‘other’ modernity.<sup>3</sup> (CHENAL *et al.* 2009a)

This city – post-colonial in every way – is now decidedly urban. To understand this position, we will look at three French-speaking West African cities at two urban scales. The first is that of city planning, with its tools, models, and history; the second – which is much closer to the terrain – is an exploration of relationship with, and issues surrounding, public spaces. By comparing these two levels, we can gain an understanding of both the commonalities and the specificities of each city. For this, we will use three field study sites: Nouakchott in Mauritania, Dakar in Senegal, and Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. In order to tell the story of this altermodern city, we must also develop a new framework. Without that, we are unlikely to observe a distinctly ‘African’ city, observing instead the standardization of the world and cities in crisis defined by what they lack (lack of water, lack of resources, lack of democracy, or lack of urbanity). In order to switch frameworks, we had to change our approach by using several instead of one, and interspersing and overlapping them to look at the same question from different angles, sometimes innovating (i.e. the use of images) by inventing specific protocols (CHENAL 2006). This approach allows us to show the African city in all its richness. Given the experimental nature of the methodology, the section wherein we describe our method is as important for its visual anthropology as the end goal itself.

This book is the result of a doctoral thesis completed in early 2009. Here, it has been freed from its formal, academic constraints. This transition was not easy; originally 1,100,000 characters, it was reduced to 550,000 in its final version – in other words, cut exactly in half. We had to mourn entire sections, with thousands of words of examples. However, the crux of our research, the key material that is most likely to help the reader get a sense of this African city, is still there. In other words, we shortened the text without altering our research objectives or the sequence of our argument in any way. For the reader’s convenience, we have sometimes taken the liberty of rearranging certain elements because of the shortening of the text.

Our main goal here is to analyse the links between urbanization processes, physical planning, models of the city, social practices, and spatial transformations in order to understand the African city in all its specificity, in light of developing efficient management techniques and planning models, and to modestly contribute to urban theory in general (or at least as regards the African city).

A macroscopic and microscopic analysis of urban planning and public space will make this understanding possible. Are the planning of city and public space complementary parts of the same reality, or are they disconnected from one another?

After some general considerations to help stimulate reflection on the urban phenomenon and the African city (Introduction), we will begin with a macro view of the city, analysing the major ideological models behind each city. What planning does it draw on? What ideas are conveyed? What are the basic models, or the common knowledge urban planners and administrative structures use when developing plans for their cities? It is, therefore, by looking at trends, planning tools, and ideologies – in short, all that provides us with a holistic view of the city – that we will analyse our three field study sites, first from an historical perspective (Section I) and then through an analysis of their planning tools (Section II). Are our three cities of study designed according to the same city model? If so, which one? Moreover, do public spaces in the three cities reveal commonalities or show that the cities are similar? Are the ideas and ideologies drawn upon imported from Western cultures? We will look at how African cities experience this importation and how it influences the use of space and social practices. African cities continue to develop according to the same rules established at their founding – even 50 years after independence. The same applies to urban planning tools, which correspond to a decidedly European colonial concept of *city* and an antiquated methodology.

In the second step in this process, we will attempt to understand public spaces, the issues they face, and how they are perceived in order to decipher regulations, analyse how the city is used, and how it has changed. What are the major issues of public space? Are they the same for all three cities? If not, what are the differences, and why do they exist? To do this we will begin with an analysis of articles from the press (Section III), and then photographic images (Section IV), which, in terms of methodology, is undoubtedly the most original section and important in the fight to overcome the stereotypes too often found in urban research.

Issues of public space are more or less identical; as cities use the same management and planning models, the outcomes are the same. Despite this, there is no such thing as ‘standardization’ of urban spaces, models, or of ways of using the street. On the contrary, cities are rooted in a context and, hence, there is no disconnect between the city and the larger setting. In the third and final step (Section V), we will compare our macro- and micro-analyses of public spaces in order to not only understand the creation and production of space, but also to better grasp the rules that govern cities, public spaces, actors’ practices and the mechanisms used to regulate them.

FOLLOWING PAGES: SHOTS TAKEN EVERY 30 MINUTES, DAKAR CITY CENTRE, NEAR SANDAGA MARKET.







Understanding the regulation and production of urban space will also enable us to critically analyse the tools used for planning and managing them, going beyond modern/traditional and legal/illegal dichotomies. Such understanding transcends the idea of a binary organization of societies to include what the African city has contributed to former colonists, to new urbanism in Dubai, as well as to the traditional village. A critical reading will allow us to propose and develop not only management tools but also, and more importantly, sustainable (in the socio-environmental sense of the term), integrated planning tools that change from Kuala Lumpur to Paris or from Zagreb to Lisieux.

Hence, it is both a detailed analysis of public spaces and urban development plans for cities that are the focal points of this research. From this will undoubtedly emerge not only an understanding of the city as a whole but also of how public spaces are used, managed, and planned (which, in turn, teaches us about the city as a whole), based on the premise that a city must be considered globally, and not simply as a collection of specific neighbourhoods or streets.

This research approach was tested in the cities of Nouakchott (Mauritania), Dakar (Senegal), and Abidjan (Ivory Coast). These three cities were chosen based on a combination of factors. The first was geographical location, as the idea was to look at cities in West Africa. In this geographical area we chose to focus only on French-speaking cities. While a comparison of cities of former colonial powers would no doubt be rich, it was not our intent here. In addition to geographical choice, we chose cities of different sizes but with similar contexts, the assumption being that there are many similarities between cities, regardless of their size: cities of 0.8 or 4.5 million inhabitants are still planned the same way and, thus, have similar problems and issues around public space. Our goal here was not to categorize cities but to understand the African city.

Our cities – all three of which happen to have ports – are colonial creations, though founded at different times. In this book we will attempt to show the *constants*, or, in other words, the continuity in thinking and planning that (re) produced (a second assumption) the same city in different epochs.

- <sup>1</sup> Independence arrived in 1960 in most French countries, while independence only came to Harare (formerly Salisbury) in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) in 1980.
- <sup>2</sup> We are referring in particular to: CHENAL, PEDRAZZINI & VOLLMER 2009 and Chenal, J., Pedrazzini, Y. & Vollmer, B. (2009b) "De l'alter-modernité architecturale dans les dunes." EspaceTemps.net, Mensuelles, 11.05.2009, <http://espacetemps.net/document7744.html>. et Chenal, Pedrazzini 2009; Chenal, J. & Pedrazzini, Y. (2009) "Sous le soleil. 11:00, Nouakchott, Mauritanie." EspaceTemps.net, Mensuelles, 07.09.2009, <http://espacetemps.net/document7895.html>. Two attempts to test the observation device that we have called "research in visual anthropology." See also CHENAL 2009.
- <sup>3</sup> In other words, an urban modernity with *other spaces*, in the sense that Foucault (1984) attributes to heterotopias. One can also think of "temporary autonomous zones" and the pirate utopias of Hakim Bey (1997).



## ASPECTS OF THE URBAN PHENOMENON

### Introduction

The fact that urban theory defines the African city in terms of 'lack' (lack of resources, lack of funds, etc.) presupposes a basic model upon which this definition is founded, just as 'informal' practices assumes the existence of a formal framework with official, established rules that are adhered to by all. The informal city (the city in crisis) therefore is defined only in terms of the *formal* city that is *not* in crisis. This city model does exist: it is the European city – historical, dense, and nestled within a network of cities that together form the urban structure of a state.

It is difficult for us to understand the African city; during a simple meander through the endless outskirts of Nouakchott, we quickly forget all about the dense city. On a stroll through the markets of Dakar, one quickly understands that the rules that govern business have nothing to do with those of a street in Lausanne or Amsterdam. And yet, 'globalized' city implies the adoption of a single model – that of a generic city (KOOLHAAS 2000).

What we see, and what white colonists tried to establish, is precisely this model of the European city (*tropicalized*, of course, so much did the models of yore take the climatic, geostrategic setting to heart). The model of the West African city is already an adapted version of a basic model. The colonial French city is based on a similar model, modes of spatial production and urban/architectural systems. This is only one partially true and partially false example, as the contextual subtlety has actually 'hybridized' the original model (which was already multiple).

If we use the French colonial model as a starting point, the history of these cities is nothing more than the long, slow deterioration of the original model. We understand the need to renew and rebuild the image of the city, to understand that the altermodernity of the African city is not merely a by-product of a model but, in fact, a self-made model in its own right – the culmination of this 'hybridization' and Creole identity and not simply a deteriorated version of the original model. Hence, we understand that the blending of models is not merely a question of globalization; it is an asset.

In order to understand the city, we must start by deconstructing the dominant models and reflecting on the urban phenomenon *as a whole*, which also means grasping different aspects of a variety of phenomena and recognizing that urban

analysis cannot 'do without' this or that issue. It must take them all into account, in all their complexity.

Were we to reinterpret the urban phenomenon based on Simmel's definition – an objectified product of the interactions of all of the actors involved – we discover that the three fundamental components of the urban phenomenon are *lifestyles*, *urban morphology*, and *centrality*. Basing our analyses on these three dimensions of urbanity and how they relate to one another allows us to transcend traditional interpretation of the city by providing a basic structure for future reflection. This also helps us understand the change in state between aspects that once moved in the same spatial framework, and the relative autonomy of fundamental dimensions of the urban phenomenon that currently exists.

We must start by analysing the city in terms of lifestyle. Lifestyles now tend toward spatial uniformity, meaning that the distinction between city and rural life (the 'free' city, versus 'rural servitude') that existed in the past has begun to disappear. With the emancipation from spatial proximity and a wider range of choices, specificities fall away, leaving us with one major lifestyle – the *urban* lifestyle – which (and this fact is new) is being adopted throughout everywhere in multiple forms, with no direct link to the spatial context (meaning the suburbs of Dakar are no less 'urban' than the suburbs of any other European city). However, analysing the city from only this angle does not allow for an understanding of strictly urban issues and ultimately puts all of the world's inhabitants the same category: *urban*. It is the *category* that serves the analysis, and not the reverse. Therefore our intention is to clearly demonstrate that it is not lifestyles that are becoming increasingly uniform but the consumption of goods and services, which is not the same thing. However, urban life is still the culmination of three factors: number, choice, and anonymity. If one connects territories using these three factors, they disintegrate; anonymity does not exist in the sprawling city, nor does choice.

In terms of form, the city is no longer a discrete system but, instead, tends to sprawl. Many works (SIEVERTS 2004) have measured sprawl, which quite possibly is linked to mobility and speed potentials (KAUFMANN 2007), economic development based on growth (liberalism) and the resulting increase in consumption. Urban morphology is becoming more spread out, resulting in increasingly fragmented spaces, spatial segregation, urban sprawl, the dilution of space and the creation of new consumer centralities (from shopping centres to wholesale supermarkets on the outskirts of African cities to amusement parks); hence, the abandoning of historical centres that, at best, have (for the luckier among them) been turned into outdoor museums for cultural tourism.

The final element is centrality, defined here as the spatial implementation of the globalization of society, with regard to spaces of power, competition, and global economy. New global centralities – be they cultural, political or economic – are



emerging, while others are in decline. The city, at the whim of competition, is redesigning the system of cities (CATTAN *et al.* 1994) – the fantasy or reality of the global city in a universal, globalized society. Historically, the concept of ‘centre’ (the opposite of or counterpart to ‘periphery’) was governed by a city-region-country hierarchy similar to the one Bairoch describes (BAIROCH 1985). Cities are the product of these three elements. Hence, you no longer need to live in downtown London to be urban; the urban lifestyle can be found everywhere, from the favelas of Caracas to the townships of Durban. These elements can be considered the building blocks of an infinite number of city models, and not the creation of a generic city. It is this perspective that will enable us to develop a methodology that takes these three elements into account. This is where our study begins.

The examples are endless; they show that the city is not global or generic, that there is no ‘Northern city’ or ‘Southern city,’ but only large groups (when different cities have several aspects in common). The West African city we are proposing – and that we will attempt to show here – is one such example.





# THREE CITIES IN WEST AFRICA: NOUAKCHOTT / DAKAR / ABIDJAN

## Section I



MAURITAINE

SÉNÉGAL

CÔTE  
D'IVOIRE

Nouakchott

Dakar

Abidjan

## THE AFRICAN CITY

### Chapter 1

The history of African cities is ancient. For instance, we know today that urbanisation in Africa existed long before Arab and Portuguese influences (COQUERY-VIDROVITCH 1993). However, while this urban history is ancient, it is clear that Europeans introduced a new type of city based on grid patterns and 'monumental' architecture (COQUERY-VIDROVITCH, GEORG 1996). In the colonial era, the 'real' city was that of the whites (founded on the European economy), while 'indigenous' areas were not considered part of the city and tended to be identified with the village model (i.e. without rules). The importation of traditional village building techniques further reinforced this idea.

But beyond the relationship between the white and black city, this separation marked "the collective imagination, giving credence to the belief that 'African culture' (traditional, authentic, etc.) was that of the village" (COQUERY-VIDROVITCH 1997). Thus, the African city only exists through the lens of European culture – or so recent works *still* tell us.

The metropolitanisation process of Third World countries is a form of urban development that is measured namely by urban sprawl, the development of large-scale agglomerations, and the formation of a hierarchical armature of cities at the global level (BASSAND 1997). The African continent is not an exception to this rule, with the emergence of ever larger, increasingly populated cities in a part of the world that, today, still has the highest population growth rates in the world (SCHOUMAKER 1999, TABUTIN, SCHOUMAKER 2004). Hence, the African city should take its place in the network of globalised cities, in this de-territorialised universe of great metropolises. However,

while immediacy and the virtual abolition of distances are the prerogative of London, New York and Hong Kong, what about cities like Douala or Lagos, where getting from one place to another can take hours and result in a series of transfers of unpredictable length? (MALAQUAIS 2006)

Of course African cities are growing at an impressive rate, becoming metropolises of several million inhabitants and competing at the international level. Of course forms are expanding, sprawl is spreading, and the urban fringes have not resembled the city in a long time, but rather consist of village-like areas. Of course Tv5 World and France 24 broadcast urban, metropolitan, white lifestyles in the remotest corners of Africa – in cities and in villages. In this way, African

cities *are* global cities and are part of the international network of major cities. But the likeness stops there. African cities are suffering economic crises, are largely in decline, have no industry, and remain on the sidelines of capital transfers that, lest we forget, largely define global cities (SASSEN 1991). Half of their population live in slums (PAQUOT 1996, DAVIS 2006) and have no access to water, electricity, mobility, or land. How, then, can it be said that Dubai, Tokyo, Karachi, Lausanne, Aix-en-Provence, or Buenos Aires are part of the same movement or follow the same model?

In the globalisation game (and it might ultimately be in this way that they are global), African cities are paying the heaviest price (MALAQUAIS 2006). Globalisation – synonymous with growing inequality – leaves hundreds of millions of people homeless in cities all over the global South.

However, the positive image that global cities and metropolises convey (at least in the literature) (SASSEN 1991, BASSAND 1997, BASSAND *et al.* 2000b) stumbles over the reality of Yaounde and parts of Nairobi and Lagos, where the populations do not even have the remnants of globalisation: they are simply excluded, condemned to immobility, informality, and insecure tenure.

For the vast majority of their inhabitants, both space and time are factors that are as real as can be. One could even say that, in some respects, their reality is accentuated by the multiplicity of images of distant places, [places] where most people living in Southern countries will never visit. (MALAQUAIS 2006)

Nevertheless, researchers continue to look at the African city through the lens of the European city model (MALAQUAIS 2006), which has important consequences not only for their research, but also for how it is used. Instead, it might be “better [to] think about the city in general, taking African cities as a starting point – the prototypes of a kind of global urban planning that is in gestation all over the world” (MALAQUAIS 2006) or, as Koolhaas argued in *Mutations* (KOOLHAAS 2000), to demonstrate that the form of urbanisation found in Lagos is becoming a generic model.

Today, the cities of West Africa are facing a serious urban crisis, born of the imbalance created by large populations, urban sprawl, and limited financial means, all set against the backdrop of mounting environmental issues. Moreover, the little wealth that can be found there does not flow back to the people, so that in African cities today the vast majority of inhabitants live in precarious conditions in a specifically urban form: slums. The African city is structured by perpetual economic struggle, meaning that it does not expand as the result of economic growth but rather as a result of decline. “The history of global urbanisation that began in the mid-19th century goes hand in hand with shantytowns” (PAQUOT 2006). This is the second aspect of the African city, which it likewise shares with other cities around the world. But slums – the *precarious* or *spontaneous neighbourhood*, as it is sometimes called – are becoming the sole development

model of West African cities, in spite of the many investments, loans, and grants from the World Bank. The city nowadays is developing primarily via its informal fringes; hence, the importance of taking into account the dynamic expansion of the informal city in urban studies today.

### Urban planning in African cities

One field in particular, urban planning, is working to guide the development of cities, attempting to understand the mechanisms present in the urban space and the mechanisms of the production of space through research. It is also responsible for rendering the results of these studies operational; in other words, giving the city the tools necessary for its development and daily management. For cities, we generally distinguish urban policies, which provide a general framework (i.e. a way of thinking about the urban) for planning and management. If policies are the backbone, planning offers a long-term vision of the city, and management implements this planning. They are the three phases of a single process.

Current urban planning is based on plans and projects for infrastructure and facilities, usually in the form of a master plan (for the purposes of this book, we do not distinguish between master plans and blueprints, as both ultimately have the same purpose) and series of projects brought together in what are called a Priority Investment Program (PIP). However, while these approaches may work in smaller cities where spatial development is limited, this type of planning has poor or no results (when it is not outright counterproductive) in large cities.

Urban management is the implementation of urban planning. However, a range of different types of plans at different levels with no steering body is not enough (MASSIAH TRIBILLON 1988). In other words, 'good' urban policy is useless if an apparatus for implementing it has not been envisaged. Thus, management is the daily application of planning and policy.

These three elements – policy, planning, and management – have an influence on public space. Private management of water, as in certain parts in South America, can stop many urban neighbourhoods from developing: whole areas can remain untouched because a concessionaire chooses to not make investments for poor people.

Urban planning in contemporary African cities is a bit like SimCity, a videogame wherein the player creates and manages a city. Its likeness lies in the fact that, in both cases, anything and everything is possible. Recipes for a 'good city' are simplistic: give people roads, do not build industrial areas alongside residential ones, and presto! While Northern countries work on processes, governance, participation, and other power games, the South is still planning its cities à la Haussmann – at least this is the case in French-speaking West Africa.

In this poorly adapted, French-style urban planning, it is often the beauty of the line that guides the process, with the underlying (and persistent) idea that a beautiful city plan makes for a beautiful city. It is here that planning joins forces with the urban imaginary.

Urban planning in African cities uses architectural methods. In other words, it is based on a plan to which a series of recommendations (sometimes called 'specifications' or 'rules of construction') that make up the corpus of urban development legal procedures is added. This type of planning allows planners to design the city's image 'as it should be' (MASSIAH, TRIBILLON 1988), at both the formal and the institutional levels, resulting in a comprehensive, coherent system of implementation procedures (MASSIAH, TRIBILLON 1988) to which municipal works can be added. Planners do not want to reintroduce regulatory planning; rather, they wish to develop a simplified tool that will indicate the location of key infrastructure for future urbanisation purposes (FARVAQUE-VITROVIC, GODIN 1997). These authors outline the Urban Reference Plan as a possible solution (PUR).

Urban planning is not in fashion. The limited impact of the documents that governed it in the past (blueprints and urban development plans) and around which considerable energy and investment were mobilized raised doubts as to their validity, especially as urban sprawl continues virtually unchecked and because limited public budgets make funding intervention difficult (FARVAQUE-VITROVIC, GODIN 1997). However, urban planning is still necessary to guide the coordination of public and private intervention, both in the provision of services and facilities in older neighbourhoods and in the development of extension areas (FARVAQUE-VITROVIC, GODIN 1997).

Planning work is an assessment of urban dynamics from three different angles (TRIBILLON 2002): socio-demographic (population growth and social changes), economic (changes in activities and jobs in particular), and spatial (forms of land tenure). And yet, it is this scheme that is not working, leaving some authors (and the majority of urban planners) to be allured by simplified plans. However, if we, like Tribillon (2002), consider that the role of urban development is to organise the projection of a social dynamic in space, then planning simply cannot ignore the city's complexity.

### Public space in the city

It was in the early 1970s that the concept of 'public space' was created to give a name to those places where urban inhabitants cross paths and meet (TOMAS 2001), and likewise to describe the disappearance of this same public space (i.e. the street, squares, and other spaces). It was in this context of loss of spatiality that the term was born, as though it were a question of finding lost urbanity

(TOMAS 2001). The proliferation of discourses on public space in fact masked a kind of evaporation of the material reality of space itself (WHITE 2001), which is to say that over the course of discussions, definitions, and redefinitions, the concept shifted from a spatial notion to a territorial one.

Thus was there a semantic shift from the beginning, with public space understood as the place of expression (HABERMAS 1962) of the *res publica*, to that of a threshing floor for popular opinion, to that of the principle of democratic debate, finally coming to symbolise the exchanging of ideas. Streets, television, cafés, the radio, and the Internet – everything becomes ‘public space’ on the same basis, provided that people can share (in the full sense of term) their considerations or experiences therein (WHITE 2001).

The design and architectural form of urban public space can be defined by the network of streets, alleys, boulevards (BASSAND *et al.* 2001) punctuated here and there by squares and parks, thus irrigating neighbourhoods. This network of spaces theoretically is free of construction and subject to public law. The site location plays on the form of the space (slopes, sunlight, etc.), as well as on planning rules and their potpourri of aesthetic and functional constraints, which set the space in the frame of a construction period. The buildings that line these spaces (mostly private but with public use, such as restaurants, shops, and other services that sometimes spill over onto the street) play a vital role in the form of public space.

The urban context, or centrality, is the location and role of the space in the city. In other words, the same space is not identical and changes depending on location in an industrial zone, residential area, working-class neighbourhood, or wealthy district (i.e. it will be more or less private, accessible and/or visible, etc.). Moreover, every street bears the identity of its city, but, in turn, contributes to the development of this identity (BASSAND *et al.* 2000a) – a back and forth game of scales. It is also cosmogonic in that it organises and prioritises the beliefs and spaces contained within the city: it is the place that defines the model and the model that enables the analysis of the place – a part that contains the whole.

The last element is that of uses in the broader sense not only of issues but also social practices. From this perspective, public spaces can be divided into five distinct, interdependent categories:

*Spaces of accessibility:* public space must be understood in its double meaning as a spatial support for human mobility (the key characteristic for modern city dwellers, which implies not only walking but the use of other modes of transport) and for urban infrastructure and facilities. Thus, public space reflects the selective logics of access to water, energy, sanitation, transport, and urban services, and in certain places is characterised by lack, neglect, insecurity, and/or environmental vulnerability, thereby exacerbating problems of public health.

*Spaces of festivity and civil/civic use:* demonstrations, parades, and sit-ins all take place in public space and are a form of direct appropriation – both material and symbolic – since, theoretically speaking, there is transgression, as all public demonstrations are subject to government authorisation (LAFARGE 1996). This is where one affirms one's place in civil society, where power changes hands, and silent marches (sometimes) overturn dictatorships. As for festivities, these serve to strengthen or awaken a sense of national belonging or, conversely, to elicit demonstrations of anger and/or protest (LAFARGE 1996).

*Commercial spaces:* Due to internal structural constraints, debt burden, and relationships of economic dependency and domination with industrialised countries, the modern economy of Southern countries is unable to absorb all of the employment demand. This results in the development of informal economies, unemployment, and underemployment. Public space then becomes the place of urban economic exchanges, linking two parallel but interdependent circuits. More specifically, it assembles so-called informal activities, procurement relationships, and the production and marketing of goods and services. The informal economy – underground and sometimes illegal – promotes symbiotic relationships that are most easily identified at the local level, encouraging processes of specialization and professional sexualisation. Because its activities tend to have low entry barriers, it facilitates the economic integration of those struggling daily against poverty.

*Spaces of sociability:* public space supports the internal (centred on the home) and external (orientated towards others and social relationships) sociability of a society. This sociability is organised in the form of networks that function according to the logics of solidarity or, conversely, dependency and submission. As part of a dynamic in permanent reconfiguration, these networks reproduce family, neighbourhood, generational, regional, ethnic, religious, and even professional affiliations. Relationships of sociability can also become institutionalised in the form of associations, or different types of interest groups (politics, leisure, sports, culture, etc.). These networks of sociability contribute to the survival of the most underprivileged through various forms of economic redistribution, although the relationships are unequal.

*Spaces of identity:* as the privileged locus of socialisation, public space is also where urban identity is forged. Reflecting fast-paced cultural changes, it acts as a kind of interface, where traditional models of heritage and vectors of modernisation (the foundations of a globalised culture of progress) join up, clash, and combine. These modernist values highlight an individualistic concept of society (individualisation and atomisation), as well as specific conceptions of the organisation of economic (liberalisation), political (democratisation), and religious (secularism) realms, with a view to rationalisation, efficiency and productivity. To



globalised hypermodernity and the living traces of a vernacular (based on mechanisms of *métissage*) can be added the constant tinkering and diversion tactics of poverty and precariousness. Identity processes in the urban milieu, therefore, also reflect the logic of relationships between rich and poor, dominator and dominated, as well as the disparate habits and conditions of unequal lives (DRIS 1999).

In short, public space is becoming increasingly ambivalent; it no longer has one unique role in the city, but rather can have several functions simultaneously depending on the season, the time of day, and, above all, the person observing and using the space.

This way of imagining public space is based on the presupposition of its specific value in the founding myth of the city. It is the major venue of expression of urban life, the collective space of daily democracy, like the Athenian Agora – a space void of individual property, a space of public and symbolic exercises of democratic power. In far away and exotic Athens, freedom of speech was nonetheless reserved for citizens, thus silencing the voice of women, slaves, and foreigners (COURET 1997).

#### Public space and the African city

The definition of public space we have chosen for our research is that of urban space outside of the home and the workplace (COURET 1997). This (albeit partial) definition undoubtedly does not take into account all situations, but it is sufficiently clear and concise to be used in the African context.

As a support for networks and social practices and the product of modes of construction, development, management, and urban planning, public space in Africa is a place of exchange, debate, and negotiation between actors. It is also a great indicator of urban changes (PLANURBAIN 1988, PLANURBAIN 1991) and the privileged place of observation of social relationships in the urban milieu (COURET 1997). In the case of West African cities, this angle is even more interesting, as the notion of public space is linked to the city's social history, which is marked by the Western conception of public space (squares, markets, streets, avenues, stations, ports, etc.) redefined by indigenous uses. As such, these changes result in an altered urbanity, with renewed forms of sociability, economic exchanges, citizenship, accessibility, and identity. Given the globalised mechanisms of dependence that reinforce processes of exclusion, it is clear that the role of public space – the forum for integration and socialisation – evolves on a daily basis. Through this, it reveals changes that affect all societal spheres: social, cultural, political, spatial, and environmental.

On the one hand, these changes have largely been induced by the emergence of a global urban culture that tends to establish a unique global model by

imposing a hegemonic form of urbanisation (the city) – a support for liberalisation and globalisation of the economy, but also of an increasing waste of resources, energy, and space. On the other hand, the largest cities in West Africa are also the product of a cultural reality, a non-Western system based on specific population, social, and economic dynamics, the permanency of traditionalist power and the resistance of these same forces. This battle between the local and the global that is still raging today is reflected in the complex tangles of acculturation, cultural resistance, and *mestizo* logic (AMSELLE 1990) that influence patterns of construction, development, and the management of urban space.

Today, African public space must face the growing effects of globalisation, reflected by an increase in exclusion phenomena and the acceleration of vectors of modernisation (BERTRAND 1998). In West African cities, these urban changes can take various forms. As an extension of the domestic sphere, public space can reveal the breakdown of family and generational structures, the destruction of networks of solidarity and dependence, the conversion of professional activities, and the evolution of women's roles in African society.

At the neighbourhood level, it can be the support for the institutionalisation of new sociability and territorial practices, as well as for the strategic reorganisation of interest groups no longer according to ethnicity or caste, but rather based on economic relationships of survival.

#### Abidjan, Dakar, Nouakchott: three cities in West Africa

In the following pages we will retrace the histories of the three cities in our study in the form of trajectories. While the creation of Nouakchott is recent (dating back only 50 years), Abidjan and Dakar are much older. Yet, despite the difference in their ages, all three have similar trajectories. Political, social and economic changes have nary had an impact on the trajectories of these cities, which already contained the seeds of what they would become decades later from their very inception. The problems are the same today as they were in the past; spatial segregation resisted Independence, spatial planning is still done in the same way, and land is the Achilles heel of urban management now more than ever.

The trajectories of these cities will help us transcend a first layer of knowledge and our fascination with the chaotic, self-managed, unmanaged, and unmanageable that ultimately provides infinite liveable living spaces. As we will see, nothing is left to chance: laws, regulations, and norms exist, actors play their roles, and financial interests combine with political ones (when they are not simply one in the same). The West African city is not an exception in this respect, but rather is a city like any other.

However, the interest lies in the fact that in West African cities, urban problems are exacerbated and, for that reason, it is easier to analyse and understand them. These problems, however, are in no way strictly African. Africa does not have urban problems that other places do not; it is simply that they are so intense and take on such proportions there that they become paradigms.

But the advantage of trajectories goes well beyond strictly issues of management and planning. Two important points remind us of this fact. The first is that cities are rooted in a context, and the second is that this context is fragile. These cities – and all capitals, with the partial exception of Abidjan – are, above all, tools of power aimed at ‘modernizing’ the population. ‘Modern’ populations are ‘civilised’ and live in cities; thus development, one surmises, also takes place in the city. However, this simplified view of the social reality of a country was established in the wake of Independence by young nations eager to propose a unique societal system based on the concept of one party, one city, and the lion’s share of the power in the hands of a small minority of the population.

# NKC

Nouakchott























## Chapter 2

*The sedentarization of nomads.* The story of Nouakchott begins in 1956, with the passing of the *loi-cadre* (framework law) on overseas territories, also known as the *Loi Defferre*<sup>3</sup>. It was starting at this time that the idea of moving the capital of the Mauritanian territory from St. Louis, Senegal, to Mauritania itself gained popularity, culminating in an order to transfer the city. Independence was simultaneous with the building of the new city in 1960, and with it came the desire to





THE KEBBE DISTRICT IN EL MINA,  
THE CAPITAL'S LARGEST SLUM.

urbanize the country. Subsequently, it seemed necessary to give the newly independent State a capital city and to turn the Bedouins into modern urban dwellers: "in order to make history and achieve modernity, it was necessary to 'get out of the desert,' and 'climb' toward cities and rural-gardens" (METRAL 1993). Modern compulsory schooling forced populations to settle, thus contributing to this forced urbanization (KOITA 1994) – in other words, *when the education system makes the city*. But this process of controlling nomads began well before Independence, under the French, with systems of population control that required individuals to sign registers at *postes*, *residences*, or *cercles*<sup>4</sup> (SAAD BOUH KAMARA, LESERVOISIER 2000).

Added to this deliberate attempt to urbanize territories was a series of unexpected factors that also favoured the country's urbanization. The decline of caravan trade, along with major cultural and commercial centres, likewise participated (most notably, Oualata and Chinguetti lost importance). Coupled with this was a drop in rainfall, which pushed rural dwellers towards urban centres, clearly strengthening the trend that began in 1940 and would be the cause of the continuing decline of nomadic pastoralism to the present day. The height of this situation occurred during the great droughts of 1968, 1972, and 1973, "which caused the sudden and uncontrollable breakdown of Mauritanian rural and pastoral societies, leading to rapid and massive urbanization" (KOITA 1994). The war in the Western Sahara completed the process by rendering the last of the caravan routes dangerous. Finally, added to this urbanization desired by the State to create a nation and the economic-climatic factors (rural exodus) we

have just described are the 'classic' attractions of urban modernity (hopes for jobs and family networks against a backdrop of high fertility).

*Between ocean and desert.* Nouakchott is located on the oceanic edge of the Sahara on a plateau of dunes several kilometres from the ocean, from which it is separated by a narrow coastal belt and a depression (*sabkha*), almost entirely on flat ground.

Extremely high temperatures compounded by a lack of water typical of deserts results in a fragile urban environment for thousands of people. The location is also limited by its inability to provide materials necessary for building the city and the inability to meet needs (even partially) in terms of food supply. These three key deterrents make it such that the city must import almost all the goods it consumes (food, water, and materials), sometimes from far away. Moreover, while the region's flatness does not impose limitations on urbanization, it allows neither for natural drainage of rainwater (however rare) nor waste-water treatment, thus making the city's morphology highly restrictive.

Thus, Nouakchott's natural setting presents important developmental limitations (aridity being the principal constraint as regards human life and activity). In addition to a shortage of surface water, vegetation cover is fragile, the soil is poor, and the wind dynamics are extremely active. The vast expanses of sand so characteristic of the region boast no plant life and tend to favour the building of dunes.

Climate conditions combined with the depletion of vegetable cover (which was already intermittent against the backdrop of the city's rapid development) and the creation of a poorly-designed deep-water port could threaten the city's very existence in the decades to come (COUREL 1998).



RESETTLEMENT AREA IN THE EL MINA SLUM.



AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE CITY  
CENTRE FROM 1980.

One of the major concerns at the city's founding was the drinking water supply. Fifty years later, the city still faces the same operational difficulties due to the scarcity of drinking water. Despite the increased opportunities in terms of collection in Idini (the city's sole source), the supply remains well below the demand, resulting in numerous water cut-offs each day in poorer areas and on the outskirts of the city<sup>5</sup>.

The intensifying of the samples, whose consequence is the acceleration of this process and hydrological conditions, are factors that favour degradation of water resources through salination, ultimately threatening the capital's water supply (SEMEGA 2006). We are still awaiting the completion of the Aftout Es Saheli project, which will carry water from the Senegal River (about

200 km away) to supplement the Idini source and give the water table a chance to 'breathe' and gradually replenish its reserve (SEMEGA 2006).

Finally, Nouakchott likewise is suffering due to human activities there. From Plage des Pêcheurs in the north to Port de l'Amitié in the south, the dune coastline has been subject to a variety of assaults, directly linked to the city's rapid growth, for many years now. The removal of sand from the coast over many years, the construction of port facilities and natural erosion have made the coastal dunes fragile in several places. At present, the growing gaps in the dunes pose a constant threat to the city and its inhabitants.

GOVERNOR MOURAGUES'S 1957  
CONSTRUCTION PLAN FOR THE  
CITY (EXCERPT).

*A Saharan history of urban planning.* Starting with the decision to transfer the capital from Saint Louis to Nouakchott, the question became designing a new city. No less than four successive plans were presented between 1957 and 1958.

However, two variables remained constant with regard to its construction: speed and economy. This urgency was due to an outside threat: Morocco dreamed of expanding its Kingdom, and the Mauritanian territory needed to be marked by a physical presence. The economic dimension had to do with the fact that, as Mauritania's economic status in the AOF<sup>6</sup> was weak, relatively little means were made available by the French government for the city's construction.

In 1957, governor Mouragues presented a budget of 1.5 billion Central African Francs for the cons-

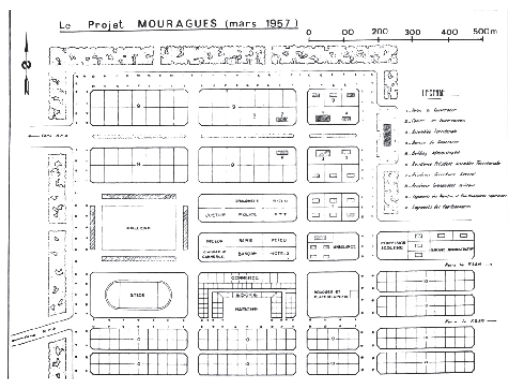


Figure 9



truction of Nouakchott. It was during this same period that the drafting of urban development plans began, initially by Mouragues himself, who “prided himself on urban planning” (PITTE 1977) and designed the first draft of a city plan. At the time, Mouragues still did not know where to build the city (PITTE 2006).

Only later, with the first surveys of topographical profiles, did it become apparent that the only possible site for the city was the dune plateau south of the Great Dune, as the sands on the latter were too moveable. The coastal belt presented the same drawback: it, too, was moveable (in addition to being too narrow). Aftout es Saheli (a depression skirting the dune) and the *ksar* (the original village) were floodable. The latter was partially destroyed in November 1950 because of the concurrent rising of the water table and the Senegal River, some 200 kilometres south of the city (PITTE 2006).

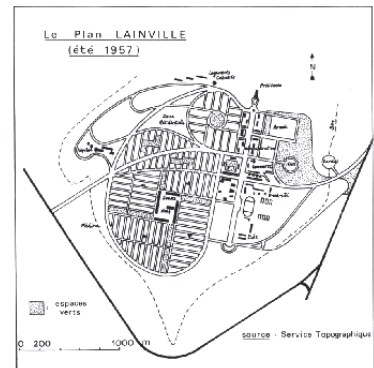
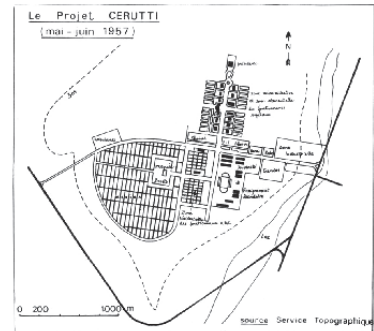
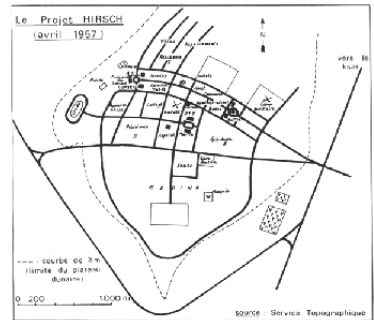
Based on Mouragues’ sketch, several planners worked on the project. The first was Hirsch<sup>7</sup> in 1957, with a plan to install the great East-West road, splitting the city in two, with the Medina neighbourhood, its souks and mosque on one side, and the Capital – the administrative seat and symbol of power – with its public buildings on the other, all designed in the colonial spirit of segregation.

Shortly after Hirsch, another project – that of Cerutti – was presented. Cerutti’s design was more precise, but the basic idea of an East-West road separating the city in two remained, thereby confirming the idea of separation between two functions and two populations.

Lainville<sup>8</sup> then planned the fourth version of the Nouakchott plan. He presented the finalized documents in February 1958, and on June 11, 1958, they were adopted by the government.

Based on Lainville’s plan, Leconte, a Parisian architect, was charged with drawing up implementation plans. So ends our brief history of how the city was conceived. From that point on, everything moved quickly: engineers replaced the architects in less than a year. The old recipes were reused, with no new propositions. The creation of a new city was not, in this case, used as an opportunity to question how a city is made. Instead, the old recipes were simply reused, with no new propositions. In other words, while it seems clear that the technicians knew ‘what to do’ and ‘how to do it,’ they saw no need to reinvent the wheel.

A city, thus, for 8,000 inhabitants was planned and built. However, capacity was reached much sooner than imagined. To deal with the population pressure, a project for a Master Plan for Greater Nouakchott was entrusted to the



HIRSCH'S PLAN, APRIL 1957.

CERUTTI'S PLAN, MAY-JUNE 1957.

LAINVILLE'S PLAN, SUMMER 1957.

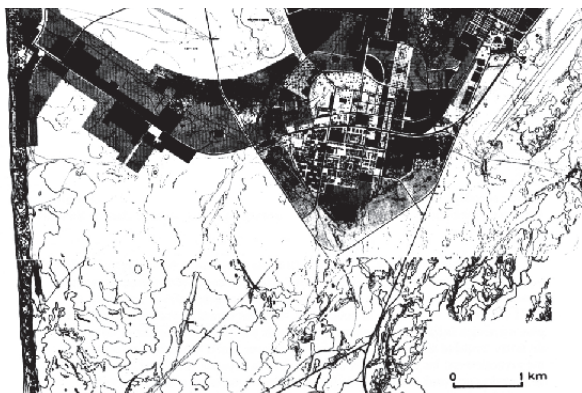


SCHÉMA DIRECTEUR  
D'AMÉNAGEMENT FOR GREATER  
NOUAKCHOTT, SMUH, 1970.

PLAN DIRECTEUR D'URBANISME,  
BCEOM, 1983.

NEXT PAGE:  
SCHÉMA DIRECTEUR  
D'AMÉNAGEMENT URBAIN,  
HORIZON 2010, URBAPLAN-ADU,  
2003.

*Secrétariat des Missions d'Urbanisme et d'Habitat* (SMUH)<sup>9</sup> in 1970, again involving France via planning missions. The SMUH's plan divided the city into four major areas: the Capital, or business area (the new downtown), the *ksar* (the village predating the 1958 city), the Wharf (the industrial/port area), and the Village des Pêcheurs, renamed the Plage des Pêcheurs (the artisanal fishing port). The Plan also aimed to "regulate uncontrolled growth", avoid the dispersion of facilities, address the junctions between the four areas and deal with problems of land development value (SMUH 1970). It also was responsible for defining, naming, and regulating homogenous parts of the city. This was par for the course as regards what was happening elsewhere at this time. A reading of the planning document, however, shows that the problem of land in Nouakchott was already apparent in the planning documents in 1970, only 12 years after the laying of the founding stone. Although

the problems were clearly defined, and the causes and consequences known, the plan was unsuccessful in regulating, controlling, or promoting dynamics.

In 1983, a third plan (after that of Lainville and the SMUH) was created under the auspices of a French agency, the BCEOM.<sup>10</sup> Like its predecessors, this plan attempted, albeit in vain, to bring order to a city growing much faster than foreseen in the projections. The BCEOM's plan evoked the idea that a city is defined (and, hence, planned) by three constitutive fundamental elements: residential areas, industrial zones, and green spaces, with the layout of these three types of areas providing coherent planning. It is on this basis that the plan, which made provision for generous green spaces, was created. Once again, this plan did nothing to regulate or plan the city, but rather merely validated the existing situation.

A last attempt to plan the city was made at the beginning of the 2000s, with the testing of a SDAU (master plan for urban planning and development) adopted by decree in 2003. Responsible for this plan was a Swiss planning bureau, Urbanplan, which had already worked on the African continent for decades. This new tool, under the authority of the Urban Development Agency (ADU) and funded by the World Bank, attempted to contain urbanization within reasonable limits and to 'densify' the existing urban fabric. The arms of the star-shaped city plan were





# SCHEMA DIRECTEUR D'AMENAGEMENT URBAIN Horizon 2010

Agence de développement urbain  
ADU

Etude portant sur les documents d'urbanisme et les  
programmes d'investissement de la ville de  
N O U A K C H O T T  
Nord de carte: 33A

urban  
plan

- |  |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| zone d'habitat populaire                   | zone militaire                  |
| extension de la zone d'habitat populaire   | château d'eau                   |
| zone d'habitat à restructurer              | rocade 2010                     |
| zone résidentielle                         | bassin de rétention             |
| extension de la zone résidentielle         | conduite d'eau                  |
| centre ville à doter d'un plan d'urbanisme | zone d'activités économiques    |
| extension du centre ville                  | extension zone d'activités      |
| ceinture verte / maraîchage                | aéroport                        |
| extension ceinture verte                   | dunes                           |
| équipements                                | limite de Moughataa             |
| cimetière                                  | protection par digue            |
|  | zone à protéger prioritairement |
|  | réserve naturelle               |

connected by a first ring in 2000, a second in 2010, and a third planned for 2020, thus giving 'shape' to the city – a clear-cut, compact form bound by a series of ring roads.

This time the plan was based not on planning by zone – even if these zones still exist – but on the creation of roads designed to contain the city's development. For the first time in Nouakchott's history and in an urban development plan, the environment was the subject of nascent reflection. The city was actually conceptualized within its immediate natural setting, with its many constraints and limitations, thereby clearly breaking with past practices.

Unfortunately, a quick reading of the planning documents shows that, with the exception of the first city plan (that of the original construction of Nouakchott), plans never succeeded in planning, framing, or regulating the development of the city, but instead have consistently and retroactively endorsed decisions made outside of any plan, which shows that plans are still lagging behind urban dynamics.

Paradoxically, the first plan and subsequent plans were used to establish lasting spatial (and thus social) segregation on either side of Avenue Gamal Abdel Nasser, with chic, historical neighbourhoods to the north and popular neighbourhoods to the south in the area called the Medina. The Nouakchott plan reused the old principle of social separation of colonial cities, even though the winds of independence were already blowing in French-speaking Africa at that time (the Brazzaville Conference of 1944 and the *Loi Defferre* of 1956 were the beginning). Finally, in 1958, a city was built using the same exact principles as those that had prevailed a century earlier during the early settlements in Dakar and Abidjan. But more troubling still was the power of this decision, which still wields its influence 50 years later, after a clear separation between affluent neighbourhoods in the north and poor neighbourhoods in the south. None of the three plans sought to reverse this trend; on the contrary, they made it a major feature.

Urban development plans in Nouakchott have always been out of sync with reality, which is why developers have consistently been unable to foresee anything; they have endorsed the decisions – even bad ones – imposed by policies and the endogenous development of the city. Thus, historically speaking, while Nouakchott did not have a top-down planning style (i.e. from departments, ministries, bureaucrats, and consultants), it was clear that the reality differed. Rather than the planning, it was the practices of urban actors – in other words, urban dynamics, such as urban land speculation, its consequences, etc. – that had a real impact on the development of the city. There was no reason to rejoice in this 'bottom-up' planning, which was due primarily to government shortcomings and almost exclusively benefitted elites. The lack of anticipation regarding the urban explosion that occurred between 1960 and 1980 was one cause, combined with severe recession in the rural economy, all set against the

backdrop of the invention of urban land and the accompanying practices. All of this resulted in a city that grew by itself according to modes of occupation, without applied planning, and was then left to market speculation.

*Demographic development of the city.* Before 1958, the future site of Nouakchott had a *ksar* of 500 inhabitants<sup>11</sup>, and a fort where “an old sergeant lived with fifteen Senegalese” (SAINT-EXUPÉRY 1939). At its inception, Nouakchott was designed to be an administrative city of roughly 8,000 inhabitants. A victim of its own success, independence, drought, and the State’s determination to urbanize, the 8,000 mark had already been reached by 1963. In 1970, the city had between 35,000-40,000 inhabitants; by 1974, the population was between 100,000 and 130,000.

This change, nonetheless, occurred in very different periods. Beginning in 1962, it was the population explosion, with its remarkable growth rates. It should be noted that when starting from almost nothing, it was easy to quickly double the population. The administration gradually took shape, and the construction of the city advanced by leaps and bounds starting this same year. This sharp rise in the number of inhabitants continued until 1977.

Then, between 1977 and 1988, the annual population growth rate decreased, though it still remained high. While growth was not what it had been in the early years, the population of Nouakchott nonetheless tripled in ten years, going from 134,000 inhabitants to 393,000 (an annual growth rate of roughly 10%). Comparatively, Dakar, Bamako and Conakry saw growth rates of 4%-5% for this same period (URBAPLAN 2000). Nouakchott’s demographic growth was upsetting to observers, and already heralded the difficulties to come. Moreover, the city was starting to feel the impact of the drought that struck the Sahel region at the beginning of the 1970s.

Between 1988 and 2000, the third period, the population of Nouakchott grew even more slowly than during the previous. This second decline confirmed a weakening trend that announced the end of the population explosion. Official estimates (based on the Mauritanian Office for National Statistics’ 2000 census) show an upward trend since 2000, but must be regarded with caution as they are estimations; it is too early to conclude a new upswing in the city’s population from these projections.

*Rampant urban development.* Climate changes have had direct consequences in terms of space. The pressure of migratory flows has led to the uncontrolled spread of the city, with new populations creating slums on the outskirts, adjacent to wealthy areas. The population’s rapid and unpredictable growth has had an

YEAR	POPULATION	GROWTH RATE
1959	4,800	6.55 %
1960	5,136	6.55 %
1965	15,174	21.39 %
1970	40,000	17.26 %
1975	104,054	13.78 %
1980	193,334	12.80 %
1985	293,000	10.21 %
1990	416,954	2.96 %
1995	482,427	2.96 %
2000	558,195	5.90 %
2005	743,474	5.90 %
2008	882,986	

POPULATION AND GROWTH RATES  
FOR NOUAKCHOTT 1959-2008.  
(SOURCE: DIAGANA 1993; ONS  
2006)



COLD WATER VENDOR ON THE  
PLAGE DES PÊCHEURS.  
FLOODING IN THE CITY CENTRE,  
A VERY RARE PHENOMENON IN  
NOUAKCHOTT.



A SHACK IN THE EL MINA SLUM.

adverse impact on the organization of the urban space, as well as on the tools and methods for managing it.

Early in its development, the urban perimeter saw natural extension, based on the direction of connector roads from the city centre (the *ksar* and Tevragh Zeïna) to other urban centres, such as Akjoujt, Boutilimit, and Rosso. This development continued via occupation of the free interstices between the original axes, giving the city a built area estimated in 2007 at 10,000 hectares<sup>12</sup>. However, this growth was largely influenced by transit routes, the dunes, saline areas, and other morphological elements. In 1974, in order to satisfy the demand for housing subsequent waves of migrants, the administration hastily created nearly 10,000 plots north and south of the city, constituting the nuclei of the Teyarett, Sebkha, and El Mina *moughataa*.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1975 and 1985, while the Tevragh Zeïna residential area was being developed in the northwest of the city on 2,500 larger plots, more than 16,000 additional plots were distributed to expand the Sebkha, El Mina, and Teyarett housing developments. Between 1975 and 1985, Nouakchott saw 188,946 new inhabitants. With an estimated 6 to 7 individuals per family, the city needed 29,000 additional plots to absorb the waves of newcomers; only 18,500 were distributed. 10,500 plots were still needed, meaning that a large portion of the migrant population was forced to settle on undeveloped land, thus forming the slums of Nouakchott.

Even with this massive distribution of plots, the demand was still high. The fact that this demand was not met coupled with another phenomenon to further rein-

force the shortage: land speculation. Contrary to the initial plans, plots were not distributed among the poorer populations. Instead, it was the elites that largely benefitted, through both direct distributions as well as through resale. In essence, when a poor family obtained a plot, the resale price was such that people quickly sold them, fostering not only speculation, but also putting them exactly where they were to begin with – without land. Therefore, the distribution of plots did not have the desired effect, ultimately

resulting in the development of shantytowns. In recent years, however, after years of plot shortages, the machine is finally moving. The Center for Urban Development Studies (CUDS 2000) estimated that, in Nouakchott, 200,000 plots able to accommodate twice the city's population were distributed among 558,195 inhabitants between 1986 and 2000.<sup>14</sup> The sale of these plots – well below market prices – went hand in hand with massive resales on the free market, with much higher yields than bank interest rates, thereby making land the most profitable investment in Nouakchott. These massive distributions have led to increased urban sprawl and greater demands for amenities that the state cannot meet. Moreover, the distributed plots form a belt around the city that is void of habitation (but not usable, as the land is now owned), which will determine the future amenities and human settlement beyond this invisible boundary.

Meanwhile, slums have become a way of appropriating land – a phenomenon that encourages many Mauritians from inland to settle in the city. Thus, the practice of *gazra* (meaning 'usurpation' or squatting) – a "powerful competitor of the *kebbe*" – has appeared (FREROT, MAHBOUBI 1998). This means that occupation precedes regulation; the wilfulness of *gazra* actors pigeonholes the government, which has lost control of spatial development (FREROT, MAHBOUBI 1998). As the land is occupied illegally, it can take the state ten, twenty, thirty or more years to modify the situation and to put at least a portion of the city in correct legal standing. The many restructuring plans put in motion are proof that this strategy was the right one, as squatters, aided by their many years of experience, will enjoy land titles in the next two to three years. While this approach is common among Moor elites, all of whom have a *gazra* (rented or occupied), it also allows the state to castigate poor populations by accusing them of speculation and, hence, un-civic practices. However, it is erroneous to think that people stay on the land, waiting sometimes decades, for reasons of speculation (BOLAY, CHENAL 2008); they do so simply because they do not have the means to buy a plot on the open market or to pay state prices. Thus, their motivations are far from the speculative strategies that researchers and the government love so much to write about.

Speculation, therefore, is strictly a luxury for the wealthier classes, and the state itself, due to budgetary demands, is at the root of this phenomenon. Each year, the government's budget includes an important sum (approx. 500M UM) from the



CAMEL FARM ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.

POOR DISTRICT OF LA MÉDINA IN THE CITY CENTRE.

sales of land. This means that 2,000–3,000 new plots in residential areas must be put on the land market each year. And as the city has no pre-defined physical boundaries, urban planning services can extend the city limits to infinity.

In essence, the land phenomenon is the result of a combination of high yields (the bank system being totally faulty in this respect) and the government's need for revenue. Despite this speculation, land on the outskirts of the city is still cheaper, which is not conducive to building upwards.

SUBSIDISED HOUSING FOR THE POOR IN THE EL MINA DISTRICT.



LARGE PARCEL ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.  
FOOD STORAGE ON PUBLIC LAND.

*The key role of the State.* In 2001, a decree ordered the replacement of the City of Nouakchott by the Urban Community, which was to be responsible for

developing local public services to improve the population's quality of life according to the law established in 1986 – that of decentralization<sup>15</sup>. The Urban Community of Nouakchott therefore now includes the towns of Teyarett, the *ksar*, Tevragh Zeïna, Toujounine, Sebkhah, El Mina, Dar Naim, Arafat, and Riyad.<sup>16</sup>

Order 87-289 of August 20, 1987,<sup>17</sup> stipulates that a Municipality and, by extension, the Urban Community (as it kept the specifications of the former City of Nouakchott) is responsible for managing municipal interests. Therefore, it will provide public services that respond to the needs of the local populations and that do not, due to their nature or degree of importance, fall under the jurisdiction of the state. The role of the municipalities is limited to social, educational, health, and environmental concerns (i.e. anything related to social and human development at the urban scale). Development, both economic and spatial, is vested at the state level.

Given the issues in Nouakchott, the prerogatives of the municipalities are weak, and the state remains the main actor, along with the *Ministère de l'Habitat, de l'Urbanisme et de l'Aménagement du Territoire* (MHUAT) (the Department of Housing, Urban Planning and Regional Development). But the MHUAT is not the only actor on the urban scene; two other departments are also very powerful: the Ministry of Finance,<sup>18</sup> which oversees the *Direction des Domaines, de l'Enregistrement et du Timbre* and le *Ministère de l'Intérieur, des Postes et des*



*Télécommunications*, which is responsible for developing laws and regulations regarding land reform.

To the traditional actors (the ministries), one must add the role played by the Urban Development Programme (PDU) in Mauritania. Between the World Bank (IDA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), and the German Development Bank (KfW), this program created new decision-making structures and, at the same time, provided exceptional aid for the city of Nouakchott. The *Agence de Développement Urbain* (ADU) is the best example. The above list cites only the key stakeholders. In reality, however, there are many more, which goes to show that the Urban Community of Nouakchott is not the only actor in the city. In fact, large government institutions remain the true masters when it comes to important decisions and expertise in matters of land and urban development. The result of this 'layering' of skills, quite obviously, is the dilution of responsibilities. Nonetheless, reducing the number of players and determining their roles and powers is an important project for a city – a project that, sadly, will never be implemented, as the current situation clearly benefits everyone. By describing the responsibilities of each player, the practices that nobody seems to *want* to put a stop to will naturally come to an end.

The state's ambition in the early days of independence was to make Nouakchott the modern capital of a modern state – the showpiece of the nation. However, this determination quickly faded in the face of daily management and problems that outweighed the resources available to deal with them, gradually putting aside long-term strategies and coping only with daily survival tactics.



BUS STOP ON A STREET NOT SERVED BY THE BUS.

LARGE GOAT MARKET IN THE EL MINA SLUM.

# DKR

Dakar





















## IN DAKAR, THE CITY; IN PIKINE, THE SUBURBS

### Chapter 3

Dakar at night. Straight streets deserted. Dull, sleepy city. One cannot imagine anything less exotic, or more ugly. A bit of animation in front of the hotels. Sidewalk cafés harshly lit. Vulgar laughter. We follow a long avenue that soon leaves the French city. [GIDE 1927]

The diagnosis is without nuance. For André Gide, Dakar at the end of the 1920s holds no interest. And yet, it was in this same period that the city took off economically, culturally, and intellectually to become a *capital*, meaning a city whose influence extended beyond municipal and national borders, not only with regard to the administration of territories, but symbolically as well. Dakar is also [and above all] the ‘gateway to Africa,’ as Air France’s pre-1960 posters declared. Dakar, from whence peanuts are shipped. Dakar, the capital of the *Fédération de l’Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF).<sup>19</sup> And finally, Dakar, the capital of Senegal. While the city’s history remains inextricably tied to France’s presence in Africa, Independent Dakar would become – and remains today – one of the two ‘modern’ cities in French-speaking West Africa, the other being Abidjan [MERSADIER 1968].

*The foundations of the city.* According to Mersadier [1968], Dakar’s foundation and development can be attributed to five major elements, which are briefly listed below as an introduction for this section.



Dakar was initially founded for military reasons. The territory between St. Louis in the north and the rivers in the south needed to be occupied. So the French set up military posts, allowing them to control the coasts and the entire inland. The importance of this military presence is still visible today, as evidenced by the many military sites (mostly on the western ridge) and, at the time, the decline in trade that resulted from the withdrawal of a portion of French troops, thus highlighting the economic importance a military can represent for a city.

At that same time, interest in growing and exporting peanuts to Europe was born. Until the 1830s, peanuts were shipped via the Rufisque port. Gradually, for economic reasons, Dakar's existing infrastructures was used instead. The decision to build a large military and trade port in the city in 1863, despite its slow and costly construction, proved to be the demise of Rufisque.

In 1895, France decided to create the AOF.<sup>20</sup> In this first stage, the region was managed from St. Louis, before transfer to Dakar in 1902. St. Louis nonetheless remained the capital of Senegal for a time. A variety of activities developed in connection with the administration, to such an extent that "finding itself situated too far away, the administration developed in a vacuum, becoming a huge machine in which the Senegalese participated relatively little" (MERSADIER 1968), but that gave Dakar power and economic activity heretofore unknown.

The military question, exportations, and administrative functions thus allowed for the rapid development of Dakar, which, moreover, developed with a unique peculiarity: it gave French citizenship to the 'natives' of Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque, and St. Louis. This institutional 'quirk' made it such that Dakar and the other municipalities had one of 'their own' to represent the interests of residents of the municipality in the French Parliament.

Finally, the city's unique geographic situation quickly gave it the important role of crossroads, thanks, in particular, to its port and airport (the closest one to South America) and contributed to the development of airmail.

*Dakar: the challenge of major demographic changes.* At the time of independence, Dakar was the largest conurbation in West Africa, and Senegal one of the most highly urbanized countries, with 23% of the population living in urban areas.

In the first half of the 20th century, Dakar needed to increase its population for its future urban development projects; a large workforce was clearly required for the major port and airport projects, to build buildings and streets, to people offices and the shops of trading houses, and to load peanuts onto boats. However, services – both public and private – to feed, care for, and educate this population had to be set up (MERSADIER 1968).

It was this third sector – that of industry and construction, which was grossly inflated early on – that led to an influx of rural populations to the city; the latter existed only because of large building projects that one day would end. The



	DAKAR	Growth	PIKINE & GEDIAWAYE	RUFISQUE	TOTAL	Growth
1878	1,600					
1902	22,000	11.55 %				
1923	35,000	2.23 %				
1936	92,600	7.77 %				
1955	238,600	5.10 %				
1960	374,700	9.45 %				
1965	455,000	3.96 %				
1967	500,000	4.83 %				
1971		1.48 %	141,000			
1976		1.48 %			1,224,458	
1988	680,932	1.48 %	619,759	188,250	1,488,942	4.00 %
2002		2.43 %		284,260	2,167,79	3.50 %
2006	1,049,253	2.43 %	1,133,830	313,161	2,496,244	2.96 %
2007					2,570,132	2.96 %
2008					2,646,208	

POPULATION AND GROWTH  
OF POPULATION FOR DAKAR,  
1878-2008.  
(SOURCE: AGENCE NATIONALE  
DE LA STATISTIQUE ET DE LA  
DÉMOGRAPHIE DU SÉNÉGAL)

industrialization that followed was unable to absorb the surplus of unskilled labour. Nevertheless, Dakar continued to grow by 6%–7% each year: half as a result of natural growth, half as a result of immigration (MERSADIER 1968). The situation became even more pronounced from the late 1960s through 1974, during a period of severe drought in the Sahel (a similar phenomenon took place in Nouakchott), thus affecting farming income and provoking a massive rural exodus – namely, to Dakar.

Between 1988 and 2006, a downward trend pushed Dakar further away from those high growth rates one typically associates with West African cities, as major cities, generally speaking, grew less rapidly than the projections of the 80s had forecast. Moreover, for decades, the city (which had grown largely thanks to rural exodus) saw a reversal of this trend starting in the early 2000s. Today, natural growth seems to be the predominant mode of development for the urban population.

Today the region of Dakar, which includes four *départements* (Dakar, Guédiawaye, Pikine, and Rufisque) has a population of 2.6 million inhabitants.<sup>21</sup>

*A brief history of the city.* For a complete history of the construction and development of Dakar, we refer the reader to Sinou (SINO 1988; SINO 1989; SINO 1993) and Mersadier (MERSADIER 1968), who have done outstanding work on this. We have borrowed several key elements from these authors in order to shed light on our discussion here.

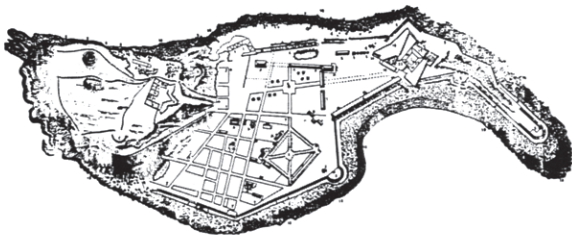


EXPRESS BUS AND WOMEN  
VENDORS IN PIKINE, A SUBURB  
OF DAKAR.

Near the end of the 19th century, the *Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies de la France* decided to establish their offices on the Cape Verde peninsula, facing Goree. The goal was twofold (SINO 1990): the first was to mark modern-day France's presence on the continent and distinguish itself from private trading posts; the second was to develop agriculture and trade based mainly on peanuts. In this regard, Dakar was at the centre of the trade on the continent. In 1862, the army quite naturally approved the first 'urban development,' a housing subdivision and cadastral plan – the Pinet-Laprade Plan, named after its designer, an engineering officer who would later become governor. The plan used a regular grid that divided the space into squares and superimposed it over the existing Lébou villages, taking no heed of the sanctity of indigenous tombs and mosques (DIONE 1992).

Although Dakar existed before the railway, it was this infrastructure (completed in 1885) that would mark the beginning of the city's veritable development. Peanuts would make Dakar the economic capital of Senegal. The presence of the AOF's general government later resulted in the extension of this installation (Mersadier, 1968). Henceforth, direction for all African trade houses took place in Dakar.

MAP OF GOREE ISLAND IN 1766.

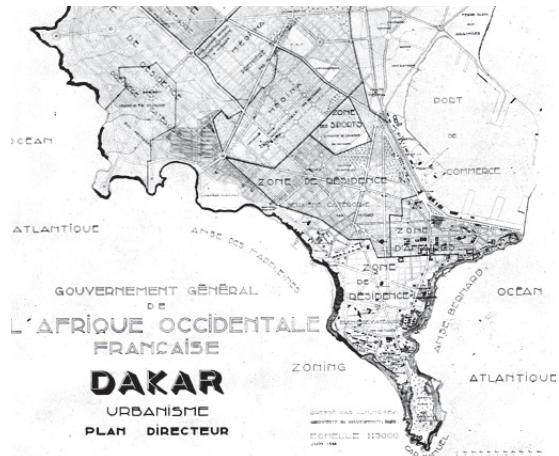
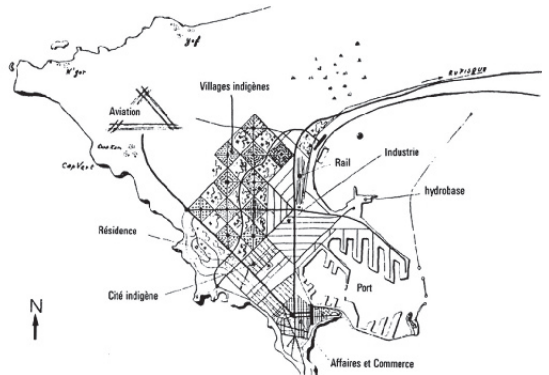


Around 1900, the decision to make Dakar the capital of the *Fédération de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) became definitive based on two key points: improving facilities (with the installation of sewers, new street patterns, and the construction of public buildings) and taking population

growth into account. As the city's new status had served to increase migratory tendencies (SINOUE 1990), the government made a plan to separate European and black neighbourhoods, with the creation of the exclusively-black, indigenous city, Medina (1915), in response to a population boom following an outbreak of yellow fever. Without saying as much, the real purpose here was to implement spatial segregation between Africans and Europeans. At the same time a master plan (1914-1915) for Plateau and Medina was developed, providing a legal basis for this separation. It was not until 1937 that the city updated its planning documents with a development plan, drafted by Raymond Lopez, and which would remain the plan in sketch form. It provided, among other things, for the restructuring of the old city, whereby only business and administrative functions would remain. This plan favoured the city's beautification. It also applied the principle of complete segregation (social, spatial, and functional specialization) and provided for development north of the indigenous villages, which were separated from the rest of the city by areas of food crops. However, starting in 1939, the war effort reduced the amount of available resources, exacerbating the housing crisis. The plan was not implemented.

The end of the war marked a change in mentality and the beginning of a new political era. The municipal government did away with the more oppressive regulations of the colonial regime, most notably with the end of forced labour. Additionally, given the limitations of the colonial system, the French government began to culturally, economically, and politically integrate local elites who would later lead the country by giving them [among other things] political representation.

With regard to urban planning, the end of the war was also synonymous with change. Master plans and other semi-official urban plans changed status with



THE PINET-LAPRADE PLAN OF 1862.

PLAN D'AMÉNAGEMENT OF 1937.

PLAN DIRECTEUR D'URBANISME (PDU) OF CAP-VERT, 1946.

the order of June 29, 1945, which formalized planning in overseas territories. The Urban Master Plan (PDU) of Cape Verde in 1946, developed by the planning and architectural mission of Gutton, Lambert, and Lopez, was the first example of this new era. This plan<sup>22</sup> served as a basis for an extensive amenities program for the development of Cape Verde. Management of this plan (the PDU) was entrusted to the *Service Temporaire d'Aménagement du Grand Dakar* (STAGD), and its application led to major works and resulted in substantial immigration to Cape Verde.

*The appearance and disappearance of slums.* Housing issues took on increasing importance beginning in the 1950s. Slums started appearing in other parts of Dakar, such as Fass and Colobane, while the central parts of Medina became increasingly populated. The government decided to curb this phenomenon by driving illegal inhabitants from areas surrounding the city to Pikine, where new housing subdivisions had been planned. Evictees were granted a 200 sq. meter parcel but had to build a home using their own means. The first operation of this type – old Pikine – was launched in 1952. For the government, it was the only solution; the city centre needed to be rid of part of its population. Thus Dakar created its twin: Pikine.

The influx of immigrants was further accentuated with independence, due largely to Dakar becoming the country's capital, as well as the centre of the country's economic (industry and trade) and political functions. However, independence changed nothing in terms of urban policy. As such, the country contented itself with colonial-era structures until the end of the 1960s, though it became clear that the resources available and methods used largely failed to meet needs (SINOUE 1990).

The eviction policy intensified. Residents of Medina and slums were moved to the Grand Yoff and Dagoudane Pikine housing subdivisions, to Pikine extension in 1967 and Guédiawaye in 1971. These subdivisions provided housing for only part of Dakar's population. At the same time, rural populations continued to flock to Cape Verde, creating new informal areas.

To deal with this, architect and urban planner Michel Ecochard was commissioned to develop a new plan in 1963. After three years of investigation and work, Ecochard submitted the first draft of the project. His master plan followed the 1961 version which promoted the development of the SICAP, Grand Yoff, and Pikine areas, and attempted, for the first time, to integrate those areas forgotten during the 'Haussmannization' of Dakar. Commonly referred to as the 'Ecochard Plan,' the urban master plan (PDU) of 1967<sup>23</sup> included the area between the Cape Verde Peninsula and the Mbaou forest. This PDU took into account the physical expansion of the municipality of Dakar and the area west of Pikine-Guédiawaye, as well as the renovation of the old parts of Medina, Reubeuss, and Greater Dakar.

This plan clearly marked a new era in urban policy, in which informal urbanization was seen as an abnormality of urban planning to be eradicated. The document aimed to plan the city's expansion and organize housing for poor populations via the development of subdivisions on the city outskirts. However, simply imagining the location of these new areas was not enough; the means to build them were lacking. The same was true for the large industrial facilities and services that had been planned (a refinery, a new airport, etc.) and which, in the end, were built. Meanwhile, population growth surged, and Dakar's urban development soon surpassed the limits envisaged by the plan (SINOU 1990).

The Ecochard Plan deliberately aimed to limit urbanization east of Pikine, to organize the conurbation's expansion from two points: Dakar City, in the west, and Pikine, in the east. The plan likewise faced limited means for this purpose, resulting in increasingly broad eviction operations accompanied by ever-weakening efforts to create facilities. Ultimately, the urban policy only favoured the solvent middle class (mainly government employees) during these years. The SICAP<sup>24</sup> and *Office des habitations à Loyer Modéré* (OHLM) only developed housing for this class, much like what took place in Greater Dakar with the 'Customs and 'Police' housing subdivisions.

*Informal urbanization.* Created in the 1950s to relieve congestion in Dakar, the city of Pikine – its 'poor' twin – grew, eventually using up all of its allotted space. While Dakar enjoyed the majority of investments, Pikine and Guédiawaye lacked the means to become full-fledged cities in their own right. The region still faces this



PETERSEN STATION EXPRESS  
BUSES.



CITY OF PIKINE, WASTE INVADING  
THE NIAYES.

problem today; with only one city (downtown Dakar), the other municipalities remain merely suburbs. Integrated management of the peninsula requires a multi-pole organization, which the government is slow to do, even though centralities are numerous and likewise exist in the suburbs.

Today, as in the past, Greater Dakar continues to develop in a predominantly informal way. *Pikine irrégulier* is the historical example, but recent population displacement shows that

history repeats itself, so much so that there was even fear of the resurgence of informal development phenomena in the city. Above and beyond such phenomena, the real cause of informality is the residents' lack of resources. Families are increasingly numerous and cannot afford to buy land, in which case the only choice is informal settlements.

Urbanization densifies the existing urban fabric, vertical growth, and the creation of outlying urban cores. The growing number of informal areas is linked to the resorption of the housing shortage and the lack of public programs and social housing, which are rare and unaffordable for most.

*Urbanization and the crisis of the 1970s and 1980s.* The global economic crisis of the 1970s challenged the development models of Third World cities in general, and Dakar in particular. The goal of facility standards comparable to those in northern countries was abandoned and the norms scaled back. The level and comfort of amenities was reconsidered in terms of users' means (i.e., giving the maximum number of people the bare minimum to allow them to settle legally and stave off the development of new slums).

Serviced plots thus replaced housing subdivisions in World Bank projects, such as the 400-hectare initiative in the north of Dakar, near the old village of Cambérène (a neighbourhood that, today, is referred to as 'serviced plots').

The Bank's and the government's idea was to provide 150-300 square-meter plots equipped with basic facilities (collective water supply and basic road infrastructures) at a modest price. A plot could be purchased on credit, as could the construction of a home. While originally intended for poor families, these plots are largely bought by the middle class individuals who already have homes in the city and are more solvent (SINOUE 1990). Thus, the problem of housing for the poor remains



PETERSEN BUS STATION: A TATA  
BUS AWAITS PASSENGERS.



unsolved.

Ten years after the global crises of the 1970s, another crisis struck Senegal: the government faced a major economic recession that changed its policy choices. Against a backdrop of a decreasing mean income among urban residents and the rising unemployment rate, the government began by reducing state spending and giving priority to investments that were immediately 'productive,' at the expense of development initiatives that, in any case, did not succeed in controlling informal development.

Under the auspices of international lenders (the World Bank being at the top of the list), Senegal moved towards management-based urban development, to the detriment of project-based urban development. Efforts were made to make existing services (i.e. public transport networks, roads, and land registry) more efficient. In this regard, the powers of the city of Dakar increased, and an urban community was created. By focusing on management, costly and/or ineffective initiatives (like serviced plots) decreased, and preference was instead given to simpler, less grand projects aimed at regulating land, leaving the construction of housing to the charge of the people.



MAIN FAÇADE OF THE SANDAGA  
MARKET IN THE CITY CENTRE.

*The renaissance of major works.* Today, two documents serve as the reference for urban development. The first is the Urban Master Plan (PDU) of Greater Dakar for 2025, which has been under consideration since 2000. However, it is not yet complete, and no one knows if it ever will be. The second document is the *Plan National d'Aménagement du Territoire* (national regional development plan), which proposes balanced development of the territory based on better mobility management. However, the main strategic goal here (in addition to initiatives confined to Dakar proper) is the construction of a toll highway between Dakar and Thiès to improve traffic flows, provide a simplified junction between Dakar and inland areas, and facilitate urban mobility in Greater Dakar. The infrastructure will provide a connection between the new Blaise Diagne International Airport (AIBD) (whose realization has been delayed) and downtown Dakar, as well as the future business centre that has been planned on the site of the current airport. It is likewise intended to favour a shift in habitat to the east, reducing real estate pressure and saturation of downtown Dakar.

*Transport issues and urban mobility.* Today, the Cape Verde Peninsula lacks space. Traffic between downtown Dakar and the rest of the country is impossible because there is only one road linking the two. Reducing traffic in the city is not easy, however. The proposed solution is the construction of a highway to

connect the two – a toll highway and a non-toll highway on the same stretch of road. Works are as yet unfinished, and traffic problems are still considerable, although some sections flow more smoothly than in the past. This determination to make traffic flow, while commendable, nonetheless poses two major problems. The first is that of modal choice; the second is the eviction of populations living along the future highway. Yet, Dakar has decided to build a road at a time when other major cities have started thinking in different terms, despite the fact that a train linking the city centre and suburbs already exists.

With transport also comes the question of travel and mobility. Paradoxically, the roads are so congested in Dakar that the entire population must bear the brunt of the combined effects of poorly-managed building projects, torrential rains, dangerous driving practices, etc. And yet, a major issue today is the ability to be mobile (KAUFMANN 2007), which is a central concern for households, as their survival depends on it.

*An unstable environment.* During the rainy season, the environment becomes a key area of concern. Drawing a parallel between health, illness, hygiene, life expectancy, and poverty is a relatively recent practice. No doubt driven by international trends, awareness that the environment is indeed a key issue of public space is developing.

The major problem here, the climate, is specifically tied to the rainy season. The rain that pummels Dakar for several weeks each year is considerably problematic. While most of the problems exist throughout the year, they are exacerbated as a result of the heavy rains (environmental concerns increase, public transport slows, and evictions once again make headlines) – all highlighting the government's shortcomings. For a few months, everything seems to take on extraordinary proportions. Yet, this very basic information (which has been put aside for decades) must be taken into account for the future development of sustainable urban management and planning. In other words, in Dakar, climate plays a crucial role.

Dakar has no control over its rainwater, and its suburbs regularly experience flooding. This can naturally be blamed on the heavy rains; however, its catalysts are the failures of the sanitation system, lack of planning, certain forms of spatiality and socio-cultural behaviours. The floods of 1999 and 2005, in particular, led the government to implement a program to both fight against flooding and eradicate slums by building social housing called *Jaxaay*.<sup>25</sup>

*Dakar implements a model.* That of the 'modern'<sup>26</sup> city, of Dubai and its highways, and of South African cities which, in the collective imagination, represent Black Africa's success at the global level. This is what Dakar wants to be: a global city, a reference, a crossroads for the region and the country. The search for this image of modernity lurks behind development programs – a global vision against a



backdrop of competition between cities. Above and beyond the international showcase the city hopes to be are the hundreds of thousands of 'have-nots' who live and die on the sidewalks of development. The problem in Dakar is that the majority of the population is excluded; the city, planned for and open to only a small minority of 'haves,' eludes them.

To implement this 'modern city program,' Dakar is focusing efforts on the building of roads and their *raison d'être*, the automobile, and are thus turning to the very modes that are largely overwhelming cities and that European and North American cities are increasingly questioning. To build its roads, Dakar is moving people, regardless of what past experience has taught it. Pikine is one such example – an experiment that did not work, in which political will was powerless against urban dynamics. "This is one of the hideous faces of urbanization in Dakar. This two-speed movement by which the poor are sacrificed at the expense of the rich and princes and which stands in contrast to Dakar's social future that keeps on growing, with peoples from the countryside in search of comfort and well-being" (FAYE 2007). This is the crux of the problem of Dakar, a dual city, with a downtown for the elite and suburbs that grow, like a shadow, for the poorest.

# ABJ

Abidjan





















# ABIDJAN: THE CAPITAL OF FRENCH-SPEAKING WEST AFRICA

## Chapter 4

The history of Abidjan is closely tied to that of the Ivory Coast and the building of the nation. For many decades, Abidjan was the physical manifestation of the projections of a technocratic urbanism that claimed to be global (COURET 1997) and systematized, and that needed to correspond to people's idea of a modern society. No other city became a promotional sample for modernity the same way; hence, the city served as a showcase for Western society in Africa and for seemingly successful urban liberalism. The steel and glass towers attested to the city's savoir-faire and its mastery of modern tools for building a city.

Abidjan – its roads, port, and endless residential neighbourhoods (all of which seemingly settled around the lagoon) – is a city made entirely out of concrete. First and foremost, however, it was the product of a development strategy which, in 1960, confirmed and accentuated the absorption of the Ivorian economy into the global market through the promotion and support of export agriculture and the call for manual labour and foreign capital (ANTOINE *et al.* 1987). In Abidjan's case, it was agriculture that produced the city.

Abidjan is a showcase of modern society (STECK 2005); it is the physical projection of a technocratic, systematized and promotional urban development that



MAP OF THE IVORY COAST.

goes hand in hand with the myth and ideology of a 'modern' society, so dear to the Ivorian government and its first president. It is likewise the showcase for the building of Ivorian society whose 'progress' is most easily seen in the urban landscape, which is the embodiment of a larger project for producing a new society (COURET 1997).

Urban policy is considered part of this development strategy, a way of 'distributing the fruits of growth.' It also perfectly reflects economic growth by extolling the virtues of a decidedly contemporary urbanism, and claims to 'promote' the city by building prestigious structures. 'Modernization' implies a search for quality urban development, with high standards capable of withstanding comparison those of the West. It must be big and beautiful, "because what we aspire to is not equality in misery, but equality in prosperity" (COURET 1997).

*The birth of Abidjan.* The development of Abidjan was accelerated by a series of epidemic disasters (LE PAPE 1985). Along with the discovery of the mosquito as a carrier of yellow fever, the disease's viral nature, and the invention of a vaccine in the 1930s, hygiene became a development norm in colonial cities. As such, research focused on settlement sites, urban forms, and building architecture. Stagnant bodies of water that could potentially attract mosquitoes were avoided at all costs. Hence, it was necessary to move away from marshlands and to drain rainwater. Building sites for cities needed to be exposed to the wind, to ventilate not only the streets but the buildings as well. "Doctors and engineers [military or civilian] reflecting on recent outbreaks all believed in preventative topography," (LE PAPE 1985). The goal was to make it possible for a European population to live in the tropics.

In 1912, Abidjan, with 1,400 inhabitants, was still a small town, although services were already being developed. By 1934, the population had grown to 17,500 inhabitants, proof of the city's rather slow growth rate. It was not until the 1950s that the population began growing more rapidly, at a rate of 10 % per year. This growth was mainly the result of internal and international migration.<sup>27</sup> From there, things moved quickly; whereas Abidjan had 65,000 inhabitants in 1950, it had 180,000 ten years later (2.7 times more than at independence).

This rapid growth continued until the end of the 1970s. However, between 1978 and 1984, contrary to previsions, population growth slowed dramatically as a direct result of the economic crisis and the return of many immigrants (largely Burkinabe) to their countries of origin<sup>28</sup>. Nonetheless, the growth rate for the 1975-1988 period was 5.6 %, though the state services in charge of planning had estimated an annual rate of 8.2 %. This was the end of both the 'Ivorian model' and the demographic dynamism that went with it. With the economic crisis, migrants tended to move toward inland cities whose growth rates surpassed that of Abidjan, mainly due to natural growth (COURET 1997).

From its inception, Abidjan was ethnically mixed, as its economic development



largely depended on rural labourers from the countryside as well as urban labourers from other cities in the region.

In 1955, for instance, Ivoirians represented only 49 % of the urban population; 44 % came from other African countries and 7 % non-African countries. However, in 1988, in Greater Abidjan, Ivoirians represented 61.5 % of the population versus 36.7 % for other Africans and just over 1 % for non-Africans. This figure confirms the slow diminution of foreigners in previous decades, and the minor role non-Ivoirians (African or otherwise) played in the city's demographic growth. Yet, poor foreigners were historically part of the urban landscape, occupying the city fringes, undeveloped areas, and informal settlements, thus 'making' Abidjan via their own means and efforts.

Abidjan's population profile changed noticeably in sixty years. The urban archetype of the young, unmarried, male immigrant that once characterized the city has today been replaced by three-generation family units: the grandparents who 'in their time' came to Abidjan from the village, the parents whose youth was essentially spent in the city, and the grandchildren who were born and raised there (COURET 1997).

Today, natural growth plays a prominent role, contrary to the situation pre-1980 (HAERINGER 2002). Prior to this time, two-thirds of growth was the result of migration. Like all colonial cities during their construction, the contribution of natural growth was small compared with that of migration, as the male population was very high (HAERINGER 2002).

YEAR	POPULATION	GROWTH RATE
1912	1,400	16.11 %
1915	2,191	16.11 %
1920	4,625	16.11 %
1925	7,464	8.58 %
1930	11,265	8.58 %
1935	17,000	10.47 %
1940	27,969	10.47 %
1945	46,000	7.16 %
1950	65,000	13.98 %
1955	125,000	7.57 %
1960	180,000	13.56 %
1965	340,000	10.83 %
1970	568,546	10.83 %
1975	951,000	9.06 %
1980	1,467,263	9.06 %
1985	1,817,657	3.24 %
1990	2,132,200	3.26 %
1995	2,571,800	3.82 %
2000	3,071,800	3.29 %
2005	3,576,000	2.96 %
2008	3898 298	

POPULATION AND GROWTH RATES FOR ABIDJAN, 1912-2008. (SOURCE: INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA STATISTIQUE DE LA CÔTE D'IVOIRE).

*Abidjan and the colonial period.* Abidjan's history began with the founding of the colony of the Ivory Coast on March 10, 1893. Its territory consisted only of colonial trading posts (Grand-Bassam, Dabou, Grand-Lahou, Assinie, etc.), which alone were occupied on a permanent basis. Early on, around 1900, the colony's main goal was not commerce but rather gaining control of territory.

At the same time as the 'pacification' of territories was taking place, a period of 'development' for the colony began through the systematic exploitation of natural resources. This meant a change in the colony's decision-making apparatus; stable and lasting administration was needed. This new political order required the building of a capital from which to govern and wield power. Grand Bassam had played this role from the signing of the colony's founding act. However, maintaining power and governance means having people to govern, and the presence of yellow fever and malaria remained a major obstacle. Grand Bassam was particularly affected by these diseases. An epidemic struck the European population, at which point eradication of the illnesses became a must for the survival of the colonial order (DUBRESSON 1989).



The administration needed to find a safe site to transfer the capital, in an area power could be continuously exercised and maintained. This constraint was coupled with another: the site chosen also needed to allow for the creation of a deep-water port so that the capital could play an important economic role in the trade system.

In its report, the Houdaille research mission of 1887 cited potential in terms of economic development due to the port's linkage to the railway. The site was located on a calm body of water, the Ebrié lagoon, west of Petit Bassam, whose water reached depths of up to ten meters. A narrow coastal belt to the south protected it from the ocean. The soil quality was good, and there would be no lack of space – once a few indigenous villages had been moved (which is never a major obstacle for a colonist). The site's location would also reduce the areas of dense forest, thus facilitating the railway's construction. The Ministry of Overseas Colonies accepted the plan to transfer the administrative capital to Abidjan-Santley. However, the move was staunchly opposed by the traders and trade houses of Grand Bassam.

Meanwhile, following a scare due to yellow fever, the capital was temporarily transferred from Grand Bassam to Bingerville. The site was located on an 80-meter high plateau. Initially, Bingerville seemed even more advantageous than the Abidjan site. It was not until November 28, 1920, that the decision to move the capital from Bingerville to Abidjan was made, and 1934 that it became effective.

Above all, this period was marked by fear of epidemics. Yet, the desire to 'physically' ground political power and develop an economy remained strong. The epidemics in Grand Bassam and the area's lands 'given' to Abidjan at no cost gradually but ultimately convinced traders to move, especially as the construction of the railway, begun in 1904, necessitated abundant labour and the development of services.

The history of Abidjan took a decisive turn on July 23, 1950, with the opening of the Vridi canal, which connected the lagoon to the ocean, opening the door to the possibility of constructing a large-scale port. Thanks to funding from the *Fonds d'investissement pour le développement économique et social* (FIDES), which



A STREET IN TREICHVILLE.  
MAIN ROAD IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE  
CENTRE, PLATEAU QUARTER.  
'CONTEMPORARY' ARCHITECTURE  
IN THE CITY CENTRE.



OVERLOOKING ABIDJAN.

financed both the canal and the railway line to Ougadougou (completed in 1955), the 'Abidjan system' was going at full throttle. Logging and farming became possible, and the port made it possible to turn them into goods for exportation.

As in Dakar, World War II changed France's vision of its colony. Among the most important factors in the development of perspectives was the return of those who had fought in Europe, the birth of an intellectual elite (and the accompanying social

demands), the growth of indigenous population, and thus the rise of the *African* city, which had become a threat to the European city. The time had come to revisit the ideologies behind urban planning, which could no longer be exclusively white. Between that and an exclusively black ideology, there was obviously a giant step that was never taken. In the end, to avoid the particularities of local governments, recommendations and decisions regarding urban planning were made in France and applied to all overseas territories.<sup>29</sup>

This post-war period most notably saw the creation of two financial institutions, the FIDES and the CCFOM (*Caisse centrale de la France d'outre-mer*), which dealt with demands for social and economic funding without straining local budgets. Although the primary mission of these two organizations was to create facilities in French overseas territories, they likewise provided the basis for social housing policies in the Ivory Coast. For Abidjan, this marked the beginning of housing policies that, in 1952, saw the birth of the SIHCI (*Société immobilière d'habitation de Côte d'Ivoire*), whose aim was the development of urban and rural areas. This

FLY-TIPPING IN THE CITY CENTRE  
STALLS IN PUBLIC SPACE IN THE  
TOWN CENTRE (RIGHT).





development had a positive impact on the city by favouring a major road network toward the city and increasing the activities of the port and railway network, all creating a large-scale labour market to which rural dwellers and foreigners were drawn.

Just prior to independence, the city was 'in full swing,' having become a major trade platform between both export products (timber, coffee, and cacao) and imported manufactured products – the very symbol of the colonial system and its success.

*Abidjan: the glory of independence and after.* To understand the history of Abidjan during the 1960-1980 period, one must recall the 'Ivoirian model, meaning the country's development strategy just after 1960, based on rapid growth to save it from underdevelopment. Initially, this model was based on increasing the value of export agriculture in order to kick-start industrialization of the internal market. At least that was the idea, which went in tandem with an opening to labour, technicians, and foreign capital. This State capitalism worked up until 1978 and saw an annual growth rate of more than 7% for nearly twenty years.

To the indigenous population, the colony had left a city whose urban policies worked exclusively to the benefit of a European minority; the birth of an Ivoirian state meant revisiting living conditions of Ivoirians (i.e., the masses), and not just those in few (elite) neighbourhoods, but for the entire city. The solution to the housing issue – subject to economic choices, of course – was to reproduce the colonial model along with all of the problems inherent to it and the modalities of its maintenance at a time of liberation. This liberal choice triggered a rural exodus both from within the country and abroad to cities, where low-income populations arrived *en masse*. It also created opportunities for foreign 'experts,' leading to the arrival of a rich, white, decidedly urban population.

The priority was then given to economic development, which allowed for the overall development of the country. As such, the government's urban development policy fell squarely into the project. Urban planning needed to reflect the government's desire to redistribute the fruits of its growth as well as the vitality and economic success of not just one city, but of the entire nation. In this

EXAMPLE OF RENTAL HOUSING.  
STREET IN A POOR DISTRICT.





CENTRAL MARKET OF ABIDJAN.

comprehensive project, planning was not merely intended as a showcase for skills, but also as a vehicle for the radical modernization of the society at large.

The urban project was one of modernization. To implement it, the government divided it into three areas: housing, infrastructure, and prestigious buildings, the latter being designed to inspire investors' confidence by playing on the city's image, an image that appealed to modernity, Western ideals, prosperity and economic dynamism.

From courtyard housing – where several households shared a common space – to villas, the typology of housing fanned out over a whole range of possibilities. Modernization's goal, however, was to push inhabitants out of 'archaic' courtyard housing to individual homes, which were the success symbol of modern (and inevitably Westernized) man. And yet, in 1960, 70 % of the population of Abidjan still lived in courtyard housing, giving one an idea of the magnitude of the task the government faced with this project as well as of the profound shift in habits and local ways of inhabiting the city (ANTOINE *et al.* 1987).

Paradoxically, economic liberalism, which the Ivory Coast had been gambling on since the 1960s, went along with a strict and purposeful state-mandated urban policy involving control of land and the entire process of production of urban space. The administration had the monopoly on land management and used clean-up procedures to take back land that was already occupied. This policy was common practice in almost all French-speaking African countries, where local chiefs had been stripped of their customary rights in favour of private property and modern rights since the arrival of independence. Shortly thereafter, specialized government agencies were set up to plan the 'Ivoirian' urban development model. In 1961, the *Ministère de la Construction et de l'Urbanisme* was created,

TÉLÉ-CENTRE (A PUBLIC CENTRE FOR WATCHING TELEVISION) IN THE YOPOUGON DISTRICT.  
A 'MAQUIS' IN YOPOUGON (RIGHT).





and in 1966 the BNETD30 was born, with the task of urban planning and, hence, the making of urban development plans and studies for the development of the whole country. In 1968, the AURA<sup>31</sup> was created. It was responsible exclusively for Abidjan and consisted of a panel of experts and expatriate (French) technicians. Its core mission was to transmit the West's urban knowledge based on restrictive norms. In 1952, the SIHCI (*Société Immobilière d'habitation de Côte d'Ivoire*) was created, followed by the SUCCI (*Société d'Urbanisme et de Construction de Côte d'Ivoire*) in 1959. The two semi-public companies had almost identical functions: the construction of affordable housing. The independent Ivory Coast reinforced these two entities with the creation of the SOGEFIHA (*Société de gestion et de financement de l'habitat*) in 1963 and the SOCOGI (*Société ivoirienne de construction et de gestion immobilière*) in 1965, which was also responsible for financing housing for all.

In 1968, a housing report showed that the model's results had been limited, and that Abidjan was still far from its target. However, nothing changed, and the model was not questioned; instead, new resources were allocated. The creation of the OSHE (*Office de soutien à l'Habitat économique*), which became FSH (*Fonds de Soutien de l'Habitat*) in 1977, attests to this. However, while the first agreements with the World Bank were made in those years, the state of the Ivory Coast, recognizing its inability to fund its overall urban development project, was obliged to publicly question it, downscale facility standards, and, most importantly, to no longer subsidize housing.

Starting in 1978, the collapse of international markets for materials produced by the Ivory Coast put an end to the Ivorian model and revealed the country's total dependence on the international economy. The failure of the model was due neither exclusively to the excessively high standards (which were also costly) nor to the end of the period of economic splendour. For, whatever the policy, the results were the same, as was the case in most other large African cities. The system for financing the construction of affordable housing and building plots contributed to capital that benefitted those who had in the land business found a less-than-honest (or in any case unfair) way of getting rich (SAVANE, ANTOINE 1989, STECK 2007). Because of the rise in the value of urban land,



ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING NEAR THE LAGOON.



TREE-LINED STREET ON THE PLATEAU.



BUILDINGS ALONGSIDE THE  
LAGOON, FACING THE PLATEAU.

speculation had become a reality and, with it, home ownership beyond the economic means of most urban dwellers (COURET 1997).

Real estate operations thus created conditions for social segregation between the beneficiaries of government-subsidized real estate (the middle class and government employees) and others (for the most part poor) (ANTOINE *et al.* 1987). Non-standard living areas, still used as a temporary solution, were legitimized by their durability. And so a non-state housing model developed – that of the courtyard, thus remedying the shortcomings of the Ivorian model – developed. In other words, back to pre-modern square one...

The existence of these popular strategies is an indication of the magnitude and endurance of the housing crisis. However, as Armand shows (ARMAND 1988), while the land and real estate sectors were of benefit to the middle classes (who

saw in it an opportunity for profitable investment), there was also illegal speculation by the lower classes, who took advantage of a lack of government control to appropriate land. For poor people, it was above all a question of finding a place to live close to areas of employment, which is why new constructions were built on the outskirts, or in more central places that were more inaccessible (i.e. cliffs, ravines, etc.). Slums are typically located in areas that are non-desirable in real estate terms, but close to employment areas.

TRANSPORT BY BOAT ON THE  
LAGOON.



*History through urban planning.* It was not until 1928 that Abidjan saw its first 'real' urban development plan – the development plan for the city of Abidjan. Prior to this, the city developed according to successive subdivision plans. Already at this time, this document set out to make Abidjan a modern city, a recurring theme used until the crisis of the 1980s.

The main goal of the plan was to zone the territory. Each part of the future city was assigned a function: colonial administration took place on the Plateau (which is also where Europeans resided and where trade houses were located); in the south was Treichville, an indigenous neighbourhood separated from the plateau by the lagoon; in the north was another indigenous neighbourhood, Adjamé, separated from the administrative area by a military camp which conveniently served as a sanitary cordon. The plan, which was rather ungenerous as regards land for African neighbourhoods, quickly showed its limits by proving unable to absorb the many immigrant labourers who came with the development of the city's activities.

The second plan, the Badini Plan of 1952, proposed one important difference: Abidjan, the administrative/residential city, suddenly became Abidjan, the port/industrial/commercial city. This change came with the drilling of the Vridi Canal. The plan largely focused on the development of port activities, external trade, and the exploitation, or rather *overexploitation*, of the site's natural resources. However, it did to some extent do away with the segregation in the 1928 plan, the goal being maximum development. The emphasis on industry was so great that the plan in some ways forgot residential areas, which were unable to accommodate the demographic pressure. However, an even bigger problem arose. The few new residential areas that were developed did not meet the needs in terms of location, as they were far away from job areas. The consequences of this oversight were immediate: the birth of new slums closer to employment areas.

In 1960, eight years after the Badini Plan, the SETAP (*Société pour l'Étude Technique d'Aménagements Planifiés*) designed a plan<sup>32</sup> which, designed in continuity with the previous one, attempted to rectify its filings (AUA 1994), in other words thwarting north-south development in favour of an east-west axis, and favouring building housing close to employment areas.

Shortly after the SETAP Plan, however, the city of Abidjan – now the capital of the new independent state – was hit by an unprecedented population boom. "The concept of urban design no longer existed, instead giving way to that of a better understanding of the realities of urban sprawl and greater mastery of social changes" (AUA 1994). To respond to this new situation and improve knowledge of urban social dynamics, conducting surveys became critical. This is exactly what the *Société d'économie et de mathématique appliquée* (SEMA)<sup>33</sup> did by conducting socio-economic interviews throughout the city. Finally the government got to know its people, the employment structure, the movements of inhabitants, and the structure of household expenditures.



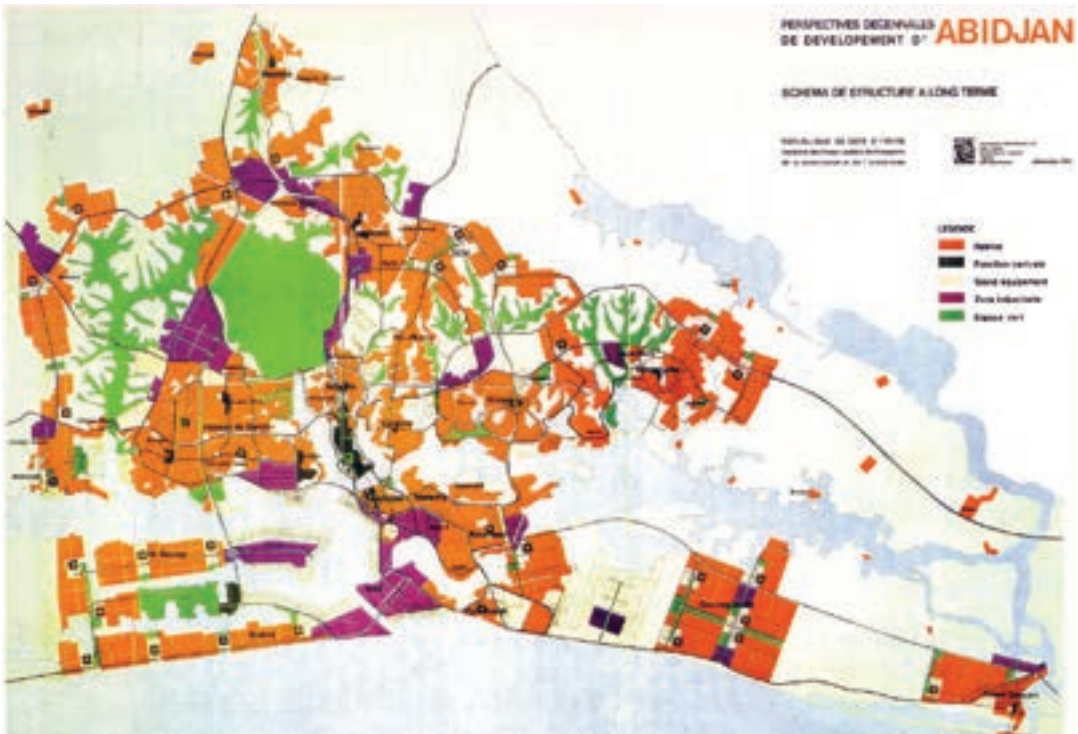
BADANI PLAN OF 1952 (LEFT).  
SETAP PLAN OF 1960 (RIGHT).

Based on this research, the government thought it could make not only demographic projections, but also projections relative to infrastructure and amenities, as well as develop a number of urban policies (including a housing policy). It



PLAN D'AMÉNAGEMENT DE L'AURA.





was based on these 'SEMA surveys' that, in 1969, a new urban development plan known as the *Schéma de structure* (structure diagram) of the BNCT was born. However, the 1974 Plan [the AURA Plan] did not propose any real changes to the '69 plan either, the general precepts being virtually the same. The actual drawing was nonetheless more precise, not only in terms of the marking of roads but also relative to the number of zones. The plans that followed were thus only updated versions of the precedent.

In 1978-1979, just before the crisis, Abidjan – in full economic splendour – was home to two-thirds of industrial production and four-fifths of service sector jobs. The balance of the investments between the city and the rest of the country needed to be corrected. It was in this spirit that a new approach to urban planning was developed, one that no longer thought in terms of the spatial planning of urban functions in the form of zones, but rather in terms of a new approach to public investment programmes. Thus, in 1977, the administration did a study called, "A ten-year outlook on development in Abidjan: 1979-1988." The goal was to develop an inter-sectoral coordination tool for development programmes and the management of the city (AUA 1994).

The ten-year outlook was drafted when the economy was booming. However, the crisis of the early 1980s put a premature end to priority programmes. In 1985, the AUA (*Atelier d'Urbanisme d'Abidjan*) addressed the long-term development

THE 1976 10-YEAR  
DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR  
LONG-TERM PLANNING IN AND  
AROUND ABIDJAN.

diagram of the city of Abidjan with an aim to rebalance the location of residential areas and industrial zones, an issue that is still topical today and that the earlier plans were unable to rectify.

Finally, the last plan [the current one] has been 'in progress' since 1994, when the *Atelier d'Urbanisme d'Abidjan*, under the auspices of the *Direction et Contrôle des Grands Travaux*, was commissioned to develop the *Actualisation du Schéma Directeur d'Abidjan* (ASDA), an updated version of the master plan. This plan once again updated a new approach to urban planning that attempted to take into account the "mechanisms of the city's evolution through specific investigations" (AUA 1994). However, it was nothing more than another plan. Surveys on informal employment, transport, and household situations were conducted. The AUA research documents show this, and the studies and plans cited above should provide a basis for a new approach to the problems of urban policy issues based on three points.

*Growing poverty against a backdrop of environmental crisis.* The country's economic situation never relived the splendour of those years of liberalism following independence. The economic crisis continues, one of the major consequences of which is the impoverishment of the population. Makeshift housing has not been absorbed; in fact, it is increasing. The courtyard habitats against which the government wanted to fight are definitively rooted in the city, with three-quarters of the population living in them. Housing programmes have shown their limitations, and living conditions have continued to deteriorate. The 2008 food riots in Dakar, Douala, and Abidjan (among other cities) are yet another example that a portion of the population can no longer bear the increase in food prices. For Abidjan, these are undoubtedly the most difficult years in its history, as economic development has not been on the agenda for a long time, and the city is coping with its rapid growth, all against a backdrop of mounting safety issues – a nationwide constant since 2002. The recent election and subsequent problems clearly show that the city is idling.

EXAMPLE OF RECENT  
ARCHITECTURE, ABIDJAN  
CENTRE.



To top it off, Abidjan is increasingly plagued by environmental problems: the lagoon is dying, land pressure is weighing more and more heavily on protected sites, such as the Banco Forest, and untreated waste is accumulating in neighbourhoods. And almost no plan has ever dealt with these problems proactively.

The lagoon gets most of the untreated sewage and rainwater that runs off the city's polluted streets, but can no longer play the role of a regulator that absorbs pollution because the levels are too great. Thus, it is no longer a



reserve for the fish that are consumed daily in the city's *maquis* (bars) (which is undoubtedly a good thing, seeing as the consumption of these fish could pose major health risks for consumers). Finally, the lack of garbage collection in poor neighbourhoods adds to the precarious situation of vulnerable populations, especially with regard to diseases. The urban environment is often the stage for infections and other epidemics.

To conclude, two historical elements strongly shaped the city. The first was the search for an urban form that made it possible to combat mosquitoes, and the second was the economic model adopted at the state level. Without caricaturing these two situations, we can nonetheless see a shift from a vision of technical, hygienic, and engineering-based urban planning to a symbolic vision of the city as a showcase for modernity and a symbol of the state. Rarely has the state been as present as in Abidjan post-1960; the city was planned based on a political ideology and a state economic system that played all roles: planner, regulator, and sometimes even entrepreneur in major housing programs. In this shift from a technical model to a symbolic one, there was a loss of functional aspects of the city that, while they were sometimes devised brutally (like a set of obstacles to be dealt with) maintained firm footing in the regional and environmental contexts.

But this system that we call symbolic is no less than a technological vision based on high standards. Are not numerous and highly-restrictive constraints the prerogative of modern man? In this way, the technical vision was replaced by the technological vision, and behind the idea that good urban development (i.e. the recipe for a 'good' city) is one that can pride itself on having high building and infrastructure standards.

The Ivorian system worked well for slightly less than 20 years; its strong economic growth was proof of this. It was in this context that the idea of the city took shape. As in Europe, a city's development takes place through economic development. This idea has remained extremely present until today. Neither the crisis of the 1980s nor the new economic order challenged the paradigms of the city such as we imagine them in West Africa today, as though the model used were the right one regardless of what has happened or what might – past, present or future.



ONE OF THE CITY'S MANY MONUMENTS.



THE SORBONNE OF ABIDJAN. PUBLIC SPACE PAR EXCELLENCE; AN OUTDOOR AREA FOR POLITICAL DISCUSSION.



## THREE CITIES IN WEST AFRICA

### Chapitre 5

*The same principle of segregation.* The histories of Dakar, Abidjan and Nouakchott are astounding because, although built at different times, all three were based on the same basic pattern – namely, the separation of European and African neighbourhoods.

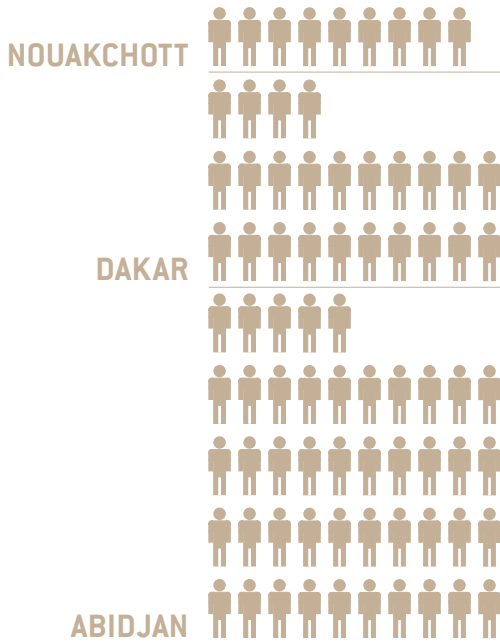
For Dakar, although the first plans do not spell out a clear racial separation, the 1915 plan for Medina clearly places the European population away from Africans, to avoid the many epidemics that decimated the white populations (At the time, it was thought that certain diseases were transmitted by the indigenous population).

From its first 'official' plan in 1828, Abidjan's Plateau and poor neighbourhoods were planned separately. In the south, Treichville was separated from the administrative and residential areas by the lagoon — a clearly defined border. In the north, however, there was no such clear border between the two areas; hence, a military camp served this function. Later, an industrial zone north of Cocody served as a border between the two worlds — one, a European residential area of high standing, and the other, poor and African.

Such separation between these two worlds existed in almost all colonial cities at that time. Even today this distinction still marks the space: the 'indigenous' neighbourhoods of the past have simply become poor neighbourhoods. The plans for and development of cities thus remain extremely rooted in this basic pattern, which has never been overstepped.

Physical segregation between administrative and European neighbourhoods and indigenous ones can also be found in the plans for Nouakchott. The first sketches were developed in 1957, and — whether Lainville, Cerutti or Hirsch — all followed this same pattern of separation between the two worlds (at that time they were referred to as 'popular neighbourhoods'). However, the end result was the same: the separation between rich and poor. Note again that the first sketch for the city plan was drawn only three years before independence, and only a year after the *Loi Deferre* on the autonomy of colonies of 1956. And while the winds of change were blowing, the old patterns remained the same. Urban independence was not yet in place.

*Similar ways of settling.* Another similarity between the cities was that, in all three cases, urban planners sought a well-ventilated plateau on which to build



GRAPHICAL COMPARISON OF  
POPULATIONS.

the city, the purpose being to combat malaria and yellow fever. Later, in Nouakchott, the plateau also served as a building site outside of flood-plains. In all three cases, the goal was to settle higher.

Moreover, plateaux also favoured rainwater runoff and liquid sewage, thus strengthening the choice. Long drainpipes that function via gravity could be laid and treatment plants built. However, plateaux are limited spaces, and poor inhabitants – who are also the most numerous – found themselves in uncomfortable conditions, given their lack of financial resources to buy good land. Ironically, the poor also settled the same way in the three cities. Regardless of whether or not it was planned, growth took place in a similar way.

French settlers favoured coastal cities, which were the bridgehead of commodities trade. The

sites chosen for Dakar and Abidjan thus had to respond to certain criteria, such as the possibility of constructing a deep-water port. The cove and the port's location in Dakar made it a secure infrastructure, as in Abidjan, where the lagoon plays this role. Nouakchott, on the other hand, is a special case. The city chose a waterside location, but not for the transporting of goods from inland to the coast. The deep-water port only came later, to meet the city's need for supplies. Unlike Abidjan, whose development benefitted from the creation of the port, it was the city's growth that obliged the Nouakchott government to create a port infrastructure.

Two settlement strategies guided location strategies of the poor, who were, generally speaking, squatters. The first, the cost of transport (which we will discuss in greater detail), seems to be the main criterion. In cities, informal settlements tend to develop close to areas where the demand for labour is high – in the densest employment areas. While this seems logical, it is rarely taken into account in planning studies. Though household budgets have been documented and cost structures are known, the relationship between transport costs and residential location has not been addressed. Even today this issue is still not a main concern for planners, despite the fact that the populations are becoming increasingly impoverished. Abidjan offers a good example. The planning of industrial zones does not take into account where people live: it is industry, on one hand, and housing, on the other. The imbalance was such that the city's authorities quickly saw the development of slums near the port, large factories, and industrial zones, i.e. wherever jobs were to be found.

A similar phenomenon, whereby the poor stayed in the city centre even though the government had provided plots of land on the outskirts, occurred in Nouakchott in the 1980s. The location was simply too far away from jobs, and household budgets did not allow for long commutes. Moreover, travel time took up a good portion of the day.

The second strategy, observable in all three cities, was to take over land not suitable for construction, in other words, land that no one wanted (ravines, steep slopes, floodable land, land impregnated with salt, and in the case of Nouakchott land on moving dunes, swamp areas, dumping areas, etc.). Such settlements are a risk for inhabitants as well as for the environment, as population density is often the highest on the most fragile sites. Niayes, in Dakar, is a good example of this.

More importantly, poor populations live on land that is not part of any plan – land that, in some sense, is ‘off the map.’ Once planning and zoning occurs, land increases in value, and the poor, who do not have the means to buy it, find themselves doomed to squatting. However, squatting can only take place on land that has no value, if one wishes to minimize the risk of being evicted. Valueless land is that which does not exist in any future projection of the city; it is there – outside of the plans – that cities are created. This is the great paradox of the planning of the African city; once a large population of impoverished people appears – as is the case of all African cities – the city often grows in unexpected places and ways.

*The government is still in charge, and planners are the same everywhere.* Before independence, the desire to plan the same way in all of the colonies was shared. This remains true today, even for Nouakchott, as we have seen. We find the same people, the same engineers, and the same architects: urbanism is ruled by a handful of men. Of course, this fact is exacerbated by the plethora of documents specific to urbanization in overseas territories. From one manual to the next, depending on the era, we learn about the necessary practices for drawing a city.

The role of Europeans (especially the French) in planning is considerable. While incontestable prior to independence, France still plays a role in city planning today, via its design bureaus or through contractual collaboration. From technical advisors for urban services to urban planning consultants, it is generally not the country’s elite who make the plans but rather who appoint those who do. And between elites who have studied in France, and French, Swiss, Belgian or Canadian planners, planning has been in the same hands ever since plans have existed. At the planning level, there was no decolonization, which prevents the emergence of new models. The elite and planners are accustomed to the European principles of the European city. Cities cannot, therefore, find their autonomy – the model of an African city.



Finally, we should mention the importance of lenders in the three countries and, today especially, that of the World Bank. Whether through priority investment programmes (PIP), roadway programmes, or by commissioning urban plans directly, the World Bank makes the African city today, both directly (by having reference plans developed) and indirectly (by funding projects for facilities and infrastructures).

*A history of planning.* Another similarity is that the state is still in charge of creating master plans. Whether through state services or international consulting firms, city planning is decided centrally and, in each case, keeps the municipalities on the sidelines. While some countries use participative processes to develop plans, plans are more or less the same everywhere.

For capitals (though Abidjan is no longer the administrative capital, it is still the Ivory Coast's largest city), especially given that the city acts as the country's flagship, it is understandable that the government seeks to maintain control. Urbanism was one of the pillars of success, or at least was meant to be the spatial expression of it; it is only natural that the state wanted to keep a handle on it. We also find cases of macrocephaly in all three countries; one big city for a whole country. Cities provide most of the service jobs, a sector on which the entire country's economy depends.

The state also uses the city to define its position on the international scene. Only a city can do this; Paris does not need France to position itself relative to Berlin or London. However, in African countries, this autonomy is not effective; cities remain mere tools of state power, and it is in this way that the state seeks to maintain control of them. Finally, cities are the first receptacles for rural immigration. By controlling cities, the state can act (or not) on this phenomenon. Note, however, that this argument is only marginally effective in context.

The state's way of trying to plan cities is not without consequence. The city's technical services must face the task of urban management on a daily basis, though planning is not their responsibility: How to allocate and/or reserve budgets and manage a space if that has not been planned? Planning does not always take budgets into account for the carrying out of certain tasks and operations, and funds for managing and maintaining facilities are not transferred from the state to the municipalities, leaving the latter unable to address needs.

If we look at the history of urban planning in West Africa (TRIBILLON 2002a), we see three clear historical phases: colonial urbanism, urbanism of anticipation, and the end of urban planning (or the era of urban engineering.)

At first, especially in the 1930s, it was the influence of the Modernist movement that arrived in Africa. As mentioned earlier, as zoning took place, provision was made for clear segregation of different populations. Tribillon speaks of total urbanism, "of which no European urban planner – not even the most Modernist

– would have ever dreamed: choosing the site of the future city, thinking about development through the application of the strictest zoning, dividing the land and designating prescribed uses, distributing the land among users, etc.” (TRIBILLION 2002b).

Then began the era of urbanism of anticipation (1950-1970). Faith in planning was strong, and resources, being limited, had to be used with great accuracy in plans. Thus did they plan for roads and other urban frameworks and extensions, which ultimately – with the introduction of populations – became real neighbourhoods.

Finally, the last period was that of projects and urban engineering. Under the World Bank's influence, the city grew, with a rash of projects aimed at creating buildable land – measures that took the place of housing policy and urban policy in general (TRIBILLION 2002b). Investments and projects were made and developed by urban investors, with partial measures for specific issues, depending on the lender. Durations were limited, and management was done on a project-by-project basis. This is the situation of our three case study cities today.

If one applies Tribillon's historic *découpage* to Nouakchott, a new city built during the second phase, we see that the city uses the old practice of an overall development plan when it comes to building. The second and third development plans were drafted during the era of urbanism of anticipation, while the current one is still project-based but is still connected with the a second generation plan – in other words, two overlapping phases. As Tribillon likewise observed (TRIBILLION 2002b), the first phase of urban development in Abidjan continued almost until 2000.

In all three cases, however, plans began with a precise drawing of the street (even on a large scale), followed by areas, and then sectors separated by roads. The diagram was the same every time: the drawing of the street, public spaces (alignment drawings were no longer *de rigueur*), and street patterns no longer seemed to be part of the planner's vocabulary, as if the urban complexity were just too complex to be dealt with at this level of detail.

*Three cities, the same problems.* Be it land, traffic, or the environment, all three cities struggle with similar problems. Although the problem of land is not exactly the same everywhere, it is one of the main causes of conflict. Nouakchott is undoubtedly an extreme case here, but the other two cities likewise struggle with land issues, which are intrinsically linked to the law, economy, and urban expansion. As in the other urban fields (ideas, morals, etc.), in land rights and land laws, two systems clash – one born of tradition, the other of modernity.

The environment also poses an array of problems. There are imbalances in all three cities; it is not merely a question of managing rainwater, wastewater, and garbage collection. Although these problems exist, others are even greater: the

dune that threatens Nouakchott, polluted groundwater, and Abidjan's dead lagoon, for instance, are all indicators of extreme fragility.

Regardless of the period or how planning is done, one important constant remains: ultimately, it is impossible to predict the future. A space is planned for 10,000 inhabitants, and 50,000 arrive, or vice versa. We can predict neither economic growth nor crises, giving us an overall impression that planning is indeed impossible. However, be it because or in spite of planning, the city is made with identical documents that clearly reveal the mechanisms at work. Furthermore, with most settlements developing without any planning, plans are doomed to limited efficacy and guidance.

This situation has led many to believe that African cities are not planned, which is a simplistic view that we refute. These cities *are* planned; their governments spend a great deal of time and money doing so, as the many plans we have shown and described here demonstrate. Their fundamental error, however, is that they do not take into account the settlement strategies of the poor – hence, the birth of squats and slums. Without taking dynamics into account, it is difficult to plan anything. Moreover, planning relies entirely on urban expansion, which is based on projections of population growth. The parallel histories of the three cities show that plans ‘trail’ behind the city, making only poor estimates of development. As such, there is a permanent gap between the planned vision and reality.

*The same goal.* The idea behind the planning is very clear in the three cities we explored: to make the city a showcase for the nation, to varying degrees, depending on the country. And while the case of Abidjan somewhat exaggerates this notion, the two other cities play the same game. Saying that the city is merely a showcase for a nation's *savoir-faire* is not enough; in each case, the ideas resurfaces that ‘modern’ man lives in the city, and that it is *through* cities that nations evolve from ‘underdevelopment’ to ‘development.’ For Mauritania, a modern nation is an urban nation. The Ivory Coast thinks the same thing. This double objective (of which cities are the medium) is apparent in their trajectories. We now more clearly understand why management and planning have stayed at the state level and are not, again, the responsibility of decentralized bodies.

At this stage in the discussion, we clearly see that the three cities are built on the same pattern of population segregation and approach to urbanism. This has hardly changed over the years. The spatiality at the heart of these projects gradually disappeared with the cities’ growth, forcing planners to change both the scale and degree of accuracy. Nowadays space is programmed, not drawn. While this change is important for the spatial quality of cities (the dimensions of streets, squares, and boulevards), it has changed nothing at the macro level, where the precepts for building the city remain the same. This has

resulted in the idea that planning is based on a preconceived notion of the city. This idea will be tested in the following chapter, which analyses current planning documents.

In the end, the trajectories of Nouakchott, Dakar, and Abidjan are similar, despite their disparate political forms and social and economic contexts.

- <sup>1</sup> Officially named the “Imperial Trail” initially, and later *Route Interfédérale No. 3* during the administrative era. Moroccans called the area from Agadir to Tindouf the “Route du Sud.” DU PUIGAUDEAU, O. (1954) *La piste Maroc-Sénégal*, Paris, Plon.
- <sup>2</sup> Initially an autonomous territory starting in 1956, Mauritania became independent November 28, 1960.
- <sup>3</sup> French law for Overseas Territories that institutes a government council to be presided over by a governor and comprised of ministers elected by the national assembly for each territory (adopted June 19, 1956).
- <sup>4</sup> Administrative entities during the French colonial period.
- <sup>5</sup> 17 newspaper articles in four daily Nouakchott newspapers (*L'Authentique*, *L'Eveil Quotidien*, *Nouakchott Info*, *Le Calame*) between January and June 2007 addressed the problem of the water supply as part of a study by the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne's (EPFL) Laboratory of Urban Sociology (LaSUR), which make it a major topic for the city.
- <sup>6</sup> French West Africa.
- <sup>7</sup> Director of Public Works in Mauritania.
- <sup>8</sup> Architect for the Bureau of Urban Planning and Public Works of Dakar (Direction de l'Urbanisme et des Travaux Publics).
- <sup>9</sup> SMUH is a French institution.
- <sup>10</sup> The *Bureau Central d'Études pour les Équipements d'Outre-Mer* (BCEOM) was created by a decree from the Ministry of France Overseas, with a mixed economic status at the time.
- <sup>11</sup> Certain authors estimate roughly 2,000 inhabitants, but travel accounts estimate a much more modest figure for this stopping place.
- <sup>12</sup> Figures provided by the Bureau of Urban Planning (Direction de l'Urbanisme).
- <sup>13</sup> The equivalent of a town or municipality.
- <sup>14</sup> RPDH 2000.
- <sup>15</sup> The first text on decentralization (note that order 86-134 of August 13, 1986, repealed and replaced by Order 87-289 of October 20, 1987, immediately laid the foundations for the veritable empowerment of local communities by making them legal entities and giving them financial autonomy).
- <sup>16</sup> The French spelling of *moughataa* varies depending on the document. We have chosen this spelling for this text.
- <sup>17</sup> Repealing and replacing No. 86-134 of October 14, 1986.
- <sup>18</sup> Decree 98-66 of June 17, 1988 lays down the powers of the Ministry of Finance.
- <sup>19</sup> The *Fédération de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) is comprised of eight colonies and the territory of Cape Verde (the peninsula), now independent from the colony of Senegal.
- <sup>20</sup> French West Africa.
- <sup>21</sup> Mersadier, *Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie*.
- <sup>22</sup> Approved by decree No. 5485 of 20 December 1946.
- <sup>23</sup> Approved by decree No. 67-864 of 19 July 1967.
- <sup>24</sup> Real Estate company of Cape Verde.
- <sup>25</sup> Jaxaay is a Wolof term meaning the eagle used by the President of the Republic A. Wade to symbolize a bird that does not let itself get bogged down in the water.
- <sup>26</sup> Modern, and not contemporary, it indeed remains an idea of Modernity – as yet unattained – in the model adopted by the city.
- <sup>27</sup> At 60 %.



<sup>28</sup> At this same time we can see acceleration in the growth rate in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso.

<sup>29</sup> In addition, coastal cities were favoured compared to inland cities. As the capital of the AOF, Dakar was favoured, as were Conakry and Abidjan – cities in full bloom.

<sup>30</sup> *Bureau National d'Etudes Techniques et de Développement*.

<sup>31</sup> Urban planning bureau for the Abidjan Region.

<sup>32</sup> The SETAP Plan of 1960.

<sup>33</sup> The SEMA studies of 1960.







While in the previous chapter we briefly revisited the trajectories of the three cities in terms of urban planning and urbanization, the present chapter is more prospective in that it aims to consider the city as projected (i.e. planned) by administrations, technical offices, and policies. This chapter offers an analysis of planning documents – not those that have more or less shaped these cities, but those now in force – regardless of legally enforcement or relevance. It is normally by decree that plans have the force of law. However, in the cases we are developing here, the question of legality has little importance, since a document's application depends not so much on its legal value as on what the authorities are prepared to apply.

The goal here is to understand the ideas conveyed by plans and the vision of society that subtly marks them. For this we will look at three plans: the *Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement Urbain pour la ville de Nouakchott*, the *Plan Directeur d'urbanisme de Dakar, Horizon 2025*, and the *Schéma Directeur du Grand Abidjan*. These are the three documents in force in these cities today.





# URBAN MASTER PLAN FOR THE CITY OF NOUAKCHOTT

## Chapitre 1

### *Diagnostic of the current situation: physical, urban, and regulatory frameworks.*

The challenges of the physical environment are explained in detail (dune belt, *sabkha*, sand dunes), providing us with the context of urban planning. The issues are shown graphically on a synthetic map.

The obstacles are easy to identify. The possibilities, however, are not described with the same degree of accuracy. Here, only leisure activities are mentioned, which seems like relatively little given constraints (such as the possible flooding of the city). Moreover, order of priority is entirely lacking in the presentation of the challenges and possibilities, as well as details versus imperatives. Since the basis is uncertain, developing reflection is difficult.

Without even citing the problem of the arrangement of the texts, the chapter on potential leads to a broader discussion of public space, justifying current needs with the usual clichés (which are often closer to a barely-sweetened version of *Tintin au Congo*<sup>1</sup> than real needs based on studies that take into account the multifaceted nature of the population and the fact that, after 44 years, Nouakchott is undoubtedly a *city*, not a *village*, as many urban professionals still like to believe). The city, like it or not, must reflect the entire population, and not just a small elite.

The description of the urban setting attempts to provide most comprehensive picture possible of the situation in the city. However, many questions remain unanswered. The major themes of urban planning are by and large missing from the diagnostic, which, for example, does not mention housing; although it is hinted at indirectly in the discussion on land use and urban density, it is not addressed directly. Some cities (like Abidjan, for instance) base their entire development on the issue of housing. But the SDAU of Nouakchott apparently does not consider the issue relevant for the city. The same is true of electrical supply, which like sanitation (liquid and solid), is not addressed in the diagnostic either. Finally, mobility is reduced to public transport in the form of express buses, which considerably limits the scope of reflection.

While this diagnostic of the urban setting is pleasant to read, it is far too cursory to allow the reader to truly grasp issues the city faces. Furthermore, rarely is the information referenced, thus lending to the idea that the city's portrait has been painted with broad strokes and does not provide a sufficient basis for the

planning development. The graphic quality of the diagnostic maps should be stressed, even if the links between the maps and texts are missing at times (zoning and public transport are two such examples).

Most of the themes and visuals are not adequately described or discussed. In the case of water supply, for instance, only a map of the network is provided. This alone is not enough; it must likewise be supported and correlated with figures on consumption and connections (other urban indicators that are found in many city monitoring groups).

We also learn that the city is divided into *moughataa*. However, this is not mentioned or discussed in the results of the diagnostic. Therefore we can ask whether it is relevant to even show this division, which is also to say that the individual data in themselves are not necessarily meaningful per se, but rather in their hybridization.

The summary draws conclusions without taking all of the themes into account. An overlapping of the themes would have helped highlight those neighbourhoods that were left behind. Likewise, the choice of neighbourhoods covered in the plan should not occur in the diagnostic, which should present the various elements to be discussed and offer an objective view of the city. The summary thus deals with the physical aspects (the dunes, *sabkha*, and coast), but does not address spatial segregation, which can only be seen by overlapping maps of urban density, transport, roads, and water systems.

The diagnostic is developed like a monograph, meaning theme by theme, without any analysis to identify the issues facing the city. Planning, however, must also put issues in perspective. No longer is it simply a question of technical knowledge (i.e. figures and tables); rather, it is a question of understanding the reality, both numerical and otherwise. Segregation between neighbourhoods, lack of equality in terms of access to resources, and issues of land provide a critical backbone for understanding Nouakchott. By ignoring this, we fail to grasp the urban dynamics.

After discussing the urban setting, the SDAU document reports on the legal, regulatory, and institutional aspects of urban planning and their consequences for urban actors. The main things to remember here are directly related to land issues: 1) urban growth has occurred through successive subdivision plans, and no comprehensive document is in force; 2) the lack of a comprehensive plan results in the distribution of the same piece of land several times (because of the overlapping of subdivisions); 3) regulations exist but are not enforced; 4) there is a dual pricing system – the official one (that of the government) and that of the free market; finally, 5) an official land title is not necessary in the land market; a simple letter of allocation is sufficient for sales between individuals. Ownership titles thus have little value.

This has numerous consequences for the city's development. The SDAU raises the following points:



- Discontinuous occupation of the urban space;
- An extension of the urban zone via illegal housing, without densification;
- Development lands are not showcased;
- The rapid rise in land prices.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF  
SUBDIVISIONS ON THE OUTSKIRTS  
OF NOUAKCHOTT.

These points are identified as obstacles to the development of the city in need of addressing. Most importantly, what we learn from the document is that land is the Achilles heel of planning, and that a certain number of principles must be laid down in order to overcome this deadlock. This goes back to what we saw earlier, in the cities' histories – i.e., that land issues are of the utmost importance in Nouakchott.

*Scope, strategic direction, and principles of planning.* The second part of the document focuses on the main principles and directions of planning. Logically, after a diagnostic, the few planning principles are given, thus leading to the master plan. First, however, the document recalls the purpose of a SDAU, and that of other planning documents (POS and *Plans d'urbanisme de détails*). These descriptions show us that the master plan is but one component of a set of tools.

The SDAU should be used to determine the overall spatial development strategy and, above all, as a programming and planning document. It establishes the broad guidelines, allowing government authorities to: 1) programme the

essential elements of urban development; 2) set the limits of the urban perimeter and determine what areas to open to urbanization; 3) determine the coherence of different types of spatial use; 4) set aside the land reserves necessary for large facilities; 5) inform actors of the planning's intent; 6) determine the content limitations of the plans to follow; 7) evaluate the compatibility of major projects that will be submitted for approval; and, finally, 8) propose locations for unforeseen projects.

But the SDAU is also a "coordination tool" (page 62); this, in principle, is the main role of a SDAU today. The SDAU of Nouakchott is, therefore, slightly more in the background compared to current tools by proposing only physical (and thus spatial) planning for the city.

The SDAU proposes four strategic guidelines. The first seeks to break with land practices. Land issues are clearly expressed, and the SDAU makes a number of recommendations, including putting a stop to current practices that have had a negative impact on the city and its development. It also states that the government must stop distributing land at a pittance. The SDAU clearly requests the surrender of a portion of public lands at market prices, the forfeiture of undeveloped concession titles, a ban on the creation of successive subdivisions without prior development of the pre-existing ones, and the involvement of local authorities in the attribution of land titles.

The SDAU's second guideline regards the environment, observing that the city is located on a fragile site and that the environmental constraints are numerous – hence, the need to take the environment-specific aspects into account.

The third guideline clarifies different actors' responsibilities for effectively implementing the document, and clarifies the roles of the local authorities, the CUN (*Communauté Urbaine de Nouakchott*), and the ADU (*Agence de Développement Urbain*).

The fourth and final guideline concerns monitoring the city's evolution and is not truly relative to development.

After the guidelines, the five main principles of urban planning are laid out. It 1) proposes making the neighbourhoods denser (indeed, many neighbourhoods are developed but also under-occupied. In this regard there seems to be a great deal of potential. According to the SDAU, this densification would be possible if the sectors were better equipped, making them more attractive. Zoned areas should therefore be densified before equipping new ones); 2) asks to counteract radial development of the city; 3) proposes regularising, restructuring, and equipping informal areas; 4) requests abandoning polluted sites and protecting the environment; and, finally, 5) seeks to facilitate economic growth.

Principle 5 poses a challenge due to the belief that economic development is lacking because the tax base needed to accommodate industry and major programmes does not exist. However, development cannot be decreed. As





CONSTRUCTION OF URBAN FRINGES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DUNES.

regards land use practices, one might believe that finding land for industry in the city is easy, as land for housing is abundant. Thus can we add the idea of facilitating economic growth (although there is no action that contributes to it directly) as a principle.

These five planning principles are then translated into concrete measures, including: restrictions on linear development along national roads; the structuring of the city through a system of ring roads; limiting urban extension via an outer ring road; renouncing all public infrastructure construction and prohibiting the construction of infrastructures by private developers from outside the building zone; strengthening the structuring and organization of the urban area through the development of a major road connecting it to the future airport site; and banning zoning beyond the ring road until 2020.

The planning guidelines seem to highlight the main problems cities face, even if the transition between the diagnostic and urbanization guidelines is not clear. We greatly prefer this second part, in which land and urban dynamics are explained (which the diagnostic does not do).

*Urban development master plan.* The Horizon 2000 chapter is the document's strongpoint. After the diagnostic and main principles, it is the plan itself that is the focus of this chapter because, while the plan is the ultimate goal, the text



MORE PERMANENT SETTLING OR  
SLUM 'DURCIFICATION' ON THE  
OUTSKIRTS OF NOUAKCHOTT.

that accompanies it is also important and should explain both the plan and the prospective elements the authors have used to devise them. While the diagnostic considers the population until 2000, it should also offer guidance for estimating the population in 2010.

As such, the chapter is subdivided into four parts, corresponding to four major themes: housing areas, areas of economic activity, protection of the environment, and road structuring.

The main idea for housing areas is that 75% of the future population should be absorbed by existing zones through densification. This projection is undoubtedly somewhat ambitious, and while the SDAU's population figures are quite low, attempting to densify the city with 75% of newcomers is almost impossible.

The issue of numbers should be raised here because, as we have already mentioned, the SDAU's figures are based on low projections that correspond *neither* to those of the *Office National de la Statistique*, nor those of the 2000 census, *nor* the projections that followed. The question remains as to which figures come closest to the reality. The answer, however, does not necessarily reside in official figures.

This still poses the problem of 'rule of thumb' which, while not an orthodox practice, is undoubtedly the one most used in planning documents. The SDAU

did not escape this, with its high projection (3.57%) and no explanation of the source of this figure. Why not 4%, 4.25%, or even 4.27%? The figures are so approximate that, while they offer an indication, practically speaking, they cannot be used. Yet they are being used, and the city's physical extension is based on them.

Furthermore, as the goal is to restructure informal settlements, the result is the opposite of densification. The example of El Mina illustrates this phenomenon. The neighbourhood had 56,000 inhabitants on 130 ha before the restructuring project, and 180 ha for the same number of inhabitants after the first phase, which clearly shows a trend toward sprawl. However, knowing that much of the city is made up of informal settlements, we can easily imagine the impact of such neighbourhood restructuring programmes throughout the entire city.

For 2010, the themes are only partially reviewed in the plan. What is more, housing, which was not addressed in the diagnostic, appears in this section of the document.

Two types of areas exist in the plan – residential and evolutionary. The plan likewise proposes separating inhabitants into two categories: those for whom regulation is necessary (while not mandatory, it provides a modern framework with many rules, and therein lies the issue), and those too poor to comply with anything. In other words, the old colonial distinction between Indigenous and European is implicitly resumed. In the background is a poor population that is never explicitly named or described as a population in its own right. Overall, the plan provides for a large number of areas, but none are explained, making it impossible to determine whether they are existent elements or projected ones. What to do with the military zone?

As we mentioned earlier, the document mentions areas of environmental possibility, some of which are located in recreation areas. And yet, we find no trace of them in the SDAU.

Upon reading the plan, we realize that there is no 'city project,' no urban development, no concept that expresses the conception of a society behind this planning spatially. We find only a series of reflexes. The proposed city is for the future. Yet, it is the same as that of the past – only bigger. Whereas Renaissance architects saw in perfect form the larger idea of an ideal society, urban planning in Nouakchott negates the very idea of the city.

*Measures of implementation and support.* The section on measures (p. 101–108), in which two types of measures are specified, concludes the planning document. The first seek to apply the SDAU as a planning document. The second recommend making adjustments to the institutional context so that the SDAU can find a place in the administration.

Implementation measures are naturally subject to an 'advertising buzz' that must be created around the document, in order to make the SDAU visible. The

proposals mostly relate to publishing the document in the form of posters, brochures, and other marketing materials or derived products.

The next measure advocates incorporating the SDAU in planning processes, in other words to comply with the limits of urbanization and land for major facilities. It then proposes [page 103] checking the compatibility of existing plans with the SDAU, and declaring parcels outside the 2010 area unbuildable. Finally, the SDAU recommends a host of additional studies.

To conclude, the accompanying measures advocate clarifying the responsibilities of the different actors, improving urban legislation, creating a city monitoring group, increasing resources for monitoring and controlling, and improving training for planners and urban managers.

Urban travel should be directly included in the SDAU. It is not clear why an additional study is required, especially given that the plan gives substantial attention to the creation of roads. The transport dimension, therefore, already must have been studied in great detail.

*Some conclusions concerning the SDAU.* The document, which is extremely short [only 108 pages] has the advantage of being quickly read and easily understood. In this respect it incorporates [without explicitly saying so] the idea from the World Bank document, "L'Avenir des villes africaines" [Farvacque, Godin, 1997], which recommends simplifying planning tools based on the observation that current planning tools are too complex and too monographic. Strictly speaking, the SDAU of Nouakchott answers correctly to the demands of the World Bank.

The SDAU text is short, with abundant graphics. In short texts, however, words take on even greater importance; each word must be weighed and considered for the meaning it might convey. However, the number of inaccuracies shows that the text is not a summary of a larger work but rather the entire corpus. Maps cannot be included for their own sake; despite their graphic quality, alone they do not provide sufficient explanation.

In addition, the plans [which are inaccurate] are such that the boundary calculations and calibrations themselves are not fixed in the actual terrain. The ring road conveys the idea of a ring road, but is drawn in such a way that it cannot serve as the drawing for a project. It is the line that expresses this type of information; the same scale in which only the graphics differ gives a different impression of the same situation.

The SDAU nevertheless fails in what *should* be its goal: to offer a vision of Nouakchott in the years to come by developing a city project. What image does the city seek for 2010? The answer is simple: none [or rather the same one as in 2000, with a few more inhabitants, a bit more industry and slightly denser]. Beyond that, there is no underlying vision to implement, no social project to set up or, more modestly, no city project. This is a terrifying realization, and a failure on the

part of urban planners. The SDAU plans nothing, in the true sense of the word,<sup>2</sup> and is ultimately a typical case of urban anti-planning.

This lack of ideas is evident at both regional and national levels. What does Nouakchott represent for Mauritania? For West Africa? For the Atlantic Coast? How does the city relate to its neighbours? What role(s) does it play for the country? What place does it hold? So many questions were not addressed, neither macroscopically nor microscopically, that reveal the document's shortcomings. Everything is similar; the city exists neither within its own context nor in its own right, and seems to have no room to breath. What is left is a plan, a drawing of an area of extension, a city that, in 2000, grows a bit. It is a spatial vision of the territory without social constraints. The territory is simply built by increasing the number of inhabitants. The principal ideology behind the Nouakchott plan is that of purely spatial development of the city.

The second ideology the SDAU conveys, though inexplicitly, is that there are two types of inhabitants, and that these two types do not have the same values. The first type lives in residential areas, and the second in popular areas. One must request authorization, while the other must not. For the latter, there is no need to bother with conformity or regulations (which they do not understand anyway). It is the segregation between the Europeans and the Indigenous population of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in modern times, and it permeates the Nouakchott model. Behind this lies the idea that the poorest of the poor, i.e., the majority of the urban African population, do not have the means to follow the rules, and that it is better to just leave them to their own devices.

In Nouakchott today, hundreds of thousands of people live in unstable urban situations, which are mentioned (only in passing) as an 'extension of popular areas.' But who are these people? These are the inhabitants of the city, those for whom these decisions are important, for whom employment and housing areas must be planned as an integrated system, for whom public transport is a major issue, and for whom urban sprawl is a definitive condemnation to immobility. These people are completely absent from the SDAU, thus raising the very legitimate question: *For whom is the city planned?* For elites who travel by SUV, or the masses of people who are stuck where they are?

*Disparities between the diagnostic and the planning.* The diagnostic is quick and dirty, and is based on a discussion of only a few topics; thus, many issues are not addressed. Such is the case for housing, sanitation, electricity supply, and mobility. The non-mention of housing is even more conspicuously missing, as the master plan makes the distinction between the two types.

Meanwhile, the administrative division has no purpose other than allowing for the planning of density. However, applying across-the-board population increases and density increases by *moughataa* makes no sense. As each commune has a multitude of urban morphologies and types of fabric, applying



numbers in an across-the-board manner for the whole city is illogical. Moreover, the value of numbers applied has no basis other than the so-called 'rule of thumb' – an insufficiently documented term that nonetheless is valued as a method in African cities. The statistics on which the plan is based are either non-existent or are difficult to obtain, and the simplest method is still estimation based on common sense. More often than not, planning uses fabricated figures, even if they seem relevant when applied. A density of 80 inhabitants per hectare for areas for urban development is the most flagrant example. There is no hard evidence behind these numbers, nor is any required. But the construction of this house of cards is a key component in the disparity between what is planned and what actually happens, with planning becoming nothing more than a series of approximations.

Topics are introduced but not reflected in the planning (the main one being the development planned in the North, on the Nouadhibou road, with the building of the future airport). This also applies to recreation areas, which are included under 'environmental possibilities' but are not mentioned thereafter.

As we have seen with public recreation areas, the ideas are not derived from actual studies on changes in society, but rather as a preconceived idea of these changes. The planning does not respond to a real demand but to an idea of reality – the one propagated by development experts and planners of all stripes who build the African city on a daily basis. Regrettably, at no time is this reality questioned. The SDAU does not contribute to a critique of the city but instead merely perpetuates the existing situation.

The lack of documentation on what actually exists in the areas makes the plan difficult to use, other than as a city map. How are we to see what exists? What is projected? The plan, lacking precision, is more akin to an illustration and cannot be applied. A striking example of this is that of retention basins. Three basins are marked on the plan, suggesting some form of sanitation. But nothing – no clarification whatsoever – is given. Is this a project? Do these basins already exist? In any case, what should be done with this information? The same holds true for the city's other facilities. What should be done with the airport? With military areas?

The main problem stems from the fact that all of the topics are not considered and that the plan is not the fruit of negotiation between all partners. Water systems have their own logic and their own planning, as do electricity networks, whereas the two should be superimposed with the urban development plan to see if there is a match in terms of planning, and thus whether the planning is something that can be negotiated between partners.

Finally, the PIP<sup>3</sup> is a program for large amenities that developed in parallel to the SDAU. These investments are only transcribed on the plan as an indication, and are not incorporated into planning. Merging these two documents would have been more than useful.

The SDAU only once mentions cost (in the chapter on the environmental constraints of urbanization). However, we know that resources are lacking in African cities, that the state is unable to meet demands, and that local communities have little means for managing the city. We also know that the costs of urbanization increase with the dispersion of habitat areas (AER 2001), and that transportation costs are a major component of residential location for the poor. The type of urbanization is therefore crucial. The increased density that the SDAU advocates serves to limit urban sprawl.

In substance, and based on the interviews we conducted with institutional actors in Nouakchott, the SDAU encounters three major problems. The first is that the document has never found its place within the administration. The recent call for tenders to update the plan is proof of this. The assumptions on which the plan is based already need to be revisited, just a few years after their formulation.

The second problem is that the SDAU did not serve as a platform for negotiation for two reasons that we can identify. The first is that this was not its primary role. The second is that it was not developed with all of the actors, but rather a small core group. Once produced, the document was imposed by decree on all players. Finally, the third problem is that the SDAU is unable to meet the demands of the private sector. The example of an emir who wanted to build a luxury hotel in Nouakchott is, in this sense, a rich lesson. The SDAU is in no way helpful in identifying areas of development, concentration, strategies, or steps to take.



# MASTER PLAN FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF DAKAR FOR 2025]

## Chapter 2

Through the decentralization process that began in 1996, the central government transferred part of its powers to the local communities. This was notably the case for urban planning. Hence, urban development plans became the jurisdiction of the authorities. However, in light of the importance of the strategic issues facing the Dakar region for the entire country and the costs of urban planning studies, the central government (through the *Ministère de l'Urbanisme et de l'Aménagement du Territoire*) supported local communities. The Master Plan for Urban Development of Dakar for 2025<sup>4</sup> was conceived within the framework of this support.

*Objectives of the 2025 Dakar PDU.* Based on the diagnostic (which we will not describe here), the White Paper highlights five objectives of urbanization in 2025.

1. To ensure spatial balance throughout the territory. The first objective is thus to counteract the municipality of Dakar's hegemony over the territory (to the benefit of Pikine in particular). The 2001 PDU already proposed this; that of 2025 remains faithful to the idea, on the basis that amenities, urban functions, and infrastructures are overrepresented in the Dakar Department, in general, and in Dakar-Plateau, more specifically. This has resulted in a major imbalance and unmanageable flows, as the region's entire population is forced to travel to the southern tip of the peninsula for certain urban services. There is likewise the idea of creating greater balance among the municipalities and making them more independent.

2. To improve the physical links between the different territorial entities. An old text on planning states: "Traffic flow is one of the basic principles of the Athens Charter, whose conditions for proper application in Dakar today are problematic" (page 223). This – a single item from the Athens Charter – is evoked here (Le Corbusier, 1968). In fact, it is the only direct quote (in other words, the only direct citation) with a theoretical basis in the entire PDU. To implement this objective, an extension of the VDN<sup>5</sup> to the 'new city' of Diamniadio going through the north is planned, as is the construction of the Dakar-Thies highway and an extension of main roads (widening and modernization).

3. To provide people better access to basic urban services (i.e. to extend water and electricity supply throughout the territory, as well as access to health services and education).

4. To gain control over the population implosion in the city. For this, the PDU proposes strengthening population policy at the State level, reinforcing decentralization policy so that people increasingly take charge of their own destiny, and promoting poles of economic development at the national level, in order to reverse migration from rural areas to urban ones. This target surpasses the scope of the PDU, indicating that initiatives must be implemented not only in the Dakar region but also throughout the entire country, if the former hopes to avoid a population explosion.

5. To preserve and improve the urban environment and natural sites. For this, local communities must play the role of “drive belts” (page 225) between the population and the central government. While this goal is not explained, the means for implementing it are.

*A meticulous diagnostic, but...* The 2025 PDU is based on a detailed urban diagnostic that takes up all of the major urban themes; housing, waste, the environment, infrastructure, and other amenities are all addressed. The major ‘gap’ in the document concerns land; we ultimately learn very little about the market mechanisms of parcels in Dakar. The systems are described, but the issues are incomprehensible.

However, the diagnostic gives an excellent picture of Dakar in 2001, 2002, and even 2003; it is in the overlapping of figures and administrative divisions that the diagnosis is less clear. The numbers change throughout the chapters, as do the divisions, and rarely do the tables overlap. The different types of habitat – sometimes categorized into three main areas, sometimes by housing type, sometimes by construction mode – are a perfect illustration of this. As such, it is hard to understand the so-called ‘village-type’ habitat, which remains a mystery (we do not find out what it is) throughout the entire document. The vagueness is so complete that even when a situation is explained using numbers, it is impossible to understand the context. We are told there is a strong demand, but from which social classes? From whom, specifically? And for what type of housing?

The figures relative to the housing demand can be called into question. If one bases them on those of the population, they are clearly out of proportion. The 2001 PDU predicted a number of inhabitants for that year that was not effective. But the numbers came from estimates, which means that, in 2002, the official figures from the *Office National de la Statistique* were much lower than expected. The previous chapter reported a difference of one-third. Thus, predicting population increases or decreases for the future is a difficult task. These estimates (and inability) have repercussions on the areas zoned for development, which are consequently also out of proportion. Anyway, history shows us that, in any case, the opposite occurs – that these spaces are always inhabited quickly, and there are never enough of them. Thus, land waste and urban sprawl are two

parallel phenomena that Dakar is currently experiencing. No analysis highlights this phenomenon in the PDU. Yet, it is a reality; the city is sprawling but has been planned as though it were going to continue densifying, as if sprawl (more people living alone, with more square-footage per person) did not exist.

Though numerous, the figures provided in the PDU do not overlap; they come from multiple sources that do not necessarily have the same administrative division as their point of reference. At some points the division is by *département*, then by region. Pikine is autonomous, and then suddenly is part of the Pikine-Guédiawaye region. In short, these divisions make overlapping the data impossible. This problem is also apparent with regard to categories: housing is not categorized the same way twice. As a result, the situation is difficult to get a handle on.

This overlapping should likewise be spatial, with major projects overlapping on the same map, contrary to what has been done (thematic mapping). Thematic maps can be useful, but the urban complexity can only be perceived by *overlapping* them. While this results in a loss of readability, we would gain understanding, which is obviously the key issue here.

The PDU – by the parcel that forms the block that forms the cluster that forms the neighbourhood, and so on – offers a nested image of the city. And behind this, the idea that the ideal city exists, like a Russian doll of fixed unit size with amenities corresponding to each level.

This image comes from a classic, antiquated spatial vision of the city that, it would seem, still exists in the Dakar region and, underlying this, the idea that

WIDENING OF THE ROAD IN THE  
PIKINE DISTRICT, DAKAR.







WORKERS IN THE EARLY  
MORNING, CENTRAL DAKAR.

planning should, above all, be spatial; an increase in the population creates need in terms of space, which must be properly arranged on a map, with strategically-placed amenities.

The diagnostic is unquestionably part of a long tradition of planning.<sup>6</sup> However, the problem is its disconnect with the objectives: the richness of the initial discussion – finances, actors, mobility, etc. – decreases as the text wears on, narrowing in a most impressive manner. The last tables show the areas for urban development. Evoking so many themes only to end with a plan by 'surface area' downplays the city's richness and complexity. Moreover, the numbers are never explained, making it difficult to understand the thought process behind the planning (as the initial objectives in the diagnostic focus on other issues).

Finally, the PDU mentions transport costs and the cost of developing new parcels (i.e. the costs of urban expansion). However, it is not clear whether amenities and operating costs for amenities and infrastructure are included in these figures. They are almost certainly only construction costs, and, moreover, only those that are the easiest to calculate (i.e., the lines of roads and serviced land). Though the calculation method is poor, it is nevertheless part of an accurate approach that involves taking into account the costs of choices made by the planning.

The document makes no mention of potential funding sources (lenders) and, more importantly, provides no analysis of local government revenues. How can income be increased? We notice the important role of markets in municipal balance sheets, and note that it is the only amenity that exists in adequate numbers in the region, which is undoubtedly no coincidence. Health facilities

and schools, by definition, are not profitable. Hence, the question of methods of redistribution arises.

While the 2001 PDU focused on issues related to poverty, the 2025 version ignores the issue entirely, making Dakar a city 'like the others,' one that is not plagued by slums. To mask this state of affairs (though poverty is indeed present and continues to grow), the use of the arithmetic averages is the most effective solution. If we take an average number of litres of water per person, an average number of people per family, and an average income, we indeed cannot fail to see the extremes at either end. The use of the *median* instead of the *mean* is far more accurate when it comes to showing the reality. Similarly, by creating smaller divisions, we could more precisely measure poverty and wealth. The presentation of the 2025 PDU hides these extremes. Yet, poverty exists and must be taken into account for planning purposes. The protests against the high price of foodstuffs that took place in Dakar in the spring of 2008 show that people are sensitive to changes in food prices. Budgets being tight, families are often forced to borrow from elsewhere just to buy their daily rice and bread.

The choice of administrative divisions likewise helps mask the presence of pockets of poverty. The division by *département* is the most telling example. Pikine, on the whole, is denser and less well-equipped than Dakar. However, were we to make smaller divisions, we would see that this average gives a false picture of the reality, and that entire zones are left to abandon. The situation is therefore much more dramatic than a mere difference in numbers between two *départements*.

Beyond this play of averages and land divisions, it is nonetheless possible to omit the problem of poverty by simply changing its definition. The 2025 PDU offers several illustrations of this. The most obvious relates to the definitions and classifications of housing. By classifying the latter as 'formal,' 'village,' and 'spontaneous,' it would seem that only the 'spontaneous' category seems to correspond to the poor. However, there is no explanation to help us understand living conditions in the 'village' habitat, or to know whether slums exist in 'regular' areas (and the answer is 'yes').

It is not a matter of apologizing for poverty or of claiming that plans should be oriented exclusively toward the struggle against poverty. However, it is impossible to understand urban complexity without taking into account the spatial and social dynamics of all social classes – and, in this case, the poor make up the vast majority of urban inhabitants.

*The choice of liberalism.* The choices made in the 2025 PDU are clearly oriented toward the theories of the market. We will consider the implications of the choice to focus exclusively on roads and major works in the analysis further on. Regional development requires economic development, according to the standard theories on the subject. This vision is likely to strengthen Dakar's primacy on the rest



STREET SHOPS AND BOUTIQUES  
ACROSS FROM THE SANDAGA  
MARKET, DAKAR.

of the country and reinforce the imbalance with other national territories, as, according to the PDU, the city needs industry and commerce in order to develop. In addition, as the development of industry in areas in the sub-region cannot be expanded at will, the city of Dakar will quickly reach the limits of its economic development, if this is not already the case. Then the region will have to manage its decline and growing poverty, like other major cities that have to deal with growing legions of poor.

Urban planning cannot create the conditions for an urban explosion. Yet, this is what PDUs and other SDAUs do by not taking people's aspirations and the reality of daily life into account, and by basing development solely on classical liberal theories. The city of tomorrow must consider the new realities, which are stunted growth and the impoverishment that comes with it, the decrease in life expectancy and food crises. It seems easy to adapt and produce space in times of economic boom, and to produce and 'correct' cities when the economy is in full swing. Economic decline requires a paradigm shift that involves changing the way things are done, and therein lies the challenge. Whether the economic crisis that plagues the cities of West Africa continues or abates, it is during these periods of crisis that planning demands imagination, complexity, and knowledge, and the current plan falls far from this.

Despite prevailing liberalism, an effort is being made to nationalize markets (points of sale) and public transport. The government is attempting to appro-

priate those business sectors that yield the most handsomely. While it seeks to regulate street markets, it is also confronted by the fact that municipalities, local communities, and the central government all need money to make the city 'operate', and that it is from the money generated by markets and public transport that local authorities can draw resources to develop other facilities and activities.

Finally, the PDU clearly makes the choice of urban sprawl. No effort is made to combat it, and instead, the PDU chooses to simply take the norms (of surface required per family, etc.) and multiply them by the number of new residents, thus validating the current situation for the next 25 years. Yet, the diagnostic gives the impression that it is difficult to plan, build, and finance amenities and infrastructure, which become more expensive with increased distance. Again, there is no reflection in terms of the cost of urbanization or the cost of travel for poor families. Urban sprawl seems inevitable.



# MASTER PLAN OF GREATER ABIDJAN

## Chapter 3

The updating of the Master Plan of Abidjan began in 1994, with the initial studies, followed by the results of the planning, and then land ownership status and land use. The documents were produced between 1996-1997, and the plan itself in 2000. The official figures used for the plans are those of... 1993.

The Master Plan of Abidjan consists of eight reports and one map and weighs several pounds. The sheer amount of paper used in the Abidjan plan (versus Nouakchott and its condensed plan, and Dakar and its monograph) is a dramatic increase. This impressive collection of material is arranged in the following manner:

### TYPE OF LAND USE IN OUTLYING MUNICIPALITIES

Purpose  
Methodology  
Characteristics of the study area  
Analysis by main heading  
Commentary by municipality

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE OWNERSHIP STATUS OF AREAS OF EXTENSION

Large land titles  
Housing developments  
Boundaries of village influence  
Areas assigned and reserved for facilities

### ANALYSIS OF THE CHANGES IN LAND USE PURPOSE

Methodology  
Evolution of urban sprawl from 1965 to 1989 (analysis by period)  
Evolution of urban sprawl from 1965 to 1989 (analysis by municipality)  
Evolution of urban sprawl from 1989 to 1993

### ASSESSMENT, URBAN DIAGNOSTIC (HISTORY OF LONG-TERM PLANNING)

The 1920s / The 1950s / 1960-1975 / The 1975-1978 period / Recent years  
Conclusion

### URBAN DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT

Demographic analysis  
Land use  
Housing and land  
Infrastructures  
Urban services  
Structural facilities  
Jobs  
Urban diagnostic assessment

### STRUCTURAL PLAN

Analysis of the last structural plan of Abidjan (long-term plan of 1985)  
Overall development approach  
Development projects

### STRUCTURAL PLAN (PRESENTATION NOTE)

No table of contents in this document that includes the highlights of the structural plan, between the summary and presentation.

### SUMMARY REPORT

Summary of sectoral studies  
Diagnostic assessment  
Structural plan

### MASTER PLAN FOR GREATER ABIDJAN

Plan

The documents claim to give all of the information necessary for the production of the final item: the plan itself.



Land-use types exist for the municipalities in the centre of Abidjan; the terms of reference (ToR) of the studies to update the Master Plan of Abidjan include the realization of those of the neighbouring municipalities of Anyama, Bassam, Bingerville, and Songon (which lie within the limits of Greater Abidjan) and thus that of the plan. The idea was to use the same working tool as in the ten communes of Abidjan (p. 2), in order to have a single land-use type for the entire perimeter of the study.

The second document, which focuses on identifying the ownership status of areas of extension, takes up the themes addressed in the second report, entitled "Identification of Ownership Status of Areas of Extension", from June 1994.

The expansion of cities requires the implementation of urban 'use' of rural land. In the Ivory Coast as in many countries, rural and urban land rights are not the same; hence, the land does not have the same value. This means considering non-urban land within the scope of the study, which should correspond to areas for future urban expansion, where land reserves exist. Legal political actions of public authorities can be put in place to build up reserves for urban development. At least that is the main goal of the study. The state wants to find out who the big landowners are and see how much land it can appropriate (hence, our inventory of headlines). The majority of large parcels are state-owned agricultural lands and are part of its rural domain. The three biggest land title-holders are IDEFOR (4,600 ha), PALMINDUSTRIE (20,800 ha) and Domains Hévétiques de l'Etat (1,500 ha). Various privately-owned plantations account for an additional 450 ha.

The state's position on large domains is paradoxical: on the one hand, it seeks to privatize companies under the pressure of major lenders; on the other hand (and the purpose of the study), it seeks to have a hand in managing urban expansion, which could entirely escape its grasp were land control to fall into private hands. Thus does the state's overall policy with regard to land clash with the spatial development of the country's largest city.

The third paper, "Analysis of Changes in Land Use" (June 1994), reports on the evolution of urban sprawl between 1965 and 1989, first by period and then by municipality<sup>7</sup>. The idea is to understand the mechanisms of the city's spatial development over time to see how a better understanding of these mechanisms might provide valuable lessons for the future. As such, the study resumes the 1989 Land-Use Types study, as well as previous planning studies (including the SETAP plan of 1960, the SEMA studies, the BNEDT Structural Plan of 1969, the AURA Development Plan of 1974, the Decennial Outlook of 1978–1979, and the Structural Plan of 1985).

Urban sprawl quadrupled during the period of analysis, going from 3,685 ha to 15,970 ha, while the population increased fivefold. Housing in particular increased during this period, but in tandem with demographics, as reflected in the housing population density.

However, this increase in urban sprawl did not take place evenly throughout the territory. The zones that were already largely built up in 1965 (i.e. Plateau and Treichville) developed less quickly than other municipalities, though they continued to play a central role in the city's makeup.

The fourth document – the urban diagnostic assessment – is a history of long-term planning that recaps (as we did previously in the trajectories of the cities) the history of urban planning through the various plans. Three key lessons emerge from this document. The first (relative to the economic crisis) describes how the plans were based on a growing economy. However, the early 1980s put an end to faith in an economy based entirely on growth and investments, which, as it turns out, was no longer sufficient to generate the space planned. As the plans were not modifiable based on changes or variations in the circumstances, they proved unable to adapt to the new economic constraints. This lack of flexibility in the planning tools is the primary cause of the disparity between what was planned and what actually took place.

The second lesson is based on the development of Abobo and, to a lesser extent, that of Yopougon, as well as the increase in squatter settlements (just to prove that the city's development depends not only on creditworthy populations, but that a large portion of its inhabitants are in economic situations that do not allow them to partake in the formal planned production of the city). These inhabitants settle in fringe areas, outside of planned ones, and, hence, beyond land constraints.

SALES ACTIVITIES IN FRONT OF A  
COVERED MARKET, ABIDJAN.



Finally, the third lesson is based on the problem of the spontaneous settlements that spring up around employment areas. While this is true of courtyard-type habitats, it is even more so for the informal settlements near areas of employment (i.e., the harbour and major industrial areas) – provided, of course, that land is available and sufficiently unattractive to the land market for authorities to turn a blind eye.

*Urban diagnostic assessment.* The fifth document, which reviews and summarizes the diagnostic, reflects on the state of Greater Abidjan in 1983 with regard to the population, housing, urban services, infrastructure, public facilities, and business activity. It also describes upcoming major projects and urban development trends. The document aims to provide a basis for thought on the Master Plan.

Two points should be made here. The first is that the year of reference is 1983; while that might seem like a long time ago nowadays, it already *was* during the plan's revision, which took place over several years. If we are to believe the many studies that show the rapid social and demographical changes taking place in African cities, this reference year seems utterly absurd. It also explains why the planning figures were wrong.

The second point concerns the sources of these figures, of which there are three types: official sources (come from population censuses), estimated sources (based on household surveys, urban densities, morphologies, and their averages), and sources 'with no real basis,' that one mainly finds in expert reports and which themselves are taken from other reports. Only official sources *should* be valid. However, 'official' is no guarantee of truth in the numbers, which are often based more in political strategy than reality. For the third type, the figures are only estimates, making their usage all the more dangerous. It is probably the second type that provides the most realistic figures. Yet, for political and institutional reasons, only the first type is used in the diagnostic, which combines the two flaws we have just described.

In essence, the results of the diagnostic provide the elements that seem most essential for Abidjan's planning, which are:

1. *Demographic growth marked by stagnation.* After years of a 10% annual growth rate, the rate dropped to 4% due to a sharp decline in migration, a younger, increasingly female population, reduced mortality, and decreased fertility.
2. *A changing urban environment.* The development of space has not been consistent with population growth. As such, the city has become denser in habitat areas, which have gone from an average of 190 to 210 inhabitants per hectare.
3. *Land resources.* In the land and real estate sectors, the trend has been toward a gradual withdrawal of the State to the benefit of the private sector, although



A 'MONUMENT' IN ABIDJAN  
BEING SHOWCASED.

control remains largely in the hands of the former (as only 5% of land production is exempted from regular distribution channels). But this production is in marked diminution, like the population and urban expansion. In terms of housing, the state maintains control with 40 % of the land for 60 % of the population, while informal settlements are becoming more widespread. The majority of housing consists of rental units.

4. *Traffic problems.* Despite an extensive network of roads and pipelines, infrastructure nonetheless requires improvement. Traffic problems are rampant, and the existing road networks require maintenance.

5. *Urban services insufficient relative to the rate of growth of the agglomeration.* Even if the diagnostic only gives us a glimpse of this difficult situation, the image of urban services is one of a city suffering; power outages are frequent, entire populations do not have access to water, and public transport is inefficient.

6. *Poor amenities.* Amenities are inadequate and poorly located, requiring increased travel to reach them. There is no coherent policy with regard to location of amenities, and the ones that do exist are overwhelmed.

7. *Jobs dominated by the service sector.* The Assessment summarizes the essential characteristics of employment: a growing working population and rising urban unemployment, a large percentage of non-workers being female, and the informal sector as the main source of job creation.



STATUE IN CENTRAL ABIDJAN  
(TOP LEFT).

LARGE BOULEVARD IN  
TREICHEVILLE (TOP RIGHT).

'DURCIFICATION' OF A SHACK  
(BOTTOM LEFT).

BUILDING MATERIALS MARKET  
IN A POOR DISTRICT IN ABIDJAN  
(BOTTOM RIGHT).

The summary ends with recommendations by geographical unit, providing us with an accurate diagnosis – that of a city in crisis, with infrastructure and amenities that fail to keep pace with a growing population. Paradoxically, it is the economic crisis that has helped slow down the city's development. However, if the crisis reaches rural areas, new waves of immigrants will settle in the city suburbs and population growth will resume – this time not with economic development but rather widespread poverty. A few years of drought in the backcountry could lead to this type of situation, as farmers – no longer able to cultivate the land – would come to the city in the hopes of finding work. Climatic and seasonal changes can be significant in Abidjan. The city is not 'off-ground'; rather it is tied to the country's economy fabric and geographical context.

*Structural plan and introductory note.* The penultimate document is divided into two parts: a structural plan and an introductory note. The note merely summarizes the key points of all the documents explaining the Plan, restating the analysis of Abidjan's last structural plan (known as the Long-Term Plan of 1985), the general development approach, and, finally, the concrete development actions implemented.

The first observation in the 1985 Plan is that population growth has not kept up with the expected pace; however, the Plan has a clear tendency to oversize. As

the time horizon was 1985, the Plan was therefore implemented well before this date and, thus, well before the economic crisis. The projections were made based on lofty assumptions, both economically and demographically. Hence, logically, there are fewer people than expected, and the extensions as such are fewer than originally planned.

No industrial activity has been created on the sites provided for this purpose. Thus, a rebalancing of housing and industry has not yet taken place, and the state's lack of resources has put a halt to the development of scheduled amenities.

The objectives of the new structural plan, therefore, must take into account all of these lessons. The old plans focused on the allocation of investments as the "driving force of growth and balance." The new plan, though in the continuum of the old one, nonetheless proposes focusing on an economy of means, developing the existing built environment, and adapting to future changes.

The main objectives of the plan are to 1) improve living conditions and the environment; 2) improve access to urban services for the majority of the population; 3) slow the spatial growth of the city and thus reduce urbanization costs by creating built spaces with high residential density; 4) improve inter- and intra-communal transport; 5) promote the development of mixed areas (jobs, activities, and housing) to minimize commuter travel for the working population; and 6) ultimately provide a better link between the geographical units of Abidjan and its four neighbouring municipalities.

The development principles are mainly designed to fill the gaps and replace dilapidated areas with new ones by promoting vertical construction. A series of measures is described for each geographical unit. We have grouped the main ones below by theme.



WEALTHY HOUSE IN A  
RESIDENTIAL AREA.



OBJECTIVES	DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS	DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS
Improve quality of life and the environment	Creation of new infrastructures to satisfy the needs of the population	Creation of a site especially for buses Rehabilitation of certain green spaces Improving drinking water connections Renovation of the centre of Adjamé Renovation of the West Plateau Storm basin Connection and maintenance of waste treatment plants Connection to the sea outfall Creation of an exhibition centre Olympic complex
Improve access to urban services for the majority of the population	Creation of new infrastructures to satisfy the needs of the people Organization of the expansion of habitat areas as part of a framework including a service centre that can accommodate local amenities	Implementation of a third power plant Increased street lighting and grid connection Strengthening the production of drinking water and extension of the distribution network
		Transferring of the bus station
Slow down the city's spatial growth, and thus reduce the high costs of urbanization via the creation of high-density built spaces	Densification in central areas	Promotion of collective housing
Improve inter- and intra-communal service		
Encourage the development of mixed areas (jobs, activities, housing) to reduce commute journeys for the active population	Accelerating the development of the Northeast area and the Port-Bouët coast	
Ensure a better link between the geographic units of Abidjan and the four surrounding municipalities	Creation of structuring and high speed lanes Long-term project to create a road network and crossing to link the municipalities of Bassam, Port-Bouët, and Bingerville	Completion of the Sud-Banco bridge Creation of the Riviera-Marcory bridge Via triomphale (triumphal way) Access road Creation of train service in Abidjan Express lanes Road links
	Creation of new business areas	Extension of the port Modernization of the FHB airport concession Development of the banks of Treichville's lagoon waterfront Rehabilitation of industrial zones Strengthening business activity

The table clearly shows that, at times, objectives exist without actions and vice versa, demonstrating the difficulty of joining what *should* be done with what *can* be done.

*Strong methodological presence.* The methods are described in such a way that we can envision, sketch out, and calculate what is described, as well as grasp the thought process and the potential biases that underlie them. Each chapter provides an aspect of methodology.

The issue of administrative divisions is central. In this plan, division by 'geographical unit' replaces division by commune, allowing for a common spatial basis for each of the data. Unfortunately, the exercise is not carried out in a comprehensive way; for instance, many of the 'division-by-commune' figures (undoubtedly easier to obtain) can still be seen. As such, the new divisions do not achieve their goal.

Moreover, we have a hard time understanding the advantage of division-by-unit versus division-by-municipality, the names of which immediately give us an indication of a location, thus making for easier reading. On the other hand – for the exercise of planning – the power of the municipalities and the officials running them is diminished, as are claims because there is no longer any overlap between the figures and a single administration for the territory.

Division by geographical unit also sheds light on a real problem between the diagnostic and the planning, as its implementation is then done by municipality rather than by unit.

*A meticulous diagnostic.* Particular care is given to the diagnostic. It is extremely meticulous, and even purports the idea that we must understand "the mechanisms of urbanization" in order to plan the city and, as such, provides a set of figures and key points of understanding. Nevertheless, while the main goal is to understand the social dynamics, they are not clearly explained. Despite attempts to provide a detailed overview of the city's production, the diagnostic remains classic, offering us nothing more than what we saw in Dakar and Nouakchott (to take just two examples). Of course, the



SHOE VENDOR IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD MARKET, ABIDJAN  
THE SORBONNE IN ABIDJAN, A PUBLIC SPACE WHERE CURRENT EVENTS ARE DISCUSSED BY ALL.



A GOAT MARKET SETS UP ALONG A  
RAILWAY LINE.

methodology's explicitness gives value to what is said, but the way it is said is still the same.

Thus, although the Abidjan Plan clearly demonstrates a desire to break with the practices of previous development plans (based on a critical view of planning history and recommendations of which methodologies to apply), it is neverthe-



ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE IN  
ABIDJAN.

less unable to propose anything other than what has been done there for the past 50 years.

The proposed plan is based mainly on urban expansion and major road infrastructures, or on major projects and amenities. Ultimately, we find the same concepts as in all of the plans before it (namely that planning exists to identify areas for urban development and to plan future large amenities and determine, more or less, in what part of the city they should be built).

The Master Plan of Abidjan ultimately teaches us nothing about the urban dynamics or the aspirations of the people that make the city, nor their strategies for survival.

In essence, it is easy to understand the numbers, as they are explained in a precise manner. What is less clear, however, is how they are used. Ultimately, regardless of the accuracy and skilled execution of the diagnostic, we lose touch with the issues and objectives of the urban development. The Plan struggles to hold all of the pieces together.



## THREE CITIES, THREE PLANS

### Chapter 4

*Table of contents.* In the table below we have compiled the tables of contents for the three urban development plans in order to consider their differences, both in their choice of themes and the manner in which they address them.

NKC	DKR	ABJ	
			THE REGION IN ITS GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT
•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International context</li> <li>National context</li> <li>Regional context</li> <li>Spatial development of the region/city</li> <li>Chronological markers</li> </ul>
			INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		<p><b>Territorial administration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical markers</li> <li>Administrative organisation</li> <li>Budgets of local communities</li> </ul> <p><b>Urban regulations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Historical evolution of the regulations</li> <li>Urban development plans and regulations</li> <li>State holdings regulations</li> <li>Building and housing code</li> <li>Environmental code</li> <li>Urban development code</li> <li>Execution of urban planning operations</li> </ul>
			SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		<p><b>Regional economic situation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role of the region in the national economy</li> <li>Urban functions</li> <li>Analysis of the urban regional system</li> </ul>
			LES ACTIVITÉS ÉCONOMIQUES ET LES PERSPECTIVES DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment</li> <li>Job locations</li> <li>Changes in location of employment</li> <li>Employment forecasts</li> <li>Income</li> </ul> <p><b>Socio-demographical characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population data</li> <li>Level of training – Enrollment rate</li> <li>Migrations</li> <li>Natural movements: birth and mortality rates</li> <li>Demographic forecast</li> <li>Neighbourhood density</li> </ul>





			POTENTIAL AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE SITE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Potential of the site</b> Physical environment Environmental potential Material resources Soil's receptiveness to foundations <b>Constraints</b> Land constraints Environmental constraints Summary of the diagnostic
			NEEDS AND AREAS FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<b>Needs</b> Housing Amenities and infrastructure Transport Employment <b>Areas for urban development</b> Unmet needs at present Spatial needs relative to the plan's time horizon Areas for development (from present to the time horizon of the plan)
			REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS PLAN
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Planning history Projections and forecasts Sanitation Transport Housing Achievements of the previous plan Consequences of the incompleteness of the previous plan
			URBAN ORGANISATION
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		Basic housing unit Block Block group Neighbourhood Urban district Urban unit Internal migration Business areas
			URBAN DEVELOPMENT ASSUMPTION AND LOCATION ALTERNATIVES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	Objectives Principles Key problems in the region <b>Urban development assumptions</b> Weak assumption Medium assumption Strong assumption Employment forecasts Design model Other alternatives Comparison of alternatives <b>Major functions</b> Roads Organisation of connections Public transport Housing Amenities

	•	• • •	Activities Water supply Sanitation Conclusion
			IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT MEASURES
• •		• • •	Emergency measures to be taken Implementation measures Support measures
25	108	56	

The weight (in kg) of the three documents is in keeping with the handling of the diagnostic. Indeed, the more thorough the diagnostic, the more pages it contains – which, of course, stands to reason. We then clearly see that Nouakchott's diagnostic is cursory, while that of Abidjan explores the different areas of the urban setting step by step. What is true for the diagnostic is not true for the objectives or the basic principles of urbanization; in all three cases, this section of the document is very short.

Only Dakar provides the city's international, national, and regional context, allowing us to understand the issues that go beyond the scope of the city, strictly speaking. Nouakchott and Abidjan make no reference to the context, as if the city had no connection with the region, country, or beyond. Yet, the role of the airport, the number of passengers, the role of the city's economy in the country and region, and its international standing all provide important information for planning.

Dakar is also the only city to make an institutional assessment, providing not only the key aspects of legislative texts that govern the city, but also the role and positioning of the Territorial Administration, and providing the operating budgets of the municipalities for past years.

Overall, Dakar provides a very accurate picture of the city with the greatest number of topics. While Abidjan's diagnostic is the most thorough in terms of the topics covered, it nonetheless develops them insufficiently. Nouakchott's SDAU is more of a summary than an assessment.

Housing is not an issue for Nouakchott; in fact, it is not even mentioned. Yet, the Plan for 2010-2020 shows residential areas and social housing, without ever describing or quantifying them. While the land approach is present, it is dealt with summarily. Nouakchott must consider the root of its problems – namely plots – before addressing housing issues. In the other two cities, however, the two issues are dealt with head on: in other words, land and housing are considered in tandem.

*Very different plans.* The planning time horizons for the three cities are not the same, nor are the dates of creation of the documents. Such disparities, however, do not affect the quality of the plans. The greater the time horizon, the greater the

risk for cities to be off-target. Still, the choice of a time horizon does not affect how planning is done. It is perhaps at this level that problems are likely to arise. A 5, 10, and 20-year plan should not be based on the same dynamics or figures. Yet, all three plans decidedly use the same figures, without updating their planning horizon.

The validity of the plan is not the same everywhere. We are still awaiting the implementation decrees in Dakar and Abidjan, whereas an update is expected for the Nouakchott plan. Despite legal aspects, cities take new planning documents as benchmarks from their very introduction, even though they are not yet official, making dispensation that much easier, as there is no legal basis. In contrast, the Nouakchott plan (which does have legal value) does not have fewer dispensations. Hence, there seems to be no link between the Plan and its legal status.

*Reducing urban complexity.* Overall, urban complexity is not addressed, highlighted, or understood; the plans ignore it. While some reduction is of course necessary, in this case, it goes too far. The end result: 'simplicity' gives way to 'simplistic.' Even in the case of thorough diagnostics (such as in the cases of Dakar and Abidjan) the plans fail to provide a just accounting of these complexities. This most likely is due to the fact that the urban dynamics are not known, that urban complexities are simply not understood, and that the creators of urban plans (we include politicians here) have no comprehension of the multi-faceted nature of the urban phenomenon.

*No city project.* These plans do not establish 'city projects.' While ideologies are very much present, they are based more on how to make a drawing than on the content itself. At no point is the notion of a city project presented. It is not the plans – which more or less result from the diagnostic – that will contradict the point; on the contrary, they reinforce the idea of a total absence of project. What image do we want the city to have in 2010, 2015, 2025, depending on the objectives of each? It is as if African cities were not entitled to a project – as though the urgency of crisis situations justified the lack of ideas.

The plans are similar in all three cities; they have neither project nor concept and, moreover, do not include the knowledge gained over the past decades. Urban research has been working for ages on the logics of action that produce the city, and although many urban dynamics are still unknown or little studied, we cannot say they have had no impact. Yet, these planning documents do not offer any proven scientific evidence; they simply reproduce the previous plan, updating the figures and leaving room for an additional section or two, according to the fashions of consultancy firms.

The city project is then replaced by a plan drawing, a fine alignment of zones in Abidjan and Dakar, and much coarser in Nouakchott, where residential areas exist alongside areas reserved for services, etc.

Hence, roads play a singular role in structuring the city, with the design of the city being reduced to the planning of roads. The development of a city model based on road infrastructure is thus utilized, and – while not discussed – the road becomes the baseline data for both the authorities and the consultancy firms responsible for planning projects. Between two structuring roads (as they are called), the plan is filled with areas of colour – one for housing, another for an industrial zone, another for green space, and so on.

*...but an idea of happiness in the city.* While the plans themselves do not develop an idea of city or society, they do propose amusement parks just about everywhere. Over and beyond this somewhat cartoonish slogan, we show that it is indeed a fantasy of consultancy firms, consultants, and the technical assistants that implement urban plans. At the same time, amusement parks, urban gardens, and playgrounds are presented as an added value that the Master Plan offers to the city.

Nouakchott is the most striking example. Confronted with the enormity of the task facing urban administrators, both in terms of land and sprawl as well as the managing of resources and the environment, the Master Plan emphasizes the need to develop recreational areas. Of course. We must also create spaces so that an ultra-minority elite can indulge in hobbies like their neighbours in Europe and America. But such decisions raise three questions: 1) Can we develop recreational aspects when no solution is proposed to the vast majority of poor people living in the city? 2) Should needs not be prioritized? 3) Are we not dealing with the reproduction of an imported model that has been deemed appropriate based on the observation of a micro-development of a type of activity?

*Major issues absent/missing.* The total lack of inclusion of current issues facing urban areas is striking. We find nothing regarding energy, transport, the environment, or social issues.

Because sustainable cities cannot function without energy, the new cities blooming in the desert of the UAE and in Northern countries are making the energy question a priority. One might expect the topic to be treated with great emphasis in urban development plans, especially given that the cities in our study do not have a wealth of oil available to them. On the contrary, in cities 'in crisis' (i.e. cities where power outages are numerous), energy issues should be a priority; solutions that are less dependent on natural resources and energy companies, that aim to increase the types of resource options in an ecological vision of energy, must be found.

In Northern countries, transportation costs are part of an old geography that today has entirely fallen into disuse. Oil prices in recent years have returned them to centre stage. This idea seems paramount in Africa, where prices play a key role in family economics, and thus in household location strategies. Only Abidjan con-

sidered this point, as the experience of the development of slums close to housing areas shows that people cannot live far from employment areas.

If we add to this the congestion of road infrastructure – with a direct impact on travel time – it becomes clear that travel is a major issue for cities. However, none of the three plans really address the subject, and while the diagnostic mentions the situation in the city, solutions are not developed.

The three cities are located in environmentally fragile areas. While Dakar mentions this, Abidjan barely makes reference to it. Regardless of the indications and descriptions, environmental problems are merely peripheral to their planning processes.

Nouakchott has declared areas where building should be restricted and then proceeded to plan residential areas there. Abidjan proposes nothing with regard to its lagoon, and Dakar remains silent – or almost – about the Niayes Region, which is encroached upon by urbanization a little more each day.

Finally, an analysis of the planning documents gives us the impression of a plan for people who do not exist. Reducing lifestyles, income, and practices to one or two categories, rich and poor, and housing to residential and social – is too simplistic to take into account the aspirations of the people? Nowadays, is it possible to dismiss aspirations, dreams, and urban practices? Can we plan for people whose desires we do not know? What do young people dream of in their slums? What are the aspirations of young people waiting for a visa to France, an admission letter from a university in Stockholm, or a boat to cross the Mediterranean? Urban planning today must take this information into account.

*Bulk data.* Each city has its own frames of reference, which is normal, except that all have trouble defining their basic units for statistical calculations. Only Abidjan has thought of division into geographical units, though somewhat unconvincingly.

An analysis of the documents gives us more of an impression that the diagnostics are merely the result of figures gleaned here and there at the discretion of government authorities and the availability of the information. Furthermore, the data is never referenced, making it impossible to trace its source or verify its accuracy.

In the list of 'bulk' data provided below, employment and demographics figure prominently. In all three plans resides an inability to do anything but project jobs and population. Despite the fact that history has shown us that, in each case, the plans are off target, that population projections are approximate and not based on reality, it is nevertheless based on these projections (jobs and demographics) that areas for urbanization are determined. While history teaches us that such projections are false, we continue to plan this way. In this case, planning takes place outside of reality.



*Conclusions.* Theories and practices of urban management that are increasingly prevalent in Northern countries seem to be totally missing from the planning. As an example we cite the following points:

1. *No reflection on the costs of urbanization (the city costs nothing).* While there is an attempt to consider elements of finance in the planning of Dakar (municipal budget and infrastructure costs), the other two cities fail to include this indicator. One has difficulty imagining how a city can plan infrastructure and the sectors to be developed without taking into account costs and, subsequently, the budget available for such investments.
2. *The poor are non-existent.* In each case, the plans vaguely make reference to the slums but do not mention anything in terms of objectives (with the exception of a few phrases in the case of Nouakchott). This demonstrates that poverty is not a priority for the cities, even though the majority of the urban population live in precarious conditions. Hence, the fight against poverty is not an urban planning issue. Urban objectives exist outside of the problems of urban poverty.
3. Population densities are based only on a calculation of a given surface area and the number of inhabitants, without taking into account the sprawling of households and other factors of social change.
4. The city's position on the international scene.
5. Current key issues are absent (the environment, energy, transport, social issues, etc.).

Clearly, the models used by these cities are not based on the urban theory currently in practice in Northern countries, but rather on an old way of doing things. Effectively, they are Northern models, but outdated ones.

And yet, the paths chosen show us that, in Southern cities, we need to capitalize on the dynamics already present in the North. However, in order to do this, we must have knowledge of the dynamics in the South, followed by a complete overhaul of these dynamics in a new generation of planning tools no longer based on the old ways of the North, but drawing on experiences from different contexts.

## SECTION II

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The White – the “civilizer” – gives high marks to local people and gives good advice on how to live. The discourse on the superiority of one race over another is obvious to the reader in Hergé’s *Tintin* comics.
- <sup>2</sup> By planning we mean the carrying out of a city project, an idea we have of the city or an ideology in the most extreme cases which aims to be a direct reflection of the carrying out of a social project.
- <sup>3</sup> *Programme d'Investissements Prioritaires*.
- <sup>4</sup> The document is divided into several parts: preliminary studies, policy briefs, hypotheses and the plan. Maps accompany each text. “The White Paper” (CAUS, BCEOM 2003) is a summary of the diagnostic. It concludes the preliminary studies which are the synthesis of urban and regional data (CAUS, BCEOM 2002), “The potentialities and constraints of the site” (CAUS, BCEOM, 2002), and the “Assessment of the 2001 PDU of Dakar” (CAUS, BCEOM 2002). The urbanization hypotheses and location variants are grouped together in a special document, like the Master Plan for Urban Development in Dakar for 2025, which also results in a separate document.
- <sup>5</sup> VDN: *Voie de dégagement NORD*.
- <sup>6</sup> Urban development plans and urban studies for West African cities have, for ages, begun with the same chapter: diagnostic.
- <sup>7</sup> The evolution of land is analyzed for the years 1965, 1975, 1979, 1985, and 1989. The dates are chosen solely on the basis of the documents available (aerial photographs or censuses). Based on the land-use plan in 1989 and aerial photographs from 1985 level, we deduce urban sprawl for both eras. Step by step, the study revisits the various plans and maps, and gives a clear picture of the city’s evolution for over more than 40 years. Documents going further back in time are missing. Hence, before 1965, the task becomes difficult, but from the perspective of understanding the city’s evolution over a period of 40 years, it is quite sufficient.





OPINION  
ordre le phénomène des enfants de la rue et la  
bilité des daaras  
« de l'enfant ». Voir par exemple arrêté  
investissements et les collectivités  
locales le fonctionnement. Le pro-  
gramme d'enseignement touchera la

**Sale vie aux usagers de la route**

**akar Dem Dikk dans les eaux tro**

ATION SPATIALE DESORDONNÉE, CRISE AIGUE DU LOGEMENT...  
**kar, la "fourmilière humaine" audit**

**Mamadou Goudiaby et Cie acc**  
**d'avoir distrait 25 millions**

**Le cri de cœur d'un archéologue**

**âtiment de la controverse réduit en po**

**DENT - Un militaire française violemment heurté par un**  
**adjudant-chef Jérôme Charret, mort sur**

des points sombres de la visite au Sénégal du président carte professionnelle

# PUBLIC SPACE AS SEEN THROUGH THE PRESS

## Chapter 1

The written press – be it independent or an extension of the powers that be – is an integral part of a city's life, its very pulse. It is also an important indicator of the urban issues cities face. If we are interested in the press, it is not so much for the *amount* of information it provides us with but rather for a type of information we could not get otherwise.

The press draws its material from two types of sources – so-called 'distant' sources and 'close' sources. Distant sources are mainly the work of reporters and press agencies, while close sources are those used by journalists working in the local daily press. We have chosen to look at the second type of source.

We began by looking at several sections of the newspaper (news events, politics, etc.). One section in particular required special attention, the *news briefs* section, which reports on out-of-the-ordinary, often isolated events. Yet, their abundance in the newspaper columns might lead us to believe that such events and phenomena are commonplace, giving us an impression of normalcy in describing a world of horrors (rape, robbery, the rise of armed gangs and daily violence). While this undoubtedly is the case in many cities, it is not (yet) the norm in our three cities, and though violence may occur, these stories are not a reflection of daily life. Newspapers make editorial and commercial choices that opt to give more or less attention to particular types of news briefs. We take these factors into account in our analysis.

Our principal objective is not a study of the press as such, but rather an exposé of the issues of public space and other pertinent topics based on an analysis of it.

COVER OF L'AUTHENTIQUE  
QUOTIDIEN, NOUAKCHOTT  
OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER.





## The choice of headlines

Newspapers can be divided into three groups: international, national, and local. While only the latter – the so-called ‘city’ press, which reports on life in the city – is of interest to us here, the unfortunate reality is that it is rare to find papers that talk only about a specific city. We therefore had to broaden our selection to include the national press.

In Nouakchott, for example, our survey included almost all of the country’s papers. In a country of 2.9 million inhabitants,<sup>1</sup> the number of dailies is obviously limited and clearly incomparable to what we see in the Ivory Coast, with its 18 million inhabitants, or Senegal, with its 12.5 million inhabitants.

But the number of inhabitants is not the only factor that limits the press’ development. Two others likewise contribute: the low rate of literacy and poverty. When half of a city’s inhabitants are illiterate, a newspaper’s potential readership is greatly limited. If, in addition, we add the low income of the majority of households, the potential customers are few. Poverty and illiteracy often go hand in hand, which limits the press’ infiltration into poor neighbourhoods. Only a small intellectual and economic elite minority have access to the press. This will be important to recall later, in the analysis; while it does not change the facts themselves, it does change how they are presented.

The table below lists all of the papers we collected, by city. While we attempted to limit our selection to five papers per city (three dailies and two weeklies), unfortunately, it was not always possible to do so. Regardless, posterior analysis



LE POPULAIRE, INDEPENDENT  
DAILY NEWS IN DAKAR (LEFT).



24 HEURES, INDEPENDENT DAILY  
IN ABIDJAN (RIGHT).

shows that there is no difference in the way information regarding the treatment of public space in the two types of papers is disbursed, except as pertains to violence, which we will examine more closely. While most papers today are online, we used the paper versions for our analyses. Our corpus included 1,395 papers – a significant sample – with the number of editions by paper and by city. By city, the following papers were selected:

TOTAL	1,395
NOUAKCHOTT	322
Nouakchott Info	130
Le Calame	36
L'Authentique Quotidien	90
L'Éveil Hebdo	28
Horizons	38
DAKAR	588
L'Observateur	151
Le Populaire	144
Sud Quotidien	111
Walf Grand Place	120
Le Témoin	21
Le Quotidien	41
ABIDJAN	485
Fraternité Matin	107
Nord-Sud	113
24 Heures	96
Le Jour Plus	96
L'Événement	73

PRESS COLLECTIONS BY CITY  
AND BY TITLE.

*Nouakchott Info* (Nouakchott). Independent daily. News, analysis. Arab/French versions also. Ample space given to new briefs. Free online<sup>2</sup> version. Edited by the MAPECI. Close to the government.

*Le Calame* (Nouakchott). Independent daily, founded by Habib Ould Mahfoudh. 'Opposition' newspaper, censored since its creation in 1993 [at least that is what it says on the front page]. Known for the accuracy of its information, the pertinence of its analyses, and its positions, especially with regard to controversial subjects (the army, Islam, prostitution, alcohol trafficking, drugs, slavery, etc.) Some of its journalists were arrested at the end of the 1990s, when they attempted to denounce the actions of the government and close relatives of men of power. The result was the paper being shut down for three years [between 1998 and 2001].

*L'Authentique Quotidien* (Nouakchott). Daily, opposition. Ample room for opinions and commentaries on politics and society.

*L'Éveil Hebdo* (Nouakchott). The country's oldest weekly (founded in 1991). Independent, opposition. Information and debates. Close to the UFP (Mauritania's progressive party). Opposition from the government, due especially to the paper's anti-slavery stance.

*Horizon* (Nouakchott). Weekly. Focus on current events, political/society commentary.

*L'Observateur* (Dakar). Independent daily, edited by the Futurs Média Group. News briefs, politics. Also online.<sup>3</sup>

*Le Populaire* (Dakar). Independent daily. News briefs, politics.

*Sud quotidien*<sup>4</sup> (Dakar). Independent. Analysis, major national issues. The most 'international' of all the papers.

*Le Quotidien* (Dakar). Independent. Mostly news briefs, some analysis.

*Walf Grand Place* (Dakar). Independent daily. The most *Dakarois* paper, it deals mainly with news related to the city.

*Le Témoin* (Dakar). Independent weekly. Analysis, news.

*L'Événement* (Abidjan). Independent daily. Analysis, politics, sports, news briefs. The AIP (Agence Ivoirienne de Presse) is its primary source.

*Le Jour Plus* (Abidjan). Independent daily. Analysis, politics, news briefs (mostly sports related). Online.<sup>5</sup>

*24 Heures* (Abidjan). Independent daily. Dispatches. Mostly international news. l'Agence Francais de Presse and Reuters are its primary sources. Online.<sup>6</sup>

*Nord-Sud* (Abidjan). Independent daily. Analysis, politics, news briefs (including sports). Online.<sup>7</sup>

*Fraternité Matin* (Abidjan). State-owned. The oldest, largest general interest daily. Fraternité Matin Group (publisher) also has its own printing/publishing house. Online.<sup>8</sup>

For the record, it should be noted that in the Ivory Coast, the 'street' associates newspapers with blue with the ruling party, while ones with pink or green are associated with the opposition (with the exception of *Soir Info* and *Inter*), which is to say that *Le Jour Plus*, *24 Heures* and *Nord-Sud* are associated with the RDR (the opposition party at the time but ruling party today) and *l'Événement* with the PDCI RDA (the opposition). 'Independent,' as such, takes on a somewhat different meaning.

#### Public space in the press

The titles of the topics are based on an empirical approach. After using the four issues of public space (mobility, public uses, sociability, and identity) established by Bassand, Compagnon, Joye, and Stein (2001), we created our own categories to better account for the many issues of public space – not only in terms of users, as Bassand et al. suggest, but also so that we could make direct links with the categories planners use to develop master plans and other development frameworks.

It was through the conjunction of this classification and the literature that ten topics (including major themes in both urban planning and social issues) were identified. *Violence and insecurity*. One of the main press topics, violence can also found under the category of news briefs, a category that is difficult to define and whose content largely depends on the paper's broader cultural context (French-speaking, English-speaking, etc.) (LITS 2001). As its position in the newspaper varies according to the paper, it can sometimes be found in the 'society' or 'current affairs' section. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this category is overrepresented and is more or less a product of the paper's editorial choices. We will analyse this point in greater detail later.



## VIOLENCE

Rape: description of rapes that take place in public spaces only

Theft: same as for rape; from petty to grand larceny

Bombings: car bombs, attacks against symbolic state buildings

Safety remedy: police control, safety policy

Vandalism: defacing of public places

Gruesome discoveries: corpses in parks, public places, dumps

Cavort: Bandits on the run, description of pursuit by law enforcement

Assault: various forms of assault

Murder: only murders that occur in public spaces

Lack of safety: general comments on the situation in neighbourhoods and armed gangs

Fraud: street scams

Organized crime: kidnapping of children/teens

Personal violence: violence in the private setting but with an impact on public space

Brawls: accounts of fights

Drugs: discovery of, arrests in connection with drug dealing

Arrests: police work, arrests (except in connection with drugs)

## INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Water: water network, water supply, standpipes, carters, water management, drinking water production

Electricity: network management, power cuts in neighbourhoods, blackouts

Road network: renovations, state of roads, deterioration because of rain, and construction of highways, detours, construction delays

## TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Parking: lack of rules with regard to parking, improper parking

Accidents: accidents between vehicles, vehicles and pedestrians, carts and cars, public transport accidents

Pedestrians: difficulty getting about in the city, crossing impossible due to roads or rains, excessive distances

Public transport: new hardware, conflicts between employees, management of public transport, obsolete means of transport, single ticket, modern modes of transportation vs. old ones

Traffic: difficulty getting about during the rainy season, relationship between carts and cars on roads, high number of vehicles

Lack of safety: insecurity in general, but also linked to

## LIST OF TOPICS RELATED TO PUBLIC SPACE

police checks (at least those that end in extortion only related to the theme)

Prevention: measures to avoid a high rate of accidents

Taxis: fares, shopping management, business strategies

## ENVIRONMENT

Nature: forests, lagoons, urban nature

Floods: rainy season, flood management, season-related issues

Hygiene: diseases that develop in public spaces, often in conjunction with the rainy season, as well as diseases caused by waste storage

Waste: solid waste, management, storage, plastic bags, odours

Sanitation: liquid waste, pipeline leakage, emptying of septic tanks in the streets, lack of sanitation

Environment: imperilled ecosystem

Fires: fires in public buildings, markets

## OCCUPATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SPACE

Erosion of space: strategies of occupying public space for private purposes

Eviction: eviction of markets, beggars

Land: occupation of public lands by private individuals/businesses

Management: general management of space

Markets: management of markets, stalls, shops, and vendors

Control: repressive management, government/police control

Stations: management of bus stations, social practices in stations

## BUILT SPACE

Heritage: listed buildings/groups of buildings

Demolition: demolition of public buildings

Development: construction, development, beautification works

Construction: airport, port, bus station

Image of the city: depiction of the city through its public spaces and buildings

## STREET AS A RESOURCE

Street vendors: umbrella/objects/telephone card/newspaper vendors

Street children: child beggars

Panhandling: female/male/handicapped beggars, panhandling sites

The mentally ill at crossroads

Prostitution: modes of prostitution, magnitude of the phenomenon

## PROTESTS

Sit-ins: sit-ins in front of headquarters or buildings symbolic of the government

Demonstrations/clashes: struggles, marches and clashes, demonstration sites

Marches: non-violent version of the previous category

Meetings/processions/parades: related to elections, politics

## CIVIC AND CIVIL ACTIVITIES

Celebrations/nightlife: religious celebrations, music festivals

Sports: sports competitions in public spaces

Exhibitions: on-street art and culture exhibitions

Elections: situation in the streets at election time

## DAILY LIFE

Modern life/the past: nostalgia, difference between *before* and *after*

Street behaviours: fashion, homosexuality, sexual mores

Life in the informal context: survival strategies

Neighbourhood life: daily life in neighbourhoods, day-to-day living

## Analysis of the database

A database was set up to list the newspapers we collected. An initial analysis helped highlight a number of issues (methodological in particular) that we will discuss here, and also allowed us to simplify the database.

There were no significant differences between the two newspaper sample collection periods. Rather, there were differences, but not in terms of the topics, how they were treated, or the number of articles, and despite the fact that elections took place in two of the three cities (Dakar and Nouakchott), the two periods yielded the same results.

The position of articles in the newspaper (on the front page, for instance) did not provide information relevant to our study. Of course, the position of articles is important for a study of the press, but as it did not show thematic differences for public spaces, we did not take this data into account.

The type of article (editorial, analysis, etc.) had no impact on our study. The facts are treated uniformly, according to topic. One exception was the 'Daily Life in Nouakchott' section, where specific mention and an explanation are made in the text. Despite this exception, we abandoned the idea of exploring nuances between different types of articles. Again, while this distinction may be relevant for a study of the press, it was not for our purposes.

Finally, the length of the articles was not taken into account in our study and had no impact on our research, as it would have offered no significant contribution to our reflection.

There was no difference between dailies and weeklies in terms of the treatment of public space, except with regard to 'violence and insecurity,' which largely fell under 'news briefs,' which we find more often in the daily press. Except for news briefs, the other topics and their treatment did not vary based on frequency of publication.

The different elements cited both allowed us to considerably simplify the database and facilitated our analytical work. By using keywords for each article, we were able to organize, sort, and interpret them easily.



It should be noted that an adjustment was made in Dakar following a month of collection; three papers – *l'As*, *l'Office*, and *Walfaddriji* – were eliminated, as they did not provide sufficient local information.

Finally, while we had initially intended to create a database of images to illustrate the articles, we likewise abandoned the idea, as it offered nothing conclusive. Over several months, we realized that the same images kept reappearing, and thus were not new images but archived ones that were being periodically recycled.

We then created maps to spatially organize the articles by theme. Spatial indications (town, neighbourhood, or area of the city) were given in most articles, which facilitated their mapping. In rare cases, when no location was indicated, the article was mapped for the entire city. A 10% transparency of a solid colour was created for each article, meaning opacity was achieved starting at ten articles. Hence, the more often a neighbourhood was mentioned, the more intense the colour became, thus creating geography by theme.

# THE PRESS, PUBLIC SPACE, AND CITY OF NOUAKCHOTT

## Chapter 2

Our survey of the press in Nouakchott was based on a corpus of 322 publications from daily and weekly newspapers. Of the 322 samples collected, 192 (roughly 60 %) contained at least one article mentioning public space, which means the topic was discussed in about three out of five papers. Though this number seems high, we should clarify that the theoretical number of articles in the 322 samples was 6,819.<sup>9</sup> In other words, only 251 out of 6,819 articles reported on public space.

Only 3.7 % of the articles talked about public space, which is to say it seems the topic is not a priority but, on the contrary, is anecdotal.

For Mauritanian elites, public space is therefore not a major concern, not even during elections, and is not considered a political issue by the ruling powers.

So what *do* newspapers talk about, if not public space? Topping the list are political intrigues and related topics (namely the acts and doings of the president and his political decisions at home and abroad). And when the spotlight is not on the president or prime minister, the press opens its columns to political parties and their programs, agendas, negotiations, and positions on a variety of topics relative to the country's management.

*Major themes of public space in Nouakchott.* The reading of press articles and their division by theme allowed us to appreciate the relative importance of the topics covered. Reading the table, one can divide them into three clearly identifiable groups.

The first group has one main theme, violence and insecurity, with 23.51 % of the articles (one out of five), clearly surpassing the others. Five other themes follow (from 14.3 % to 10 %). They are (in descending order): network support (14.43 %), protests and demonstrations (12.35 %), transport and mobility (11.16 %), daily life and identity (10.36 %), and the environment (9.36 %).

Finally, a third group with less than 7.5 % of articles is comprised of themes that include the occupation of space (7.17 %), built space (4.38 %), the street as a resource (3.98 %), and civil/civic activities (3.19 %).

While these figures give us an indication, they should not be taken 'as law.' We will now explore their nuances in order to

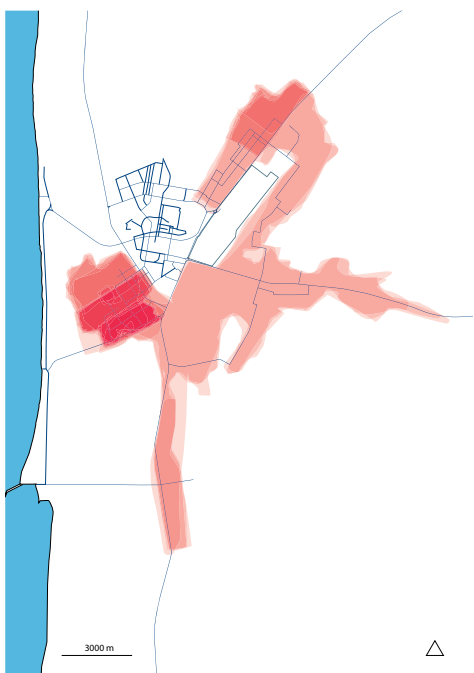
ANALYSIS OF THEMES IN THE  
NOUAKCHOTT PRESS.

TOTAL	251	% Theme
Network support	36	14.34
Transport and mobility	28	11.16
Environment	24	9.56
Use/management	18	7.17
Built space	11	4.38
Street as resource	10	3.98
Space of protest	31	12.35
Civil and civic activities	8	3.19

establish whether they are meaningful *per se*, or whether they tell us anything meaningful about the importance of the themes in public spaces.

*Violence and insecurity.* Violence and insecurity was the major theme in Nouakchott, with 23.5% of articles devoted to it. These articles primarily report on the numerous murders, robberies, and stories of bandits great and small, who work by night – especially in the city’s slums. Taken together, the texts evoke a land of horrors reminiscent of Lagos. The large number of news briefs in the press, however, results in a strong asymmetry between the situation as described and the reality. As *Le Calame* asks, under the pen of Thiam Mamdou, “Is Nouakchott a dangerous city?” The answer is clearly ‘yes,’ according to many articles. But statistically speaking, for a city of nearly 900,000 inhabitants, the answer is ‘no.’ The whole city succumbs to insecurity. “The people of Nouakchott live in indescribable anxiety due to the large number of homicides in the capital, without a single voice rising to denounce a phenomenon that is increasingly plaguing the people of Nouakchott.”<sup>10</sup> Such claims must be interpreted on several levels. The many articles addressing the situation in neighbourhoods show that the majority of the problems are located in El Mina, which is becoming the most dangerous part of the city. In articles on safety issues, however, the scale changes, moving from a single neighbourhood to a whole area – that of the outskirts. For the press, *violence* and *outskirts* are synonymous, even while it questions the surge in violence throughout the city.

VIOLENCE IN NOUAKCHOTT.



Thus it is mainly the “inhabitants of outlying neighbourhoods that are the principal victims of theft and acts of violence,” their distress only increased by the fact that “[i]t is no use reporting thefts to the police because they are too lenient on thieves. All they can do, if they do catch them, is send them to prison, which they are then released from,” explain victims.”<sup>11</sup> The helplessness of victims against police indulgence is one factor explaining the rise in violence in outlying neighbourhoods, among people whose only option is to deliver justice themselves, as one inhabitant explains in the same article. “For instance, you lynch one or two, or *faire le supplice du collier*,<sup>12</sup> or shoot them so they’ll leave us alone forever.”

The press cites density, poverty, and lack of infrastructure as the causes of this violence. However, one soon realizes that this problem exists in other neighbourhoods as well, but simply does not make headlines. Albeit a hypothesis, this may perhaps have something to do with the way elites have of

lambasting certain segments of the population (i.e. the poor and primarily black Africans). Thus are we faced with an enterprise, conscious or not, that disparages certain ethnicities by depicting them as violent.

Some journalists offer other, more fanciful explanations of this violence and insecurity, proposing modernity and its flood of inventions, practices, and consumption as the cause. "These game rooms are often not without danger, because many children, as they do not have the means, will steal, scam and assault, just so they can play a game. The result: catastrophic grades and juvenile delinquency on the rise."<sup>13</sup> If we are to understand correctly, young people are addicted to video games and, lacking the means to 'support their habit,' steal, assault, and racketeer, thus leading to a rise in violence. The example is characteristic of the confusion between school grades and juvenile delinquency, which are so often likened. This 'proof' is convoluted and essentially offers no explanation for safety issues. Modernity – the mother of all vice.

*Infrastructure support* (14.34%). With titles like "Nouakchott is thirsty,"<sup>14</sup> "A strange thirst,"<sup>15</sup> "The crisis continues,"<sup>16</sup> and "Is the water disappearing?,"<sup>17</sup> the press reports a disturbing fact: Nouakchott is, in fact, suffering from a major water shortage. So disturbing is this theme that it accounts for 10.36% of the articles for the entire Nouakchott sample, far surpassing the others.

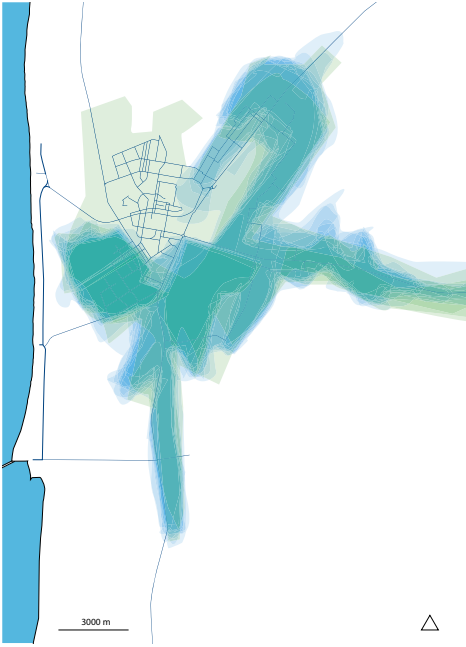
The situation is understandable: when hot weather arrives, residents of poor neighbourhoods lack water. But, in fact, this crisis is only one factor in a larger, more complex ensemble of crises the city is facing. The articles show that it is not only water the people lack, but also electricity and gas – all in a context of rising costs of basic necessities. This is not an isolated incident, as the problem crops up at the same time each year, and people have grown used to it.

However, the *causes* of the water shortage are not clear, although the situation is the same year after year. "Worse yet, no one can tell you clearly where the problem of water lies",<sup>18</sup> the press tells us. However, we can highlight a combination of factors that, taken together, likely explain the origin of this phenomenon.

Extreme heat: "The period of intense heat, the misappropriating of certain water pipes, and its misuse in certain neighbourhoods are the main causes of this shortage."<sup>19</sup> Intense heat means greater water usage, especially for vegetable gardens. But while water diversion has always existed, the consequences are dramatic during periods of intense heat, as the amount of water needed increases, as do the number of diverted pipes. The geography of water access then greatly differs from that found during normal periods.

THE FRONT PAGE OF THE  
AUTHENTIQUE QUOTIDIEN  
REPORTS ON THE LACK  
OF DRINKING WATER IN  
NOUAKCHOTT.





INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT IN  
NOUAKCHOTT.



The political choice of shortage: Water is a theme that makes news headlines everywhere. “‘They’re depriving us of water so that we won’t focus on the drug problem or other national issues, like rising prices, the return of deportees, etc.,’ said one forty-something year-old woman, sitting on the dung of a donkey ruminating not far away.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, there are those who claim there is no shortage, that in fact there is enough water, and that this shortage was created to divert attention from other sensitive national issues. The population explosion: “In the 47 years that our young nation has existed, our leaders have never realized that, year after year, we are experiencing a population explosion.”<sup>21</sup> A direct cause of the shortage is also the growing number of people in the city, which is increasing faster than drinking water can be produced. During periods of intense heat, refrigerators and freezers run at full capacity, creating a shortage of electricity as well.

*Transport and mobility in Nouakchott (11.16%).* The press agrees that there are three main problems related to transport: congestion, safety, and high costs.



FILLING BARRELS FROM A FIRE  
HYDRANT FOR RETAIL SALE  
(TOP LEFT).

STORAGE CONTAINERS FOR THE  
SALE OF WATER IN OUTLYING  
AREAS (BOTTOM LEFT).

700MM-DIAMETER DRINKING  
WATER PIPELINE BETWEEN  
THE IDINI WATER TOWER AND  
NOUAKCHOTT (RIGHT).



Add to this intense urban sprawl (resulting in increased travel times), and the picture of Nouakchott is nearly complete.

Traffic congestion results from a combination of three factors:

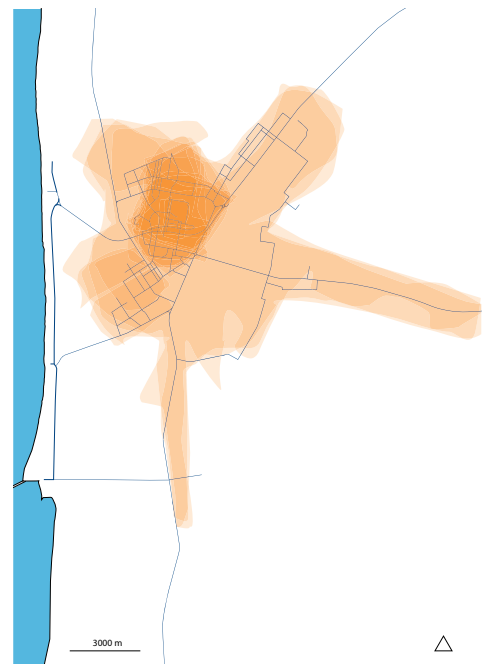
1. The first is that there are too many vehicles: “60,000 cars invade the streets of Nouakchott each day.”<sup>22</sup> While the number of vehicles per person is low compared to other cities around the world, Nouakchott nonetheless gives the impression of having too many cars. The influx affects not only private vehicles but other types of transport as well, such as taxis. “Twenty years ago there weren’t even a hundred taxis in Nouakchott. In 2007, the city [was] served by more than 1,000.”<sup>23</sup>

2. The second factor is the dilapidated state of road infrastructures in Nouakchott, “where traffic still obeys no rules, and the phenomenal increase in the number of cars is putting a strain on the [the city’s] road network.”<sup>24</sup> It is both this “phenomenal increase” in the number of cars and the small size of the area covered that makes the network fragile.

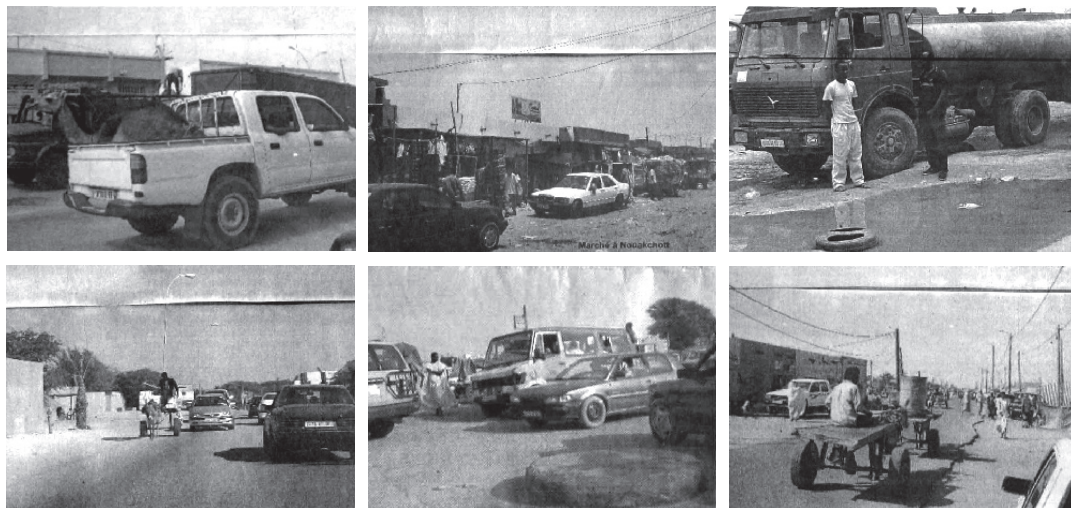
3. The third factor is the lack of respect for rules and norms, a problem that many articles underline. “Certain unscrupulous drivers drive any which way. Sometimes, they actually drive off the road to take a shortcut, which in general poses serious problems for the poor pedestrians walking near the road.”<sup>25</sup> Others go even further, pointing out that “[i]t is a well-known fact – our drivers behave... as though they were on foot. They go in front of [pedestrians], stop wherever they want and whenever they feel like it. The highway code is for other people.”<sup>26</sup> For others, albeit a minority, it is *drivers* who must pay for this lack of rules. “Indeed, considering the behaviour of pedestrians – who act as though they own the land – cavalier rickshaw drivers and cart drivers are crazier than ever, and the well-intentioned driver no longer knows which way to turn.”<sup>27</sup>

By mapping the articles, we find that traffic problems occur in the city centre, specifically downtown. There are two possible explanations here. We know that it is primarily the wealthy who have access to cars. Hence, it stands to reason that it is in the areas where they work and live that we find the most cars on the road. Moreover, these areas are also the areas where the car density is highest, creating the highest concentration of traffic.

TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY IN NOUAKCHOTT.







MISCELLANEOUS PRESS PHOTOS  
ILLUSTRATING THE TRANSPORT  
ISSUE IN NOUAKCHOTT.

*The role of the environment* (9.56%). What are the environmental risks? According to the press, there are two. The first is reported in the headlines of the 12 June 2007 edition of *Nouakchott Info*: “How to deal with plastic waste?” The second is the larger problem of protecting the city against flooding from the sea. The problem of plastic waste is not simply that of shopping bags; it is the problem of solid waste in general (meaning that produced by local populations as well as that sent over from Europe and the United States, for which Africa acts as a massive storehouse).

“No one would disagree that the material that finds its way to Nouakchott greatly adds to the deterioration of our environment, and that the main concern for Westerners is getting rid of it.”<sup>28</sup> Old cars, televisions, clothes, and computer equipment from Europe arrive by the container, either to be resuscitated and get a chance at a second life or, as in most cases, fill the city streets like so much clutter.

The paradox of waste is that, while it destroys the environment, it is also a source of revenue for the poor, who “manage to earn a daily pittance and find [useful] objects therein.”<sup>29</sup> With regard to these shipments,<sup>30</sup> “[a]t first, the business was not supposed to be profitable. But ever since the Mauritians – greedy for money and gnawed by the lure of financial gain – discovered it was big business, it has become everybody’s business.”<sup>31</sup> Many people manage to scrape by on what they earn from trash, and those who benefit from it the most do not want to see the situation change – even if it means polluting the environment a bit more. But beyond the environmental problems that solid waste in the capital’s streets might pose, the problem of trash has largely to do with image.

Nouakchott is dirty... [as are] Arafat, Dar Naim Toujounine, Tevragh Zeina El Mina... Nouakchott is dirty... Litter, trash heaps, dead animals and sewage ponds are everywhere. Our capital has two faces: the first welcoming, reasonably clean, with wide streets lined with well-maintained sidewalks. This 'part' of the city, unfortunately, is confined to one avenue – Avenue Gamal Abdel Nasser. On every other level, however, the capital's main street is repugnant. The air is smelly, the stench of rotting carcasses stifling, and donkeys, carts, even goats compete with cars for that which serves as a road.<sup>32</sup>



PROBLEM OF SOLID WASTE STORAGE AT THE SOCOGIM MARKET.

A city must be clean in order to be modern. "The city of Nouakchott, with shops everywhere, looks more like an overflowing dustbin than a capital worthy of this name. The image of the capital – which was already suffering – is deteriorating even further."<sup>33</sup>

A second major environmental issue for the city is the dune belt, which protects it from flooding.

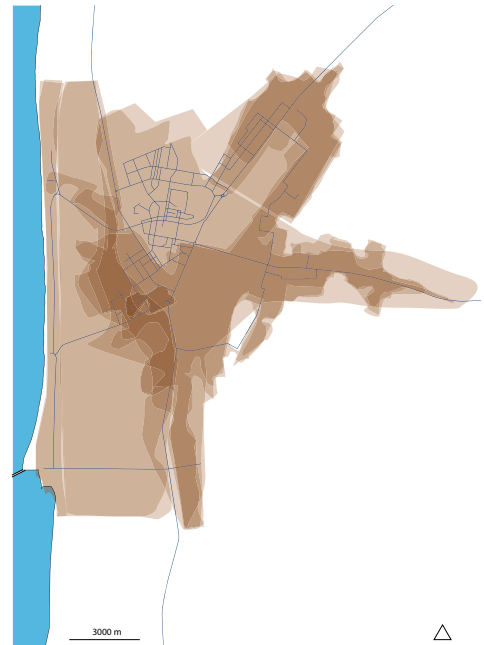
[The city] is protected from the waves of the Atlantic by a 20-25 kilometre-long dune belt, [which has been] weakened in recent years by the extraction of sand for construction and the building of tourist facilities. But this erosion has accelerated since the building of the Port de l'Amitié, starting in 1980. If nothing is done, the port is expected to be swallowed by the Atlantic by between 2010 and 2015."<sup>34</sup>

Although the press has exposed this problem, it does not appear important enough for it to be taken seriously.

ENVIRONMENT IN NOUAKCHOTT.

Considering the danger that threatens the capital, the measures being taken are inadequate. For the first time, measures were taken after a meeting of an inter-ministerial committee. The solution: to unblock a huge sum of money that was then poorly handled. An unconscionable contract with a company created to try to restore the dune belt was awarded. Given the risks, it can be bluntly stated that no action has been taken."<sup>35</sup>

Are the measures being taken the right ones, especially given this thinly veiled whistle-blowing for acts of embezzlement of public funds by companies or clans? There appears to be no real desire on the part of the authorities to go beyond the pattern of "daily management of current affairs," because the danger is simply not imminent enough. However, we would like to mention again that norms *do* exist. The problem is that "the urban development plan is by no means respected, and the [rural] exodus increasingly lends to these effects. What



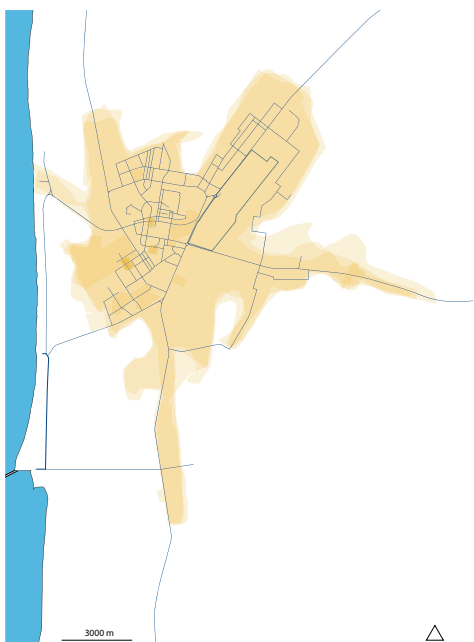


ROAD LINKING THE CITY CENTRE TO  
THE PORT INFRASTRUCTURE.

is unfortunate is that, at all levels, lack of responsibility is simply an *état de fait*.<sup>36</sup> Planning documents exist but are not applied. The question now is whether or not they are even applicable. The mapping of newspaper articles addressing environmental issues shows two important points. The area between the city and the sea – today increasingly urbanized – is Nouakchott's vulnerable zone. It is comprised of *sabkha* (dried salt lakes that are below sea level, on whose surface salt can be found). Secondly, even if the problem of solid waste exists throughout the city, it is in the outskirts that it is most difficult to manage. The combination of these two phenomena – waste and flood risk – makes the Sebkhia and El Mina areas extremely susceptible to environmental threats.

*Occupation and management of public spaces* (7.17%). Though the number of articles on the management and occupation of space is by no means negligible, we will only highlight the issues raised in two articles, which seem representative of the topic as a whole. The first concerns the military presence and other armed groups in the city centre, and the second markets.

OCCUPATION AND MANAGEMENT  
OF SPACE IN NOUAKCHOTT.



Despite appearances, Nouakchott is one of the most surveyed cities on the planet. Wanting to be modern, liberal, even carefree, the fact is that it has the greatest number of men in military uniforms and barracks per square per meter! In the street, pedestrian[s] must watch their step so as not to be told off by men in uniform. There is no busy street without some type of military building or other – be it a headquarters, barracks, a clinic or hospital, places in front of which walking is prohibited.

Space is not experienced the same way everywhere. The state's interests are protected by producing large spaces that are not freely accessible. In other words, a security cordon exists on public space – an example of restrictive use of the street or a specific directive that modifies the use of space.

The second theme is that of the markets. In Mauritania, one does not have the right to set up a stand on the public way, at least in theory. As the entire city works on the principle of use of the street for commercial purposes, there are market stands

everywhere in the streets, not to mention shops exceeding the boundaries meant to contain them. The paradox is that the public authorities not only say nothing; they actually have a vested interest in this chaos because they collect taxes from it.

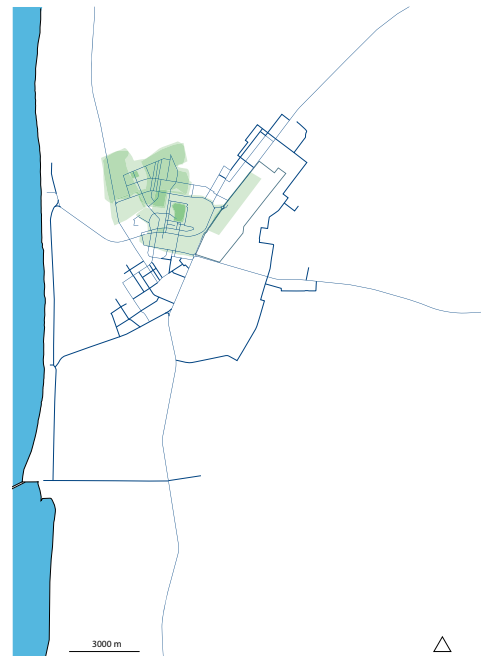
Since May 10th of last year, the market in the 5th district and its surroundings has been undergoing an unprecedented 'de-cluttering' operation, led by the local authorities in collaboration with a company by the name of Nour, to clean up the market and surrounding area. For the moment, it is not clear whether this action was planned long in advance or is taking place because the First Lady was paying a visit to a neighbourhood clinic. All we know is that, thanks to this 'clean sweep,' the neighbourhood can now breathe a bit.<sup>37</sup>

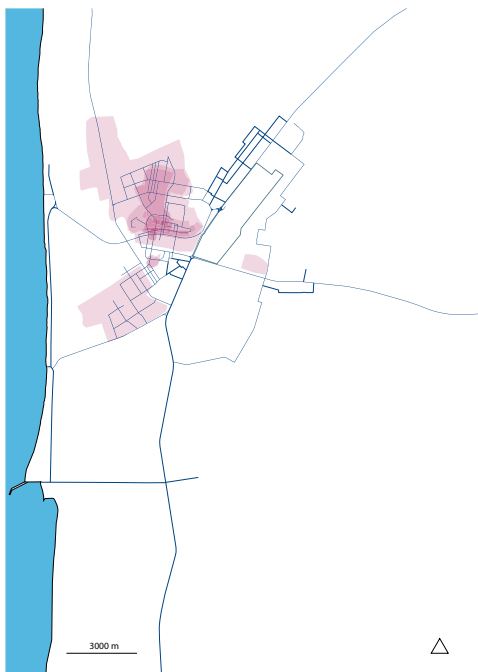
In the background, we again find the problem of 'invasion' of the street (i.e. public space) by stationary and mobile vendors. The argument is twofold: on one hand is the problem of traffic and mobility; on the other hand, it is a major source of revenue for communities, regardless of the location of the stalls in the streets.

*Public space as built space* (4.38%). There are not many items in this category, which is largely based on two planned prestigious architectural projects: a stadium and a luxury hotel. Nothing concrete for the time being, however – only plans. In other cases, the press reports on issues relative to calls for tender that do not comply with public procurement rules, as was the case with the construction of the new airport. Another market, another bid cancelled by the minister for the building of the city centre. The only evidence is the almost daily publication of images in *L'Authentique Quotidien*, revealing either new construction, buildings in progress, or the Presidential Palace. This section, entitled "l'Authentique," shows scenes of everyday life in the city – the water vendors, the crowds, the urban landscapes, and a series of prestigious government buildings, like so many images of the city and symbols of modernity. While these scenes of daily life are plentiful, it was the construction of public buildings in particular that grabbed our attention. In this section, outlying neighbourhoods do not exist; it is a highly centralised perspective that likewise reveals that government invests only in the centre, not the entire territory (as illustrated in the mapping of the articles).

*The streets of Nouakchott as a resource* (3.98%). The notable number of street vendors and beggars might lead us to believe that the topic might provide fodder for a great many articles. Yet, the opposite is true. Articles on water street vendors offer a wealth

BUILT SPACE IN NOUAKCHOTT.





THE STREET AS A RESOURCE IN  
NOUAKCHOTT.

ARTICLE HIGHLIGHTING THE  
QUESTION OF DAILY VIOLENCE.

## Descente de la police dans des cybercafés : Qui est-ce qui fait courir la police ?

Dans le but de vendre à samedi derniers, des éléments de la police ont fait une descente dans les trois cybercafés, (Cyber@rt, Hup cyber et Cyber@rtPlus), situés en face de l'ambassade de la Palestine, aux côtés de la BMD.

Prenant position devant ces cybers, un peu après 23h, les éléments de la police habillés en tenue bleu-forest et dirigés par une femme, le commissaire Ghouba, feront un véritable état de siège des ces "boutiques Internet" dont ils prendront le son de ne pas en empêcher l'accès aux internautes.

Pourtant à l'intérieur des cybercafés, le climat est lourd, puisque les policiers ont confié que tous les téléphones portables des personnes présentes, ont pris sur eux de répondre à leur place aux appels entrants et ont fait une fouille propre et générale.

La descente qui se poursuivra, nous affirme une source présente jusqu'à 02h du matin, ne portait pas sur les ordinateurs, ni les courriels des internautes, ni sur un problème de connexion. Le seul objet pris ici était le téléphone mobile.

Un peu comme si les limiers

de la DSE, car ce sont eux qui mènent l'enquête, cherchant à mettre la main sur quelqu'un qui vient de passer une communication à partir de l'un de ces trois cybercafés.

Cela est d'autant plus vrai qu'ils continueront à répondre aux appels téléphoniques et à attendre leur "client" jusqu'à la dernière minute, non sans oublier d'envoyer certains des téléphones portables des internautes. Ils ont aussi pour les ramener bien plus tard complètement éteints.

Longue donc sera l'opération mais pas infructueuse puisque les policiers sembleront avec eux deux marocains de chez "Cyber@rtPlus", un mauritanien et deux algériens.

Déjà qui prendra la relève cette machine de dimanche au cybercafé "Hup : cyber", nous confirmera qu'ils ne sont toujours pas revenus, les parents de l'un de ces personnes sont venus récupérer de ses nouvelles au cyber. Soit en effet, attendu à la "Belle compagnie" (Marrakech) ?

Quelqu'un en sait, comme nous le diront les tenants des cybercafés "Marrakech" par la police, aucun mandat de perquisition n'a été

présenté par les policiers et aucun problème de la part de son ordinateur, aux machines, à l'équipement ou à la connexion des cybercafés dont ils sont les propriétaires, ne s'est avéré la raison de cette descente des policiers et de l'état de siège qui s'en est suivi jusqu'au petit matin.

C'est dire combien de qui fait courir les policiers semble être d'une très haute importance électorale. Surtout relatif à la lutte contre le terrorisme, étant donné que le dernier procès des présumés islamistes saïfistes s'est soldé par vingt acquittements et une seule condamnation par contumace pour l'infraction et que d'autres groupes s'apprêtent à passer devant le juge ?

Une chose est sûre : nos veilleurs flics ne dorment pas.   
Bouazza Oussou KHATTAT  
mmkhattat@hotmail.com

of information, such as the population's typology (in this case, young people from a certain village in Mali).

Like all of his colleagues, Samoura Keita, 19, wakes up at six o'clock. He unties his donkey, loads two 200-litre barrels [on its back] and heads for the hydrant. Samoura plunges a dipper tied to the end of a four-meter string into a basin and eventually fills the two barrels. Like his fellow Malians from the village of Bolle (near Niore), he works between the neighbourhoods of El Mina and Basrah.<sup>38</sup>

There is an ethnic and spatial distribution of water vendors, all of whom have 'temporarily' migrated to the city to earn money to help sustain their villages (water vendors almost all come from the borders of Mali and Mauritania). The street is not only a resource for those who live there – be they Maures (black Malians) or Mauritanian Soninkés – but for entire villages.

Entry into the water selling business takes place via appointment between the members of a group. One must have the means: a cart is important, but it is

the donkey that is the lynchpin – a lynchpin that requires constant investment to maintain its level of performance. The 500 UM<sup>39</sup> tax paid monthly to the municipality is little compared to the cost of a donkey.

Other 'inhabitants' of the street include beggars, who like so many 'shaggy masses... roam the streets of the capital, loiter in front of large grocery stores [and] lurk around petrol stations."

Aggressive and creative, these beggars pursue their prey to their last stronghold, using and abusing spiels recited a thousand times, with enough excuses to split your liver and make you cringe. Uninhibited, they try to get between you and your mobile, waving their hands at you (palms always skyward), with no respect for your privacy.<sup>40</sup>

Their position in society is not an easy one; at best, they are simply considered pesky creatures, but more often are thought to be professional scammers, as "begging has become a job for many opportunists who may use the subtlest means to get more sensitive [people] to pity their plight." This can even go so far as 'feigning' poverty or scams to earn more money by 'pulling at the heartstrings.' Beggars, the press tells us, are 'profiteers.'



In addition to street vendors and beggars, a third group makes its living from the streets: prostitutes. "They are young, beautiful and usually still enrolled in a public or private school in Nouakchott. However, faced with the hardships of life, they have chosen the easy way out."<sup>41</sup> Over and beyond the journalist's judgment regarding the 'ease' of prostitution, the article shows that the economic crisis is pushing women and children to prostitution just to have enough money to survive, as well as the fact that prostitution is common among very young women, most of whom are school age. "Every night, I go out, I wander... and sometimes make 10,000 UM<sup>42</sup> in an night."<sup>43</sup> The places are known. A dispatch centre assembles the prostitutes, who then 'get into cars' to go to more discreet, secluded locations. The act itself does not take place directly in a public space, but elsewhere in the city (near the beach, the dunes, or at hotels expressly for this purpose). "While S. was walking along the sidewalk, a car pulled up next to her. She seemed to know the driver well. She got in, and the car disappeared. About two hours later, she came back."<sup>44</sup>

The articles on this topic can be spatially distributed in the city centre and downtown; the place of beggars and small street vendors, they are, above all, the places of the elite, of jobs, banks, and administrative offices – attracting throngs of workers and, consequently, the vendors and beggars. There are few beggars in popular neighbourhoods, if any, as begging in such areas takes on another face. As for prostitution, it mostly occurs at the fringes of the city centre, away from main roads, which are areas of solicitation.

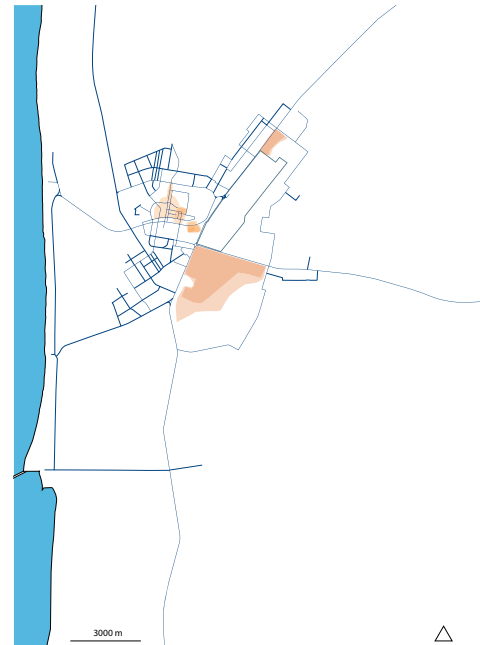
*The street as a place of protest* (12.35%). For part of the city's population (we will see which one later on), public space remains the place of protest *par excellence*. However, not all public spaces are equal. Hence, the sites chosen for protests, sit-ins, and other demonstrations are key to making one's voice heard.

To avoid being thrown into the streets like lowly beasts, the residents of Gazra de Hey Essakne chose to bring their case to the attention of the President of the Republic. This explains their massive presence in front of the Presidential Palace this morning of Monday, May 7, 2007."<sup>45</sup>



STREET VENDOR (DAILY NEWSPAPER AND TELEPHONE CARDS).

PROTEST AREA IN NOUAKCHOTT.





In Nouakchott, the Presidential Palace is still the most emblematic location for making oneself heard. In order to make their plight known, residents of outlying areas demonstrate in front of the palace. That way, at least they have a chance of appearing on TV, in the hopes that the president will respond directly to the event. The problem with this is that it makes the president omnipotent, as if he acted alone and, hence, alone had the power to change the situation.

In short, what we learn from the press is that the street is where the poor make demands, that spaces are not equal, and that the demands are the result of desperate circumstances. The street is not easily taken to, and is used only when all other means have failed. Though politics has started to move from the centre toward the outskirts (in the hopes of winning votes in elections, undoubtedly), people must still go the centre to make their voices heard.

*Civilian activities* [3.19%]. This section looks at the activities of civilian life (street concerts, elections, sports competitions, and celebrations). Nouakchott, however, is not teeming with sporting and cultural events. Thus, three-quarters of the articles in this section concerned the presidential elections that took place during the collection period.

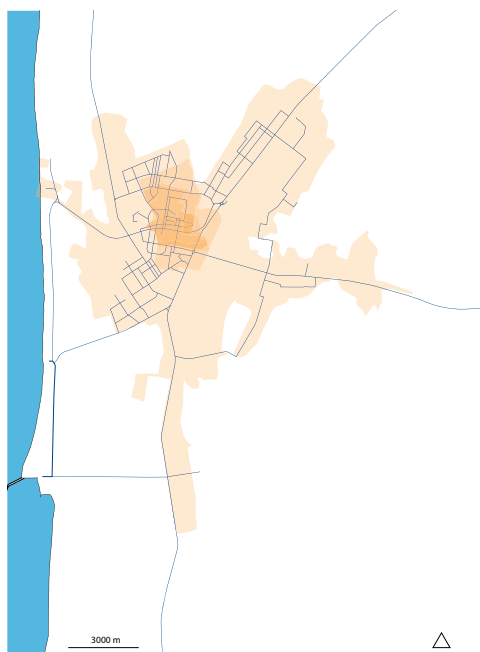
Despite the presence of the political parties in the neighbourhoods on Election Day, “in polling stations that were all but abandoned by voters, there was at best only about 48% of voters at around 1:00 p.m.”<sup>46</sup> There is no mass movement – even to elect the President of the Republic. This trend is confirmed by other articles, notably:

Nouakchott is weeping in sorrow. Sunday, March 11, the day of the presidential election. Half-deserted streets, the markets nearly abandoned and the avenues – typically crowded – are empty, swept by freezing sands carried by a steady brownish wind. On Avenue Gemal A. Nasser, the capital’s veritable pulse, the emptiness is striking. While any other time the pedestrians who cross one of the city’s busiest roads must wait long minutes without finding passage, [today] there is not a soul.<sup>47</sup>

If the streets are deserted on Election Day, it certainly had to do with the fact that the government prohibited any movement during the inauguration of President elect Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallah (SIDIOCA).

Articles on civil and civic life report on the entire territory, with no distinction between the centre and outlying areas. However, while the articles were not spatially represented by neighbourhood, it was nonetheless in popular neighbourhoods that public

L'ESPACE CIVIL ET CIVIQUE  
À NOUAKCHOTT.



transport went to collect voters who, in general, only travel by foot. The reference is indirect but nonetheless exists, and refers to the poor.

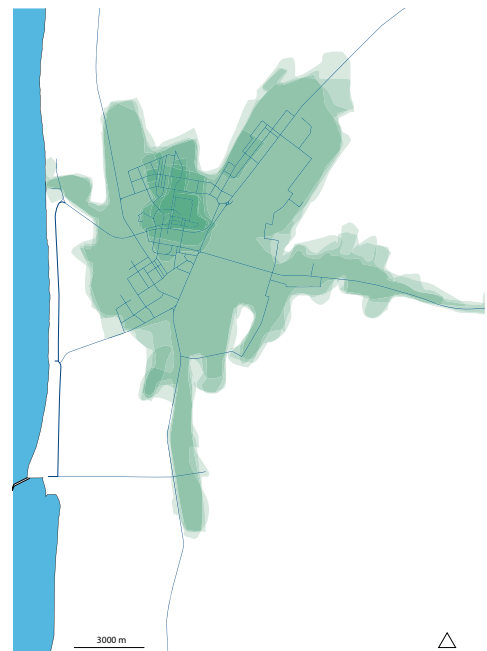
The press makes no mention of the celebrations or marriages one sees here and there in the streets of outlying areas. Sometimes an entire street is blocked off and a tent set up with music crackling away. Festivities take place in the streets or in squares in front of the home of the family (typically for a wedding or baptism). For a few hours, public space becomes an extension of the private sphere – the occupation of a public good by private individuals and usage that is necessary, given that homes tend to be small and cannot accommodate the many invited guests. However, the press does not comment on this, despite visible evidence of such use of public space. And in spite of the blocking of streets, celebrations do not seem to be a major cause of traffic problems. These practices are rooted in the lives of people and neighbourhoods, and are basically accepted by all.

*Daily life and identity* (10.36%). This is a regular column by Amar Fall, a reporter at *L'Authentique Quotidien*, who has written numerous articles on the subject. In this case, he looks at changes in lifestyles, between life in days gone by (a nostalgic reference to the recent past) and modern life (made of concrete, miniskirts, and strange customs), with a clear tendency to romanticize 'the good old days,' in a recurring litany that 'things were better in the past.' "The old Nouakchott is disappearing; new buildings are shooting up from the ground at a furious rate, destroying the old buildings that are part of the memory and memories of another time..."<sup>48</sup> One must keep in mind that "another time" refers to only few decades earlier (five to be precise), and these 'days gone by' are the colonial and postcolonial era. Yet, 'Nouakchott is nostalgic for the good old days.' Modern life likewise brings its flood of modern customs – or at least that is how they are perceived. Whether it is the youth, clothing styles, or sexual practices, all share the fact that they break with the established order. In fact, these 'new' customs are only deviant with regard to a *traditional* lifestyle.

[Young women] compete shamelessly with one another to entice men. To do so, they use a whole arsenal of efforts and imagination ... and these are *homo sapiens*, practically in their original state, that we see strolling past. [T]his reprehensible behaviour violates all social conventions. Our safeguards have been shattered into a million pieces, and our ancestors are undoubtedly turning over in their graves."<sup>49</sup>

The author's point here is clear: women entice poor, defenceless men and are destroying society. "The private

SPACE OF DAILY LIFE AND  
IDENTITY IN NOUAKCHOTT.





AWAITING THE RETURN OF  
BOATS ON THE PLAGE DES  
PÊCHEURS.

FRESH MINT SOLD AT THE  
MARKET.

SCENES OF DAILY LIFE.

parts of this category of girls are almost visible. They run around everywhere, any time of day, for respectable people to see.”<sup>50</sup>

However, it is homosexuality that poses the biggest problem. Articles on this subject are crude and do not mince words to describe the phenomenon. “What is recounted in this article is only the tip of the iceberg, but it is simply not ethical to talk about certain things that might be shocking for certain readers. But know that this phenomenon exists and is spreading throughout the country each day.”<sup>51</sup> According to the reporter, “this phenomenon – a precise description of which is difficult for us to provide – is only a tiny part of more odious practices which will be discussed in future editions.”<sup>52</sup>

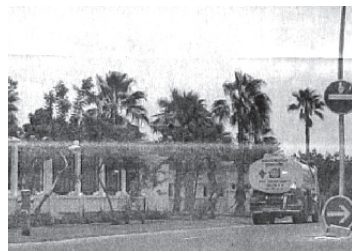
‘Images of modernity’ refers to asphalt, concrete, and big buildings, whereas those of ‘tradition’ refer to lifestyles, with slippage from one to the other. They also refer to the construction of the state since 1960, the year of Independence: “Thirty years of political vagrancy

essentially aimed at decimating the youth and dividing the different ethnic groups, with the misleading purpose of building a modern state.”<sup>53</sup>

Beyond the nostalgia, we find two contradictory models, with the city as a destructive element of society. “Ours [society], which is still largely traditional, effectively works from the very depths of the city. Urban logic, that cold



600 m de débris à Rosso



Nouakchott, le 9 avril 2007 : des chèvres dans le jardin du Palais présidentiel

individualism, is very much present, but is softened by traditional networks of solidarity that protect entire generations against loss and keep society from spiralling downward. But the capacities of these networks are limited."<sup>54</sup> The old clichés are used with no regard to context. The city is destroying societies, while rural life is the emblem of social links and mutual aid.

*Structuring elements of public space.* To summarize, four key issues emerge from our analysis: water, the environment, transportation, and violence. However, four elements emerge as structuring for public space (meaning issues that are cross-cutting and that mark space socially and/or spatially): 1) the influence of the climate; 2) the behaviour and attitudes of users with regard to the common good; 3) the management of space or informality as a rule; and 4) the poverty that clearly characterizes this space.

1. The season of extreme heat. Although it is no longer fashionable to talk about the climate's influence on human activity, it clearly marks public spaces in Nouakchott. The scorching summer season comes with its abundance of problems, water being the main one. With a rise in temperature of a few degrees, the water shortage begins, followed by electricity shortages. More generally, however, it is Nouakchott's geographical location that poses the biggest problem. With no hinterlands, it is too hot for crops, has too much sand for planting, and has no resources of its own. Effectively, the city is entirely dependent on a remote, outside supply chain.

2. Many articles refer to the 'non-urban' behaviour of users of public space. Whether in traffic, in daily life, or with regard to the environment, many problems result directly from behaviours that are incongruent with the context. Part of the traffic problem results from the behaviour of drivers, who cause traffic jams. The same is true of trash; people litter in the streets and empty their septic tanks in public space.

Behind this persistent critique of practices lies this idea that there are *urban* practices and *rural* practices, and that the people – for the most part rural – do not make the effort required to live in the city. For the press, the rural model (in this case, the Bedouin one) has merely been imported to the city, as if the urbanisation of the population were unable to keep up with the city's urbanisation (the construction of streets, squares, etc.) and as if its adaptation to concrete was not fast enough, and many of the problems were due to this gap between lifestyle and urban living conditions.

CARCASS OF A DONKEY AT THE SOCOGIM MARKET.



It is not communal life that requires adapting to (because communal life also exists in villages), but adapting to life in a new spatial setting (i.e. the urban context and its morphology) that takes time. Inappropriate behaviour is not presented as 'poor problem' but rather a problem that affects the entire population – remarkably egalitarian.

3. Informality is the only rule: it dictates relationships between people and things. Although the press deplores these practices, one must understand that they are so ingrained in society that it is difficult to know in which context we are operating, challenging the notion of informality itself. Once a practice becomes the rule rather than the exception, is it not then a norm?

4. From evictions to public transport, to the environment and water shortage, a large portion of the population is visibly impoverished. Those living in the outskirts, far from the centre for the most part, are the first victims of these shortages. They are also those who take to the streets – the only place they can make themselves heard. Much of the population lives on and makes its living from the streets. For them, the street is a resource: you can sell there, sleep there, even protest there. The key issues of public space are therefore closely linked to poverty.

While acknowledged in the press, poverty is perceived neither negatively nor positively, but as a basic fact of life, with no value judgment. One senses, however, a strong societal hierarchy: some are rich, some are poor, and that's life

in the city. The facts are reported unceremoniously. However, it does blatantly target one population – Sub-Saharan blacks – who are held responsible for the violence, insecurity, management issues, and other woes the country faces, due to their ethnicity and economic situation.

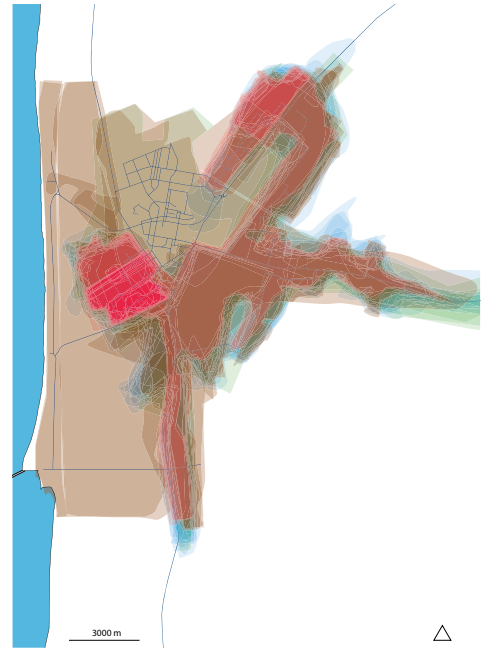
From here, a kind of geography of poverty emerges in Nouakchott. By superimposing maps depicting violence, shortages, and environmental issues, we see that the outskirts are affected by all three problems. Poverty exists in areas where environmental risks are present, in turn creating other problems that piggyback it. Poverty is also found in areas that are less well served by infrastructure. It would seem that violence is born in such areas, even though, as we have seen, safety concerns must be relativised in Nouakchott's case, and the elite tends to criminalise certain populations. In spite of this, we find the classic elements of poverty and their consequences.

TRANSPORT OF GOODS IN POOR DISTRICTS.  
PUBLIC TRANSPORT AT THE CAPITAL'S MARKET





In addition to problems of poverty, Nouakchott suffers from a poor image, especially its city centre. The idea is simple: in order for a city to be a city, it must have a modicum of symbolic elements that, for the most part, are spatial and serve as the basic backdrop of a 'modern capital.' Nouakchott does then base itself on other cities of similar size, but to the models of Johannesburg, Dubai, Rabat, and European cities, which still serve as an absolute model. A spatial model is established, a concept of a city centre built, and users must simply adapt. And if that does not occur, we try to change their behaviour, rather than change the model. For example, the presence of animals is not 'worthy' of a big city. Thus, animals must be removed from the centre, despite the fact that they are a resource for thousands of families. We are clearly in the realm of image – the one the city would *like* to have. Nouakchott has built a modern world for Bedouins forcibly converted to urbanity.



GEOGRAPHY OF POVERTY  
IN NOUAKCHOTT.





## DAKAR

### Chapter 3

The study of the press in Dakar is based on a corpus of 588 editions, from both daily and weekly newspapers. Of the 588 editions, 180 contain at least one article mentioning public space (approximately 30 %). In other words, half of the newspapers mention the subject at least once in their columns. Although this number may seem high, some of the other figures help explain this initial figure, given that the total number of articles in the 588 editions is 14,890,55 and only 234 mention public space. In other words, only 1.57 % of the articles mention public space. It appears that, for the press, issues involving public space are merely anecdotal.

The main press topic is the President of the Republic, Me Abdoulaye Wade. He is, in fact, omnipresent – his actions, his decisions, his travel, and his policies are all commented upon in detail in the press. The same holds true for the deeds and actions of the First Lady and her son, Karim, who recently entered politics. This is followed by political topics in general and the power struggles between political parties. In election run-ups, for example, each party announces its programme and criticises the others' programmes. And yet, even at a time – perhaps the time – when future policies should be being negotiated and major urban issues brought to light, the city does not seem to be regarded as worthy of interest. Problems are discussed the same way regardless of whether they occur in the urban setting or the rural context. Hence, the city is not a relevant category.

Much room is given to news briefs in all the papers and, as the vast majority of events occur in the private space, they do not appear in our study.

Sports also feature in many headlines – from the national teams' away matches to the stars of traditional Senegalese wrestling (the national sport), and sports heroes' activities are described in detail, from their parties to their private lives. Of course, with Youssou N'Dour (a world star, but, above all, a national star), a non-negligible number of articles are devoted to music. All of these topics, though given varying degrees of attention, are more documented in the press than is public space.

FRONT PAGE OF THE  
INDEPENDENT DAILY,  
L'OBSERVATEUR.



Themes and their importance

TOTAL	234	% Theme
Network Support	14	5.98
Transport and Mobility	38	16.24
Environment	30	12.82
Occupation/Management	24	10.26
Built Space	9	3.85
Street as Resource	15	6.41
Protest	30	12.82
Civil Activity	13	5.56
Daily Life, Identity	15	6.41

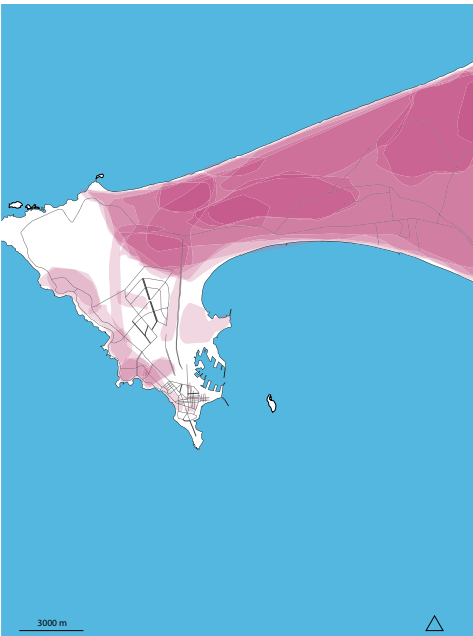
IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS THEMES IN THE PRESS.

network support, built space, the street as a resource, civil and civic activities, and daily life.

*Violence and insecurity* (19.66%). By volume, the main issue of public space in Dakar is ‘concern about violence and safety,’ with approximately 20 % of articles.<sup>56</sup> Obviously this does not include all of the news briefs for the city, but only those directly related to public space.

...[he] leant down in front of the tourist, tugging the bottom of his trousers to distract him. The American fell for this trick, as his natural reaction was to lean forward. This was the opportunity that one of the thieves was waiting for, so as to relieve him of his wallet containing a large quantity of dollars.”<sup>57</sup>

VIOLENCE IN DAKAR.



This is the best-known trick in the world in city centres, but is probably most frequently used in Africa, from Dakar to Djibouti. Tourists are ‘ripped off’ on

main roads in full view and in broad daylight. “This happened last Saturday; in the middle of the street, they grabbed his bag, which contained everything he had...”<sup>58</sup> Various pick-pocketing and scams occur in public spaces.

While pick-pocketing may take place in the city centre in broad daylight, armed gangs roam only at night, using the cover of darkness to commit their crimes. “The next evening, gendarme cadets organised a retaliation operation. They carried out a raid...”<sup>59</sup>

As night falls, the face of the street changes, as do the activities that take place there. “A group of criminals armed with machetes rob a hairdresser.”<sup>60</sup> There is no mention of gangs as yet – only ‘groups’ of criminals, indicating that this trend of violence is not yet on par with other large cities, such as Lagos or Bogota. The numerous cases of assault are then followed by numerous cases of arrests, giving

an overall impression of rampant violence that is nonetheless under control, given the large number of arrests and the fact that police quickly regain control of areas. Insecurity is a phenomenon of the suburbs and

in the suburbs, it is the poorest who are the victims, and they do not usually go to the police after being attacked. Only the wealthy and educated file complaints after an assault, comments an intellectual from Sans-fil.<sup>61</sup> According to him, there are far more break-ins, robberies, and cases of assault and battery than statistics show.”<sup>62</sup>

This describes a reality; the poor are not only victims of a greater number of attacks, but moreover are not able to exercise their rights.

Mapping the articles shows very clearly that the suburbs are the main victim of violence and safety issues, followed by the neighbourhoods along the western coastal road and the Ouakam town centre. This is easy to see when we plot the main roads: rushes of offences are directly linked to the expressways. We find a very marked spatial distribution of problems in the suburbs; they are both victims of violence and its producers. We also note that violence is mostly nocturnal, with the exception of a few tourist scams.

*Infrastructure support* (5.98%). Because Dakar hosted the OCI (Organisation of the Islamic Conference) summit from 8–14<sup>th</sup> March 2008, the city had to be rendered fit to receive around forty Heads of State.

Thus, a vast programme of works was organised for roads and hotel infrastructure.<sup>63</sup> In terms of roadwork, this meant renovating the western coastal road from the city centre to Léopold Sédar Senghor airport, including the entire stretch between the airport and the Patte d’Oie roundabout, as well as the VDN (North Bypass). This massive renovation programme was carried out at the same time as the toll motorway project from the city centre to the Patte d’Oie and from the Patte d’Oie to Rufisque. The renovation work and the programme to build a motorway at the same time turned Dakar into one giant construction area, which was widely documented in the press.

Articles show that the management of these construction projects caused problems. The poor programming of bypass and detours during work hours led to an increase in accidents and



TOLL MOTORWAY DURING CONSTRUCTION WORKS.

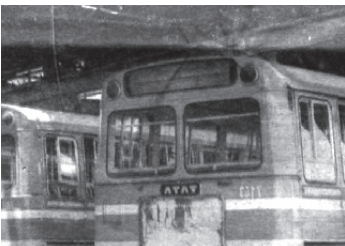
INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT IN DAKAR.





PETERSEN BUS STATION,  
TATA BUS.  
PETERSEN BUS STATION,  
EXPRESS BUSES.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PUBLIC  
AND PRIVATE TRANSPORT.



congestion: "This situation is the result of the lack of a proper and clearly marked detour routes for cars to use."<sup>64</sup> Cars had to find their way through total chaos to bypass road works, with each driver trying to save time, looking for the shortest possible route, overtaking on both the inside and outside, just to get a little further ahead in the bottleneck – practices which create congestion problems of their own.

I understand that it's for the good of the country, but I think it might have been better to build step by step. [...] Even at the best of times, without all the road works or anything, it was hard to get around by car during rush hour, and even more so now. And with the rainy season arriving, the situation could get even more complicated."<sup>65</sup>

Poor management of construction projects is often cited, with blame generally attributed to the entrepreneur, to the fact that several projects are underway at the same time, the lack of organisation with regard to bypasses, detours and delays.

The other problem is electricity, though a distant second to the catastrophic management of road networks. "The unsurprising return of untimely power cuts these last few days, just as populations are confronted with a serious shortage of butane gas, is further aggravated by the fact that Senelec's (national energy company) senior management only now felt it necessary to inform their clients of the reasons for this unfortunate situation".<sup>66</sup> the malfunctioning of a central supply source. As there was not enough electricity to meet the demand, the

electricity company decided to alternately cut off power supply to different neighbourhoods for a few hours at a time. This method avoids power cuts in wealthier neighbourhoods by targeting only on the poorest ones. Such power cuts are clear evidence of the marked segregation that exists between neighbourhoods. Mapping the articles highlights the main roads, especially the western coastal road and the VDN from the western coastal road heading north. To the west, from the city centre, we can see the motorway and its inflection point, the Patte d'Oie roundabout. Roads depart from this point, heading either westward towards the VDN, or eastward via the motorway that, once completed, should allow drivers to leave Dakar quickly and to avoid the current traffic problems on the Rufisque road, which, for the time being, is the only way to enter Dakar.

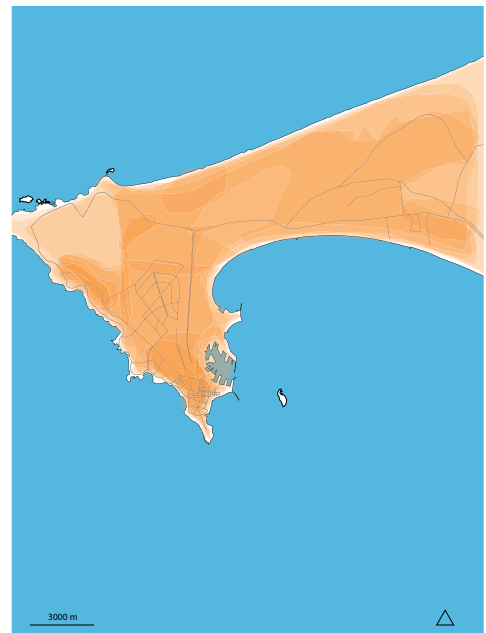
*Transport and mobility* (16.24%). This is the second most addressed topic in Dakar, following issues related to violence. Although this theme is wide-ranging, public transport and road accidents are the topics most discussed. The press does not discuss all types of public transport; in fact, it discusses almost exclusively the 'Dakar Dem DiK' (DDD) buses,<sup>67</sup> about which there are many stories – from embezzlement by executives, to counterfeit F2000 notes<sup>68</sup> being transported by bus, to fare-dodgers, as well as other management problems of the company that owns the DDD. For example, the press reported:

Drivers for this 'well-structured' public transport company should set an example and respect the highway code. However, the way some drivers drive is totally informal, like drivers of our 'slow coaches'. Quite a paradox!<sup>69</sup>

TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY IN  
DAKAR.

A State-controlled company should have exemplary practices. Behind this criticism of drivers, a reference is also made to the arguments that were used to create a new DDD bus service. In response to the informal practices of the urban transport sector (in both the managing of travel and administration, which was clear in the behaviour of express coach drivers on the roads), the government decided to set up a new, controlled and *controllable* structure to tackle the sector's informality. However, the newspapers decried the fact that, despite creating a new company under new management, the situation remained the same, using the anecdote of the reckless bus driver to make a more sweeping statement about DDD buses.

Anecdotes have little value in themselves, but nonetheless shine the spotlight on urban transport, and the slightest incident is quickly cited as 'yet







WASTE STORAGE IN A  
RESIDENTIAL AREA.

SUBURBAN STREET DURING  
THE RAINY SEASON, NEAR THE  
SYNDICAT MARKET.

another problem' with the DDD's management. Above all, however, the numerous articles highlight both the impact of DDD buses on public space (with 350 buses, it is a large company) and the latter's inability to 'modernise' by putting an end to informal practices.

While unrelated to public transport, accidents represent a second major sub-category for transport. How (often serious) accidents occur is reported in precise, unflinching detail. We read of an "accident caused by the indiscipline of the driver of an articulated lorry (registered DK-5956-AB) to the name of Mamadou Ndaw. A lorry belonging to Mrs. Mame Yacine Ndiaye,"<sup>70</sup> or a "Renault Clio driven by a medical sales representative with a female passenger crashed head-on into a four-wheel drive vehicle with the registration DK-0272-AA, driven by an airline pilot who was driving on the wrong side of the road. The driver of the Renault Clio, with the registration plate DK-9575-S..."<sup>71</sup> Do such details help in apprehending the culprit? Is this a kind of popular

justice we glimpse through the manner in which accidents are reported? While there is nothing to support this, the level of detail of the reporting is disturbing. Yet, it could simply be that journalists must give full accounts of events without concealing any evidence.

For transport, integrating the formal and informal is a reality.

The urban transport sector in Dakar is marked by duality in this transition period between two centuries. But this duality tends to become blurred in the gradual move toward integration arising from the notion of complementarity between modes of transport that emerges from the analyses made" (GODARD 2002b, GODARD 2002a).

We shall return to this view in our own analysis, as it tends towards a conception of urban management that does not oppose *formal* and *informal* but rather allows for their co-existence or their superimposing.

*Environmental issues* (12.82 %). The heavy rains in 2005 forced thousands of inhabitants from poor neighbourhoods into temporary camps until they could be re-housed in a housing estate ('Plan Jaaxay'). In 2007, however, the press – awaiting the winter and its host of problems – used the occasion to allude to seasons past and to remind readers that the government had not kept its promise on several counts, including flooding issues. "Yesterday, inhabitants from the districts of Darou Rahmane de Guédiawaye expressed their dismay at being totally forgotten by the Plan Jaaxay."<sup>72</sup> Voices were raised against the authorities' apathy, despite the allocation of financial resources. "We are in the very heart of the outlying neighbourhoods of Yembeul and Ben Barak, where waters from the

torrential rains that fell on Dakar in 2005 swallowed up houses in suburban neighbourhoods. The area, now divided in two,

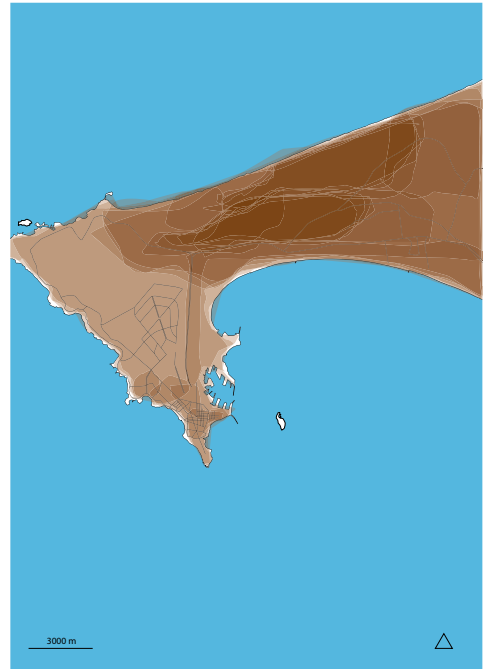
'the Mosquito Lagoon' (as it is known by locals), where empty houses float, is the buffer zone, bordering the sub-districts of Darousalam 4 and 5 and the Mayoro Samb districts. [...] The forgotten people of Ben Barak blame the authorities, especially Me Abdoulaye Wade's government, which, in their opinion, is responsible for their problems. 'When the Socialists were in power, we never had flooding because they pumped the water out every time.' [...] Mr Sow is convinced that political affiliation prevailed, to the detriment of the reality of the situation."<sup>73</sup>

The circumstances of the poor are not a priority for the Government, and the people of this district remain in a precarious situation, still awaiting housing worthy of the name.

"Now, in light of the inhumane treatment of the disaster victims of Yembeul and other areas, it seems clear that the Jaxaay plan is a double swindle serving to both undermine democracy and support private interests."<sup>74</sup> In general, after a review of past issues, a series of articles evokes the winter to come: "faced with the impotence of the authorities to contain the problem of flooding, the inhabitants of the suburbs have taken their own measures to protect themselves."<sup>75</sup> The spectre of the floods of 2005 lingers.

Another major environmental issue is the management of liquid and solid waste. The story starts with a rubbish collection strike. "Insalubrities have returned to the neighbourhoods. The capital has been taken over by piles of filth, which angry inhabitants unceremoniously dumped in the streets, avenues and alleys."<sup>76</sup> "[The] piles of filth dumped on the pavement are the result of the battle between the Ministry of the Environment and the Cadak-Car Agreement, according to the General Secretary of the SNTN (National Union of Street Cleaners), Madany Sy."<sup>77</sup>

The conflict turned the city into what looked like a municipal dump. "Tired of keeping their rotting rubbish at home, the people of Colobane decided to dump it at the Place de l'Obélisque to protest the non-collection of their garbage for more than ten days."<sup>78</sup>



THE ENVIRONMENT IN DAKAR.

BUSES, CARS AND PEDESTRIANS  
SHARE THE SAME PUBLIC  
SPACE.





SPORTS IN PUBLIC SPACE.

Although the conflict was short term, the problem of refuse is, on the contrary, structural. “We have become familiar with refuse, have got used to it and, while we do not have a favourable popular opinion of waste management, we shall be living in these surroundings for a long time,” declared Oumar Cissé, an engineer with the IAGU (African Urban Management Institute) in *Le Quotidien*.<sup>79</sup> Poor waste management presents a threat to public health, and “can cause a disease known as ‘dirty hands,’ or ‘cholera,’”<sup>80</sup> which obviously affects those in more precarious situations in terms of sanitation. The fight against the accumulation of rubbish is also a fight against poverty.

Liquid waste presents the same public health problems as solid waste.

Disgusting! The streets, alleys, and sometimes even main roads of working-class neighbourhoods are impassable due to the sewers spewing up everywhere, sometimes taking inhabitants

hostage. We could accept or understand this if it were merely a question of collateral damage from the rains. But far from it – this is waste water that plagues the neighbourhood streets for days on end, bringing with it the risk of disease due to the insalubrious conditions.<sup>81</sup>

This phenomenon is not exclusively due to winter weather phenomena, but persists throughout the year.

The suburbs clearly stand out in the mapping, proving that while the environment is an issue that affects the entire urban area, it is mainly poor districts that face the greatest problems and threats to their populations.

*Occupation/management* (10.26%). The topic of occupation and management focuses on two major issues: the management of markets and inhabitants’ use of streets. Here we find a problem symbolic of the modern city and urban practices:

It’s a truism to say that, in Senegal, the ‘couldn’t-care-less’ attitude, negligence, and other forms of slackness have now become standard practice. Otherwise, how could we allow citizens, who claim to earn a living from the sweat of their brow, to occupy the public highway with no authority whatsoever – local or national – without as much as bothering to lift a finger to call a stop to it. [...] A country that tramples upon the laws and regulations that govern it is anything but modern and certainly not civilised.<sup>82</sup>

However, one solution to the problem of canteens is eviction after several warnings. “[T]he prefectural decree requires traders who have set up their stalls outside and around the area immediately surrounding the market to vacate the premises.”<sup>83</sup> Traders often think the state or municipality will not dare to carry through on its threats. “Others decided to stay on, thinking that such a decision could not be put into effect immediately”<sup>84</sup> for the following reasons, which are used as an argument against evictions.

Certain products can no longer be sold, as certain “[m]arkets are the sole destination for the products of farmers and fishermen from the South of the country.”<sup>85</sup> Evictions, therefore, have repercussions on places and populations far beyond Dakar’s borders; hence, evicting sellers from the port market deprives the population of Casamance of a sales outlet for their goods.

There is also a more direct loss as the canteens are destroyed, because when evictions are done with bulldozers, all of the equipment and stalls are destroyed, resulting in considerable losses for the owners.

For a long time, the informal system has provided *de facto* rights: in other words, it has prolonged an informal situation for years, legitimising it and, in some cases, eventually making it formal. This is less and less the case, as even established businesses that have existed for many years can now be evicted.

We should likewise mention the municipalities’ construction of canteens almost everywhere, which stands to reason; every time a canteen is set up, the municipality collects taxes. “Worse still, the 423 stalls allowed to remain are illegally occupied by sellers, and the Municipal Council Housing Organisation continues to collect daily taxes from them.”<sup>86</sup> It is a paradoxical situation – occupation is illegal, but the municipality nonetheless collects taxes.

An article on “the indiscipline and privatisation of the road by the Senegalese,” published in *Le Devoir*,<sup>87</sup> describes the use of the public highway for private purposes, which disrupts both vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Four phenomena are cited. 1) The presence of building materials: “[p]iles of sand, stones, bricks and gravel line the neighbourhoods, entirely blocking the streets – the result of the building craze that so marks this area, but also the sign of the radical liberty that the citizens grant themselves with regard to public roads.”<sup>88</sup> The relative narrowness of parcels here makes it such that a building covers almost the entire plot. 2) Various celebrations: “[r]eligious singing, baptisms, weddings, deaths, and any other sort of family ceremony is also an occasion to take over the street for the day or longer.” Daba Ndiaye of the *Cité Nord Foire* complains, “For the slightest excuse, people take over the streets as if they were on their own property.”<sup>89</sup> 3) Sport



OCCUPATION AND MANAGEMENT IN DAKAR.

THE WEEKLY PAPER LE DEVOIR DESCRIBES THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL PRACTICES ON THE STREET.





DESTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS IN  
THE HEART OF THE CITY.

in the street: “[w]hen young people want to play football undisturbed [...] they strew the road with stones and bricks.”<sup>90</sup>

Without a football pitch in the city centre, people take over the street to play sport, sometimes even blocking traffic. And, lastly, 4) Concessions’ projects: “[t]he Onas,<sup>91</sup> the Sénélec,<sup>92</sup> the Sonatel,<sup>93</sup> and the SDE are often to blame for this. These companies are considered major concessionaries, whose projects deform the roads.”<sup>94</sup> Projects are carried out over

very long periods of time, blocking roads for months on end, and sometimes come to a halt before ever being completed.

Several explanations can be put forward at this stage, as the article highlights another interesting element: “[i]n our poor countries like Senegal, populations live outdoors. There is a strong relationship and interaction of populations in the street.” The link between poverty and occupation of the street is very clearly formulated here. Rich people from rich neighbourhoods do not hold parties in the street but in their homes, out of sight. Hence, as Dakar has a large majority of poor people, much use is made of the streets. Nonetheless, reference is also (and always) made to “the urbanisation of Dakar, [which] does not go hand-in-hand with the mentality of the populations” – a classic example of the modern urban versus the old rural way of life.

The article also questions the role of public space as an extension of the private domain and, above all, as an extension of the traditional African yard, which is not, strictly speaking, a private yard but rather one shared with several families. In the event of a lack of space, public space thus becomes the logical extension of this yard.

*Built space* (3.85%). “As an archaeologist, what strikes me the most is the irreparable destruction inflicted upon our buried cultural heritage, the mysteries of which only archaeology is capable of uncovering.”<sup>95</sup> Memory and heritage are constantly being destroyed because construction works in Dakar never allow for archaeological digs beforehand. Consequently, entire chapters of civilisation are buried under houses, streets, and other byways.

Built heritage is above all a dated European notion – a conceptual framework to which only African elites have access. Behind this lies the colonial and historical management model that is problematic when confronted with the African reality. This is not to say that nothing should be done about heritage in Africa; yet, behind this notion lie many ideas that have not yet found their place in the cities of West Africa.



"We are faced with an aesthetic of disorder stemming from the fact that people have not been introduced to the concept of aesthetics from the start."<sup>96</sup> This quote is in keeping with what we described above, and goes so far as to cite the notion of aesthetics as an explanation for behaviour. Herein lies the paradox as, on the one hand, the life of an old-world district is mentioned – that of the old Kermel. Full of life, it then spread out over the entire neighbourhood. Now, its current informal circumstances have prevailed, and it is smothered under the canteens. We do not, therefore, understand which aesthetic is being discussed.

The 'canteen-isation' and illogical, senseless occupation of the market's immediate surroundings, which will inexorably spread out in concentric circles, will lead to the gradual necrosis of the district as well (again in concentric circle), and eventually the city centre. From an aesthetic point of view, as well as that of city planning, occupation of the urban space, security, and respect for the environment (especially the urban environment), and – for economic reasons – what is happening in Kermel can only lead to a dead end."<sup>97</sup>

The situation is not clear because we cannot determine which problem is the main one. We understand that Kermel should become an architectural jewel, revealing to tourists not the hidden face of Senegal – the face of informality and poverty – but instead showcasing the country's heritage. "The economic value of our heritage, like any heritage, comes through compliance with the norms, rules, and organisational codes to manage and make use of this heritage."<sup>98</sup> The problem with Kermel is that users do not respect these rules: "It is clear that the 1993 disaster did not teach us a lesson. And the worst thing is that the whole city has become a place where anything goes [...] what happens in Kermel is a reflection of what is happening in the entire country."<sup>99</sup> Citizens are not urbanites, states the press, returning to the big debate on social practices in the city that, apparently, are not urbane. Living in the street or from the street is not urbane. It is not urbane to dump one's rubbish, block traffic, own animals, and so on. For Dakar's journalists and intellectuals, the list of what is urbane and what is not is long. "In fact, it is because of



BUILT SPACE IN DAKAR.

BEGGAR NEAR THE SANDAGA MARKET, DOWNTOWN.





the anarchic way that public space is used and laid out! This is compounded by heavy migration from the countryside to the capital, a soft urbanisation policy, a notorious lack of civic spirit, and frenzied construction that is increasingly on the margins of basic architectural standards – all of this in a frantic race for profit, where the ends justifies the means.”<sup>100</sup>

The idea of city is very much present behind the press’ apprehension of ‘built space.’ A ‘good’ city model suggests heritage and involves specific lifestyles. The question is no longer which city for our practices, but which practices for our city, wherein form prevails over function and practices.

*The street as a resource (6.41%).* In Dakar, begging – with two exceptions – is addressed in a general way through discussion of talibés (street children).

Begging, which is defined as the solicitation of free aid for one’s personal benefit, is, in the eyes of the law, an offence – at least if it is done on a public street, away from places of worship. As such, it is punishable under Article 245 of the penal code by imprisonment from six months to two years. This is why the authorities organize regular raids, aimed to rid the capital of its ‘human congestion,’ according to the official terminology commonly used during the time of President-poet Leopold Sedar Senghor.<sup>101</sup>

Begging is generally illegal, except near mosques, thus giving public spaces different value. However, with the exception of mosques and other places of worship, it is interesting to note that a legal framework does exist and is put into action from time to time, quite often in fact, when it comes to ‘cleaning up the streets.’

Beyond laws, begging can be seen in specific areas of the city and is thus a highly

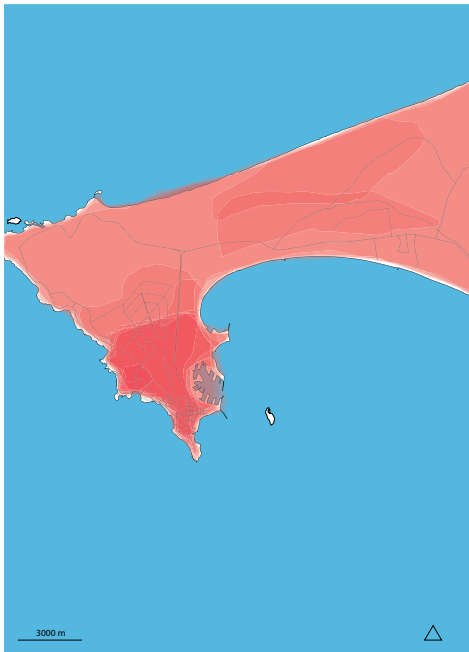
localised phenomenon. “All the places where small change circulates and men and women take the time to make a stop (banks, post offices, bakeries, markets, pharmacies, etc.) are peopled by all of the crippled and poor of the Earth.”<sup>102</sup>

If the choice of places to beg leaves nothing to chance, the hours of the day and days of the week do not either. Friday at prayer time is the best time, and the morning hours, when people take the bus to work, promise the higher earnings for beggars. Some beggars are mobile, while others stake out specific places (DIOF, FAYE 2002).

They are victims of the structural adjustment policies that have left many companies bankrupt, putting their workers on the street. Overnight, many found themselves forced to beg. There are also rural inhabitants who fled the inhospitable countryside to settle in the city where, with no job skills, they have no other choice but to beg.<sup>103</sup>

While begging is often seen in an extremely negative light, this is not always the case. “An intimate

THE STREET AS A RESOURCE  
IN DAKAR.



relationship develops between beggars and certain donors, so that some beggars have their own personal donors, and vice versa.”<sup>104</sup> Every rich Muslim has his ‘poor,’ to whom he gives by habit on a daily or weekly basis, always in the same place, based on the belief that their contribution will be of greater value if it always goes to the same person.

The problem of street children stems from begging, of course, but raises another question – that of childhood. *Talibés* who beg in the streets of Dakar do so firstly so that they can eat, but also to ‘pay’ the marabou of the *Daara*<sup>105</sup> for their Koranic education, for which the marabou is supposedly responsible.

Some 8,000 children are let loose in the streets of the Senegalese capital each day to ‘work’ as beggars. At least that is the estimate the press gives, and that also comes from the World Bank. Children come from all over Senegal and neighbouring countries [...and] spend the day in the street looking for a bit of money and food. ‘Many of them roam the streets early in the morning, dressed in rags, with their pittance pots slung over their shoulder.’”<sup>106</sup>

However, it is first and foremost “the economic crisis [that] gave birth to a new phenomenon, which is the exploitation of street children in the market of begging.”<sup>107</sup> In fact, children are sent out into the streets to beg and, in general, can only return once they have collected enough money – an amount set by the marabou each morning and that varies according to his needs. Increasingly, the learning dimension – which was the original basis for this practice – disappears and is replaced by outright begging. For proof of this, “just start a long conversation with [one of] them, and an adult shows up to avoid any problems.”<sup>108</sup>

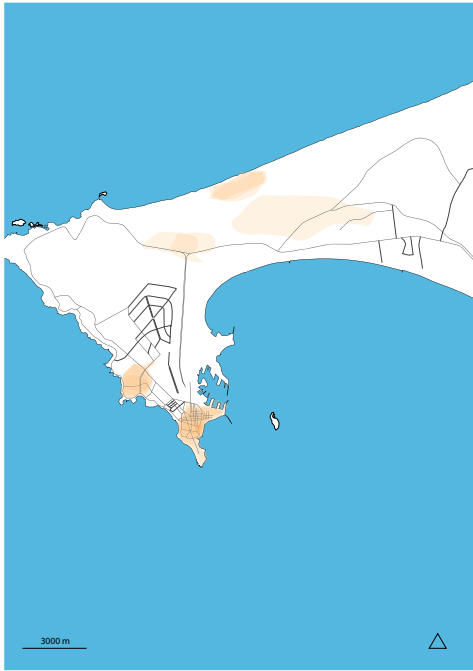
Apart from begging, one of the few other professions described in detail is that related to an idea a major brand of instant coffee had – to sell and advertise its product in the street. The company equipped dozens of young people with small pushcarts bearing the brand’s colours, which wind through the streets selling coffee. This new enterprise inspired others, who started doing the same thing. Nowadays, we find hundreds of itinerant tea and coffee vendors in Dakar.

*Space of protest* (12.82%). The street is the place of protest *par excellence*. In Dakar, there are three ways of protesting. The first is to march on places of power.

The women of civil society, of the different political parties, associations, and networks will march from the Place de l’Indépendance to the Presidential Palace this morning to hand deliver a bill on gender equality...A symbolic and special walk because they will all be dressed in white.<sup>109</sup>



CREDIT VENDORS FOR MOBILE  
TELEPHONES.  
NEWSPAPER VENDORS IN THE  
CITY CENTRE.



SPACE OF PROTEST IN DAKAR.

Thus do the people 'take' the city centre, by walking from a highly symbolic place (the *Place de l'Indépendance*) to the Presidential Palace – the real seat of power.

A second way of protesting is to 'sit in' on the premises of the site that is the object of protest. Such is the case for market evictions, where people will physically remain on the premises, sometimes until being removed by force. "In a sit-in yesterday on the premises designed to alert public opinion and the country's highest authorities, these vendors made their determination to remain in place known."<sup>110</sup> Typically, this approach ends with intervention by security forces.

Finally, and something novel: marches no longer only take place in the city centre – the symbolic seat of power – but also in the suburbs. This suggests a certain autonomy with regard to the city centre and also that the media is going further afield to report on such event – a prerequisite of any form of protest.

One surmises that a march that takes place in one of the poorest areas of Dakar is symbolic for several reasons. It is to show the authorities that the suburbs are in exile and continue to exist in economically dire conditions.<sup>111</sup>

The main cause of protest is the deterioration of living conditions. "The *Fédération générale des travailleurs du Sénégal* expressed outrage at the harsh living conditions of the people of Senegal."<sup>112</sup> The poor take to the streets to raise awareness of their economic situation among political authorities.

Given the standard of living of these populations, the spiralling inflation of staple products and power cuts by Senelec, the CNTS is trying to bring the government's attention to the dangers that threaten the Senegalese population by marching.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, protests sometimes erupt during political meetings and presidential parades in the city, especially when unexpected factors come into play. "An unusual scene yesterday: the presidential motorcade, taken hostage by the torrential rains that pounded Dakar yesterday, was immobilized at the Pont de la Patte d'Oie."<sup>114</sup>

Jeering before the ridiculous situation, several witnesses at the scene did not miss the opportunity to make scoffing comments. "That's good!" exclaimed a young mechanic. Thirty year-old Abdou added, "This will allow him to know how we live." A labourer added, "Now he's the victim of these endless construction projects just like everyone else."<sup>115</sup>

However, the city centre remains the ideal scene for revolt, despite the fact that protest is gradually decentralizing, moving into even the poorest neighbourhoods of the suburbs. Another key place in Dakar (as elsewhere) is the university, which is also a hotbed of protest.

People's hopelessness, largely due to their living conditions, pushes them into the streets. Hence, it is these voiceless populations that tend to use this form of protest, as the only way of making themselves heard.

But having a symbolic place to march is not enough: the protest must also be bothersome enough that it is worth talking about. This generally means blocking traffic. When one knows traffic in Dakar, one understands that blocking off a street has special meaning.

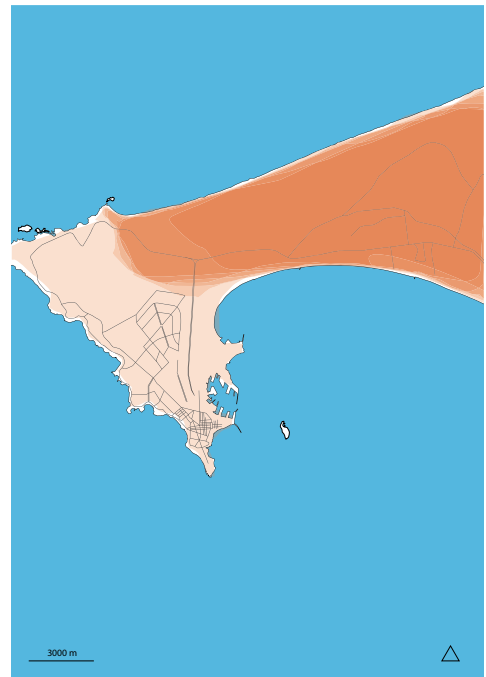
Yet, blocking traffic does not give drivers the impression of being held hostage, which is often the case in other countries (and in France in particular). In its columns, the press presents it as though the poor had the legitimate right to take to the street and instead criticizes the state, holding it almost entirely accountable for crisis situations.

*Civil/civic activities* (5.56%). "In this surreal setting, there is no doubt that the eyes of foreigners setting foot on the soil of this country for the first time would be drawn to this group of men, kettles in hand, performing their ablutions in the middle of the street, heedless of passers-by, the more distracted of whom risk wading through this water after the passage of these very ordinary Muslims... most of whom come from the country."<sup>116</sup> On Fridays at high prayer time, downtown Dakar becomes one gigantic outdoor mosque. After performing their ablutions in the street, worshipers spread out their prayer rug on the pavement and pray. The press highlights the fact that this religious practice takes place in the street itself (let us recall that Senegal is a secular country). It also claims that this practice is almost exclusively one of unmannered country folk, as though urbanity were synonymous with not praying in the streets.

Contrary to the recommendations of Islam and of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, the *talibés* of Béthio Thioune and other PDS activists prayed in diversity at the Bopp Murid mosque, which will soon be renamed The Great Murid Mosque. Men and women shared the same row for five o'clock prayer. Worse, certain girls did not pray but rather sat between rows putting on makeup. Then came the brouhaha the first seconds following the prayer."<sup>117</sup>

While some newspapers decry the use of public spaces for prayer, others complain of the lack of respect with regard to how praying is done. The press constantly bounces back and forth between these two positions. However, what we learn from such observation is that religious practices are increasingly influenced by people's daily lives, are no longer uniquely based on a religious model, and find inspiration in other acts of civil life.

CIVIL AND CIVIC SPACE IN DAKAR.





DAILY LIFE IN DAKAR.

*Everyday life and identity* (6.41%). “Our customs are increasingly trampled upon by the licentious and the homosexuals, who have sullied the streets of the capital,’ ranted one sixty year-old man in disgust, after learning of the arrest of homosexuals caught having sex at night in the back of a 4x4 in his council flat neighbourhood. The police approached the all-terrain vehicle with their headlights off, shone their torches through the vehicle’s window and nearly choked: inside, on the back seat, police commissioner Malick Ndiaye’s men could clearly see a mature individual with his trousers down, preparing to straddle his partner, a young *talibé* (a beggar from the Koranic schools) of 19, with his pants around his knees.”<sup>118</sup> Homosexuality, still extremely taboo in Dakar, is strongly condemned and considered one of the most deviant offences. However, the fact that such practices take place in 4x4s in the middle of the street proves that the practice is nonetheless tolerated, even if the press is indignant about it.

“When naked women invade our streets” is the headline, with a photo offering the reader a bit of nudity as proof.

Fashion show or flesh fair. This is the spectacle the capital offers us on a daily basis, with this procession of teeny-boppers exhibiting their charms in full view of passers-by. Dakar is worthy of a Hollywood... The trend is for young women to show their bodies for the contemplation of our men. So they do it, competing with one another to look the most sensual. They pretend to be like their stars, who increasingly encourage them to undress.”<sup>119</sup>

Changes in customs are reflected in clothing styles that, effectively, are becoming more and more revealing. It would seem that stars ‘from elsewhere’ are responsible for these changes. While some complain about the way these young women dress, others seem to be more sympathetic to the facts: “[it’s] not easy [for her] to hide her curves in summer. No way, no more missing out on the fashion trends of 2007. Chosen as *the* summer clothing items by very ‘hip’ young women, mini-skirts and tights are the cornerstones of most every wardrobe. Behind this comment lies the reality; there has been significant change in the standards of beauty, whereby curvaceousness is no longer a criterion of beauty. Nowadays, women hide their curves and pay closer attention to their physiques.”

These undisciplined behaviours are obviously at odds with the plans of political authorities, led by the recently re-elected President, to make Dakar a modern city like Johannesburg... Might it not be suffering from the bad habits of its inhabitants, the majority of whom are rural folk that behave like Bushmen?”<sup>120</sup>

Bad behaviour is a rural phenomenon. While there is a strong contrast between the city and the countryside, each region has its way of life. Dakar's problem is that a fair percentage of its inhabitants come directly from the countryside and do not change their behaviour upon arrival in the city. "Dakar is a dirty city whose inhabitants must rid themselves of their bad habits and adopt behaviour consistent with life in modern cities."<sup>121</sup> Being a modern city thus supposes the eradication of certain practices mentioned here. "It is, therefore, for the authorities, a question of instilling in the people a new civic mentality, even if it means cracking down... The President of the Republic, who wants to build cities and make a modern country, must unflinchingly fight against the bad behaviour of his citizens. Dakar, indeed, must lose this image of a dirty city that it's been stuck with for more than a decade."<sup>122</sup>

The street is the place of societal transformation, and mapping shows that such transformations are taking place throughout the city. The people demand models that are more traditional, but from traditions elsewhere. They yearn for the right to dress like characters on TV series, yet give the authorities the right to implement means of repression like those we find in South Africa, in order to make Dakar a modern city.

*Cross-cutting themes in Dakar.* "This is one of the hideous faces of urbanisation in Dakar. This two-speed movement by which the poor are sacrificed at the expense of the rich and princes, that contrasts with the social future of Dakar, which is ever-growing because of rural populations who come in search of comfort and well-being."<sup>123</sup> This is the crux of the problem in Dakar, a paradoxical city, with a centre for the wealthy and suburbs (which are multiplying like carbon copies) for the poor, with strong spatial segregation and resulting social segregation. In 1952 (VERNIÈRE 1973), Pikine (a suburb) was created to temporarily relieve Dakar of overcrowding. Yet, it has become an example of an urban extension that quickly eluded the control of planning to become a rallying place of the poor.

As we saw in Nouakchott, different elements play an important role in structuring the street space. The same is true for Dakar.

The first is climate, and thus is linked to the cycle of seasons (namely the rainy season). Indeed, rain for weeks on end in Dakar each year brings its share of miseries, and while most of these problems exist year-round, they are exacerbated by the heavy rains. The environment becomes a problem, transport slows, and evictions make headlines again, all highlighting the state's shortcomings. For several months, everything seems to take on extraordinary proportions. This

AN EXAMPLE OF TITLES RELATIVE TO THE PUBLIC SPACE.







LE SUD QUOTIDIEN MAKES THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SPACE FRONT PAGE NEWS.

basic fact – ignored for decades now – must be taken into consideration when analysing public space.

The second element is the overwhelming presence of the state (mostly in the form of lack of) in public space. These shortcomings can be seen in waste management, major development projects, and evictions made on broken promises. However, the state also makes its physical presence felt in the many arrests, making police presence felt not only in the street but also in the press, which acts as a kind of middleman, impressing the idea that the city cannot escape the state. In Dakar, the state government handles everything; the management of crisis situations falls within its purview. People's expectations tend to be high, and the press castigates the government when nothing is done. The government, via its ubiquitous president, steps willingly into its role: that of a man of supreme power who manages the daily life of his people.

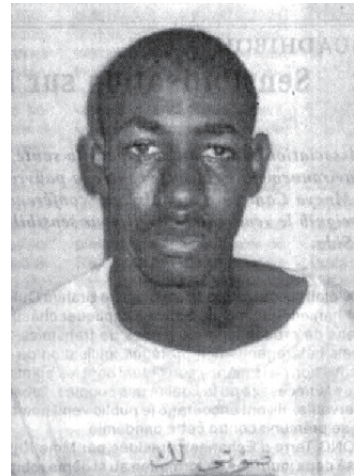
Finally, the third element is the fact that not all places have the same value. We can see this most notably in the way different neighbourhoods are managed. Some neighbourhoods receive aid, others do not. Power cuts are targeted and discriminatory, and evictions seemingly are carried out with no clear rules. Management of neighbourhoods is ultimately a combination of power struggles, policies, and segregation choices.

Based on these observations, we can conclude that the street continues to be a place of integration and resources for the poor. In addition to being a place for small business, begging, and prostitution, it is also a place for civil and civic activities of inhabitants, who exercise their rights through protest. For these populations, however, the street is above all an extension of the private sphere, into which their rights 'spill over.'

Through this analysis of Dakar, we learn that there is clear segregation between rich and poor as regards the use of the street. The street is no longer the playground of the elite, and use of public space differs according to social class and context. For instance, it is rare to see the African elite protesting outside of the Presidential Palace; their demands do not unfold in the street but in other spheres. The street thereby remains 'a place of the people' in the true sense of the term. For, while the public sphere is the place of the poor and its primary resource, the press insists on the fact that it is state's job to help them, and as poor people are highly present in public space, the state should be present there to assist them. If we do not seek the reasons for this inactivity objectively and honestly, we

ARTICLE ON THE DRESSING PRACTICES OF YOUNG WOMEN, WITH A PHOTO TO ILLUSTRATE!





come away only with the fact that it is the duty of a modern state to aid its poor. The state is visible in public space in the struggle against informal practices for two reasons. Firstly, these practices are considered the number-one cause of many of the bottlenecks in the land, economy, and transport sectors, to name only the most important. However, they are also the reason for the gap with regard to the image Dakar would like to have. The informal sector, therefore, is not synonymous with urban practices or urbanity, but, on the contrary – according to the press – with rural ways of life. And while the literature does not confuse the two terms, to the press they are clearly identical.

SCENES OF DAILY LIFE IN THE  
PUBLIC SPACE.



Our research on Abidjan is based on a sample of 485 newspapers, of which 224 (46%) had at least one article about public space; in other words, half of the editions made at least one reference to it. The 485 newspapers all together contained approximately 15,103 articles; of these, only 309 mentioned public space, which means that only 2% of articles were about public space either directly or indirectly, which is relatively negligible.

The leading topics were political ones and those linked to the conflict that has been ravaging the Ivory Coast since 2002 (either about the Bouaké region in the North of the country, or political decisions taken in Abidjan with regard to the conflict<sup>124</sup>). And as Guillaume Soro, Laurent Gbagbo, and Alassanne Ouattara make numerous speeches, this fills most of the newspapers' columns. Apart from the conflict, no other particular themes stand out, aside from a few words about sport, and a growing number of 'celebrity gossip' pages.

*The different themes and their respective importance.* While the theme of violence stands out among the others (with approximately 21% of articles), it is closely followed by another: the environment. Then, also ranking high, come transport and mobility issues and public space as a place of protest. We somehow imagined this theme would rank higher due to the conflict, but alas, it ranks only fourth. Chances are that an analysis of the entire country would have provided different results, but as we limited our investigation to the district of Abidjan, and most of the confrontation occurs in Bouaké – which is directly connected to the conflict zone – our results show otherwise.

The problems of managing space are discussed in 9% of the articles, directly linked either to the illegal occupation of space or to land and land use, and are the interface between the 'major' themes below and other issues, including: Built Space (5.5%), Daily Life (4.21%), Civil/Civic Activities (3.24%), Public Space as Network Support (3.24%) and The Street as Resource (3.24%).

*Violence and insecurity* (20.71%). Insecurity is regularly discussed in the press. Abidjan seems to be a dangerous place. Information on this topic is presented not only via detailed descriptions of violent acts; the articles likewise offer readers a more general view on safety issues.

IMPORTANCE OF THEMES IN THE  
ABIDJAN PRESS.

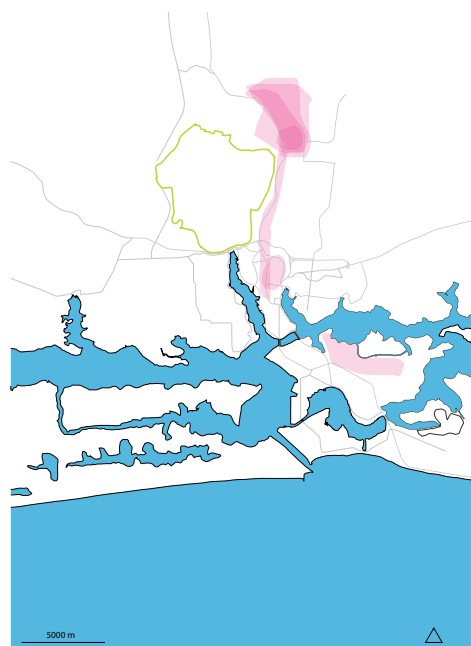
TOTAL	309	% Theme
Violence and insecurity		20.71
Network support	10	3.24
Transport and mobility	49	15.86
Environment	58	18.77
Use/management	28	9.06
Built space	17	5.50
Street as resource	10	3.24
Opinions/Protest	48	15.53
Civil and civic activities	12	3.88
Daily life, identity	13	4.21



VIOLENCE IN ABIDJAN.

INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT  
IN ABIDJAN.

Fortunately, however, the reality is slightly different. “Thank Goodness!” was the title of an article about “two robbers arrested,”<sup>125</sup> in which the press lauds the police’s efficiency. The journalist recounts the exploits of the two bandits, until their arrest by security forces – a parable of the triumph of the good of order over evil, but above all counteracting the strong feeling of insecurity in Abidjan that puts the city in the ‘dangerous’ category.



Although theft and attacks appear to be commonplace in most neighbourhoods, the press attempts to provide a distanced, inquiring perspective. Is insecurity growing in Abidjan? What can be done about the armed gangs? Tips on combating safety issues – which include police presence in dangerous neighbourhoods and cracking down on illegality (which is a source of violence) – are offered as examples. The discourse is unequivocal: poverty and illegality generate violence.

“Four individuals armed with Kalashnikovs and pistols carry out an attack” was the headline of *Fraternité Matin* on 24 May 2007. This is but one example among many that foster a growing sense of insecurity, the more one reads, as well as the impression of safety being a general problem all over the city, and that attacks of this kind can occur anywhere and at any time. The city described by the press is monstrous, dangerous, and violent.

*Infrastructure support* (3.24%). The main problem here is water. Even articles about roads often focus on tackling the problem of flooding, which “greatly inconveniences drivers, who have trouble finding their bearings in this stinking swamp, as well as pedestrians, who are exposed to foul splatterings. The most serious thing is that state of the roads is deteriorating because of...the water, which does not seem to concern the authorities or relevant organisations,”<sup>126</sup> and this is in the Boulevard De Gaulle, the very centre of Abidjan. The roads themselves do not pose a problem. During the winter, however, the streets and byroads, which are “flooded by the slightest rain,”<sup>127</sup> become a major concern for users, as the articles concisely summarize: “The

flooding of badly-maintained roads obstructs travel for residents, pedestrians, and drivers, 'causing traffic jams at rush hour.'<sup>128</sup> "The stench is unbearable,"<sup>129</sup> and it also raises the question of hygiene, as "people take advantage of the situation by removing the caps from their latrines and emptying the contents directly into the streets."<sup>130</sup>

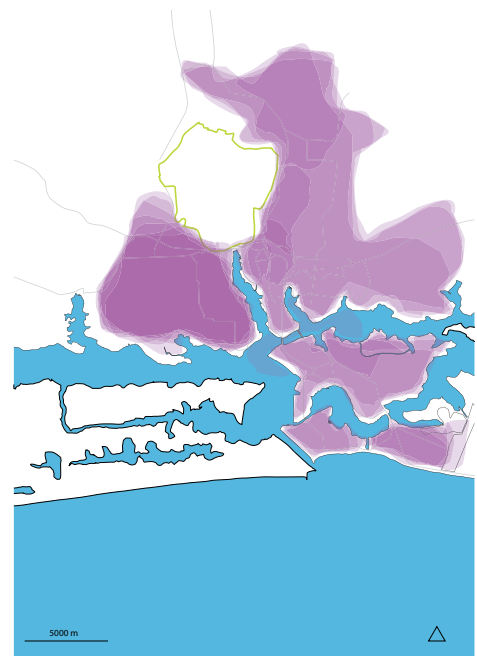
Flooding causes damage to the asphalt due to runoff. As the "District of Abidjan [is] powerless"<sup>131</sup> regarding this situation, French soldiers from Operation Unicorn sometimes compensate for the city's lack of resources by renovating retention basins, so that they can "capture runoff water as they did in the past."<sup>132</sup> Once again, both the problems and the actions taken are directly linked to the winter and the heavy rains in Abidjan.

*Transport and mobility* (15.86 %). Three items stand out in the press regarding public transport: praise for new equipment (the new Tata buses), other modes of transport (which are often outdated), and the controversy surrounding 'flat-rate' fares.

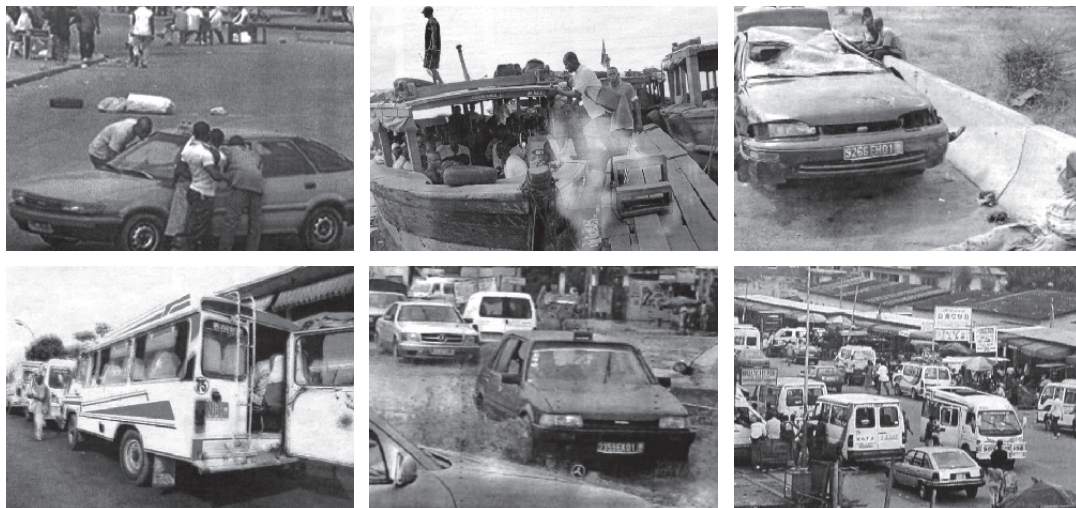
"The introduction of Tata buses is a source of pride for public institutions (SOTRA)"<sup>133</sup> which, in order to pay for them, had to appeal to "the UEMOA<sup>134</sup> financial market, through the issuance of a mandatory loan by means of a public bid"<sup>135</sup> – a deal worth CFA 12 billion.<sup>136</sup> However, controversy surrounds the purchased buses, as regards certain technical issues and their lack of appropriateness in the context. "These buses are ill-suited to inter-urban transport in Abidjan, where bus-stops are very close to one another, roads are in very bad condition, and buses are usually filled to 100 %, 150 % or even 200 % capacity."<sup>137</sup> "The only good thing is that they are cheaper than Renault buses."<sup>138</sup> However, lower costs in the very short term suggest higher operating costs than for the older models, even though it cost more to purchase them.

Other means of transport, especially makeshift solutions that populations use due to lack of alternative means (and lack of means in general) are described next. "Fast and economical, 'pinasses' and pirogues still worry some, far too prudent people. They fear the boats may capsize during boarding and prefer to take boat-buses."<sup>139</sup> "Illegal" transport can be dangerous but, despite this, is widely used, as it is the only means of transport the poor can afford for long distances. Though boarding these vessels can be risky, people do not see them as a way of avoiding poor roads and traffic, or of travelling faster. Road transport is the only transport imaginable.

TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY IN ABIDJAN.







VARIOUS TYPES OF PUBLIC AND  
PRIVATE TRANSPORT.

The 'flat-rate' fare is a "system that requires *gbaka* (municipal taxis), inter-municipal *wôrô-wôrô*, and meter taxis to pay a fixed daily rate to protect them from extortion."<sup>140</sup> The idea was initially greeted with enthusiasm by unions,<sup>141</sup> "reaffirming their support for the 'flat-rate' fare, which they see as a panacea against racketeering on the roads." However, they were soon disillusioned because racketeering by the security forces has not decreased, and moreover, transporters are now required to pay a tax, which they see as extortion by the government. The latter threaten to strike if the president does not put a halt to this flat-rate fare,<sup>142</sup> foreshadowing the unrest and protests that will undoubtedly follow if the flat-rate fare system is upheld in an already tense climate.

In addition to public transport issues, taxis themselves are a recurring theme. We quickly understand that taxis and organized crime often are intertwined. "Public transport vehicles such as taxis and *wôrô-wôrô* have become the Abidjan underworld's means of attack."<sup>143</sup> However, the crux of the problem lies elsewhere: "Every morning, I negotiate with metered-taxi drivers to get to work. From here, in Adjamé, to the Plateau, I always say 1,000 francs," he explains. "On Monday morning, it's more complicated. The meter-taxis know that, at the beginning of the week (especially at the beginning of the month), the demand is greater than the supply."<sup>144</sup> Despite there being a legal meter system, another mode of operation has been established, and the peoples' lack of means undoubtedly plays a role in this. On one hand, taxi drivers are struggling to earn a living; on the other, people do not earn enough to pay transport fares, as "travelling by meter taxi leaves you with empty pockets. From rigged meters to unexpected traffic jams, the interminable 'click-click' of the meter adds to the pain and drives you mad."<sup>145</sup> As fares are high, haggling often takes place. The taxi driver must assess fares based on the price of petrol, the number of journeys he can make in

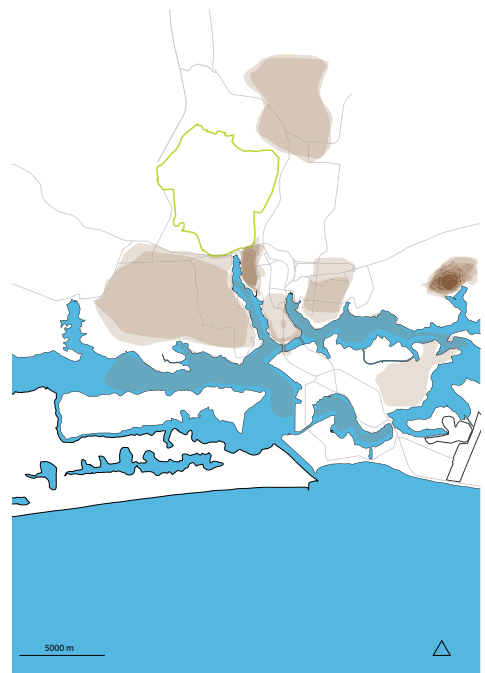
a day, the cost of hiring the vehicle, and his income needs, as well as supply and demand, the date, the time, or the next religious holiday. An ultra-free market has been created for public transport, or, in any case, for taxis.

While the government seems to want to modernise public transport, as evidenced by its attempts to regain control of the transport sector and bring legality back into transportation management, illegal practices have become the only solution to the financial impossibility of developing within a legal framework, due to the economic crisis.

*Environment* (18.77 %). Undoubtedly the most talked-about environmental event in 2006 was when the Greek cargo ship Probo Koala unloaded toxic products in Abidjan, leaving 94 dead from contamination. The victims, not all of whom died, and their families claimed damages, which were slow in coming. In the end, Trafigura, the company responsible for the accident, offered less than 100 billion CFA. The government decided to take 68 billion and leave victims with 20 billion CFA, or 200,000 CFA<sup>146</sup> per person. “Two hundred thousand francs. That’s the price of a sheep for Tabaski [a religious festival]. We’re worth more than a Tabaski sheep,”<sup>147</sup> said the outraged Olivier Dago Zaté, General Secretary of the Toxic Waste Victims Alliance. “200,000 francs is not enough and does not even cover the costs we’ve incurred.”<sup>148</sup>

This story, in fact, points to a larger phenomenon: dumping large quantities of toxic waste on land on the outskirts of cities is common practice. Many cities have become open-air dumps for European industrial companies. For a little money, many municipalities, individuals, and even state governments are willing to accept what the North does not want – its waste. A second important factor exists regarding the environment. “It should be borne in mind that the phenomenon of houses collapsing is recurrent in the district of Attécoubé every rainy season.”<sup>149</sup> Rain has an enormous impact on public space, and the problems that occur each rainy season raise questions regarding illegal building. “The flooding of homes built on undeveloped and illegal sites,”<sup>150</sup> problematic construction, and those built on unbuildable sites are discussed (such as “populations living close to a ravine that is likely to collapse”),<sup>151</sup> as is the government’s *laissez-faire* attitude. Even though liability is attributed to traditional leaders, the situation persists because the institutions in charge of such mandates are unable to deal with them, admittedly for financial reasons, but also because

THE ENVIRONMENT IN ABIDJAN.





THE WASTE STORAGE ISSUE.



of lack of space to relocate these populations.

The problems primarily appear to be linked to the rainy season, during which “we noted that all the streets of the Recasement district [become] lakes.”<sup>152</sup> As “the neighbourhood is not serviced and there is no drainage system, there is stagnant rainwater everywhere, creating an artificial lake”<sup>153</sup> – a lake of rubbish and sewage amidst houses, resulting in two additional problems: a clear increase in disease and the slow death of ecosystems: “Cocody Bay is dying before our eyes,”<sup>154</sup> and “Abidjan, the jewel of lagoons yesterday, [is] the jewel of refuse today,” according to the *Ministre de la Ville et de la salubrité urbaine*.<sup>155</sup>

The populations’ unsafe practices and bad habits are among the causes. “Community living and respect for basic hygiene rules do not seem to exist in Koumassi in particular and Abidjan in general.”<sup>156</sup> “People must stop throwing their litter around.”<sup>157</sup> Public space has become a dumping ground for the waste – both solid and liquid – produced in homes.

Given the problems just described, evicting inhabitants living in illegal housing is often seen as a solution, especially given that those living in these neighbourhoods do so, by definition, without authorisation. The press suggests ‘bringing order’ and putting an end to squatting, as if the poor squat by choice. Another solution, proposed in several articles, is for the police to impose fines. Finally, a third solution proposes to change people’s practices. “Let’s start by changing our mentality,” announced *Ministre de la Ville et de la Salubrité urbaine* Mel Eg Théodore.<sup>158</sup> Before awareness campaigns are introduced, the minister – in a reproving tone – asks that each person take responsibility and act with civic pride.

*Occupation/management* (9.06%). With regard to land, illegal sales by land chiefs are often the root cause of problems. “This site is part of a 789-hectare parcel that has shrunk dramatically over the years, with the ‘help’ of Mr Kokora N’Goly François. Now, there are only 19 hectares left.”<sup>159</sup> Another example was a headline in *24 Heures*: “Illegal sale of land in Abobo.”<sup>160</sup> “Is the generational struggle between members of the Dougbo to control the traditional leadership of the village of Agban in the municipality of Attécoubé drawing to a close?”<sup>161</sup>

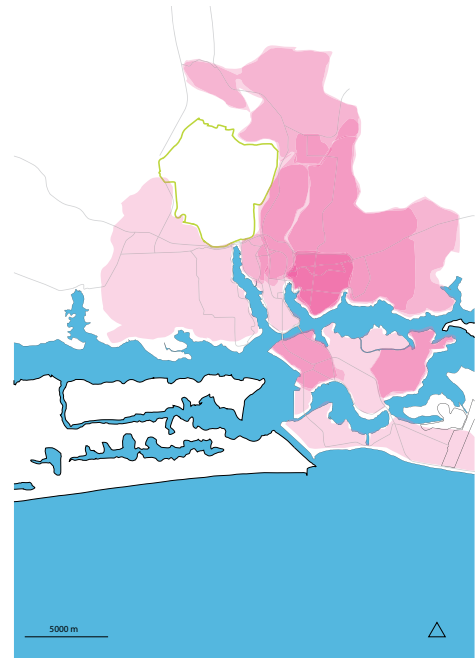
This question points directly to the crux of the issue: the division and control of land, bearing in mind that urban land is still partly managed by traditional chiefs. Hence, two systems overlap here: the modern system of state law, and the traditional system of customary rights.

In addition to land issues, public space likewise faces the issue of the illegal markets in the streets, as a great many traders set up their stalls directly on the pavement. To combat this 'scourge,' municipalities regularly send in bulldozers, as *Jour Plus* describes: "Buckled iron booths, shops and stalls totally destroyed... Bricks, rubble, and broken planks everywhere. This is what small businesses looked like at 10 o'clock this morning...after the bulldozer had passed through the street."<sup>162</sup> Such evictions reflect a desire to combat an unhealthy environment and 'clean' the city.

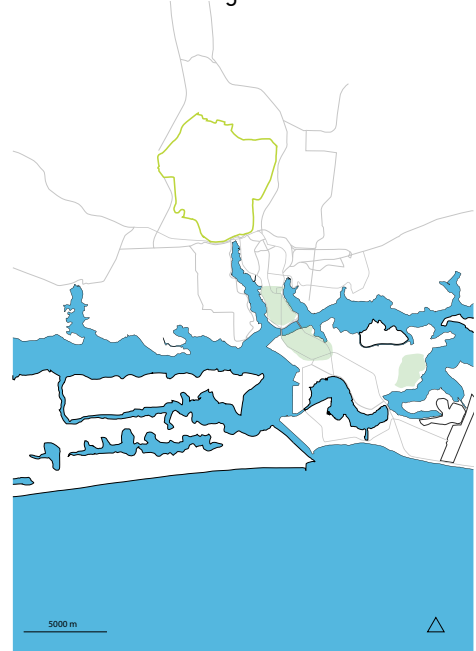
"All those vendors who damage the environment each day with plastic bags, newspapers, banana skins and orange peels, etc.,"<sup>163</sup> states one article discussing norms and the dangers stalls represent when vendors fail to respect them. This is the official argument authorities use to justify evictions, although no one seems convinced by it. Indeed, as much of the city does not meet norms, one wonders why it is that only a few stalls have fallen prey to this desire to 'meet norms.'

But the markets are also linked to racketeering and corruption, and the stalls destroyed are those that have not paid the city's unofficial 'tax.' A mafia system exists, in which traders must pay to keep their spot each month. Should they fail to do so, the bulldozers roll in. "Each trader must pay the sum of 50,000 CFA – those that did were spared."<sup>164</sup> In its fight against illegality, the municipality developed a scale to measure vendors' legality. Officially, no one has the right to stay. However, those who do have the fortune of seeing their equipment spared.

*Built space* (5.5%). "The big problem in the industrial zone is that many owners simply use their... land for purposes other than creating industrial units. We recall in July 2003, when Ahoussou-Kouadio



OCCUPATION AND  
MANAGEMENT IN ABIDJAN.  
THE BUILT SPACE IN ABIDJAN.



Jeannot, the *Ministre de l'Industrie et de la Promotion du secteur privé* at the time, visited a 4,000m<sup>2</sup> plot only to discover that the owner had chosen instead to build his home.” This brings us back to central themes of illegality and informal practices that emerge in the press. We will return to this later in the text, in the conclusion of the chapter on Abidjan.

*The street as resource* (3.24%). While any observer may note large numbers of vendors, prostitutes, and beggars in the streets, this somehow manages to escape the press.

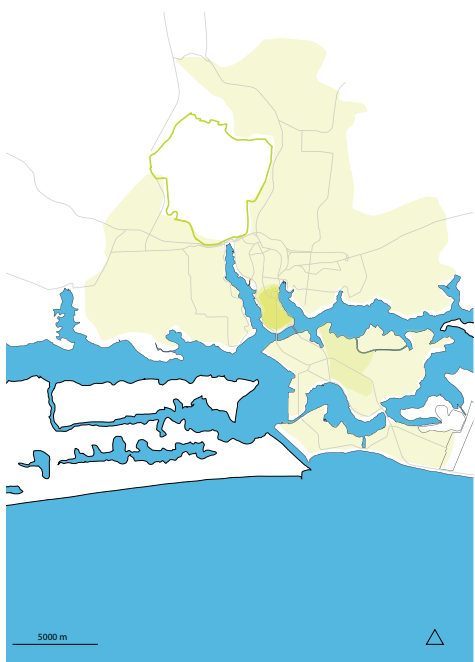
Among the rare articles on this topic is a piece on prostitution in the Ménéklé<sup>165</sup> market. In the case of prostitution, we understand that a public place like a market may also prove to be a potentially prime source of income. The article does not shy away from discussing figures or describing how much women earn (ranging between 5,000 CFA a night and 25–30,000 CFA on hot nights during the weekend).<sup>166</sup> Such details portray prostitution as a profession in its own right and, moreover, a lucrative one. No mention is made of the misery that prostitution causes, or of the violence, or of having to sell one's body. While not described in a positive light, prostitution is not perceived completely negatively either.

The article also informs readers that, at night, the streets and market transform and practices change. During the day, the market lives from the sale of garments; at night, it becomes a huge prostitution zone. Stalls in booths become so many

'beds' lined up next to one another, where clients come to buy sex. The article gives us interesting background information regarding the role of the police and the extortion by security forces. “Two officers arrived. Anderson hastened to explain that he could not give them 1,000 CFA just then. One of them seemed to understand, while the other decided to arrest one of the girls.”<sup>167</sup> Behind this anecdote we glimpse how public space is controlled by security forces and a *laissez-faire* attitude regarding illegal practices in exchange for money.

After prostitution, begging is the most addressed topic in the columns of *Fraternité Matin*.<sup>168</sup> As in the case of prostitution, it is difficult to learn how much women earn by begging, although the article raises this question. One old woman refuses to say what she earns from her 'activity.' “People don't give me much. Only 10 or 25 francs. I hardly earn 200 francs a day,” she explains, and to prove it, she holds out a bowl containing only 35 francs.<sup>169</sup> The article also

THE STREET AS A RESOURCE IN  
ABIDJAN.



tells us that it is mainly women who beg in the street. While the street topics discussed earlier do not appear to be gendered, begging is a striking example of a gendered issue: only women beg.

However, the profiles of these women are not homogeneous, and competition exists between foreign beggars and Ivorian beggars, reflecting racism with regard to non-Ivorians.

This is the case for these ladies from Burkina Faso or Tuareg women, who were undoubtedly honourable mistresses of the house back in their own country but now pose stiff competition for (local) beggar women at intersections and in front of mosques. To outdo our beggars, they have innovated by putting their children in front of them.<sup>170</sup>

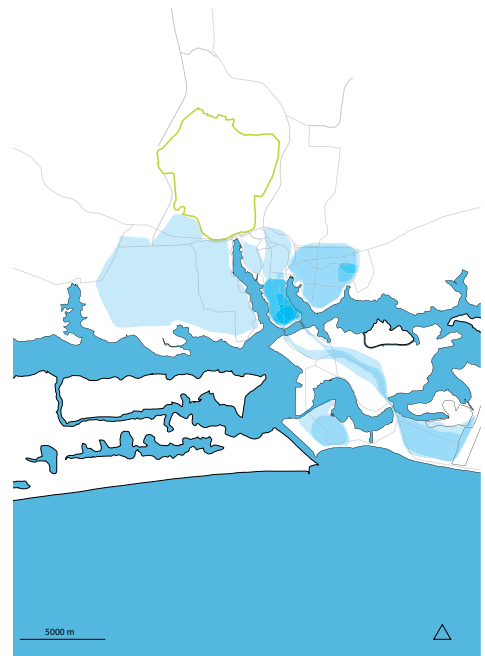
Children are used to evoke pity from passers-by in the hopes that they will give more generously. However, this phenomenon is not new, and whether sent out alone or with adults, the result is the same – children increase earnings.

We also learn that there are specific places for begging, as they mention “intersections and in front of mosques,” as well as specific times and days. Fridays, especially “during *jurna*’ prayer, which takes place every Friday at 1pm,”<sup>171</sup> seems to be the preferred time for beggars, who apparently come out in flocks. However, not all places equal, and timing plays a major role. Without citing them by name, the author refers to Muslims (mosques, Friday prayers), whom he describes as responsible for the begging that takes place in the streets of Abidjan, again reflecting the problem of community acceptance.

*Space of protest* (15.53%). Of the articles on demonstrations and protests, none mention peaceful demonstrations that do not get out of hand. All adhere to the same basic pattern: discontent gone awry. The causes of this discontent vary, ranging from the difficult economic times to a minister who makes a ‘bad’ decision, which is followed by people taking to the streets and, typically, destruction, and symbolic looting. “Faced with the lack of teachers, angry students began to march, led by the Fesci [students union] presidents of different sections. The streets of Cocody were paralysed for almost 30 minutes. However, this did not satisfy the determination of the students, some of whom set their sights on storming the offices of Lidho<sup>172</sup> on Rue Mermoz.”<sup>173</sup>

“Not satisfied with the arrest and sentencing of a member of their group by the public prosecutor, the people of Locodjro (Adjamé) staged a violent demonstration”<sup>174</sup> – a case of retaliation for one

SPACE OF PROTEST IN ABIDJAN.





of their own. Examples of this kind abound, wherein students or residents of certain neighbourhoods or communities show their discontent by directly and physically attacking the person responsible because one of their own has (in their opinion) suffered from prejudice.

Demonstrations are always held at (or in protest of) symbolic sites. In Abidjan, such sites are found throughout the city. Thus, protest is not Plateau-centric and remains effectively decentralised.

*Civil activities* (3.88%). Among the articles, we find announcements both for future festivities and reports of events that have taken place. “50,000 fans celebrated Drogba” was the headline of *24 Heures*,<sup>175</sup> while *Fraternité Matin* reported:

We'd expected to see Abidjan's bars, clubs, and other festive meeting places packed, in order to hail the resurrection of Christ their own way. But no! There was an everyday ambiance in the economic capital's different venues for the people of Abidjan over the long Easter weekend.”

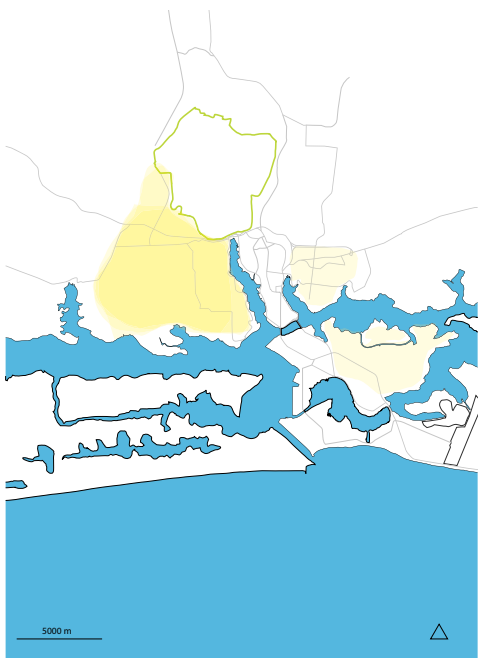
Lovers of the beverage [beer] gathered in Ficgayo on 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> May for the Beer Festival. Over the three days, the district turned into a series of bars, chosen from among the square's best.”<sup>176</sup>

Despite the impression of nonstop partying in the streets an observer might have upon visiting the city, special events are organised on a periodical basis, and strive to outdo one another with their activities, decibels of music, and quantities of beer. Apart from the fact that it is almost exclusively the district of Yopougon that is mentioned, there is little left to say on this topic.

*Daily life/identity* (4.21%). “When banking becomes a nightmare. Long, tiresome hours waiting for inefficient ‘money computers’ that are often out of order. Withdrawing money at the end of the month can be an uphill battle.”<sup>177</sup> The issue of cash point machines may appear trivial, but nevertheless reveals a great deal about life in the city.

The teacher, who works in Dabou, made the most of his day off like many of his colleagues to go to the bank. ‘There aren't any banks in most of the towns around Abidjan, so all the civil servants working there have no choice but to come here,’ he explained. Using cash points has become standard practice and, regardless, the banks are not open long enough to serve everyone. Although the trend seems have grown since the introduction of ‘machines,’ long queues have always existed in the streets at the beginning of the month, when workers receive their pay. However, using cash points gives

CIVIL AND CIVIC SPACE IN  
ABIDJAN.



rise to other difficulties, especially with regard to the amount of time required to withdraw money. One explanation [for this] is provided by one customer who claims that 'it takes far too long to go to the counter,' before adding, with a hint of humour, that 'this machine is probably an old one sent over from France' (because of its capriciousness). Another explanation is 'that there is always the chance it will break down or run out of cash, not to mention the cards that get stuck in them because people don't use them properly.'<sup>178</sup>

Many machines are empty or out of order, and when a machine *is* in working order, it is often customers' lack of skill in using the machine that causes long queues. We observed that guards are on hand not only for security reasons, but also to help people withdraw money by explaining how to use the machine.

Above all, it is the long wait in the street that is seen as a form of punishment – apart from the person who did not have to suffer like a "martyr like the others, with sweat pouring down them, obliged to use whatever they happened to be holding [folders, newspapers, etc.] as protection from the sun's burning rays as best they can, because he was 'accompanied by [his] young brother, who's standing in the queue [for him]. Today he's going to find out how it's often difficult to get money.'" We will return to this tale later in our analysis, as it demonstrates a very interesting aspect of the African street. Basically, for a coin or two, one can always find a smaller, poorer stand-in willing to perform almost all of one's day-to-day errands.

*Major issues of the street.* In Abidjan, three main points stand out: the climate, poverty, and informal practice. The seasons mark public spaces. In Abidjan, it is the rainy season that is felt most strongly. The heavy rains exacerbate the city's problems, which of course exist the rest of the year. During the rainy season, however, these problems take on exceptional dimensions, making them a major element in public space. Again, the deterioration of the roads due to runoff, traffic congestion, landslides, and sanitation problems (diseases caused by stagnant water and general lack of hygiene) are all phenomena that occur during the rainy season. No particular site or district is more affected than another; its entire area is affected, and Plateau and other prestigious residential areas are no exception. It is, however, the informal and working-class neighbourhoods that suffer the most and where the greatest damage occurs.

The second element that structures public space is poverty. Although classic definitions of poverty list several types (material, skill-based, social, etc.), in this case it is strictly a question of economic poverty, which forces



DAILY LIFE IN ABIDJAN.



DIFFICULTY UNLOADING FRUIT  
DURING THE RAINY SEASON.

populations to develop strategies to compensate for their lack of resources. Begging and prostitution are two such survival strategies directly linked to poverty. When the street becomes a resource for its users, it is highly likely that the latter are poor. Going further, we could even say that they live in extreme poverty, the poverty of prostitution and begging, for which the fee to enter into the sector is zero. Hence, no nest egg is required to start earning a living (unlike cigarette sellers, for example, who must have start-up capital).

Many survival strategies are born of this poverty, with some using the street as a source of income and others turning to violence (crime, muggings and theft). Extortion is also an important factor, and while not an invention of the poor (far from it, in fact) it emerges in many situations wherein police, in particular, supplement their income by extorting private cars, taxis, buses, and passers-by. These methods are also directly linked to the scant financial resources of a class of civil servants that are financially responsible for large extended families.<sup>179</sup>

Mobility is likewise difficult for the poor, as they do not have the resources to use fast, secure public transport. Furthermore, the neighbourhoods they live in are not equipped with road networks and are often inaccessible for pedestrians, meaning they must travel great distances to reach places that are relatively close 'as the crow flies.' And when they happen to have a little money, they are forced to haggle with taxi-drivers and vendors.

The press treats poverty as though it were the *root* of the problem, and rarely the consequence. Articles almost never show compassion for those who have to struggle to survive, and poverty is always portrayed in a negative light – as though the issue was whether poverty were a good thing or not. And yet, a phenomenon that is the result of society's choices (and not the cause) cannot be dealt with this way. Still, the most disadvantaged classes are harshly criticized.

The third element is the informal practices of the street. The case of taxi-meters is a striking example of the superimposition of a formal and informal management of social relations. To deal with 'anarchic' fare setting practices, the government required that each vehicle use a meter and the fares be negotiated per kilometric unit. However, it is the customer who must bear the brunt of the 'click-click' when the taxi hits traffic, making shopping extremely expensive during rush hour or in the rainy season, when the streets are almost



DURING THE RAINY SEASON, THE  
ROADS BECOME IMPASSABLE.

impassable and journeys take far longer. The result is a decline in taxi use, as customers simply can no longer afford them. Inevitably, taxi drivers – who also have to earn their living – are forced to react outside the legal framework by offering ‘unmetered’ journeys, calculating the fare for the trip based on how many journeys they can make in the day, how much money they must earn, the price of petrol, and the cost of hiring the vehicle (a daily fee for which they pay its owner). Customer, too, must calculate how much they are willing to pay for a journey. Negotiations then ensue between the customer and driver, the result of which greatly depends on the day, time of day, and whether the holidays are imminent, all of which affect supply and demand.

This is almost a textbook case of an illegal system piggybacking onto a legal one. One does not replace the other; instead the two combine based on supply and demand and coexist, shifting back and forth between the two modes of management depending on the circumstances. Two interesting points emerge that are worth looking at in greater detail. First, there is the city’s obvious lack of financial resources and, hence, the plight for a vast majority of the population, forcing them to find alternatives to those offered by the legal framework, making shifting from legality to illegality a survival skill.

As a result – and this is one of the more difficult points to grasp – informal practices define liberal economic relationships, implementing the principles of increased competition and regulation of these relationships by market forces. In the case of taxi fares, negotiations take place between the customer and driver. However, if these negotiations are unsuccessful and the customer waits, another driver will come along, who, urgently needing a little money for petrol, will be forced to work at a loss just to fill his petrol tank, which will, once again, permit him to demand higher fares. This framework – with the economic crisis shattering the last normative and social barriers – is more like an economic jungle, wherein everyone must be able to adapt in order to survive.



COMPLETELY EMPTY ROAD SPACE  
IN THE CITY CENTRE.



THE PRESS SHOWS SCENES OF  
DAILY LIFE.



BUS STATION IN THE CITY  
CENTRE.

The occupation of space is another example of the overlapping of two types of management. On the one hand, vendors who set up their stalls on the roads causes problems (traffic and environmental) and are not in compliance with the legal framework that prohibits such practices. On the other hand, municipalities tolerate this and, in many cases, are able to collect taxes from it, which is often their sole source of income. Depending on the political or economic climate, vendors are threatened with eviction, and are thus faced with the legal framework, while authorities continue to tax and extort them, leaving them in a Catch-22. Hence informal practices, following the government's example, lead to corruption, racketeering, and mafia practices.

The landslides that threaten poor neighbourhoods are the result of three factors. The poor build their homes in places formal planning does not exist (on hillsides or in slum areas prone to flooding). This is the result of real estate logic: as the price of land is lower in non-buildable areas, this is naturally where the poor are forced build. In addition, there is little risk of eviction since the land has little value to the market.

Public space can be understood in three ways. The first has to do with places of protest, which shows the importance of the street in this enterprise. When governing bodies no longer use all of the mechanisms of power, a counter-power establishes itself in the street. This is what has occurred in Abidjan, where certain decisions are taken by or in reaction to the street – a clear sign of the dysfunction of the state system. The second aspect is the development of an economic trend. Beyond the strict framework, daily practices give rise to new ways of

doing things (i.e. informal practices) in order to survive. We will not recite the case of taxi-meters and the system created to circumvent this problem, but will simply stress that, in a situation of extreme economic crisis, a parallel system develops to sidestep the rules. The third point is that public space must be understood as an entity in constant flux (i.e., between day and night, when the markets become outdoor brothels). The street adapts very quickly to changes: one morning it is a space of the ruling power, and that of the opposition the next. In a single day, the informal business sector decides to reassert its rights. Signs of multi-functionality are evident depending on the time, day, week, or month.





# COMPARING CITIES

## Chapter 5

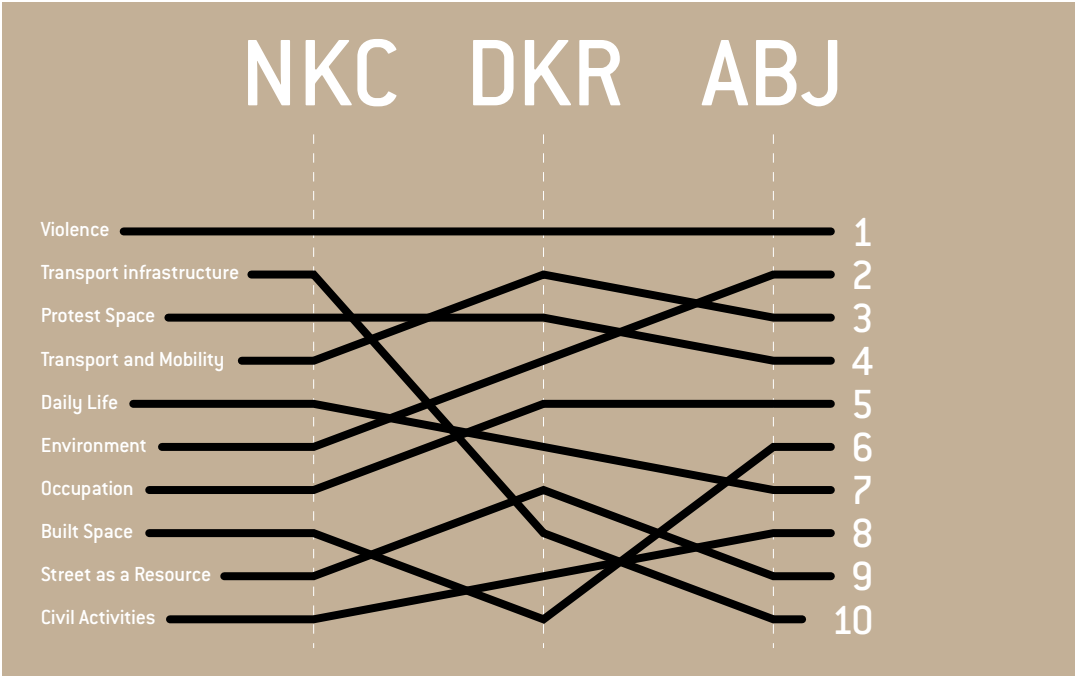
Having given a detailed presentation of each case study, we will now compare the issues at stake in the different cities. Where do the differences lie? What do the cities have in common?

To summarize, we should bear in mind that, of all the press articles, the percentage that address public space was 3.7% in Nouakchott, 1.57% in Dakar and 2.04% in Abidjan – extremely low figures in all three cases – showing that public space is not a key issue, at least not for the press.

Globally, the issue of violence ranks first in all three cities. There are, however, subtle differences. For instance, in Abidjan and Dakar this theme was followed closely by other themes, whereas in Nouakchott, violence was head and shoulders above the others.

After violence, transportation and mobility issues were major themes in two cities (second and third for Dakar and Abidjan, respectively). Although this was

RANK BY THEME AND BY CITY.



not a priority topic in Nouakchott, we see that it is nevertheless a key issue. Next came *spaces of protest*, which was near the top for all three (3<sup>rd</sup> in Nouakchott, 3<sup>rd</sup> in Dakar and 4<sup>th</sup> in Abidjan). The last notable category, the *environment*, was less important in Nouakchott (6<sup>th</sup>) than Abidjan.

The other themes were relatively insignificant by comparison. One exception, however, was *the street as network support*, which ranked near the top in Nouakchott but not in the other two cities.

Issues concerning the *occupation and management of public space* ranked in the middle for all three cities. Though not a priority topic, identical problems can be seen consistently and in similar proportions in all of them.

With the exception of issues of *infrastructure* and the *environment*, the other themes ranked similarly, indicating that the problems are more or less the same despite the cities' differences. The slight variations can be understood in terms of how information is processed; the environment does not provoke the same discussion in Abidjan as in Nouakchott. Nonetheless, the hierarchical order of the key issues was the same for the three cities. Apart from certain specificities, problems relative to public space in Dakar and Nouakchott are identical.

*Infrastructure support.* The topic of networks has two major elements. While Nouakchott has great difficulty in supplying its population with drinking water, Dakar and Abidjan's problems above all concern road networks.

An initial explanation could be the climate and lack of water in Mauritania (long periods of water stress), which flows abundantly in the other two cities. Although Dakar can also have periods of severe drought, Abidjan appears to be spared this phenomenon; on the contrary, its overly abundant rains also cause serious urban problems.

Electricity is a secondary issue in Nouakchott, though its causes are the same as that of water scarcity: extremely high temperatures. Electricity is important in Dakar, but is seemingly not a problem in Abidjan, where electrical supply issues lead to setting up an informal bypass system of managing networks through pirated connections.

Power cuts take place in both Nouakchott and Dakar in the poorest neighbourhoods (working-class neighbourhoods and the outskirts). Through a form of segregation, a geography of electricity can be clearly identified in these two cities, resulting in an increase in informal practices.

## Lutte contre l'insalubrité

## Mel Eg Théodore promet de ne



« Pour le Diable, archange de la ville et de la culture urbaine, d'une conférence de presse à l'hôtel Bristol, je nous ai tous amenés par moi-même, tous les uns devant les autres, nous sommes restés et bien sentés ». Amour du rythme « quel projet pour la ville ? », les yeux fermés, après avoir dit :

A.F.D.

[illegible]

## Recherche en tradition orale

## Cissé Baongo adopte le CNRTO

des Etats centraux et la répression de la violence. Les Etats centraux ont réorganisé en 1997 leur système de sécurité, en créant l'Unité d'Etat, la nouvelle Division des Affaires Internes (DIA) et le Centre national de la sécurité intérieure (CNSI). Le CNSI est un département autonome, du type de ceux qui existent dans les Etats fédéraux, et qui est chargé de la sécurité intérieure.

## Violation des droits humains

La Coordination des organisations de la société civile et des (COSC), n'a pas fait dans la capitale pour dire son

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# e réveiller

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de bien. Les hommes de bien  
forment un milieu rural et  
urbain qui traversent difficile-  
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sociaux, économiques et  
politiques que les organisations  
religieuses ont souvent pu leur  
aider à surmonter par l'Etat  
protestant. Les paysans, s'ils  
sont intelligents, s'en rendent

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l'absence de l'Etat est une  
mauvaise chose. C'est la première fois  
[...] que l'Opus accepte la  
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qui reconnaît le rôle des  
missionnaires, prêche le  
conservatisme. Les laboran-  
tes français s'accrochent de  
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certainement efficace que  
les 300.000 missionnaires qui  
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take place in both the poorest neighbourhoods and the outer suburbs, a geographical pattern clearly identified in the early 1990s. There was an increase in informal

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la société civile et des syndicats de diverses organisations non gouvernementales, des organisations de

Road networks are a major issue in Dakar and Abidjan. While in Dakar it is linked to the president's major public works projects, in Abidjan it is linked to flooding and, hence, the rainy season.

However, while major works explain some of the problems in Dakar, there are other phenomena involved as well. The rains make it such that roads become impracticable during the winter. Driving practices (or, rather, illegal driving practices) also add to the problem.

Flooded roads hinder travel, and likewise engender serious health problems. The effect on public space is especially notable in Abidjan, where rainwater stagnates longer than elsewhere. The key point here – beyond the lack of water, electricity, and roads – is that network problems affect other areas as well, including hygiene and health (for stagnant water) and demonstrations and violence (for water shortages).

In our examples, poor neighbourhoods suffer the most in terms of shortages with regard to infrastructure and many other issues. What is more, the government barely reacts. Yet, the people expect solutions, as the common property that is the street, in fact, belongs to the authorities; as such, the latter are expected to solve its problems. It is not the municipalities that are blamed but central government, regardless of the progress of decentralisation. Shortages are one of the tactics the government uses to put pressure on the people. At times, it abuses power with inegalitarian responses, creating segregation between neighbourhoods and offering vote-catching responses that do not meet actual needs.

*Transport and mobility.* Although there are subtle differences between the cities, it is clear that getting about is a major issue, and whatever the mode of transport, it is difficult for people to move. Not surprisingly, the poorer the population, the more difficult it is for them to move – for reasons ranging from the cost of transport to having to travel ever greater distances (urban sprawl) to increased travel time due to traffic congestion and road conditions, as the price of the journey depends not only on distance, but also how long the journey takes. Traffic congestion, caused by the rainy season and the poor driving practices of those who do not respect the highway code (using any means necessary to reduce their journey time), is egalitarian in that everyone is effected in an identical manner, regardless of social class.

Despite this apparent equality, the fact remains that the most disadvantaged



A SERIES OF NOSTALGIC ARTICLES ON CHANGES IN PUBLIC SPACE WHICH APPEARED IN THE AUTHENTIQUE QUOTIDIEN OF NOUAKHOTT.

Palais, Infrastructures, chefferie traditionnelle à Yamoussoukro

## L'héritage d'Houphouët part en lambeaux

**François RABATTE**  
C'est une surprise,  
à l'heure où les  
ministres de l'Éducation  
sont en vacances.  
Mais c'est aussi une  
bonne surprise, à l'heure  
où les ministres de  
l'Éducation sont en  
vacances.

Le 15 août, le ministre  
de l'Éducation, Jean-  
Louis Borloo, a annoncé  
qu'il allait démissionner.  
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vacances.

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Les barbes et les diables

[illegible]

1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2000; 283: 2689-2696.

**24**  
heures  
*Politique*

[illegible]

pour que cet État de droit ne soit pas un simple slogan. C'est ce manifeste pour la défense de la justice, en 2005, la Cour de la République a signé. Un grand nombre de personnes ont participé à une manifestation dans le centre de la ville de la capitale. Une manifestation de la justice, du « Roi de la justice ».

**ANNONCE**  
DA à la croisée des  
de Lamoussoulou  
**et cadres se  
pour la mairie**

**se délaissée  
oulot accuse.  
le reproche  
anny et KKB**

100

can only travel by foot and that, for them, travel poses a major issue, the busy city roads becoming like so many un-crossable borders.

Populations that do have access to public transport must face fare cost, as mentioned earlier, as well as the risk of traffic accidents; the poor condition of vehicles undoubtedly plays a part in this. It was partly to tackle this dilapidation that the government intervened in Dakar and Abidjan to fund the public transport sector (with new equipment and management). The primary reason for state intervention in these cities was to regain control of a sector that has gotten out of hand, and to clamp down on informal practices by 'formalising' the sector, in particular by purchasing new buses (Tata-brand buses in both cities) to combat the express coaches and other *ndiaga-ndiaye* one finds in Dakar – and that are synonymous with informal practices. However, although the government is taking steps to combat informal practices, it nonetheless continues

ARTICLE FROM THE DAILY  
24 HEURES DESCRIBING  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN  
ABIDJAN.

to “deal” in the realm of the informal through extortion, common to the three cities.

To conclude, in all three cities there is awareness that traffic needs to flow more smoothly. Dakar needs to construct major road works (motorways and bypass roads), Abidjan needs to manage bottlenecks, and Nouakchott needs to change driving practices. In all three cases, smooth-flowing traffic and mobility are crucial.

*The Environment.* The environment is not a major theme in Nouakchott (9.56%), is somewhat more so in Dakar (12.82%), and is a key issue in Abidjan with 18.77% (after violence). In all three cases, it is an important topic, and in Nouakchott probably more so than elsewhere, although the numbers do not reflect this. Waste is the main cause of the issue, especially solid waste, which is everywhere in the street. While in Nouakchott the concern regards the city's image, it is for reasons of hygiene and disease in cities where the rainy season poses a major health concern.

People's practices are largely to blame for this. There is a tremendous lack of understanding with regard to the dangers of waste. People live amidst waste; it is dumped in public areas with no concern for the consequences. The overflow of private waste into public space is interesting in itself, with the street being seen as a place of storage.

As with most other areas, the environment primarily affects the most vulnerable

populations – a constant whereby, regardless of the problem, it is the outskirts and any other impoverished areas that are the most at risk.

To conclude, although the environment is not the main concern in Nouakchott, it is, however, in this city that the situation is the most serious. The dune ridge, which protects the city from the seawater, is fragile in many places. Hence there is a real threat of flooding in the city, though this does not seem to worry the authorities. The neighbourhoods facing the greatest risk are the Sebkhia and El Mina areas.

Raised awareness of environmental issues would undoubtedly change everyday practices. However, this is not the case for the time being, and though these problems are obvious (not merely rhetoric and concepts about climate change), populations have difficulty seeing environmental restrictions as anything but a secondary concern in the hierarchy of their daily needs.

*Occupation and management of space.* Newspapers talk about land in Abidjan and Dakar, but not in Nouakchott. This hides a different reality. Land problems are, in fact, equally pressing in Mauritania but are only discussed in connection to public space. While, in Abidjan, traditional and modern rights overlap and land is sold to the highest bidder, this is not common practice in Nouakchott, where land is occupied through gradual encroachment, with private space spilling over into the street.

Markets are an important element. They are the ideal place for informal practices, where everything is managed outside government control, even though municipalities tax market stalls. With a business opportunity and a few square meters of free land (STECK 2007), a stall pops up, then another, and so on. Ultimately, the markets spill over into the streets, leaving barely enough room for pedestrians and cars to pass. This is the case in all three cities.

The municipalities castigate vendors who take over the street and impede automobile traffic and, yet, collect taxes – a major source of income – from them. It should be stressed that the street seems to be a place of individual practices, where an 'every man for himself' philosophy seems to prevail. Public space is managed as though there were no rules, as though anyone may use it as he pleases. Obviously this caricature is only partially true, as regulations for street vending exist. But these rules are negotiated between users, and the authorities rarely get involved, thus leaving the street to clans, corporations, and ethnic groups.

**LES ÉLECTIONS**

**La culture pour montrer une image positive des banlieues**

Le 10 mai 2010, à 18 heures, au Centre culturel de la ville de Nouakchott, une soirée a été organisée pour présenter les œuvres de la collection « Culture positive » de la ville de Nouakchott. Cette collection, qui vise à valoriser le patrimoine culturel et artistique des habitants des banlieues, a été présentée par le directeur général de la ville, M. Mohamed El Ghannouchi. Les œuvres, réalisées par des artistes locaux, ont été achetées par la ville de Nouakchott et sont maintenant exposées au Centre culturel de la ville. M. El Ghannouchi a souligné l'importance de cette collection pour montrer une image positive des banlieues et a encouragé les habitants à participer à de telles initiatives.

**Culture**

**Élections de Miss ou l'art de s'enrichir et autres...**

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CULTURE AS A VECTOR OF A POSITIVE IMAGE IN THE DAKAR WEEKLY LE TEMOIN.





tion at night, it is barely discernable in the street during the day. Certain places, markets especially, are used differently during the day and at night, and fruit stalls become beds for commercial sex.

*Violence and insecurity.* Acts of violence are included in what are commonly known as ‘news briefs,’ which, as we have already seen, are over-represented in the press. Violence in these cities thus is far less terrifying than it appears. There is often a direct correlation between violence and safety issues and the fact of a neighbourhood being controlled by the people, not the government, as in Johannesburg, Ibadan, and Nairobi, which “have experienced the rapid growth of gated neighbourhoods, in other words, neighbourhoods where residents attempt to control access by closing them off, either partially or completely, temporarily or permanently, from the surrounding streets” (BÉNIT-GBAFFOU *et al.* 2006). Enclosures and gated communities<sup>180</sup> are responses to safety concerns – as are ghettos. Above all, it is a question of spatial control carried out by and for the people, and bypassing the public authorities. Abidjan is emblematic of this. “

There should no longer be any illusions about the street; it is an open space, but public only in name. In Adjamé, an extreme but revealing example, in the area with the densest commercial activity, the street is subject to constant control, discreetly combining networks of ‘posted’ guards who survey all that goes on and armed men. This private management of part of public space is all the more tightly-controlled because transactions – in almost all cases accompanied by cash – take place in boutiques that in general are very much open to the outside. With such forms of control and, if needed, the possibility of resorting to a certain kind of violence (which can be extreme), we have far more than the mere appropriation of the street for economic use. In this context, traffic, including pedestrian traffic, appears to be very tightly controlled. (STECK 2007)

However, this is still exceptional, and Abidjan, Dakar, and Nouakchott are not yet massively under such territorial control. Nevertheless there are growing safety concerns, although the press provides no proof of an increase in violence, which seems more perceived than actual.

The violence described in the press typically occurs at night, with reports of numerous arrests, showing that, ultimately, the police are still in charge of the city – or at least parts of it. In the three cities, violence occurs in the working-class and poor neighbourhoods where it is generated and plays out. However, we should be wary of the idea of poverty as synonymous with violence, and while the articles do not allow us to analyse this further, we nonetheless observe that the press tends to lash out at specific populations. Questions remain as to whether it is describing a reality or constructing it.

*Protests and demonstrations.* Public space is and remains the place where the poor come to make their demands heard. While in Nouakchott and Dakar, only the most dire situations force people into the street, this is less the case in Abidjan, where populations more readily occupy public space. In Nouakchott, demonstrations are

held at symbolic sites in the city centre – never in the outskirts. In Dakar, protest occurs in both the centre and the suburbs. Finally, Abidjan's multi-polarity allows for protest in every neighbourhood and municipality, with no direct link to the centre.

Although the street remains the place of protest *par excellence*, the manner in which protests plays out differs according to the city. This can also be observed with regard to law enforcement, where each city's approach is distinct. While Nouakchott allows demonstrations, they are quickly countered in Abidjan. Clashes with security forces are thus a constant, or almost, in this city. In Dakar and Abidjan, many demonstrations and protests are staged on the campuses (Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar and Cocody in Abidjan).

In Nouakchott, only the poor demonstrate. In Dakar and Abidjan, however, demonstrators' profiles vary more greatly. For the latter two, it is not only the poor who demonstrate, but also workers, teachers, etc. Yet, "street culture is not necessarily a culture of unruliness or violence. In some of its aspects, it is an attempt to subvert or rewrite society's dominant norms. By describing it, we gain some idea of the nature and effectiveness of government institutions for socialisation" (DIOP, FAYE 2002).

*Civil/Civic activities.* Most civil and civic activities occur in an orderly fashion. Elections were held in Dakar and Nouakchott as this study was being conducted, which is why many of the articles were devoted to this topic. There were some festivities in Dakar and Abidjan, though Nouakchott appeared to have fewer festivities and less nightlife, at least in public spaces.

Naturally, it is in Abidjan that we find the most festivities; it is also there that, as night falls, every day of the week, entire streets turn into outdoor discotheques and bars. Nothing comparable exists in the other two cities where, for religious reasons, alcohol is not consumed in the street. Although this ban is strictly adhered to in Nouakchott, it is flexible in Dakar, while Abidjan remains 'the temple of festivities,' where beer flows freely in the city's countless bars.

*Daily life in the three cities.* In Nouakchott, daily life is discussed in the countless columns about life in the city, which tends to over-represent the issue. This theme shows a clear difference between Nouakchott and Dakar, on the one hand, and Abidjan, on the other, which does not fall prey to the same problems.

In Dakar and Nouakchott, it is the rapidly changing mores that, according to the press, are the cause of many problems. Skirts are getting shorter, criteria for beauty are changing, more flesh is revealed. These signs, while seemingly anodyne in Abidjan, are discussed at length in the press in the other cities. With voyeurism and despair, the changing mores are closely scrutinised.

Sexuality and homosexuality in particular are described as perversions one can barely believe exist; society seems to have fallen prey to this behaviour, which



The relationship between the centre and outskirts is not the same in the cities, as shown by the diagram representing the mapping of the articles. Nouakchott has a strong centre with a number of symbolic places (including the palace) and paved roads – and the outskirts. Power cuts, water shortages, and environmental problems occur in the outskirts, where the poor live. The city is built on this dichotomous centre/periphery relationship.

Dakar centre and periphery have a dualistic relationship. Here it is not a case of outskirts, but suburbs. These suburbs have existed since the 1950s (see chapter on the city's profile and the history of its urbanisation), and have clearly created the city's poor 'twin.' This idea of the city and its twin persists in the press.

Lastly, Abidjan does not have a centre-outskirt/suburbs relationship, but rather is multi-polar, with each part of the city bearing its own distinct identity. The inhabitants of different neighbourhoods do not come to the centre to demonstrate or protest, but rather do so in their own districts. Youpougon, a town in its own right, is also the largest municipality in the Ivory Coast – and answers to no one. Municipalities appear to be genuinely autonomous, all brought together under the name of Abidjan.

The three cities do not have the same approach to poverty. The press shows that, although the context of the economic crisis is the same in the three cities, and although there are as many poor in Abidjan as in Dakar, the press in the different cities does not react the same way to the phenomenon, which nevertheless affects the majority of the inhabitants of all three.

In Nouakchott, poverty is an urban fact of life like any other; it exists, of course, but is not decried or described as something to be eradicated at all costs. While present and visible, it appears that the society accepts the co-existence of rich and poor, and whereas the former drive 4x4s, the latter beg in the streets. That's life in the city.

There are as many poor people in Dakar as in the other cities but, contrary to the newspapers in Nouakchott, which hardly seem to report on poverty, Dakar's press sides with the poor, condemning the situation in which many inhabitants must live. Poverty is inadmissible, and the government is largely responsible for it, doing nothing to re-house its poorest citizens, combat power-cuts or increase wages so that, in the end, populations are forced into the street.

In Abidjan we find a third approach, which is to chastise poverty. The poor are responsible for many of the urban problems. For instance, if the environment is deteriorating, it is because of the poor's behaviour. Begging is looked down upon, as are informal practices (the invention of the poor). The press paints a very negative picture of poverty, wherein the poor should not be assisted but should themselves make an effort not to make urban circumstances more difficult than they already are.

In each of the three cities, not only does the press have a different view on the poor quality of modern life, but on modernity in general. Abidjan does not express

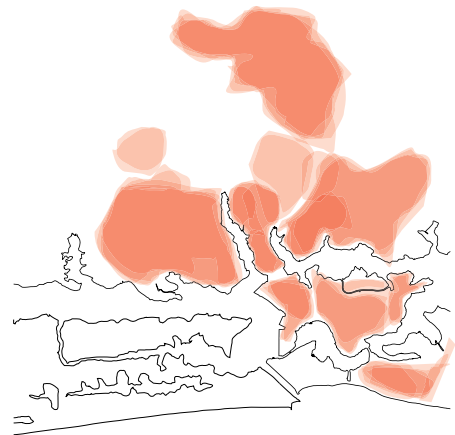
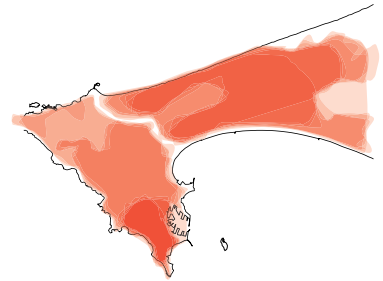
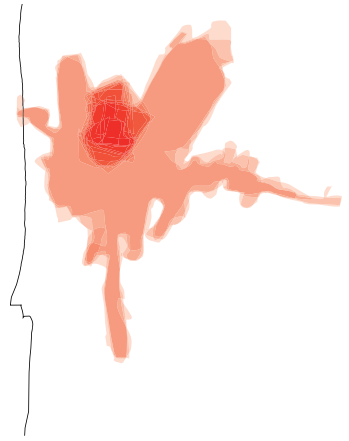
a great desire for modernity, while the other two cities portray it as the ultimate goal.

In the cities' more recent history, Abidjan (since independence in 1960) has portrayed itself as the showcase of a modern Ivory Coast that is open to the world. We do not know if this goal has been met, but are inclined to believe that the press has fully integrated this fact, depicting Abidjan as the modern city it dreamed of becoming. In this case, there is no need to demand more. In the other two cities, the press instead demands the *right* to become a modern city. Johannesburg is often cited as the example to which to aspire, and the obstacles to achieving this model are blamed on the practices of non-urban populations. Rural people living in the city are seen as impeding progress towards this goal, and even after they have lived in the city for decades, they are still considered non-urban.

Religion also plays a key role, and whether it is in their changing mores, urban practices, management, or begging, Dakar and Nouakchott appear very similar. The commonalities include a strong religious presence, even though Dakar (and Senegal) are secular, and similar geography, making them cities whose inhabitants belong to the same ethnic groups. In its mores and daily life, Abidjan is more like a distant cousin.

The cities have a common management style involving 'knuckleduster' operations, as Fouchard reports (FOUCHARD 2007). "The inability to ensure that laws and regulations are applied and the lack of genuine political will allows 'knuckleduster'-type operations to prevail." In reality, the cities have found only one way of dealing with their problems; removals, evictions and renovations depend on visits from foreign heads of state and international donors.

The street is both shared and contested. It is a negotiated space: the areas surrounding dwellings and shops are rented out, and the settling of vacant or 'dangerous' lots (railways, interchanges, near motorways, etc.) is a subject of constant debate and informal agreements between a host of stakeholders both private (syndicates, associations, industrial actors, etc.) and public (civil servants from the local government, the railways, and the police). For this very reason, the street is also disputed between the growing portion of the population who lives in [and by] and local and national authorities, who intervene from time to time to establish urban order whose framework fluctuates depending on the political agenda. (FOUCHARD 2007)



POPULATION DENSITIES  
COMPARING THE CENTRE TO THE  
OUT-SKIRTING DISTRICTS.



As we have seen, the street is the scene of everyday life for the working-class and the stage for government's physical presence. Between these two extremes everything is possible, depending on external factors (political agendas, of course, but also the season, economic crises, geopolitics, etc.) – in short, things far beyond the population's control.

### SECTION III

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Exactly 2,905,727 according to projections by the Office National de la Statistique, based on the 2000 census.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.ani.mr/anifr.php>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.lobservateur.sn>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.sudonline.sn>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.lejourplus.com/>
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.24heuresci.com>
- <sup>7</sup> [www.nordsudmedia.info](http://www.nordsudmedia.info)
- <sup>8</sup> [www.fratmat.info](http://www.fratmat.info)
- <sup>9</sup> For each paper, a sample of fifteen editions was taken. An average of the number of articles per paper was made, then multiplied by the number of papers.
- <sup>10</sup> Diop Mountaga, Nouakchott face à la criminalité, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 22 May 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Thiam Mamdou, Crimes, châtements et meurtres, Nouakchott est-elle une ville dangereuse?, *La Calame*.
- <sup>12</sup> This consists in putting a tire around the victim's neck, dousing him with gasoline, then setting fire to him.
- <sup>13</sup> Anonymous, Perversion et banditisme en ligne de mire, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 3 July 2007.
- <sup>14</sup> Anonymous, Nouakchott à soif, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> Aidara Cheikh, Une soif obscure, *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> Diop Massiré, La crise persiste, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>17</sup> Bâ Yousseuf, L'eau est-elle en train de disparaître?, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>18</sup> Ould Bèjà Amar, De l'eau pour les masses, *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 18 June 2007.
- <sup>19</sup> Sans auteur, Nouakchott à soif, *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>20</sup> Aidara Cheikh, Une soif obscure, *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> Bouyagui Zeini Ould, Pénurie d'eau: l'eau s'est-elle évaporée?, *Nouakchott Info*, 15 June 2007.
- <sup>22</sup> MOMS, "La pagaille dans les rues," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 29 June 2007.
- <sup>23</sup> Fall Amar, "Taxi gouffre," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 30 April 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> Guèye Bakari, "Infraction non stop!", *Nouakchott Info*, 22 March 2007.
- <sup>25</sup> Ly Bally, "Les usagers paient les pots cases," *Nouakchott Info*, 13 June 2007.
- <sup>26</sup> Fall Amar, "Pour une stricte réglementation," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 21 May 2007.
- <sup>27</sup> Guèye Bakari, "Une traversée éprouvante," *Nouakchott Info*, 10 May 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> Bâ Yousseuf, "Un danger pour l'environnement," *Eveil Hebdo*, 22 May 2007.
- <sup>29</sup> Sans auteur, "Les ordures hantent les plus jeunes," *Eveil Hebdo*, 29 May 2007.
- <sup>30</sup> Used products from Europe and/or the United States.
- <sup>31</sup> Bâ Yousseuf, "Un danger pour l'environnement," *Eveil Hebdo*, 22 May 2007.
- <sup>32</sup> Sans auteur, "Nouakchott est sale," *Authentique Quotidien*, 5 June 2007.
- <sup>33</sup> Bâ Yousseuf, "Un danger pour l'environnement," *Eveil Hebdo*, 22 May 2007.
- <sup>34</sup> Salem Dahaman Abou Bah Mohamed, "Nouakchott, rien à voir avec le « Tsunami »!", *Le Calame*, 21 March 2007.
- <sup>35</sup> Bâ Yousseuf, "Qu'est ce qui a été réellement," *Eveil Hebdo*, 17 April 2007.
- <sup>36</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>37</sup> [Anonymous], "Vaste campagne de décongestion des voies publiques," *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 15 May 2007.
- <sup>38</sup> Diagana Khalilou, "Dans le sillage des livreurs d'eau," *Nouakchott Info*, 6 March 2007.
- <sup>39</sup> 500 UM = 1.31 EUR.

- <sup>40</sup> Aïdara Cheikh, "Nouveau filon des pauvres," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 3 July 2007.
- <sup>41</sup> Guèye Abdoul Aziz, "Étudiantes le jour...", *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 30 April 2007.
- <sup>42</sup> About 26 Euros.
- <sup>43</sup> Guèye Abdoul Aziz, "Étudiantes le jour...", *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 30 April 2007.
- <sup>44</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>45</sup> Sow Khalil, "Les délogées en Sit-in devant la présidence," *Nouakchott Info*, 8 May 2007.
- <sup>46</sup> Ould Khattat Mohamed, "Où sont passés les électeurs?," *Nouakchott Info*, 26 March 2007.
- <sup>47</sup> C.A. "Le pouls de la vie à Nouakchott," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 8 March 2007.
- <sup>48</sup> Fall Amar, "Le Ksar se meurt," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 13 July 2007.
- <sup>49</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>50</sup> Ly Balla, "Halte aux tenues de honte!," *Nouakchott Info*, 21 June 2007.
- <sup>51</sup> Bâ Youssef, Diop Massiré, "Perversion ou phénomène de mode," *L'Eveil Hebdo*, 29 May 2007.
- <sup>52</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>53</sup> Fall Amar, "Nouakchott écartelée," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 24 May 2007.
- <sup>54</sup> Fall Amar, "La vie sous l'eau qui dort," *L'Authentique Quotidien*, 3 April 2007.
- <sup>55</sup> For each newspaper, we counted the number of articles from a sample of 20 editions. This average per newspaper was multiplied by the number of issues for each paper, thus giving a theoretical total of the total number of articles.
- <sup>56</sup> As is the case for the other cities – we see this in the comparison between the cities in the following chapters – although violence and insecurity is the main theme for the city of Dakar, this needs to be qualified, which we will do later in the text.
- <sup>57</sup> Faye Ibrahima Ngaary, "Un Américain détroissé à Ponty," *Walf Grand Place*, 5 June 2007.
- <sup>58</sup> Ouest Foire (bis), *L'Observateur*, 26 July 2007.
- <sup>59</sup> "L'élève gendarme et ses condisciples tabassent tout le quartier," *Walf Grand Place*, 23 May 2007.
- <sup>60</sup> Ndiaye Ndèye Anna, "Une bande de malfaiteurs dépouille une coiffeuse sous la menace de coupe-coupe," *Le Populaire*, 12 April 2007.
- <sup>61</sup> Sans-fil is the name of a district.
- <sup>62</sup> Athié Sada Farmata Adame, "Les victimes?," *Walf Grand Place*, 2 May 2007.
- <sup>63</sup> The large hotel under construction on the coastal road that was supposed to host some of the Conference had still not been completed on 14 March 2008, the final day of the OCI.
- <sup>64</sup> Prieria Dissa Alioune, "Quand les routes casent les véhicules," *Le Devoir*, 2 August 2007.
- <sup>65</sup> *Idem*.
- <sup>66</sup> Vally Mane Awa, "La Senelec se décharge sur Gti," *Le Populaire*, 17 April 2007.
- <sup>67</sup> The DDD buses were supposed to replace other types of express coach. At the moment, all transport modes are still in use and the DDD buses have not replaced any of them.
- <sup>68</sup> This refers to fCFA.
- <sup>69</sup> Rédaction, "Aux chauffeurs 'anti code' de DDD," *Walf Grand Place*, 21 May 2007.
- <sup>70</sup> Anonymous, Accident, *L'Observateur*, 10 July 2007.
- <sup>71</sup> Anonymous, sans titre, *Le Quotidien*, 9 July 2007.
- <sup>72</sup> Ndoye Yathé Nara, Darou Rahmane expose sa misère ambiante, *Le Quotidien*, 9 August 2007.
- <sup>73</sup> Ndoye Yathé Nara, "La face hideuse des 'oubliés de Jaxaay,'" *Le Quotidien*, 14 June 2007.
- <sup>74</sup> Anonymous, "Inondations," *L'Observateur*, 26 July 2007.
- <sup>75</sup> Thiam Ibrahima, "La banlieue sous la hantise des inondations," *Le Témoin*, 24 July 2007.
- <sup>76</sup> Fall Madior, "Dakar (ré)envahie!," *Sud Quotidien*, 25 April 2007.
- <sup>77</sup> Sarr Pape, "Le Sntn dénonce une guerre larvée entre l'Entente Cadak-Car et le ministère de l'Environnement," *Le Populaire*, 26 April 2007.
- <sup>78</sup> Sarr Pape, "Colobane transforment la place de l'Obélisque en décharge publique," 23 April 2007.
- <sup>79</sup> Kane Safiétou, "Les périls d'une cohabitation," *Le Quotidien*, 3 July 2007.
- <sup>80</sup> Mbengue Cheikh Tidiane, "Pour la guerre aux ordures dans les quartiers populaires," *Sud Quotidien*, 27 April 2007.
- <sup>81</sup> Anonymous, "Des égouts qui prennent en otage dans les quartiers," *Walf Grand Place*, 20 April 2007.
- <sup>82</sup> Anonymous, "Les 'loumas' n'ont pas leur place dans une ville," *Walf Grand Place*, 7 June 2007.
- <sup>83</sup> Ba Aïssatou, Konte Mame Aly, "Kermel se débarrasse de ses 'saletés,'" *Sud Quotidien*, 3 July 2007.

- <sup>84</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>85</sup> Preira Dissa Alioune, "Les commerçants dans le désarroi," *Le Devoir*, 31 May 2007.
- <sup>86</sup> Sarr P. "La société Mads s'estime lésée, la Mayrie perçoit indûment des taxes sur des stands," *Le Populaire*, 28 March 2007.
- <sup>87</sup> Diedhiou Marie Augustine, "La voie publique envahie anarchiquement," *Le Devoir*, 14 June 2007.
- <sup>88</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>89</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>90</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>91</sup> Office National de l'Assainissement du Sénégal [Senegal's National Sanitation Office].
- <sup>92</sup> Société Nationale d'Electricité du Sénégal [Senegal's National Electricity Company].
- <sup>93</sup> Société Nationale de Téléphonie [National Telecommunications Company].
- <sup>94</sup> Diedhiou Marie Augustine, "La voie publique envahie anarchiquement," *Le Devoir*, 14 June 2007.
- <sup>95</sup> Thiaw Ibrahima, "Le cri de cœur d'un archéologue," *Le Quotidien*, 5 July 2007.
- <sup>96</sup> Konte Mame Aly, "L'insulte à la ville," *Sud Quotidien*, 26 July 2007.
- <sup>97</sup> Mbodji Mamadou, Kermel et sa mue, "Un patrimoine en dépression," *Le Quotidien*, 1 August 2007.
- <sup>98</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>99</sup> Konte Mame Aly, "L'insulte à la ville," *Sud Quotidien*, 26 July 2007.
- <sup>100</sup> Mbodji Mamadou, Kermel et sa mue, "En patrimoine en dépression," *Le Quotidien*, 1 August 2007.
- <sup>101</sup> Diop Nogaye Diarra, "Quand la mendicité s'institutionnalise dans notre pays," *Le Témoin*, 2 May 2007.
- <sup>102</sup> A.S.G., "Mendicité: Un business qui nourrit son homme," *Le Témoin*, 2 May 2007.
- <sup>103</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>104</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>105</sup> A type of Koranic school where the child lives and learns the Koran.
- <sup>106</sup> Issokho Lalla, "Le malheur d'être talibé dans la banlieue," *Walf Grand Place*, 20 April 2007.
- <sup>107</sup> Cissokho Lalla, "Le malheur d'être talibé dans la banlieue," *Walf Grand Place*, 20 April 2007.
- <sup>108</sup> Seck Abdoul Aziz, "8000 enfants sont exploités dans des réseaux selon une étude de la Banque mondiale et du BIT".
- <sup>109</sup> Cissokho Lalla, "La parité vaut bien une marche," *Walf Grand Place*, 23 March 2007.
- <sup>110</sup> Seck Abdoul Aziz, "Les commerçants en sit-in optent pour le bras de fer," *Le Populaire*, 30 July 2007.
- <sup>111</sup> Ndoeye Yathé Nara, "La Ftgs va marcher à Pikine," *Le Quotidien*, 20 July 2007.
- <sup>112</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>113</sup> Diallo Mamdou, "La Cnts marche vendredi," *Le Quotidien*, 25 July 2007.
- <sup>114</sup> Ndour Pape Samba, "Wade piégé par sa propre pluie," *Walf Grand Place*, 1 August 2007.
- <sup>115</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>116</sup> Gueye Alassane Seck, "Peut-on faire de Dakar une ville moderne sans changer les mauvais comportements de ses habitants," *Le Témoin*, 20 March 2007.
- <sup>117</sup> "Hérésie à la prière de 17h," *Walf Grand Place*, 17 May 2007.
- <sup>118</sup> Diedhiou Abdoulaye, "Un émigré surpris nuitamment par la police dans sa voiture, en pleins ébats avec un talibé," *Le Populaire*, 22 May 2007.
- <sup>119</sup> "Quand nos filles s'habillent – ou se déshabillent! – comme à la Télé".
- <sup>120</sup> Gueye Alassane Seck, "Peut-on faire de Dakar une ville moderne sans changer les mauvais comportements de ses habitants," *Le Témoin*, 20 March 2007.
- <sup>121</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>122</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>123</sup> Faye Chérif, "Un township en plein cœur de Dakar," *Sud Quotidien*, 13 June 2007.
- <sup>124</sup> Obviously, the political situation has evolved in the meantime.
- <sup>125</sup> Bi Armand Gohoré, "Deux braqueurs arrêtés à Bouaflé," *Fraternité Matin*, 5 May 2007.
- <sup>126</sup> E.K. "La voirie fout le camp sous nos yeux," *Fraternité Matin*, 21 June 2007.
- <sup>127</sup> S.K. "Le 43e Bima cure le bassin de 'colatier,'" *24 Heures*, 18 May 2007.
- <sup>128</sup> Anonymous, "Un chantier interminable!," *Nord-Sud*, 21 April 2007.
- <sup>129</sup> *Idem.*
- <sup>130</sup> *Idem.*

- 131 Anonymous, "Un chantier interminable!," *Nord-Sud*, 21 April 2007.
- 132 S.K. "Le 43e Bima cure le bassin de 'colatier,'" *24 Heures*, 18 May 2007.
- 133 Abidjan transport company.
- 134 West African Economic and Monetary Union.
- 135 A.T., "La Sotra sollicite 12 milliards de fCFA," *24 Heures*, 16 May 2007.
- 136 CHF 30 million.
- 137 Ba Nimatoulaye, "Un recours obligé pour certains Abidjanais," *Fraternité Matin*, 9 May 2007.
- 138 *Idem*.
- 139 *Idem*.
- 140 Djama Stanislas, "Le ministre Mabri Toikeusse s'approprie le ticket unique," *Nord-Sud*, 15 June 2007.
- 141 Toure Arouna, "Les transporteurs se dressent contre Adama Touré," *24 Heures*, 25 June 2007.
- 142 Traoré Abou, "Les transporteurs menacent de débrayer, si..." *Le Jour Plus*, 20 June 2007.
- 143 Coulibaly Zoumana, "Les taxis et wôrô-wôrô font de plus en plus peur," *Le Jour Plus*, 17 June 2007.
- 144 A.E.O., "Les taxis luttent contre la mort," *24 Heures*, 29 June 2007.
- 145 *Idem*.
- 146 200,000 fCFA = EUR 305.
- 147 Adiko Eustache, "Les populations d'Akouédo crient leur colère," *Le Jour Plus*, 27 June 2007.
- 148 Anonymous "Des victimes protestent, la police charge," *24 Heures*, 27 June 2007.
- 149 Foua R.N., "Le pluie fait 6 morts à Attécoubé," *24 Heures*, 7 June 2007.
- 150 Djidjé Marie-Adèle, "Amon Tano et Dacoury-Tabley apportent le soutien du gouvernement," *Fraternité Matin*, 17 June 2007.
- 151 Djidjé Marie-Adèle, "Amon Tano et Dacoury-Tabley apportent le soutien du gouvernement," *Fraternité Matin*, 17 June 2007.
- 152 Kouamé Inno, "Les eaux usées dans la rue," *L'Événement*, 21 May 2007.
- 153 Adiko Eustache, "Les populations d'Akouédo crient leur colère," *Le Jour Plus*, 27 June 2007.
- 154 Touré Moussa, "La baie de Cocody se meurt sous nos yeux," *Fraternité Matin*, 27 April 2007.
- 155 Anonymous, "Mel Eg Théodore promet de nettoyer Abidjan," *24 Heures*, 4 June 2007.
- 156 Kouamé Inno, "Les eaux usées dans la rue," *L'Événement*, 21 May 2007.
- 157 Anonymous, "Mel Eg Théodore promet de nettoyer Abidjan," *24 Heures*, 4 June 2007.
- 158 Gneproust Marcelline, "Je vais nettoyer," *Fraternité Matin*, 3 June 2007.
- 159 Kodjo E., "Kokora N'Goly accusé de brader les terres du village," *Fraternité Matin*, 5 June 2007.
- 160 L.O., "Le chef du village accuse," *24 Heures*, 13 June 2007.
- 161 Koudou José S., "Deux clans se battent à la tête d'Agban-village," *Jour Plus*, 7 June 2007.
- 162 Coulibaly Zoumana, "Plusieurs commerçants en détresse," *Jour Plus*, 27 June 2007.
- 163 Inno Kouamé, "La guerre aux commerçants," *L'Événement*, 7 May 2007.
- 164 Bakayobo Lanciné, "Une opération sur fond de chantage et de rançon," 12 June 2007.
- 165 *Fraternité Matin*, 12 May 2007.
- 166 The journalist informs us that the price is 1,000 CFA for the girl and 200 CFA for the pimp.
- 167 *Fraternité Matin*, 12 May 2007.
- 168 *Fraternité Matin*, 14 April 2007.
- 169 35 euro cents.
- 170 *Fraternité Matin*, 14 April 2007.
- 171 *Idem*.
- 172 Lidho: Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme Ivorian Human Rights League].
- 173 Adewola Ezékiel Samuel, "Des étudiants saccagent le siège de la Lidho et l'Apdh," *24 Heures*, 24 May 2007.
- 174 Landry Kohon, "Le commissariat du 28e arrondissement saccagé," *Fraternité Matin*, 14 June 2007.
- 175 T.B. "50'000 fans ont fêté Drogba," *24 Heures*, 11 June 2007.
- 176 Koutouan Hervé, "Bières et musique à gogo à Yopougon," *Fraternité Matin*, 21 May 2008.
- 177 *Fraternité Matin*, 6 June 2007.
- 178 *Idem*.
- 179 In Africa, the term "*famille élargie*" is used to describe cousins, uncles, and close relatives.

- <sup>180</sup> Gated communities are “private housing developments, designed and built as neighbourhoods surrounded by walls with limited access in order to facilitate control. They are entirely private, with each resident paying a mandatory contribution to a joint-ownership association” (BÉNIT-GBAFFOU, FABIYI, OWUOR 2006).









# PHOTOGRAPHING PUBLIC SPACES

## Chapter 1

Having toured public spaces via press articles, we will now analyse it via images. While the former allowed us to assess the scope of the issues surrounding public space, the latter will help us understand the spatial and social tensions in public places. For this we will use a series of images: identical shots taken thirty minutes apart over a single day. We will begin by counting the number of individuals in the images, and will then describe and analyse the street elements.

We would like to reiterate that our work aims to understand the links between spatiality (public space) and social practices. Visual research is based on the idea that photographic images can help overcome the obstacles between spatial and social approaches by proposing a veritable analysis of spaces and practices. While the use of photographic images is relatively uncommon, in his ethnology lessons Marcel Mauss (MAUSS 1926) introduced the idea that photography allowed for the collection of visual data, and hence the possibility of 'memorizing' multiple details – information that the naked eye alone cannot retain (PIETTE 1996). For this section, the images will serve as the raw material for our research, which we will then analyse. This method – used for the three cities – provides accurate comparative material. Effectively, by comparing cities we can eliminate 'specificities' and instead highlight generalities. It also allows us to better understand the relationship between morphology and lifestyles, above and beyond a city's political, economic, or cultural context; this relationship serves reflection on African cities.

One of the major advantages of using photography is that it allows us to consult the information any time, now and in the future. A photograph is a vignette of reality upon which we can stop, reinterpret, and even investigate new issues. It is on this point that observation photography distinguishes itself from note-taking, which is much more subjective and therefore less transmissible.

Photographs can also be shared and discussed among researchers, thereby creating a common language around a shared document that can be analysed and interpreted, either individually or collectively. Photo images can likewise be used as a support for interviews with urban actors (AMPHOUX 2001).

Using the system we created, we were able to superimpose different periods of time in a single frame, image by image, and at different times of day, thus providing an understanding of the constants and variants in each context.



PHOTOS BY BENOÎT VOLLMER,  
PHOTOGRAPHER, IN A STREET  
IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA OF  
NOUAKCHOTT.

While the built environment changes over the long term, the sun's course and practices relative thereto change over the course of a day. To understand and compare cities, we needed a specific protocol to apply to all three cases so that the content of the images in the cities could be compared.

Photography is also important because it allows for archiving, and hence can serve as a record of both endangered and contemporary elements (FIELOUX, LOMBARD 1990). It captures a given epoch and provides material that is reusable decades later. We can imagine taking the same shot for five, ten, or twenty years, thus allowing us to study changes in the long term. For this reason, the methods of archiving and image management must be carefully chosen. While we will not go into the details here, we would like simply to mention that, with photography, we were compelled to think about the format (paper vs. digital), time, and conservation in the short and long terms.

Finally, and most importantly, photography gives us material to analyse with regard to spaces and behaviours that unfold before our eyes as observers.

Standardisation of urban spaces and the practices carried out there is one of our hypotheses. The visual research we will now present will allow us to test this hypothesis directly.

#### Methodological note

This chapter summarizes a publication called *Visual anthropology in Urban Africa: a methodological guide* (CHENAL 2006), published as part of a Dialogue of the NCCR North-South program, which provides a complete panorama of the images taken for our studies.

In order to understand both spatial and social dimensions, we developed a system that allowed us to show change both in these practices and in the spaces in which they occur. Each street or group of streets was documented, observed, and analysed from various angles, which are summarized in the table below:

Sun, shade, and light: how do people react to them?

Activities: who does what and when?

Relationships between men and women: men's hours vs. women's/children's hours.

Animals in the city (sheep, camels, goats, dogs, chicken, cats, rats, etc.).

The locations of café/restaurants, shops, street vendors, etc.

The constants and variants of the street: what moves and what does not?

The series of images we propose here is entitled, *A Day in the Life of a City*. Fixed, pre-selected frames show the characteristics of the street. By taking the same shot every 30 minutes, we were able to appreciate changes in a given space over the course of a day (the movements of passers-by, the sun's course, etc.) – in other words, the temporalities of the city.

This body of work was produced by professional photographers in each of the cities so that the work could be carried out simultaneously. Moreover, the fact that the photographers were 'local' (and therefore familiar with the places and city in general) made it easier for them to do their work without requesting authorisation beforehand, and without questions from the police or *gendarmes*. Effectively, we are often uncertain about our rights as far as taking pictures in public spaces are concerned. Establishing who grants such authorisation can also be difficult, which is why it is easier for local photographers to perform this task without authorisation.

Finally, this approach let us compare visions of the city, as well as providing some additional information, such as how does a photographer see his city, and what does he want to show? Unfortunately, the results did not meet our expectations. Photographers Boubacar Touré Mandenory (Dakar) and James



Gahue (Abidjan) each worked in their respective cities. The situation was slightly more complicated in Nouakchott, and we ended up using a French photographer, Benoit Vollmer, from the school of photography in Vevey.

*The series of images: a day in the life of a city.* Different shots taken from different points in a given street were chosen beforehand. A picture was taken from each angle every 30 minutes, from dawn until dusk. A circuit was created between the different locations in order to take the greatest number of shots in 30 minutes, to then return to the first location and begin again 30 minutes later.

The images shown here represent the initial attempts for this part of the work: a series of images produced every 30 minutes over a single day. We did preliminary trials to better develop our methodology and eliminate issues of framing and clarity.

Preliminary precautions were taken to ensure that the raw material could then be used and analysed correctly. This included: 1) producing the work in digital format using a camera that allowed us to take pictures with more than 9 million pixels in RAW format; 2) developing an archiving system using three hard-drives updated on a weekly basis; 3) use of a tripod (markings were made on the ground and descriptions written in a logbook so that the locations could be easily found again); 4) using a wide-angle lens, when possible; and 5) numbering and organizing the photos. In addition to the number assigned by the digital camera, the hour, date, exact location, photographer, and comments (re: the weather, etc.) were also provided.

While not all of the information was required for the study, we wanted to start by taking note of as many elements as possible; hence, the goal was not to produce bulk images, but rather to allow for an initial period of immersion. The photographer and researcher visited the field as any civilian might, wandering and actively participating, so as to become part of the environment and understand the issues at play. This phase, which preceded the actual shoot, had two advantages: first, it allowed the photographer to become familiar with the field and identify the most relevant features to later study them more closely; secondly, it allowed them to habituate the environment and its inhabitants to the presence of the photographer (COSNIER 2001). All of the street's permanent fixtures (i.e. buildings, roads, and non-mobile) were then noted. This work was followed by an observation of the changes over the course of the day (the sun's movement and resulting behaviours, the routes taken by street vendors and their sales strategies, etc.) (DE KETELE 1983, MASSONAT 1987). Unlike direct observation, photographic observation allows the observer to consult visual records after the fact, without relying on memory or potentially imprecise notes. Like statistics, interviews, or any other archived material, the images become raw research material and are used not as a means of communication or illustration but as objects to be analysed.

This qualitative, sensitive approach to public space allows for a close observa-

tion of morphology and the issues of public spaces, and at the same time highlights practices and how different spaces structure the city. This system allowed us to observe the city on a daily basis. One notes areas of shade, the number of people in the street, and what direction they take, the location of street vendors, the relationship between men and women, men's hours vs. women's hours, the presence of children and beggars, as well as animals (sheep, camels, goats, dogs, chickens, and cats). The location of cafés, restaurants, shops, and street vendors was likewise important in our analysis.

Finally, we tried to describe these spaces statistically, based on the number of people present (according to gender and age) and in terms of the physical dimensions of the street. For this, we took counts on the images themselves. Absolute figures were not significant for this, as each figure was contextual, and the differences can vary greatly depending on the location (in which case the overall context of the image was commented upon). Instead, it was proportions that were of interest here (men vs. women, different types of vehicles, itinerant street vendors vs. vendors with fixed stalls, etc.).

There were also differences between the cities. Even though the research protocol was extremely rigorous, the photographers who walked the city streets for weeks in order to produce the series of images we will analyse below sometimes took liberties. This was notably the case with regard to time. Despite this minor glitch, the material allows for an easy comparison of the cities and a comprehensive understanding of the differences between a street corner in Nouakchott and one in Abidjan.



## THE STREETS OF NOUAKCHOTT

### Chapter 2

*Shot 1 [Nouakchott].* The first annotated shot is that of a street in the new centre of Nouakchott. Indeed, pushed by residential neighbourhoods and undeveloped land north of the historic centre, this new centre has the tendency to expand toward this part of the city. The section photographed here is the continuation of Avenue Charles de Gaulle, which meets up with the capital's most exclusive areas. We therefore imagine it as a busy main road, far from the crowds of working-class neighbourhoods. However, in the last 36 months or so, a number of businesses, residences (furnished apartments for rental), and two hotels have popped up. The street view is inorganic, sandy, and has little vegetation, even if we note a sapling and a grove hugging the boundary wall of a property. The white-beige of the sand dominates the image. The grey we see in the distance indicates construction. When the sun is strongest, the colours become almost hypnotic. A long shot was difficult to obtain due to the glare.

NKC  
SHOT 1



For the entire day, women represent only 15% of people on the street. However, their presence is not uniformly spread over the course of the day. In fact, we see them in the morning (around 9:00 a.m.), just before noon, after mealtimes, and at the end of the day.

In general, we see a large number of people walking around 9:00 a.m., undoubtedly on their way to work in shops and offices. Thus it is the start of the workday that animates the street in the early morning. But while work may start 'late' in offices, government bureaus and the private sector in general, this is not true in other parts of the city. Residents of working-class neighbourhoods get up earlier, as these 'walkers' do not live in the same street or neighbourhood even, but typically on the outskirts.

The street gradually comes to life until around 12:30, followed a drop in both foot and vehicle traffic resulting in a slump between 3 and 4 p.m., which also happens to coincide with the hottest part of the day. At this time of day the street looks more like a 'ghost town,' until the heat finally breaks and people return at the end of the workday. The same is true later in the afternoon; as the sun starts to go down, people hit the streets.

At 8:00 a.m. – when we begin shooting – the fruit seller has just finished setting up his stall. We saw him arranging the last pieces of fruit one by one – mangoes, oranges, watermelons; the bananas are hung up on a pole at around 10:30. The stand is manned by several salesmen over the course of the day on a rotating basis. We spotted at least three. While the fruit shops employ many people, sales are paltry; a few bananas and two or three mangoes disappear over the course of the day. The lack of crowds in front of the stores likewise indicates poor sales for the fruit vendor.

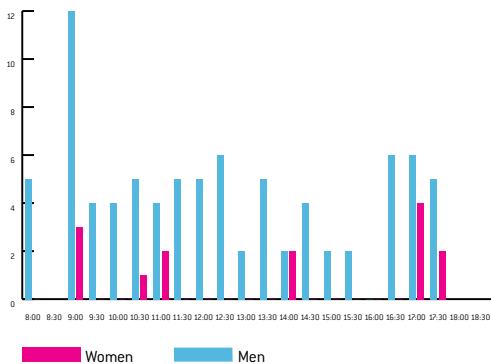
While there are many others, this example of appropriation of public space by vendors who ostensibly 'spill over' into the street is striking... and temporary; when night falls, the fruit is put away in the shop, and only the poles remain.

Another example of appropriation of public space is the pile of sand we see on the side, which forces people to slightly change their trajectory. Building materials are always stored in the street.

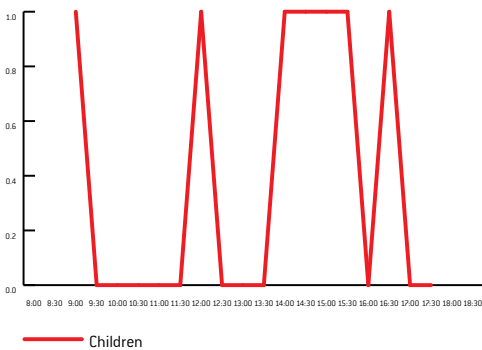
The roadsides (without a pavement) are comprised of sand, which, as we can see here, eats away at the area intended for cars, seemingly freeing up space on both sides of the street. These strips, however, are not for use by pedestrians but rather vehicle parking. All morning long, people park their cars on the roadsides for anything from a few minutes to several hours. The sand and cars make it difficult to walk. The boldest walk directly in the road, when traffic permits.

This street is mainly a thoroughfare. Those we see sitting are, for the most part, vendors. At the end of the day, the storefronts – shaded in this image – become waiting areas for parents, for taxis, or for other transport. We see people standing at noon and at the end of the day, between activities, their presence understated.

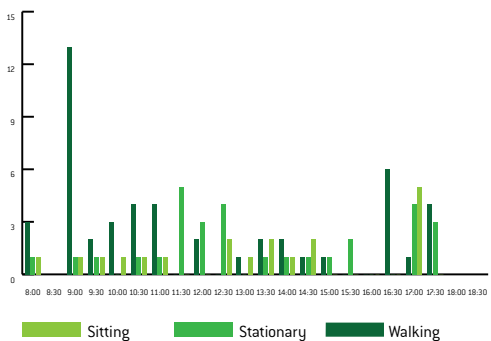
NKC  
SHOT 1



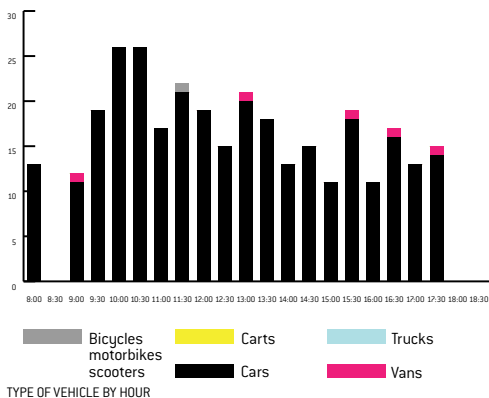
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



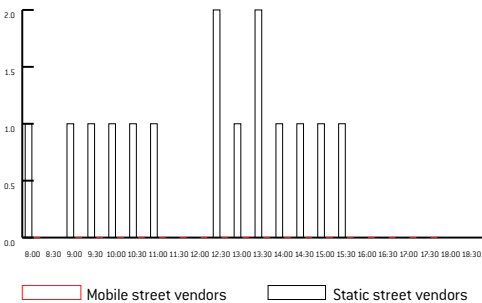
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



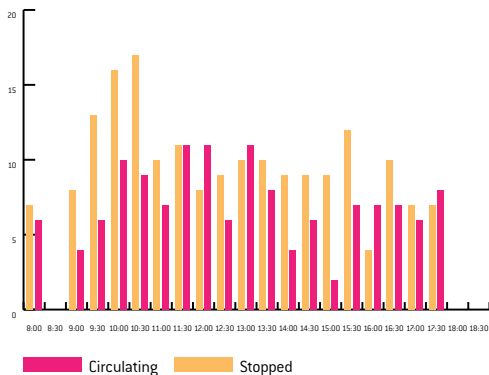
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



Shops are only open in the morning, when the grates are lifted. The lack of activity and employees waiting out front to lure in customers indicates that this street is not yet fully 'operational,' but rather is 'transitioning,' as it is located in the newly-expanded city centre.

The street is one giant car park; 60 % of the vehicles are parked, while 40 % are in transit. In this street 98 % of the vehicles are cars. A couple of trucks and a motorcycle make up the other 2 %. There are a few children in the street, but the street is primarily an adult world.

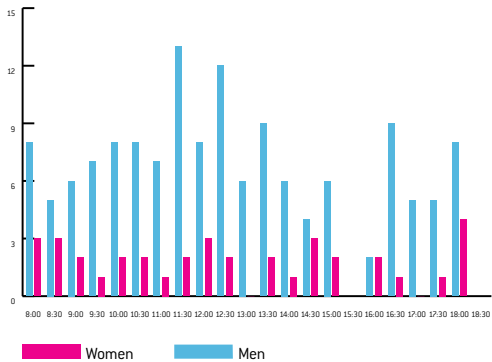
Shade is of the essence. The entrance to the fruit shop is covered by a "roof" to protect it from the sun, once the shade from the building itself disappears. The sun dictates the general ambiance of the street; the few people who actually sit in the street sit in the shade, of course. In the morning and at midday people walk on both sides of the street, as there is no shade. However, as the sun goes down and the buildings themselves start to provide enough shade to cover part of the street, pedestrians walk in the shade as a rule.

*Shot 2 [Nouakchott]*. This image was taken from the median. In the foreground, the kiosk, trash bins, trees, and street lighting all indicate that we are in the city centre. Individually, these elements can be found elsewhere in the city. However, it is their simultaneous presence in one place that clearly indicates the centre.

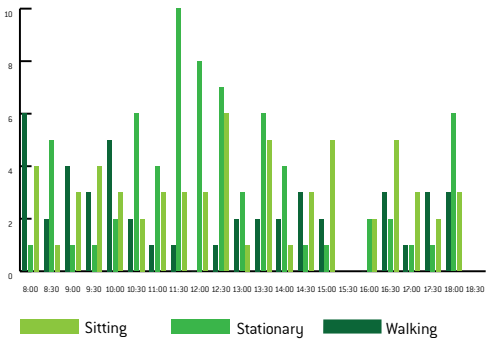
NKC  
SHOT 2



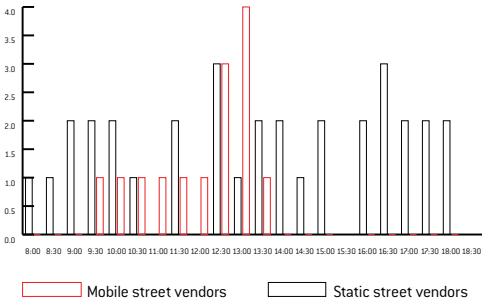
NKC  
SHOT 2



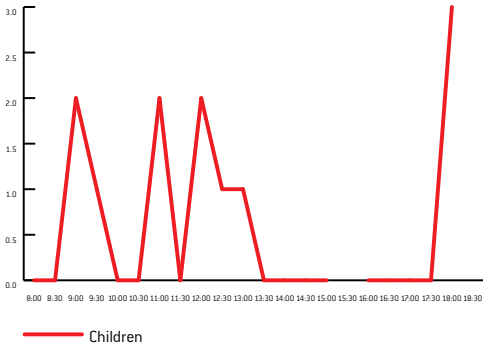
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



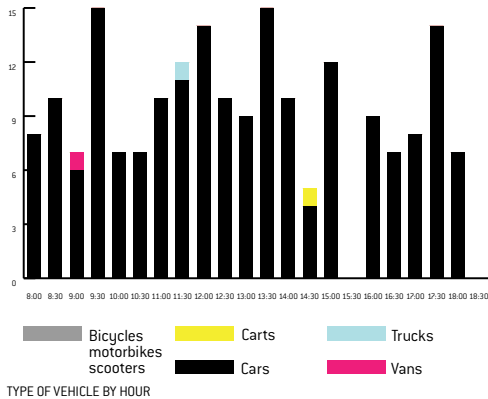
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



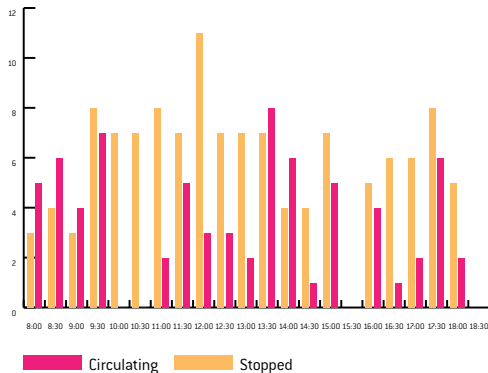
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

Slims-brand cigarettes have financed the creation of cigarette kiosks. One can also buy candy, tissues (name given to facial tissues), and other basic commodities. These points of sale are not meant to compete with the shops but the daytime roadside stalls – the modern-day version of the small street vendor at his wooden table (or rather the marketing version that now exists everywhere). Like Nescafé in Dakar, which uses street vendors for its advertising campaign, Slims – the thin cigarette – has taken up this idea and made it an actual institution. Permanent structures (meaning they cannot be broken down at the end of the day and set up the next morning) have been built in public space. Authorisation was therefore requested from (and granted by) public authorities (city hall, in this case) to build such kiosks, perhaps setting a precedent by which vendors, with their wooden tables, could demand the same rights.

The kiosk is covered by a large roof, for optimal sun protection regardless of its location in the street – a multi-purpose model (like street furniture) based on European city models, especially French ones. A slightly raised base makes the building recognisable as a point of sale – a system (intentional?) that prevents crowds from forming in front of the counter, which is what normally occurs, as people do not usually queue up but simply gather en masse. Three bollards prevent cars from parking too close, thus creating a path for pedestrians.

Shade here is paramount. In the background are women and men under a tree at their vending tables. These vendors stay under the tree the entire day, moving their table from right to left, front to back, following the shade. The boundary between the road, roadsides, and different street elements is therefore based neither on physical markings (i.e. kerbs) nor on invisible boundaries (land titles). Rather, their installation is entirely determined by the sun's course and the presence of a shade-making device, which, in this case, is a tree.

The vendor cannot lie down inside the kiosk because of its shape and dimensions, and therefore must remain seated or standing. As such, the area immediately behind the kiosk becomes an extension of it, where the vendor may rest during slow periods (i.e. siesta time) in the shade of the large roof. The roof is designed to keep the sun out, even when the latter is at its lowest. At noon, when it is at its peak, the building's base becomes a shady stoop for other vendors.

The colours of the street are varied, ranging from the green of the vegetation to the unusual grey and pink of the buildings. The remaining buildings hint at white and yellow, like the preceding street. The building in the background attempts to distinguish itself by its colour, as does the kiosk in the foreground, which is painted green – an unusual colour for a building, even a kiosk.

The number of people increases as the day goes on. One exception, however, is in the early morning. On the 8 a.m. shot, the many walkers we see are workers

on their way to work. Later, the street veritably 'wakes up,' with the number of people increasing until noon or 12:30 p.m., after which their numbers during the hot, slow hours sharply decrease until 3–4 p.m., finally increasing again in the late afternoon as the sun starts to go down and the work day ends.

The presence of women – mainly vendors, both ambulant (mint vendors) and fixed, who are here throughout the day – is low (20%), but greater than in many other parts of the city. However, excluding the female vendors, we see almost no women. Even the majority of passers-by are men.

Sales are mostly done by women, who sell fruit and vegetables from their stalls, or mint. The sale of newspapers and phone cards, however, is reserved for men, mostly young. At stalls we find older people, while ambulant vendors tend to be young men in the prime of life. At around 1 p.m. the kiosk becomes the rallying point for newspaper and phone card vendors. Surprisingly, after this rally, they all disappear for the rest of the day.

In sheer numbers, the street is busiest just before noon. However, this is also when walkers are at their fewest and most people sit or stand still.

Other than at 9 a.m., when there is an influx of cars, the flow is the opposite of that of pedestrians, with a slump between 9 and 11 a.m. – when pedestrians are their most numerous. This shows that there is no clear correlation between the presence of people and that of vehicles, as the social categories are not the same.

The dustbin lorry empties the green container in the morning. The road workers then leave it lying down on its side, so that by the end of the day waste is no longer put into the container but next to it. In fact, the container serves no purpose other than to broadly indicate where it is waste should be left.

As in the previous shot, the roadside primarily serves as a vast car park. Parking does not seem to follow specific rules regarding vehicle density or tidiness; instead, cars stop wherever there is room, be it perpendicular, parallel or diagonal to the street. Parking spaces, as such, do not exist; all parking occurs along the sandy strips. Pedestrians must therefore weave their way around the parked cars. Priority is given to vehicles: it is not an ideological issue with regard to modes of transport, but rather a response to the hierarchical structure of a society wherein only the rich can afford cars and thus have priority over the street vendors, salespeople, and pedestrians.

It is mainly private vehicles that we see in the streets, as well as a fair number of taxis (a third); vans, trucks, and carts rarely pass through here. Roughly 20% of the cars are 4x4s.

Children are rarely seen in the street; when they are, they are either *talibés* begging for food or mint sellers. The street is not a place where children gather and play.

*Shot 3 [Nouakchott]*. This shot is similar to the first shot; it shows the same street but from a different angle. Once again we see a street lined with buildings on either side, though the photo itself shows only one side. In the centre we see a strip for cars, with a sandy 'pavement' on either side. The buildings have one to two storeys, but the concrete reinforcement bars lying on the pavement in the foreground suggest that one or even several additional floors remain to be built. The ground floor is a row of shops.

The shops are only open for a couple hours in the morning before closing for the rest of the day. Here we see no overflow of activity into the street, as the shops are air-conditioned. Further along, one door stays open all day long and into the evening – a shop with no need for a storefront as neighbourhood residents know it well. Hence, is it only frequented by locals.

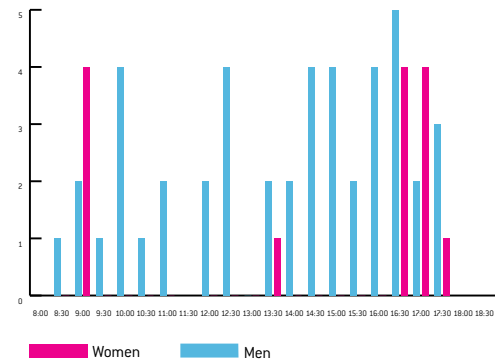
There are two types of stores and boutiques: those that spill over into the street (thereby indicating business activity) and those whose doors remain shut (as they are air-conditioned), whose plate glass doors allow in little light. The mirrored doors and windows are not inviting, and the only way to know whether the shop is open is by pushing on the door. Today the city centre is a mix of these two types of shops – one in the street and the other along it.

NKC  
SHOT 3

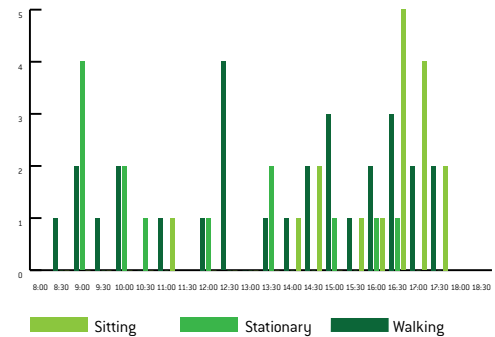
The colours here are those we find elsewhere in the city: the white, beige, and brown of the gabled facades are, in fact, the colour of the stucco. The vegetation



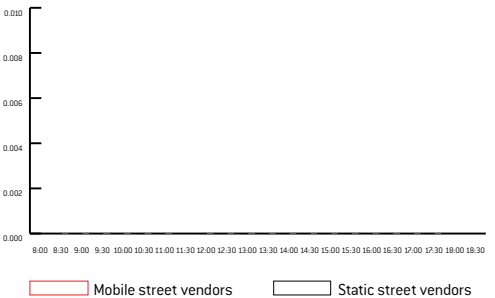
NKC  
SHOT 3



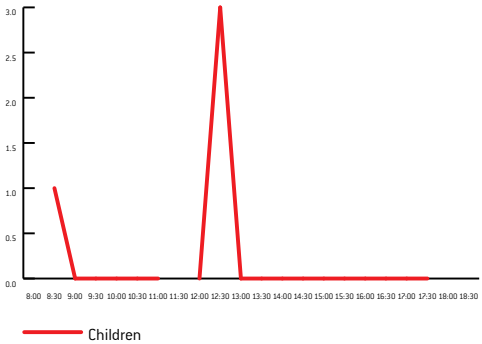
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



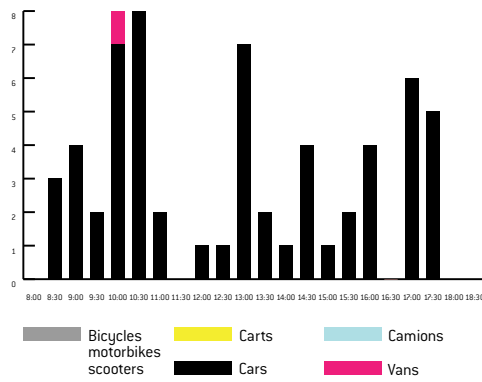
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



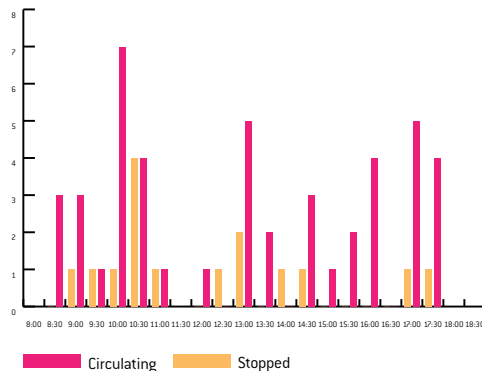
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



here is reduced to a tree on a street corner. In this street there is little reason to stop, which explains the fact that most of the people are on the move. Sitting is reserved for the afternoon hours, in the shade of the buildings, where pedestrians wait for transport to return home.

Unlike the other examples, there are no lulls in the activity in this street, and people are present throughout the day. Not surprisingly, however, it is the late afternoon that sees the greatest number of people. Here, again, there are few women present (24%), except in the morning (around 9:00 a.m.), at 1:30 p.m., and again around 4:30 p.m.

The number of vehicles varies depending on the time of day, with an influx between 10 and 11 a.m., and again at 1 p.m. Their numbers increase again between 3:30 and 5 p.m. With the exception of one van, the vehicles were exclusively cars (mostly Mercedes 190E).

The images show a thoroughfare where there is little more than a ballet of cars. Its proximity to the city centre and its lack of businesses reveal that very different types of streets exist in the same general geographical area, and that the activity on one street is not necessarily the rule for the entire area, even if it is a main street. Thus we can surmise that it is the presence of an intersection, supermarket-type store, or kiosk that creates a focal point – a gathering place for the ‘people of the street;’ the other streets are only areas through which one passes or waits.

When people do sit down, it is only to wait for public transportation. This street is not a final destination. This thoroughfare dimension is further reinforced by vehicles, only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of which are parked, versus  $\frac{3}{4}$  in circulation.

Vendors both lend to the street’s liveliness and are also an indication of it, as they only congregate in places where customer potential is high and a quick sale can be made.

*Shot 4 [Nouakchott].* The image on the right shows one of the largest private homes in the city, located at the entrance to a residential district that extends to the north of the city. In contrast to the dryness of the street (i.e. lack of vegetation), the house stands out like an oasis of green, its fence punctuated with plants like so many mouldings. In the foreground, a few palms trees have recently been planted, undoubtedly fresh from a nursery. Their growth will depend entirely on regular watering.

The fence theoretically indicates the boundary of public space. However, the palms in their planters and bushes in the foreground clearly have been built on public property, which has been appropriated for private use. Here we do not have a case of an individual helping to ‘build’ the street, but rather someone looking to beautify their home and, at the same time, ensure that vehicles do not get too close to the fence, thus keeping them at a respectable distance. One could imagine private facilities being used to create a pavement but, in this instance,



the markings on the ground in front of the entrance portico clearly indicate that it is an individual who has appropriated public space for his own purposes, with no particular intention to beautify it.

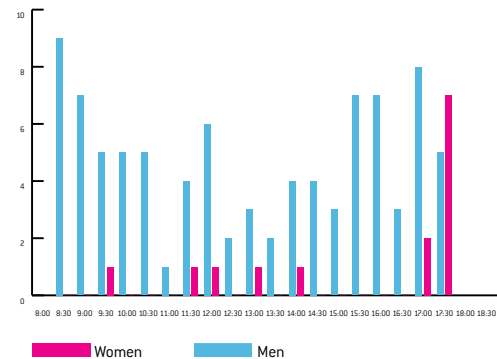
**NKC**  
**SHOT 4**

The image shows only part of the house, but its imposing character and random architecture make it a curiosity in this part of the city. Who could live in such a vast space, in such apparent luxury?

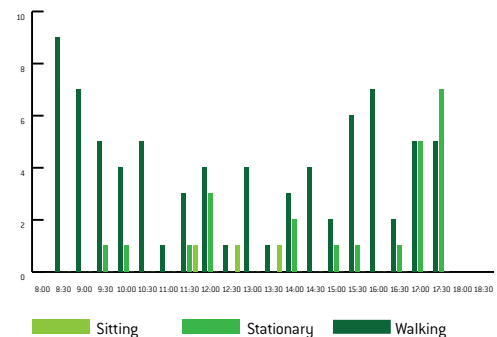
Except for the vegetation of the first house and the neighbouring fence, the rest of the street still seems to be under construction, as evidenced by the grey cinder blocks that can be seen here and there.

The shot shows a 'classic' street in a rich neighbourhood, with a wide paved road. At first glance, nothing seems to be happening. However, our count shows a number of things.

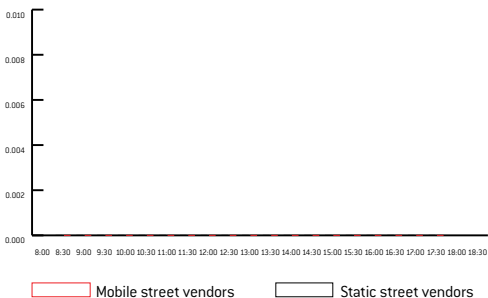
Of the passers-by, 86% were men and 14% were women; hence, a lower proportion of women than in the other images. At 8 a.m. many of the people we saw were house employees on their way to work. After this, the number of people dwindles until about 11 a.m. – the major lull of the day. At the end of the day we find the same number of people in the street. With the exception of the house gardener in the foreground, almost all of the others are on the move – no chatting or stopping in the street.



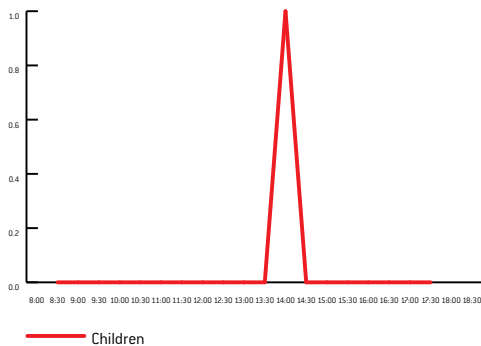
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



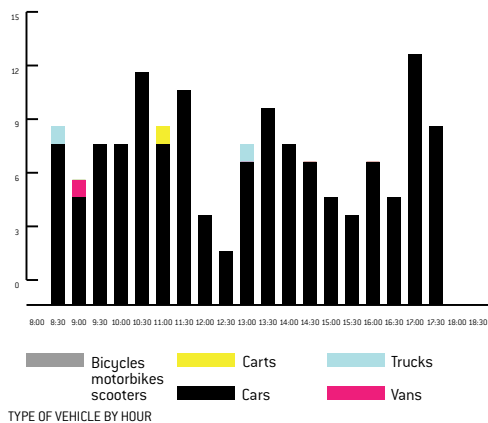
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



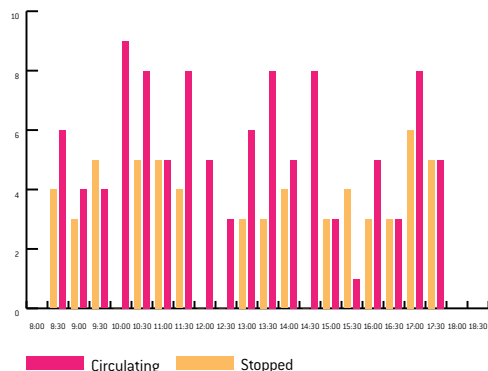
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

We already saw that shade plays an important role in the streets. As there is none here, it is almost impossible to sit down and peacefully wait for the day to unfold. Consequently, people just pass through.

Though this is a residential district, we saw few children. One even has trouble imagining them playing in the streets in front of these mansions (they are undoubtedly inside them). Nor is the neighbourhood conducive to vendors, who are simply absent.

Finally, while people tend to keep moving, vehicles tend to park (63%) along the roadside, as in the other images. This time, however, this parking space is exclusively for the use of the residents of the house in the background – another example of privatisation of public space.

*Shot 5 [Nouakchott]*. This shot was taken further south in the city centre, where the shop signs are of a more 'popular' nature. The location is the city's original perimeter – the one from the 1960s. The large homes were surrounded by rows of shops and stores, and the enclosure walls have been widened and reinforced to create retail spaces. In the background we can still see the original residence on two floors. Once the shops are rented out, the investment quickly pays for itself and can even be extremely lucrative, which is why many shops are built side by side in this district.

Again, an abundance of vegetation indicates that we are in the city centre, with the shrubs in store entrances completing the package. The angle made by the two thickets delineates a privatised space in front of the stores. There is an actual pavement – a rare feature in Nouakchott and, again, pointing to the district's centrality and history. But this wide pavement is now divided into two – one part for vehicle parking and the other an outdoor extension of the stores. The ground here is tiled and clean, and concrete planters prevent cars from parking all the way up to the storefronts. The fact that the space has been privatised, in this case, allows people to walk safely alongside the buildings and easily access the shops. Despite the greenery, the image is dominated by the grey of the ground, road and pavement. There is little sand, even though the image shows the end of the tar road.

This area specializes in sales of electronics, televisions, and mobile phones, as the shop signs indicate. Like almost everywhere in the city, each neighbourhoods sell specific products. Stores open between 9:30 and 10 a.m.

The type of shops found in this district undoubtedly explains the almost total absence of women in the street (less than 2%). Their presence was mostly noted in the late afternoon, after the hottest time of the day. This is a place of business, almost exclusively for men. Like street vendors, children have no place in this adult male setting and are not present.

People tend to sit down only in the late afternoon – not surprisingly, when there is enough shade to do so comfortably. For, while vegetation can be seen in this



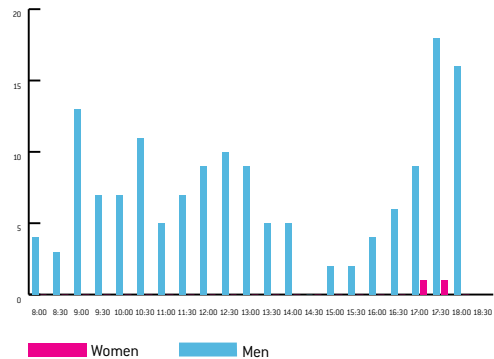
## NKC SHOT 5

image, there are no trees in the foreground and the storefronts are exposed to the sun the entire day. It is impossible to linger in the streets; vendors cannot stay there, nor can stands be set up. It is only the late afternoon that discussion begins to animate the street, with people stopping to sit on low walls.

This city centre street has little traffic. Jam-packed in the morning, scarcely anyone remains after 10 a.m. The rhythm picks up around noon and at the end of the day, but trivially compared to the morning hours – at least for cars. Regarding parking, a great number of cars park in the morning and do not move until evening, giving one the impression that the street is a giant car park. Regarding vehicles in operation, the movement of the cars seems to be directly related to the shops. Big cars park directly in front of them long enough to make their purchases and then leave.

This shot offers an accurate illustration of how parking is done in Nouakchott. A car parks onto the pavement, then another does the same at some distance (leaving enough room to be able to pull out easily), and others follow suit – in the road, pavement, where have you. Drivers try not to block one another in or to completely block traffic, which is not always easy. There is neither rhyme, nor reason, nor rules; you simply park where there is room, and as close to the shop entrance as possible.

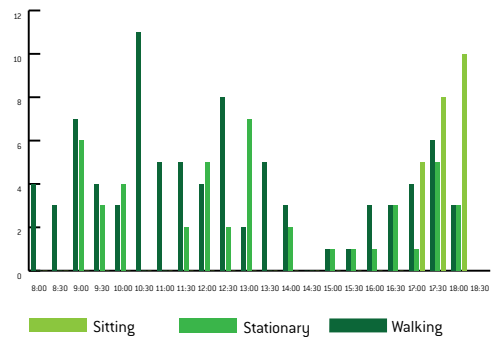
NKC  
SHOT 5



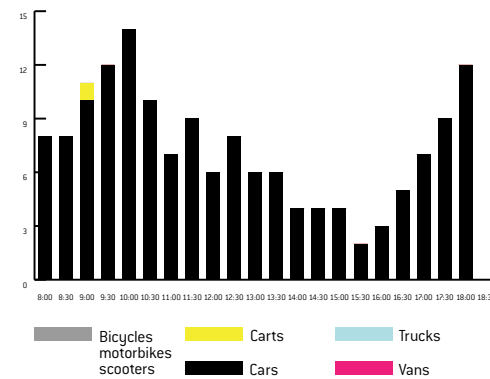
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



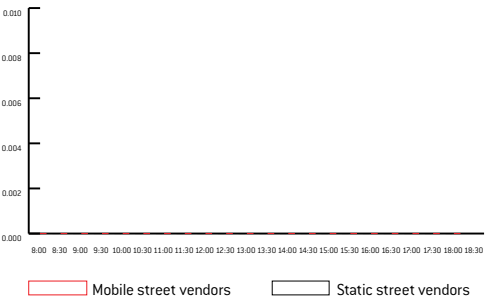
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



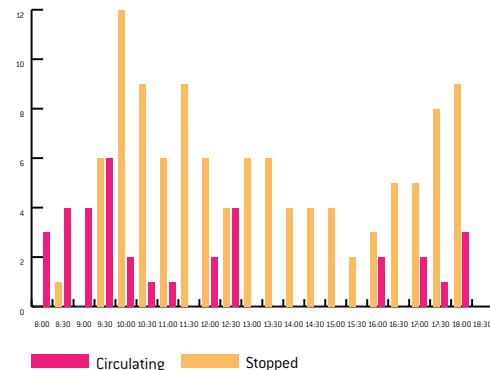
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

*Shot 6 [Nouakchott]*. This shot was taken south of the city centre in a working-class area. As we can see, the pavement, again, has disappeared and been replaced by sand, and the rows of shops have given way to more disparate buildings whose facades and enclosing walls do not clearly delineate public space from private land. The vestiges of street furniture on the right – bus shelters (in the shade no less) – still wait to serve buses. A billboard awaits a new poster, shacks and stalls sit empty, waiting to come to life: such is the scene at sunrise. Under the street lamps, which are still lit, the yellow of the sand and buildings stands out.

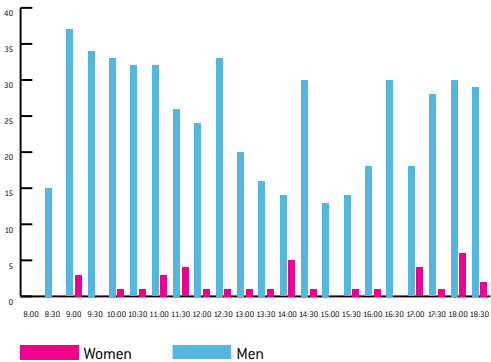
Soon thereafter, employees start to arrive, shops open, and a vendor sets up his stall and bench in the middle in the foreground. In the background, the other vendors are also getting ready. Once they are set up, the vendors and craft-people wait for customers hidden in the shade of their stalls. When there is no longer enough shade, they simply leave for a few hours. When they return, they turn the stall around, thus creating their own shade. We discover that this particular vendor repairs watches and sells bands. He sits on a chair (two broken chairs tied together to create one, in fact); the bench is for his customers. This is a good example of the use of shade: the vendor works on one side of the stall, takes a break to wait while the sun passes to the other side, and then goes back to work.

NKC  
SHOT 6

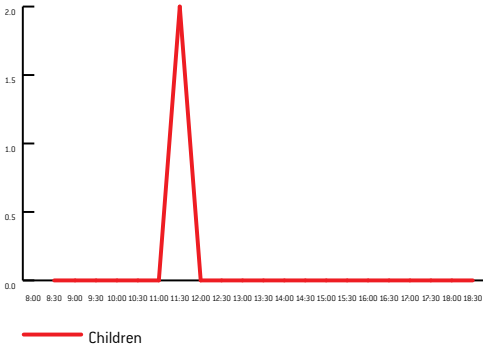




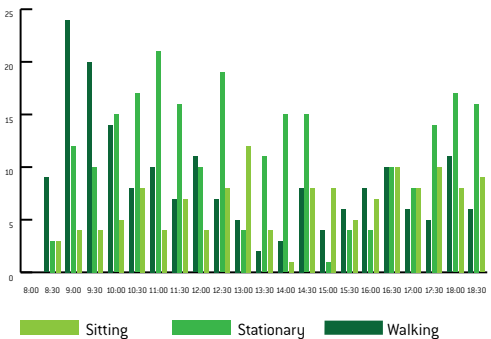
NKC  
SHOT 6



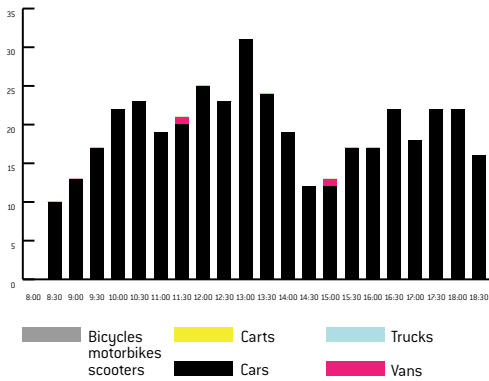
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



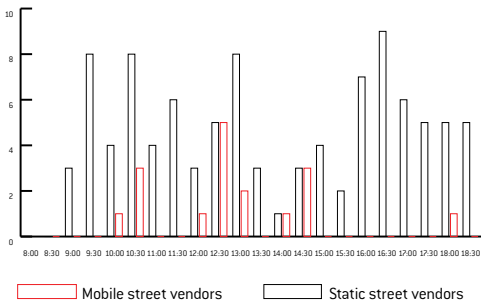
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



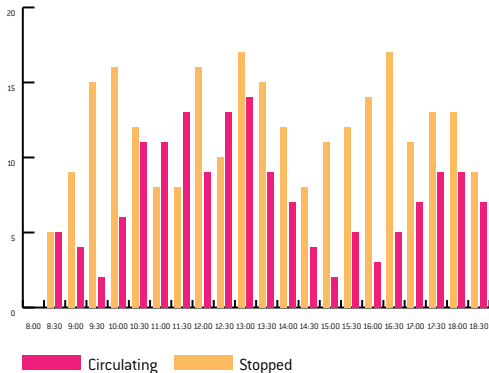
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

Other vendors have developed other systems that allow them to stay open and work throughout the day, notably by taking advantage of the bus shelter and tarps, depending on the time of day. This area, however, is teeming with repair shops of all kinds; watches, shoes, glasses, and a variety of everyday items are brought here to be repaired. Customers typically just park their cars to have their repair work done.

While at 8 a.m. there are few people in this street, by 9 a.m. human traffic is at its peak. Then the number of people slowly decreases until around 2 p.m., increasing again in the afternoon until 5 to 6:30 p.m. Two exceptions are 12:30 and 2:30 p.m.

Only 6% of the street's daily population is women. Men walk mostly in the morning, using the street as a thoroughfare between home and work. Once again, children are not present (only two were observed the whole day).

There is no system for blocking cars, which tend to usurp all of the space available. While the latter come over the course of the day, there are fewer around 11 and 2:30 p.m. The time of the day when there are fewest people is between 2:30 and 3 p.m. But the rhythm of cars is not the same as that of pedestrians: while there are many people in the streets in the early morning, this number decreases as the morning wears on; for cars, the contrary is true.

There is no permanent appropriation of public space in this scene. Stall vendors use public space, appropriating bus stops and street furniture, and leave their stalls overnight, but there is no 'solidifying' of these installations. As such, they are apt to disappear at the whim of the police or as the result of a political decision. The main explanation for this is the economic impotence of vendors, who do not have the means to fortify their stalls and are not influential enough to prevent the destruction of their property.

*Shot 7 [Nouakchott].* This image, the last in the Nouakchott series, was taken from the roof of a building overlooking a street near the SOCOGIM market. The precise location of the image and name of the market are of little importance – we simply note that it is a market scene, as the crowd of vendors attests.

The lack of paving, vegetation, and street lamps make one thing clear: this is not the city centre but rather a working-class area. As building density is high, it is undeniably in the old city (the periphery being less dense).

The dominant colour here is that of the road: brown, an impression that is reinforced by the facades of the buildings, which are a similar colour. In this universe of brown, only the women's coloured veils stand out, announcing their presence at the market.

Effectively, women are more present in this scene (13%) than in any of the other shots. The market can thus be described as a place of women – at least in Nouakchott. While their numbers exceed those for the other images – if the market is indeed a woman's place – the numbers remain low. Hence, even the



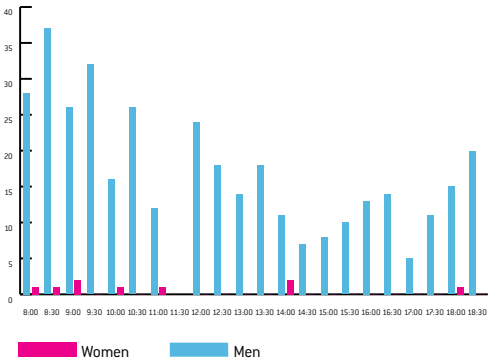
market is a man's space first and foremost. There is another story behind the female presence we distinguish here, which our studies on markets helped us better grasp: women are not allowed to enter shops or the interior of the market, and thus are relegated to the outskirts, which explains their presence in the street as saleswomen.

NKC  
SHOT 7

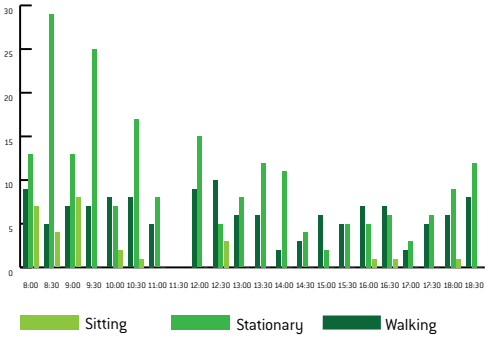
Though we did not perform a count for the entire image, it clearly shows a busy street and a 'normal' situation. Numbers are greatest in the morning, dropping between 12:30 and 1 p.m. Between 2 p.m. and the end of the afternoon, they recede until disappearing altogether. Female presence waxes and wanes throughout the day.

Men are most numerous in the morning until about 1 p.m., after which their presence in the street decreases until about 2:30, the quietest part of the day, until their numbers increase from 4:30 p.m. through the end of the day. The rhythm thus is the same as in the other scenes, even though there is a stronger presence throughout the day.

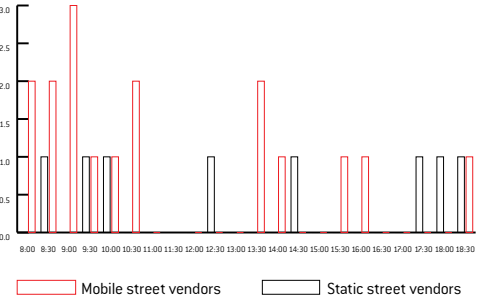
While children seem to be absent in this city – at least in the streets we studied – their numbers increase slightly in the market streets, where we saw toddlers accompanying their mothers as the latter did their shopping, or children alone working or begging. Street vendors are rare at the market for the simple reason that the fixed stands sell all of the same products they could possibly offer.



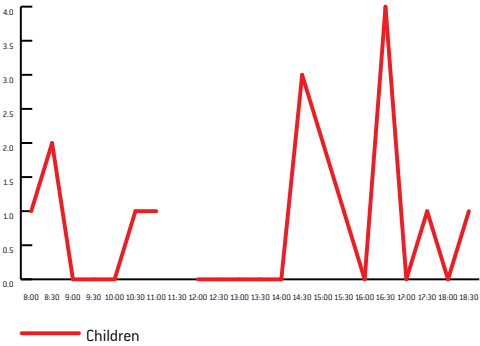
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



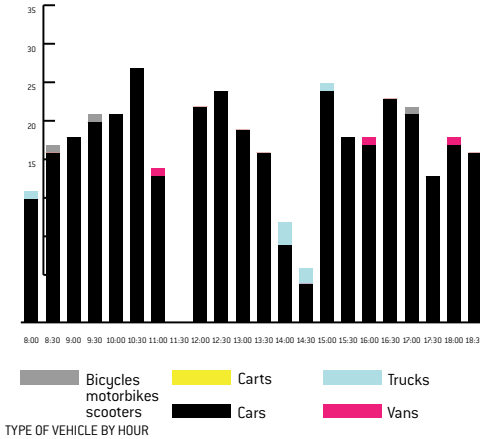
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



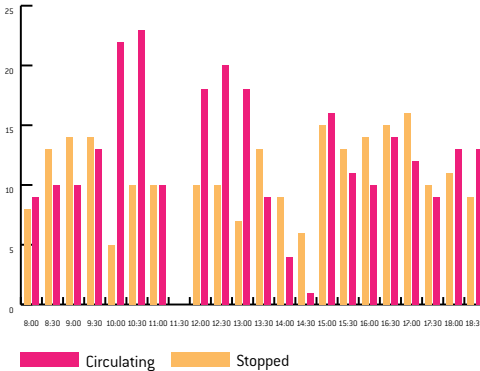
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

Finally, the car is not the sole or exclusive mode of transport in these market streets; vans are abundant, as are the trucks which come to unload merchandise, and the carts that are an indispensable (and the least expensive) means of transport for people going to other neighbourhoods and transporting merchandise inside or outside the market. Finally, between moving and parked vehicles the proportions are more or less equal, with slight differences depending on the time of day, as the graphs indicate. However, the 4 p.m. lull was observed for both pedestrians and vehicles.

*Summary of shots for Nouakchott.* We will now review our findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of our street images.

1. In Nouakchott, only 10 % of the population in the street are women. Public space is therefore highly gendered and, hence, a predominantly male place. Moreover, women's presence in the streets is linked almost exclusively to markets and sales (i.e. buying or selling). Apart from this – with the exception of the cleaning ladies we saw early in the morning on their way to work or sometimes at a shop in the afternoon – women are simply not present in the streets.

The few women we did see were either seated or belonged to one of the aforementioned categories; rarely did we see them walking, as even getting about inside the market is done by collective taxi or cart, depending on the individual's means.

Walking is not a choice but rather an obligation in Nouakchott, given the high cost of transportation (or, in some cases, because walking is actually faster than taking the bus, at least for short distances). Ambulant vendors are also condemned to walk. Whatever the case, no one walks for pleasure. Among the upper classes (i.e. those with direct access to a car), no one walks to work, even if it is only 200 feet away. Walking is the poor man's – and woman's – lot.

Coming back to women's presence in the streets, it is around 9 a.m. and then between 11 and 11:30 a.m. that we saw the greatest number of women. They then disappear between 12 and 1 p.m., come out again in the early afternoon, disappear during the hot hours, and return in greater numbers until 6 p.m. Of course, this is the total count for a whole day for our images, for which the number of individuals was averaged. This total nonetheless gives us an idea of the overall trend.

The lull for men is between 2 and 3 p.m. – the same as for women – due to the heat. Men's presence in the street is therefore directly related to the climate. The morning hours being the most comfortable, this is when men tend to come out. The end of the day is also a time for making purchases and gathering in the streets, when the temperature starts to fall (albeit slightly), and the sea breeze picks up in most parts of the city.

Finally, while women were absent from our images, children were even more so.

The few we saw were either very young (accompanied by their mothers) or were *talibés* begging in the streets of the city centre.

2. After the issue of gender comes that of the strategic locations of vendors. Indeed vendors do not set up their stalls just anywhere; they choose places with high customer potential (busy streets and intersections, or buildings with a lot of employees). However, there must also be enough space for customers to stop for a few seconds (or minutes) to make their purchase and, if necessary, easily park their cars.

Ambulant vendors can be found primarily at intersections with lights. When the light is red, they sell newspapers, tissues, 'Swiss army knives,' multi-pronged adaptors, and cotton swabs to waiting drivers. Male and female mint vendors, however, stand in front of grocery stores and near bread vendors. Phone card vendors can generally be found at intersections and tend to be stationary. In short, each type of vendor and product has its own rules. Likewise the time and place depend on what is being sold. Certain items – newspapers, for instance – are only sold in the morning.

Gender segregation can also be seen in sales practices. While both men and women tend stalls, ambulant vendors are almost exclusively young men. The only exception is mint, which is often sold by women and children of older mothers.

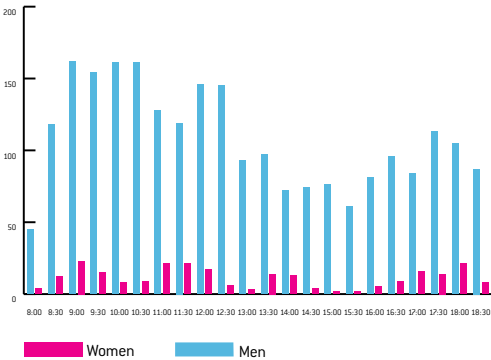
Like vendors, beggars also have location strategies. The city centre is their favourite spot. One sees people on crutches or in wheelchairs weaving their way between cars at intersections when the light turns red. But intersections also attract *talibés* begging for money and food, recognizable by the metal boxes they carry to hold the donations they receive.

3. Another feature of the Nouakchott street is privatisation. Public spaces tend to be under strong pressure, especially regarding real estate. There is a tendency to privatise the street, or at least to use it for private purposes. Five such phenomena were seen in Nouakchott:

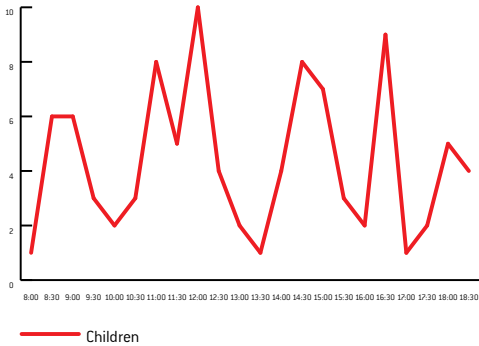
- *Constructions*. Strategies exist for using public space for personal landscaping projects, like the owners of the imposing villa who did a series of 'improvements' beyond their walls.
- *Storefronts and road markings*. Fruit shops appropriate the street, extending their facades well beyond the plot boundaries. Road markings and bollards mark the distance between the shop and the street.
- *Parking*. Cars park in the street, not on private parcels, which tend to be entirely built up.
- *Vegetation*. A tree or two is often planted at the fronts of parcels, providing shade for the guardian and keeping the street 'at a distance.' This invisible threshold is on public land.

# NKC

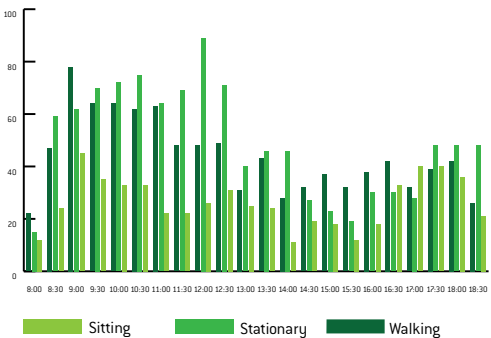
## SUMMARY OF SHOTS



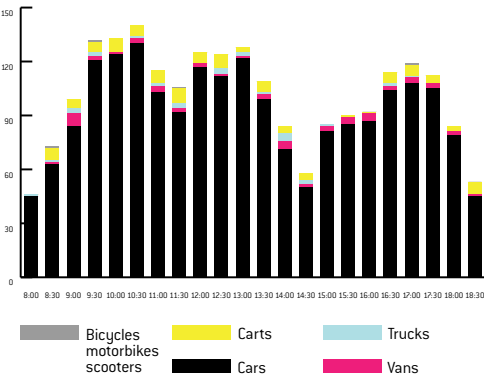
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



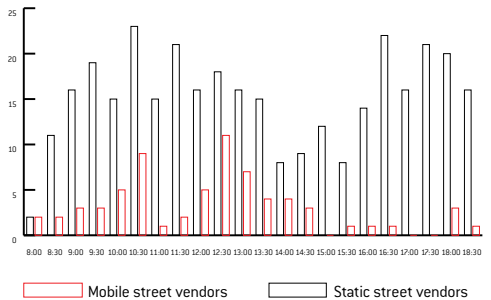
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



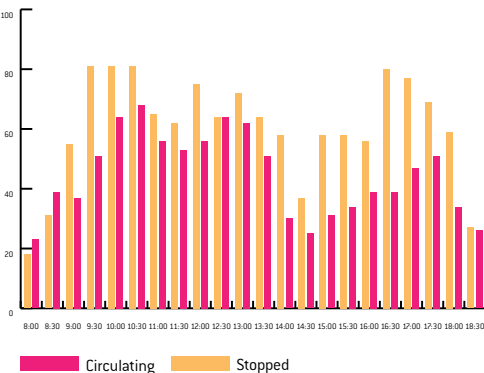
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



– *Storage*. Another way of privatising public space is by storing building materials and piles of sand or bricks on it. Building material is always stored on public property, even if it obstructs traffic.

There are two ways of appropriating public space: temporarily (temporary sometimes lasts for several years) and permanently. Vehicle parking and the storage of materials are, by definition, temporary, while the planting of trees or shrubs is more permanent. This is ambiguous, as there is clearly a desire to appropriate public space and keep the street 'at bay'; at the same time, planting trees structures the street and provides shade. This leaves constructions and road markings. In the former, we find a pure and simple appropriation of the street. A rich, influential shop owner builds on public land and the authorities turn a blind eye. In the case of road markings, however, it is more complicated. Although appropriation undeniably takes place, the examples we saw showed the limit of the pavement in front of the shop, and while fruit vendors *obstruct* foot traffic, electronics shops actually *create* a pavement area that did not exist before. In this case, private use adds value to public space.

4. The influence of shade on the organisation of the street is also important. The sun is the main determinant of how the street operates in Nouakchott. All installations – regardless of the neighbourhood (central or periphery) or time of day (from dawn to the scorching afternoon hours) – are set up in view of benefitting from the maximum amount of shade. Vendors start in the shade, stop when the sun is at its zenith, and return later in the day. Women follow the shade around a tree all day, readjusting their stalls to the sun's course.

The boundaries of public space between the road and roadsides are not indicated by markings such as kerbs or differences in surfacing, but are made based on the time of day and, hence, shade. Some stalls spill over into the road in order to stay in the shade, even if this means obstructing traffic. This is probably the most important point to grasp about public space. In Nouakchott, the sun dictates many of the rules.

5. The colours of the city are indicators of centrality. In fact, one could make a map using only colours. What would they be? Predominantly white for buildings downtown, with the roadsides and pavement tending towards beige, almost yellow (the colour of sand), creating an impression of brightness. In contrast, working-class neighbourhoods are brown – the immutable brown of the buildings and unsurfaced roads. The difference between the centre and periphery is clear, even if there seems to be a growing trend towards colour variation (namely pink and grey) for buildings in downtown areas.

With the exception of taxis, green is exclusively the colour of the vegetation. On this point as well we can easily imagine a map indicating spatial segregation, with the downtown and residential neighbourhoods abounding in greenery and with working-class districts, outlying areas and shantytowns treeless.

6. There are two modes of transportation – walking and the car – the former being for the poor and latter being for the privileged classes. Between the two, one finds a few buses, vans and lorries – the bus for transporting the masses, and vans and lorries for the transport of goods. But the car clearly dominates.

Markets are conducive to the use of cars, lorries and vans. Their numbers are proportionally greater in commercial areas than in the rest of the city, relative to cars. At markets in outlying areas and popular districts, carts are not only used for transporting goods – as is the case downtown – but are also a mode of human transport [the least expensive mode of urban transport, in fact]. As carts are not an authorized in the city centre, the only ones we saw were those used for transporting goods.

It is also important to look at the correlation between the presence of vehicles in the streets and that of pedestrians. The graphs give similar curves (which are superimposable for all of the images), showing a strong presence between 9 and 10:30 a.m., 12 and 1 p.m., and again, to a lesser degree, in the late afternoon. Looking more closely, however, this superposition is not so clear in the city centre, as certain images show obvious differences between the hours of pedestrians and those of vehicles. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the two groups represent two very different populations. Early-morning walkers do not have the same working hours as drivers; hence, we do not see them in the street at the same time.

7. Literature on the African city conveys many ideas that are generally taken as certainties, such as the alleged presence of animals in public spaces, which seemed so obvious that, while we felt certain we would find hosts of animals, the only animals in the streets were donkeys pulling carts; a herd of goats crossing the street is more the exception than the rule. Nothing came of these counts, as the numbers were so insignificant that we did not bother to map their presence in Nouakchott.

8. Finally, as with the case of the animals we assumed would be so numerous, we thought we would see solid waste strewn throughout the city because that is what the press claims. Visually speaking, however, we found Nouakchott to be a clean city. Of course, not all neighbourhoods were surveyed. And, of course, piles of rubbish exist here and there and illegal dumps mark the city limits. But the city is not drowning in rubbish, as waste is collected regularly. This is due to the fact that the authorities recently addressed the issue. However, it is not our goal to go into a detailed history of waste management here. Rather, we simply wish to dispel the myth of a city teeming with waste, as this is not the case for Nouakchott. The same issue will be addressed for Dakar and Abidjan.



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## THE STREETS OF DAKAR

### Chapter 3

*Shot 1 [Dakar].* This shot was taken in a working-class neighbourhood of Dakar. In the centre of the image, a building under construction forms a street corner. Works are being done in public space, and a construction pit has been opened. In fact, the entire neighbourhood seems to be under construction, as evidenced by the grey buildings in the background and bricks on the ground floor of the building on the right. The roads are paved, though sand has started to invade the intersection.

The buildings – grey, white and yellow, and all similar in tone – seem to follow no specific pattern; it is, in fact, the non-built elements that give the street a multi-coloured effect. The red, brown, and grey tarps, orange houses, and yellow and black taxis make the street into a patchwork unified by the sun.

DKR  
SHOT 1



Except for a few large trees, there is little vegetation – an inorganic tableau in which vendors, customers, and passers-by are assuming their positions. In the early morning, however, this scene is largely devoid of human life; the only people we see are those walking to work, giving it a feeling of desolation, as though the stalls have long been ownerless. Some are even overturned and lying on the ground. However, at around 7 a.m., vendors start arriving and setting up, some in the stalls they occupied the day before, some toting their own benches, tables, and materials with them each day. When the market closes at day's end, however, everything is put away until the next morning.

In the early morning no sun protection is necessary. Soon, however, parasols appear and are not dismantled until late afternoon.

The crossroads is a man's place, with only 6% of women. Yet their numbers increase throughout the day, with a lull between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

The vendors are all male – at least in this shot – and the few women we saw were not involved in sales activities. The number of men steadily increases until 8:30 a.m. and then decreases until 2 p.m., marking a second slump. The number of men steadily increases until about 7 p.m. The number of people (male and female) is greatest at the end of the day.

In addition to the sale of gas and burners we see in the foreground, we also find clothes, socks, and other footwear, all undoubtedly for men only, which partially explains the lack of women.

The statistical curve of passers-by (those on the move) closely reflects the overall male/female curve. The peak (between 7 and 7:30 p.m.) coincides with people leaving work, prior to the evening meal. The street is at its busiest at the end of the day. While we saw many people early in the morning on their way to work, we find few people seated, though their numbers increase as the day wears on. On the whole, 15% walk, 20% sit, and 65% stand.

We did not see any children before 10 a.m. but then saw them at regular intervals throughout the day, either as vendors or in the company of their mothers. Nevertheless, their numbers were low (11 for a day of 668 people counted, including non-school hours).

The number of non-mobile vendors increases in the early morning, as this is when they set up their stands, and reaches a peak at around 9 a.m. After several slumps (approximately 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 2:30 p.m.), their numbers pick up again at the end of the day, when the number of potential customers increases as well. The situation is reversed for mobile vendors, who are least numerous during the busiest hours. However, they return at noon and late in the day, lending the impression that they are not necessarily here for vending purposes (seeing as they sell the same goods as non-mobile vendors), but instead use the location as a rallying point following their morning and afternoon rounds.

Crossroads are not for parking but for passing through. The few cars and trucks

that actually stopped did so for only a few minutes. In general their numbers are low, with several peak periods (7:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.). Outside of these hours, there are few vehicles. While most of the vehicles are cars (83%), a number of vans also appear around midday.

Vendors sometimes set up their stalls directly in the road, only inches away from traffic, if construction works prevent them from setting up in their usual location.

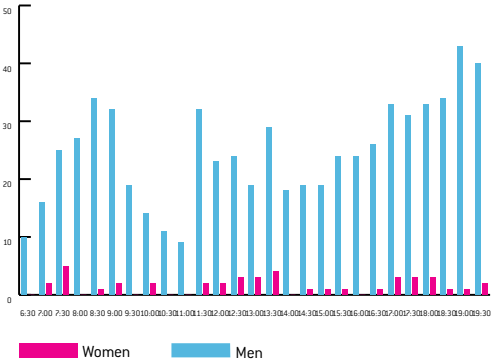
*Shot 2 [Dakar].* This shot shows the same building as in the preceding shot from a different angle. As the numbers are the same as for the previous image, we will not discuss them again. The building in the background is undergoing renovation. Work is also being done between the building and the road. Thus, all of the stalls have had to move forward on the pavement and into road, and though they have left a small passageway on the former, we see that many people choose to walk in the street. Effectively, though stall-keepers leave a meter or so of pavement free, it is quickly taken over by customers and vendors – the former inspecting the goods and the latter negotiating the prices. All of these transactions take place on this meter of pavement, leaving pedestrians no choice but to walk in the road.

On the first shot for the morning, we see an empty area that, by 10 a.m., is bustling and remains so throughout the day until the evening. The street

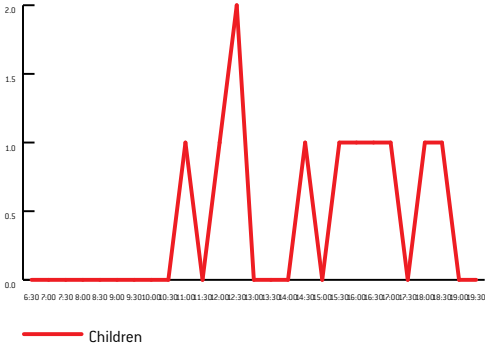
DKR  
SHOT 2



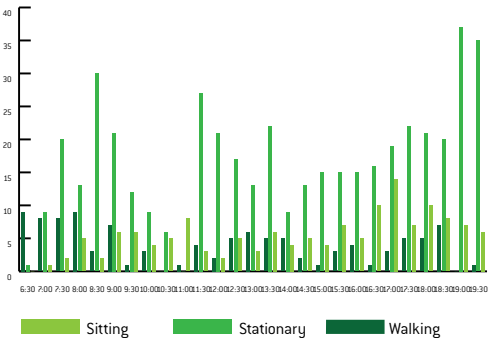
DKR  
SHOT 1 and 2



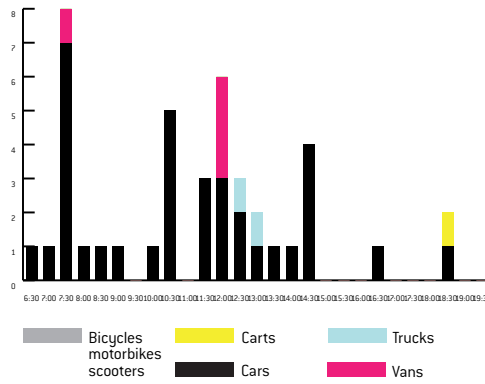
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



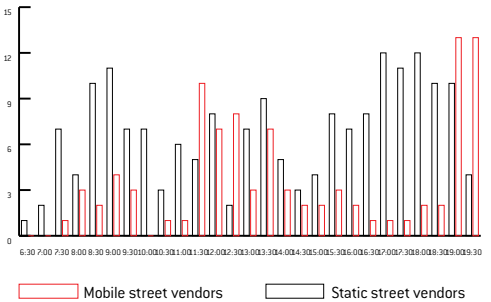
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



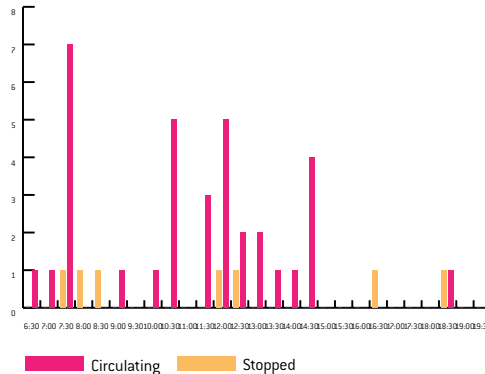
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

therefore has two completely different faces during the day and at night – between when the stalls are still in semi-chaos, awaiting occupation, and the moment when everything gets put away, with each element serving its function, including the cardboard boxes which double as protection from the sun (for the merchandise).

In most cases, the stalls are 'stored' off the road at night and taken out again in the morning. Others remain in place along the road overnight.

The streets are mostly inorganic; the vegetation in this shot is a single tree. Some of the elements we see here are: asphalt in the foreground, pavement, an area of rubble that foot traffic has flattened out, and precast concrete borders indicating construction.

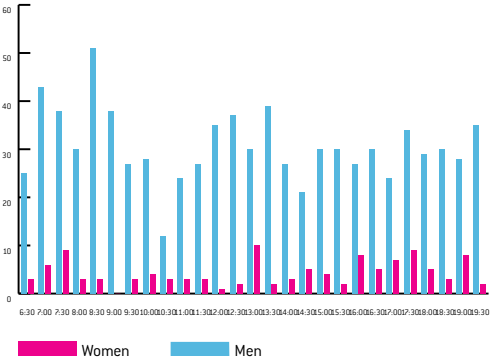
The best spots are given to the merchandise, and vendors make do with whatever shade they can find, spending much of the day sitting or lying down under their stalls and only emerging to negotiate a sale with a customer.

Typically, vendors man their stalls the entire day without switching off. If a vendor needs to absent himself for a few moments, his neighbour stands in for him.

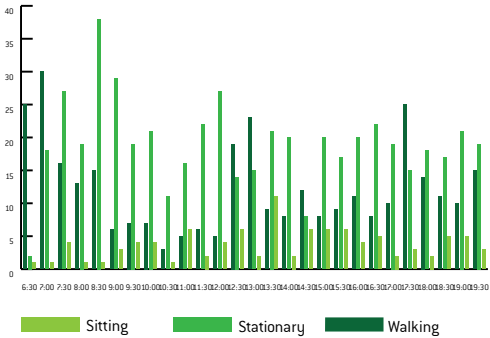
The sale of men's shirts, boxer shorts, and glasses in part explains the small number of women, as this area of the market sells only men's items. We must remember that women are much less present in this predominantly male street because of the items sold.

**DKR**  
SHOT 3

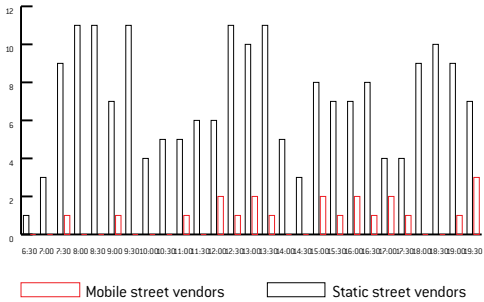




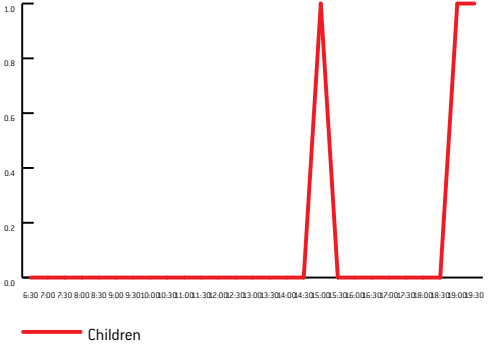
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



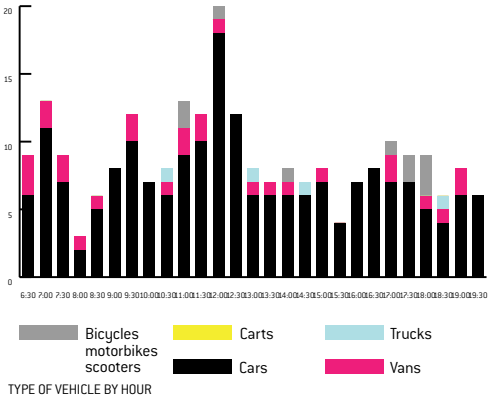
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



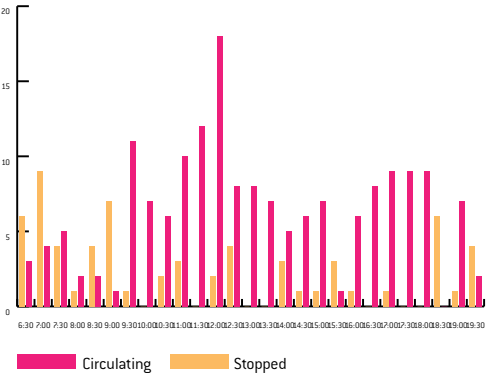
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

*Shot 3 [Dakar]*. This shot was taken in a working-class district of Dakar, in front of a major road artery (recognizable by the median between the lanes). During the day this median becomes a market. Though still empty at 6:30 a.m., vendors start arriving between 7:30 and 8 a.m. and have finished setting up by 10 a.m.. Logically, one of the first vendors to appear is the ambulant coffee vendor, allowing early arrivals at the market to enjoy a hot drink.

Installation occurs on either the median or the pavement. On the right of the image, a fence surrounding a construction site has taken over part of the pavement, forcing the stalls to move forward into the road itself. The pavement accommodates stalls while pedestrians must walk in the road, which they share with cars – forced cohabitation between two very different modes of transport.

The 'white' stonewashing of the main building has become grey, like the overall impression of the landscape itself – grey and dusty. The asphalt with its fine layer of sand and the dark parasols in the sun give the scene a monochromatic effect, in spite of the brightly coloured taxis and clothing, both worn and sold. Again, this world is largely inorganic; vegetation is peripheral. Protection from the sun comes from parasols rather than trees, which is unusual.

The many vendors indicate that we are in a market area, as the stalls take up all the available space.

The number of women is high compared to the previous image (13%), but still very low in absolute terms. This percentage is spread out over the course of the day, with disparities depending on the time of day. The sale of cloth explains their presence here.

Passers-by are present early in the morning, around midday, and around 5:30 p.m. Their high proportion (35%) reflects the fact that the street is an obligatory thoroughfare. People walk on the main roads, buses make stops along them. As we can see, vendors set up their stalls in transit areas, as commerce, by definition, require customers.

With the exception of 10:30 a.m. – when the area is surprisingly empty – the zone is bustling throughout the day. While disparities exist according to the time of day, they are minor. This is also true for vehicular traffic, although the lull periods are not the same. The low volume of traffic at 8 a.m. can only be explained by the fact that the shot was taken at a rare moment when, for a few seconds, the street was empty. The street's busyness is evidenced by the fact that three-quarters of vehicles are moving. The remaining 25% are parked, but apparently only for a short time, as we never see the same vehicles from one image to the next. Trucks, vans, and two-wheeled vehicles (no carts) represent 18% of the vehicles; the remaining 82% are cars.

*Shots 4 and 5 [Dakar]*. Here we will look at two shots simultaneously. Both show the same scene: the photographer simply turned 180°. The numbers are the





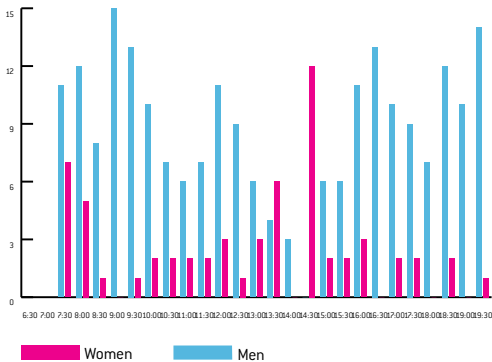
## DKR SHOT 4

same but, upon further scrutiny, we see that each offers different information, providing its own explanatory elements.

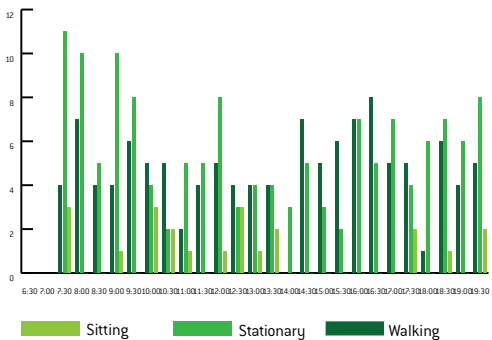
The scene is in downtown Dakar, as the morphology of the buildings suggests. Shot 4 shows a very large building on the right, giving us a first clue. However, it, by itself, is not an indicator that we are in the city centre; one can easily imagine similar buildings in other neighbourhoods. Rather, it is the simultaneous presence of other elements (the paved roads and DDD – Dakar Dem Dikk – buses, which provide service between the centre and certain parts of the periphery, but do not serve the entire city of Dakar) that confirms this. But it is, above all, the remnants of colonial architecture (i.e., the central building in Shot 4, or the typical architecture of the balcony overlooking the street on Shot 5) that situates us, as such architecture is only found in the historical city centre on the Plateau. It is possible to discern where this picture was taken without naming the exact street, thanks to a few hints. This same approach allowed us to clearly show the location of images for Nouakchott.

These shots were taken an hour after the others, giving us the impression of a city that is awake, as though the city centre woke up before the other neighbourhoods. This is not the case, of course, and the installation of the stalls attests to the fact that all Dakar vendors begin their day at roughly the same time (with the exception of ambulant coffee or food vendors, who sell breakfast before the work

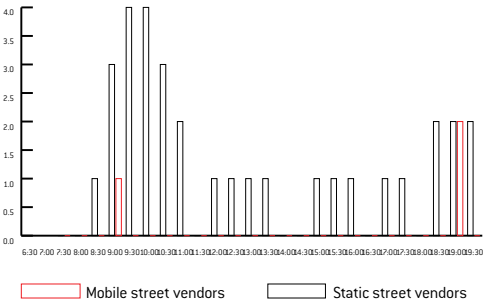
DKR  
SHOT 4 et 5



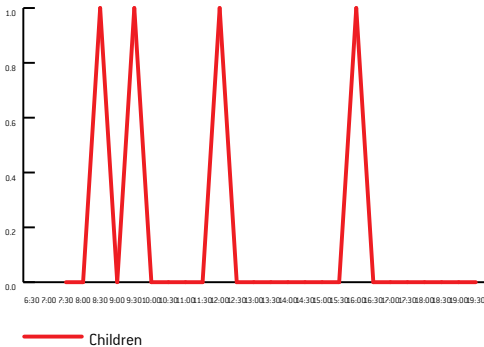
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



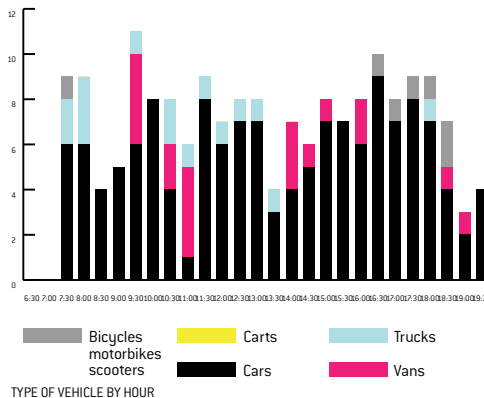
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



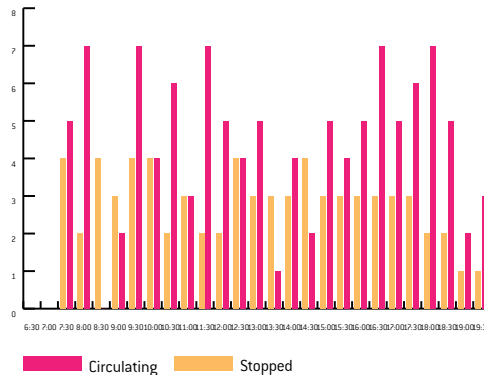
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



# DKR SHOT 5

day begins]. Once again the vegetation is scarce and seemingly always 'off in the distance,' as though it were not part of the urban landscape.

The population of the street is comprised of 87% men and 13% women – proportions similar to those in the other shots. Women are present in public space throughout the day. The same is true for men, with lulls at around 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. In general, there are more people in the afternoon than in the morning.

The strong presence of *talibés* in certain streets obscures the reality, as their numbers are greater downtown than in other neighbourhoods. The other children we saw were infants and toddlers with their mothers (in equal proportions to the women). *Talibés* are mainly present in the morning. Once they have earned enough money, they can return to the *daara* (the *daara* is the Koranic school of the marabout; the latter sets the amount *talibés* must earn each day, and the child may only return once he has collected enough money).

Vehicles are not present uniformly throughout the day. While their numbers are low until 2:30 p.m. (with peaks between 9 and 9:30 a.m. and between 12 and 12:30 p.m.), their numbers increase at a regular rate starting at 3:30 p.m.

The layout of the street does not leave much room for vehicle parking, which means that cars must keep moving. Shot 5 shows an interesting phenomenon: cars covered by protective tarps, parked along the street (often early in the morning), are left there for the day and then collected again in the evening. Hence,

a handful of parking spaces have been set aside for long-term parking, but not for customers who want to stop for a few minutes to make their purchases.

Finally, as regard vehicles, two surprising facts are worth noting: the number of coaches (Dakar Dem Dikk), express buses, and yellow-and-black taxis (not to mention two-wheeled vehicles) attests to the strong presence of public transport, especially downtown, where it seems to be the only mode of travel.

As the pavement is often covered with stalls, pedestrians are forced to walk in the road, which they must share with trucks, cars, and other vehicles. As the latter have the priority, walking is difficult in the streets of Dakar.

*Summary of shots for Dakar.* We will now look at some of the more striking features for Dakar.

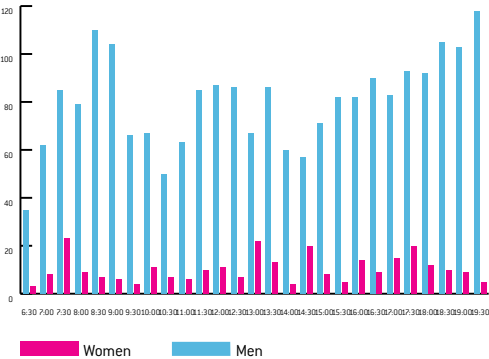
1. *Sun and shade.* Shade plays a key role in the streets, and vendors, who spend many hours at the market, have perfected ways of protecting their stalls from the sun. In Dakar, however, it is the goods that are the priority, which makes sense, given the value of the good and the damage the sun can cause (e.g., by fading the colours of fabric). Vendors must protect their stock or be certain they can turn their merchandise over quickly, before the sun has time to damage it. As protection from the sun is a major concern, vendors set up their stalls to maximize the shade created either by the stall itself or by parasols, which are frequently used. When shade is limited, vendors take refuge under their tables, seated, or lying down. Spending the entire day outside in conditions such as those in Dakar, without shade, is an impossible challenge. Hence, with the exception of a few pedestrians who have no choice but to walk in it, no one stops directly in the sun for more than a minute or two. While we, in our northern latitudes, seek and revere the sun, in Dakar it is an element against which people protect themselves.

2. *The place of men and women.* Women represent only 11% of the population of public space, which is to say, a very small percentage. However, they are present throughout the day, like men who, in general, are found in great numbers all day long. This disparity is even more notable at day's end, likely due to household tasks (cleaning, preparing meals, etc.) which are exclusively performed by women. Hence, men stay in the streets later while awaiting mealtime.

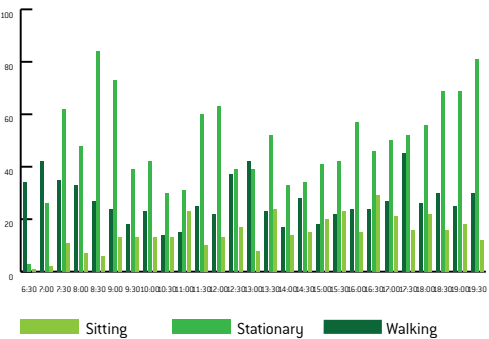
At around 2 p.m., the streets seem slightly less busy than at other times, but the difference is not flagrant. Unlike Nouakchott, in Dakar one does not have the impression that the city becomes a ghost town at 2 p.m.

3. *Sidewalks for sales, roads for walking.* This is the cardinal rule in the streets of Dakar. Vendors use the pavement, at times even spilling over into the road, but typically use the kerb as the boundary of their stalls. And while this boundary is typically respected, this means that pedestrians must share the road with

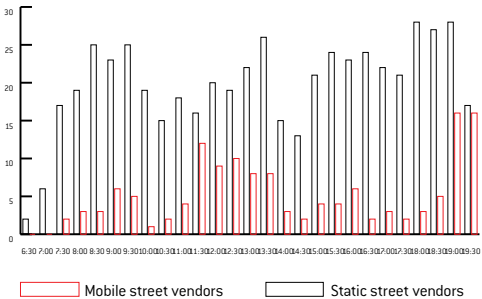
# DKR SUMMARY OF SHOTS



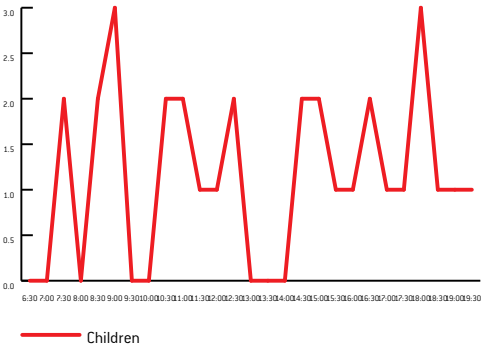
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



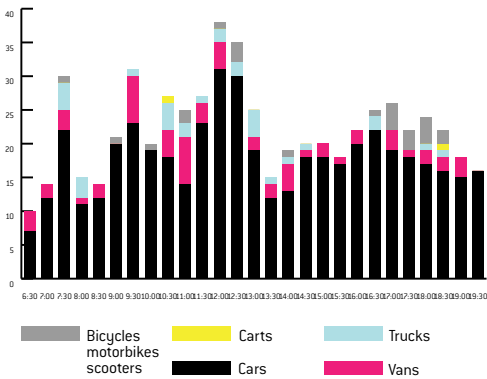
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



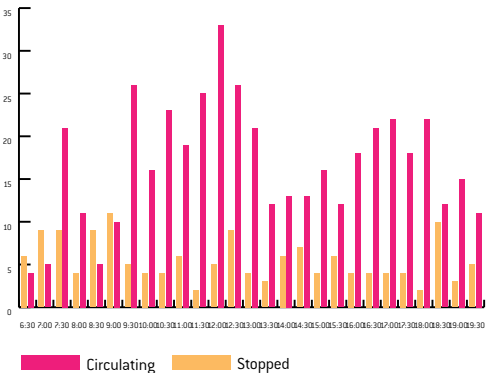
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

vehicles. One notable exception is in the case where even the most minor construction work pops up: when vendors cannot occupy their 'normal' spot, they simply move their stalls forward, even into the road itself.

To conclude, walking and cycling, though the most energy efficient modes of transport, are hard to do in Dakar not because of the distances (although this may also play a role), but simply because of the difficulty of getting about. Pedestrians and cyclists (though few) must share the same space as cars and trucks.



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## THE STREETS OF ABIDJAN

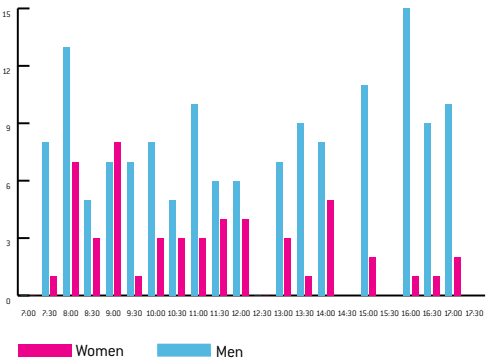
### Chapter 4

*Shot 1 [Abidjan]*. This shot was taken in a working-class neighbourhood, far from the prestigious buildings of the city centre. In the foreground we see an empty square protected by boulders, to keep vehicles from parking in it. This security cordon obviously works, as no vendor, vehicle, or pedestrian seems to dare enter the space, which remains empty all day long.

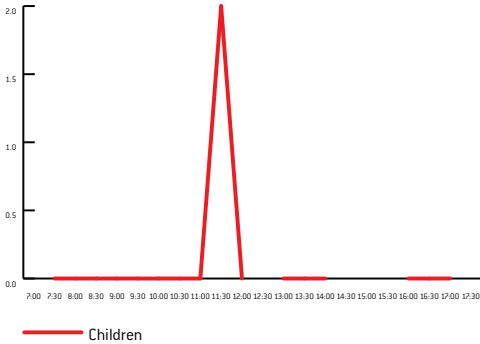
The buildings have dwellings on the upper floors and shops on the ground floors. The space between the shops and street serves a dual function, accommodating both vehicle parking and stalls selling cigarettes, sweets, fruits, and vegetables. The shops, which are behind the stalls, typically do not sell the same products as the stalls.

ABJ  
SHOT 1

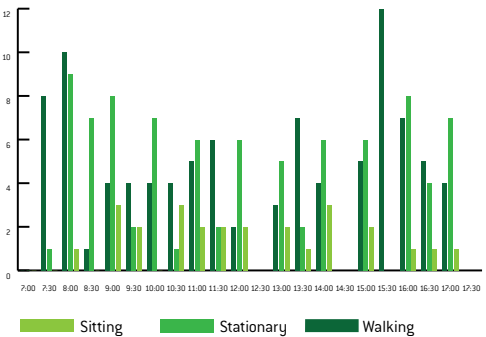




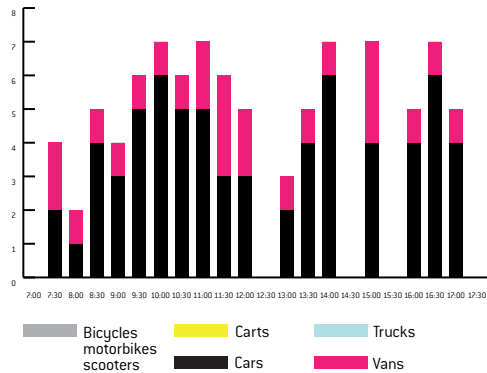
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



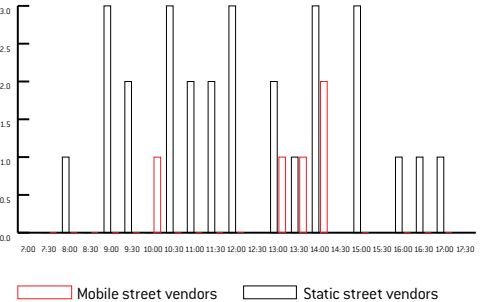
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



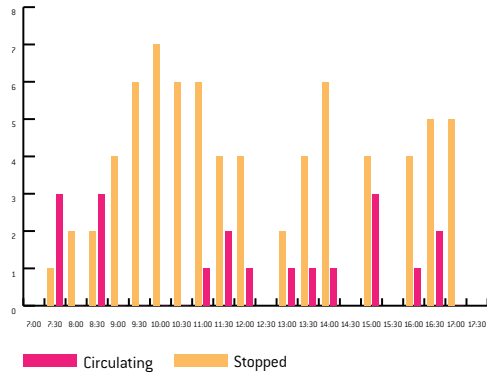
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

Roughly three-quarters of the people in the street are men (73%), and one quarter are women. While this proportion, again, seems skewed, Abidjan was nonetheless the city where we saw the greatest number of women.

Female presence is not evenly distributed over the course of the day; it is strong in the morning (8–9 a.m.), sharply decreases in the afternoon, and rises again around 2 p.m. Men, however, are present regularly throughout the day, with the exception of peaks at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. and a slight increase at the end of the day.

Two phenomena are highlighted in this image. The first is the layout of the stalls, and the second (a result of the first) is the space left for passage. As we mentioned earlier, an area in front of each shop leaves room for parking and stalls. As the latter must leave space in front of the shop entrances, they tend to move as close to the road as possible, all in a row, forcing pedestrians to walk in the road, alongside cars, trucks, and stationary vehicles. With the exception of one van, the vehicles we saw only parked for a few minutes at a time. While few vehicles are parked, even fewer actually circulate in this relatively calm street.

The early hours of the morning reveal a street that is somewhat dirty. However, a city employee gives it a quick clean, and this is how it will remain until the evening. Cleaning takes place more or less on a daily basis.

There are few ambulant vendors in this street, which makes sense given the small number of pedestrians and cars passing through. As a rule, there is a direct correlation between the number of vendors and the number of people in the streets. Hence, in this instance, there is still sufficient traffic to warrant stall installations.

The colours of the city are primarily grey and black, which are synonymous with the humidity that plagues the city – even if they start off white or yellow, like the two buildings we see in this shot. Effectively, while the lack of vegetation alone does not attest to the heavy rains that batter the city, the buildings do. Yet, the fact that sun protection is set up from the wee hours of the morning tells us a great deal about the sun's intensity. However, these protective devices are likewise used to protect the products from the rain. Given these two clues, one deduces that the climate is hot and humid.

Pedestrians – namely employees on their way to work – are numerous in the early morning. Apart from this, the percentage of people walking, standing, or sitting is relatively stable over the course of the day. People sit in the early morning and late afternoon, but only a total of 12% of people sit over the course of the day. The other 88% either walk (slightly higher) or stand (slightly lower)

*Image 2 [Abidjan].* The landscape here shows a city without vegetation, though we know that Abidjan is a green, tropical city. The characteristic 'black' stucco, resulting from the constant humidity, says a great deal about this issue.



## ABJ SHOT 2

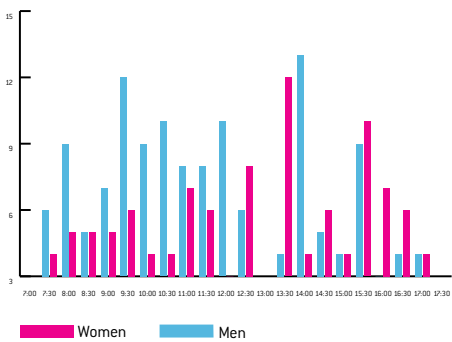
In the foreground, we once again see a system of concrete markers preventing vehicles from taking over – again with space between the facades of the buildings and the road. In many cities, this space would serve as pavement, but in Abidjan it is used as a commercial space for businesses and restaurants. Effectively, the image shows food stalls where one can eat lunch or dinner. Their late opening (after 8:30 a.m.) indicates that they do not serve breakfast.

Systems of protection against the sun and rain are mounted and dismantled based on the level of activity of the food stalls they shelter. Thus, we know who is working and who is not. When one has customers, such installations are mandatory, regardless of whether the weather forecast calls for sun or rain.

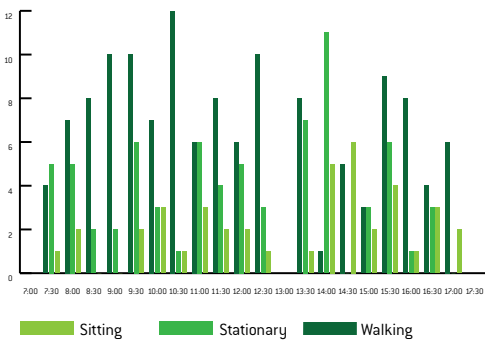
We deduced that there is no morning waste collection in this street, as the bottle and boxes in the foreground were there the entire day before assumedly being collected and taken to a dump.

The percentages of men and women in the street are 55% and 45% respectively. Most of the women are vendors preparing lunch. This job, though occasionally done by men, is almost exclusively reserved for women, which largely explains the many women in this street – albeit only in part, because they are obviously not all vendors. Women are most present at mealtimes, with low numbers in the early morning, a lull at around 10 a.m. and then increasing until 2 p.m., at which

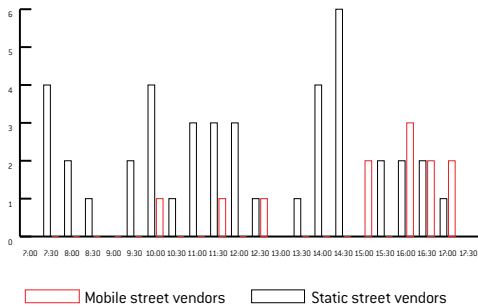
ABJ  
SHOT 2



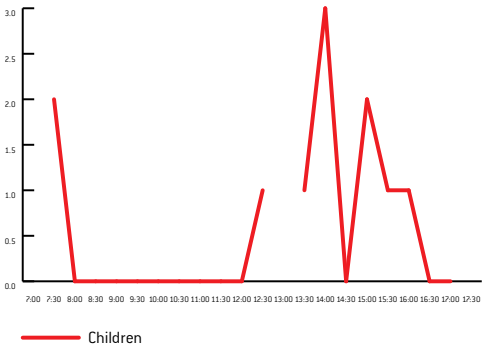
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



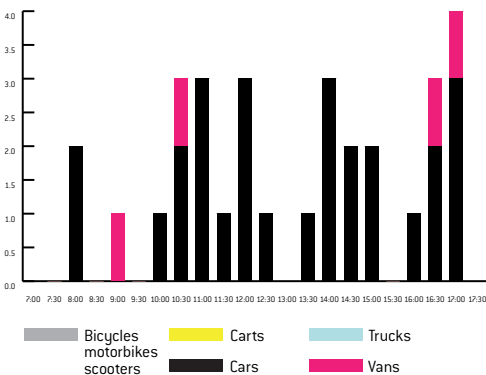
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



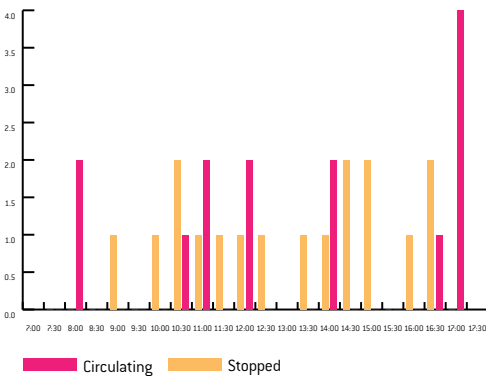
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



point there is another slump. At about 3:30 p.m., they come out in throngs, with their numbers dwindling as the end of the day approaches. Men and women tend to be present in the streets at the same time.

Overall, one finds the greatest number of people (men and women) in the streets in the morning. While relatively absent in the early hours, their numbers grow until about 2 p.m., after which they start to fall.

The street seems busy, with 53% of people walking; others come to do their shopping at around 1 p.m. because, while there are a small number of actual seats at food stalls, most sell on a take-away basis. The many people walking give the street a busy look; those standing are making purchases, and the few who are sitting (17%) are saleswomen behind their stalls.

Ambulant vendors are not a common sight in this street, though, surprisingly, they tend to appear in greater numbers at the end of the day, when the number of passers-by decreases.

The pavement is a place for eating and parking, and parking seems to function on a rotating basis throughout the day, which is to say that people do not park their cars for the entire day – just long enough to run an errand or have a quick conversation.

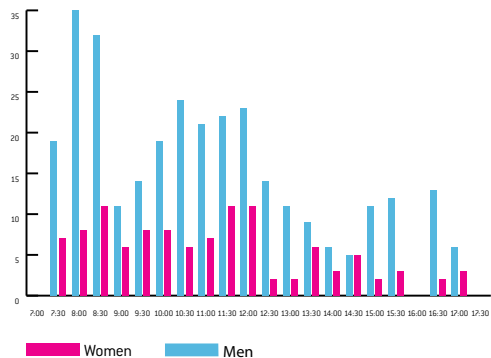
Most of the vehicles are cars, with the odd van thrown in. There are no trucks, carts, or two-wheeled vehicles.

*Shot 3 [Abidjan].* This shot was taken in front of a shopping centre downtown [Treichville] that was still under construction. A day of observation revealed a ballet of taxis and general hustle and bustle. The road in the foreground, which is extremely smooth, without the slightest pothole or bump (as a modern expressway should be), is evidence that work has recently been done on this major artery. The street's cleanliness is also in keeping with this spirit of modernity; there must be coherency between the road's function (in terms of flows, but also in symbolic terms) and the image it portrays.

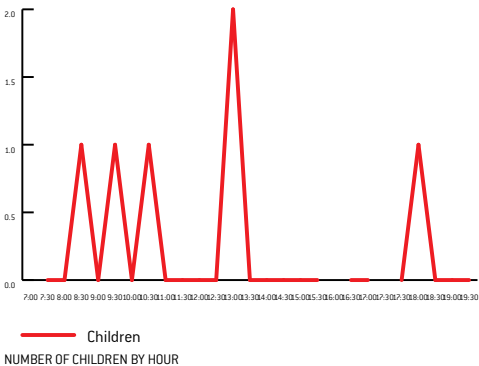
The percentage of women and men was 27% and 73%, respectively. Generally speaking, people were the most numerous in the morning, with a marked difference between the genders. The peak period for men was 8–8:30 a.m., followed by a slump around 9 a.m., then an increase and levelling off between 10:30 and midday, after which their numbers decreased until 2:30 p.m. (the lull for the day), and another less significant increase. While women's presence in the streets more or less follows the same pattern, the peak and off-hours were much less marked. What was most striking was the strong female presence in the morning, until 12:30, followed by a sharp drop in the afternoon.

Most of the people we see standing here are waiting for taxis. The ones who are seated are the female vendors sitting under a tree, the only shade-bearing vegetation. Few people walk, as this is not a thoroughfare but a place where people come to wait for taxis.

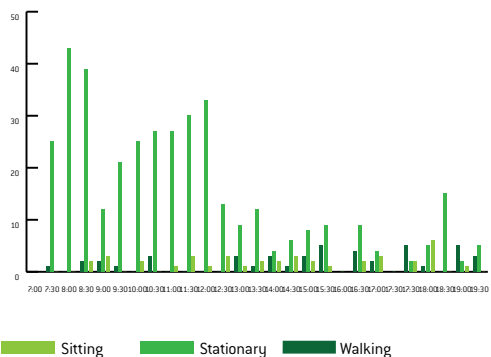
ABJ  
SHOT 3



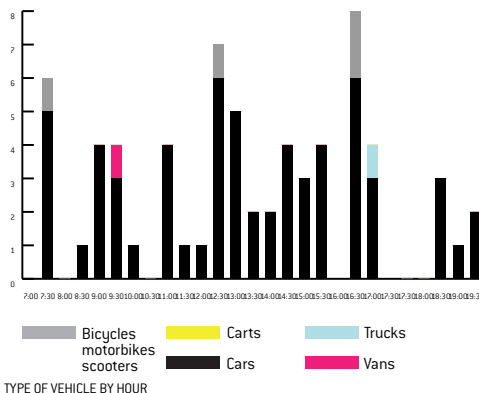
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



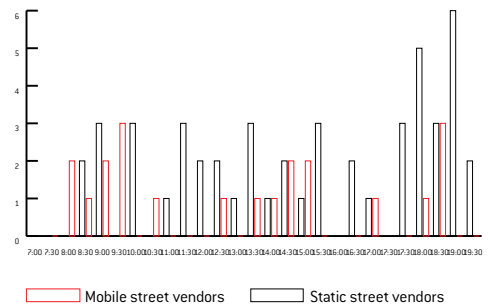
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



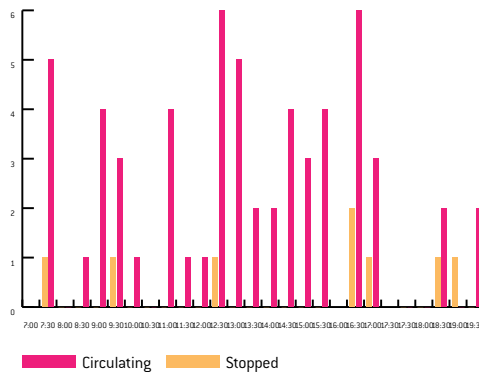
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR



### ABJ SHOT 3

Young children are seen in the company of their mothers. However, their low numbers and low presence over the course of the day did not provide conclusive information.

The scene is much like a giant taxi stand. It is therefore natural that the majority of cars (taxis) are same colour. We also see a number of two-wheel vehicles, which we did not see in the other shots of Abidjan. We surmise that there is a link between their use, the quality of the roads, and ease of travel.

The tree here serves as a shady spot for a cold drink vendor, as evidenced by the blue cooler sitting on a wooden base. Women sell drinks here starting at 9 a.m., with three or four working in rotating shifts. The early morning vendors reappear in the late afternoon.

But the most striking detail in this image is the queue that forms when there are not enough taxis. People start queuing up one behind the other at non-peak hours – as is the case here at 9 a.m. – as they would in front of a cashpoint or to wait for a bus.

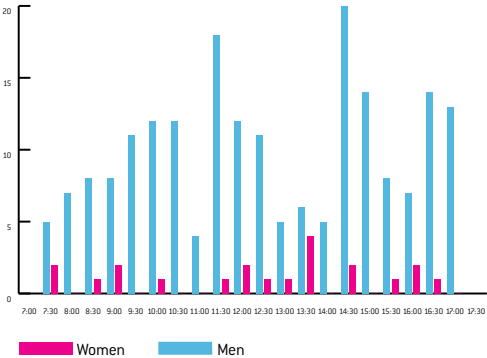
Ambulant vendors sell more goods (bottles of water, cigarettes, recharge cards for mobile telephones, etc.) to taxi drivers, who never leave their vehicles, than to pedestrians.



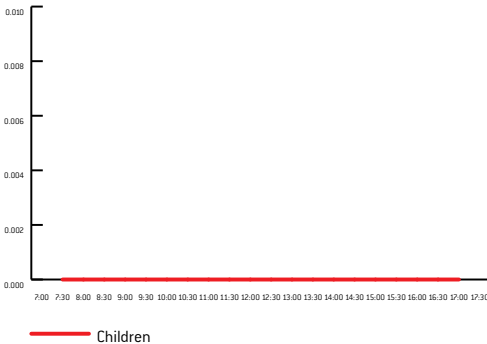
*Shot 4 [Abidjan].* This image shows a storefront with items overflowing onto the street, like the chairs on the right and tiles on the other side, indicating the shop's presence from the outside. Lots of smooth asphalt with few joints. The buildings have only one storey, as it is a business district. There is no litter on the ground, nor are cars parked on the pavement. Like in the other shots, vegetation is largely absent. Except for a few trees in the distance, the scene is decidedly inorganic.

**ABJ**  
**SHOT 4**

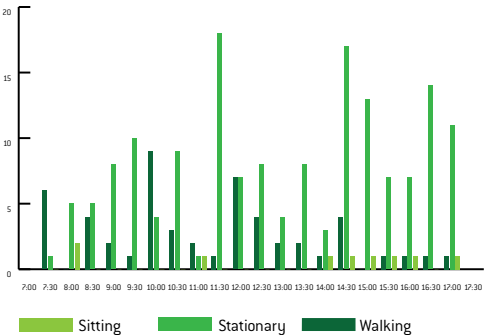
The ratio of men to women is extremely disproportionate, with women representing only 10% and men 90%, though other shots revealed a stronger female presence in the streets – at least compared to Dakar and Nouakchott. Although women are present in the street throughout the day, their low numbers do not allow us to draw any conclusions or determine any patterns regarding the intensity of their presence. For men, however, their numbers increase from 7:30 a.m. until 10:30, followed by a lull at 11 a.m., when there are few people in the street. Their numbers then sharply increase at 11:30, only to rapidly decline until 2 p.m., followed by an explosion at 2:30 p.m. – the peak period for the day. From here, the numbers decrease until late afternoon. All in all, there are slightly more people in the streets in the afternoon than in the morning.



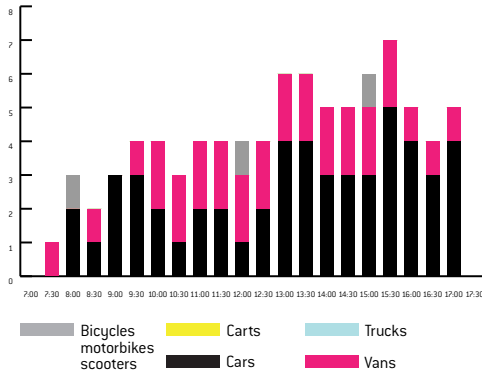
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



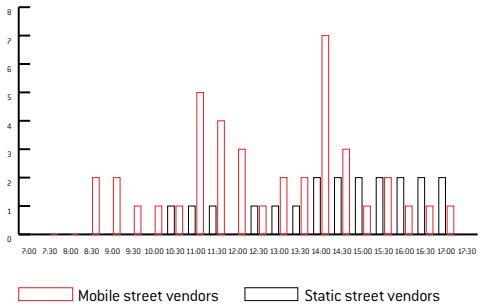
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



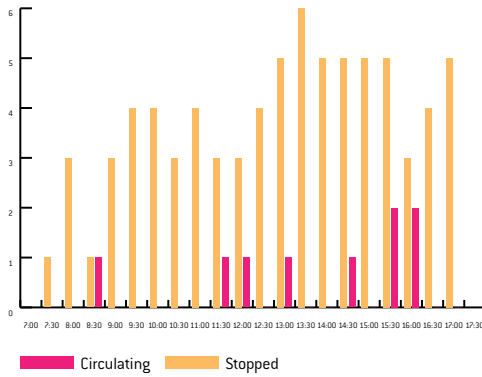
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

The peak hours of male presence in the streets correspond to the number of people standing. Few people sit or walk. Those standing are, for the most part, vendors waiting for potential customers in front of shop entrances. At certain times of day, vendors outnumber customers.

Here, there is no question of walking in the road, as the pavement actually functions as a pavement. Yet, pedestrians must nevertheless share it since, as we saw in the other shots of Abidjan and the two other cities, the pavement is used for short-term parking for when doing errands. Thus, pedestrians cannot move freely due to the parked cars. The vendors here are exclusively young men and, for the most part, sell men's clothing. This is the only case where sales take place directly in the sun, as there is no shade at the store entrances, where these vendors must remain posted in order to sell their goods.

Without knowing for certain what kinds of products are sold inside the stores, one gathers that they, too, are geared toward men, as vendors choose their sales locations based on the potential clientele. As these vendors are selling only men's items, chances are good that the store is mainly a man's store, which accounts for the very low proportion of women in this street.

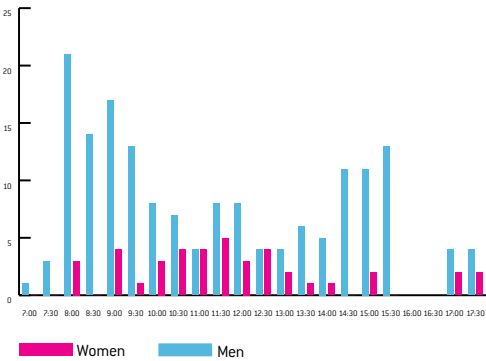
*Shot 5 [Abidjan].* This shot was taken in front of a courthouse (background), which is surrounded by a fence, thus limiting public access to the building. However, we will focus here on the scene in the car park in front of the courthouse. The people behind the fence offer a clue as to courthouse's hours of operation (closed from 1 to 3 p.m.), reinforced by the influx of cars in the morning until 10:30 and starting again around 3 p.m., when they are even more numerous. However, the situation is not the same for pedestrians, who remain in front of the courthouse even when it is closed.

80% of the people in this shot are women, and 20% are men. Women are out in force between 9 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. but are less so in the afternoon, although the difference is not important. The peak hour for men is 8 a.m., after which their numbers wane until around 10 a.m., picking up again at around 2:30.

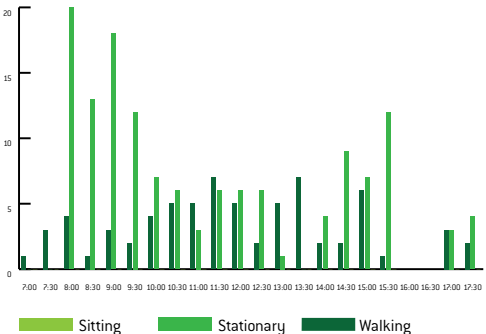
The people we saw in the morning were mostly standing [see Table 98]; in fact, no one was sitting down. The presence of walkers versus those standing was reversed.

The courthouse does not allow stalls in the area surrounding it. There is no space for them, even though the potential customers are numerous. This is also true for ambulant vendors, who are only present around 8:30 a.m. and then disappear for the rest of the day. As it is obviously not a question of customers, it is undoubtedly either a formal ban on vending or simply being driven off by the police that keeps them away.

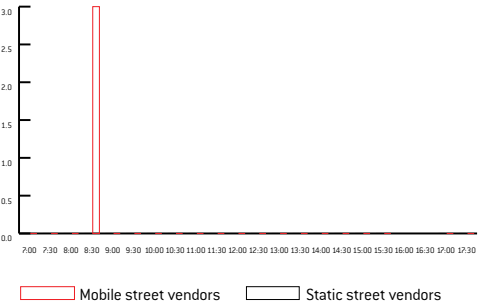
Vehicles – almost exclusively cars – park neatly in front of the courthouse in rows, as if an implicit rule of order prevailed here, and the rules of 'good parking' were accepted by all, despite the absence of markings.



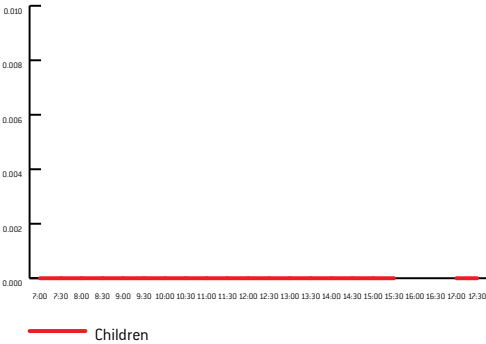
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



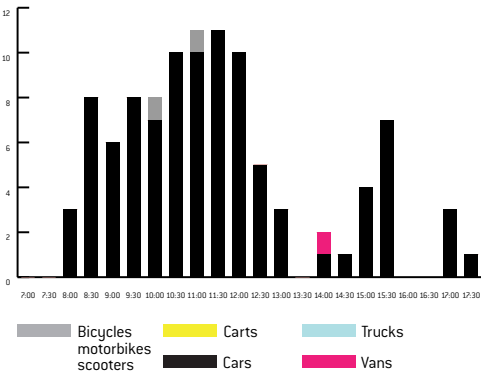
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



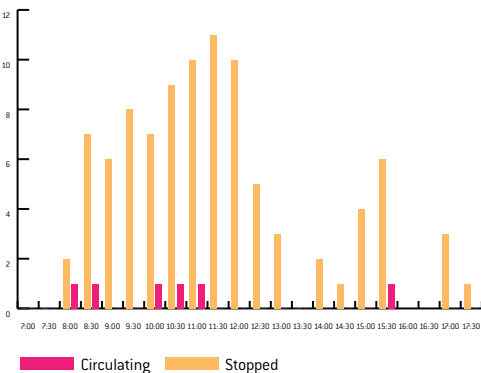
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR





*Shot 6 [Abidjan].* The red dirt in the foreground and brown stucco of the building dominating the image suggests that we are no longer in the city centre but in the periphery. The pavement area has no kerbs, and the boundary between the asphalt road and dirt roadsides is not clearly distinguishable. The building has a business on the ground level and dwellings on the upper level.

There is little vegetation on the street, which, once again, contradicts the stereotype of lush tropical cities with palm trees invading the sidewalks. Only the threatening storm clouds hint at the city's humid climate.

There are 36% women and 64% men in this shot – in other words a 'normal' situation for this type of neighbourhood, where women are numerous. Male and female presence during the day was similar but for two exceptions: the first between 9:30 and 10 a.m., when women's presence was low and men's great, and the second at 2:30 p.m., when women disappear from the street entirely, which also coincided with the peak period for men. Over the course of the day, there was an equal number of men and women; unlike the other images, there were no clear influxes (or vice versa) depending on the time of day. Outlying areas thus tend to be well-populated throughout the day, which is not the case for downtown areas.

ABJ  
SHOT 5



## ABJ SHOT 6

The number of vehicles was the same at all times of day, with slight lulls at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. and no real rush hours. Most of the vehicles were taxis (blue in this part of the city).

Few people actually sit down, and those who do are typically vendors behind their stalls.

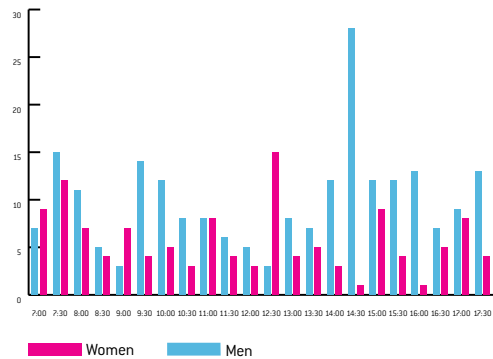
The large, empty space in the foreground remained unoccupied, as though specific rules forbade anyone from appropriating it. Pedestrians used it as a thoroughfare, and when the rare car or fire truck did stop there, it was only for a few minutes.

This scene shows us what life is like in a residential area, with its pharmacy and handful of vendors to meet residents' basic needs – not a business or high-traffic area.

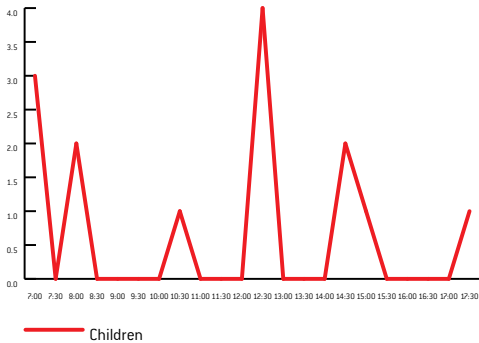
*Summary for Abidjan.* We will now discuss some of the salient points for Abidjan.

1. Women are highly present in the streets, representing roughly 30% of the total number of people we observed. Men and women tend to be present in the streets at the same time and have the same lulls (12:30–1:30 p.m.). Thus, the only difference was their numbers. One point worth noting is that female vendors

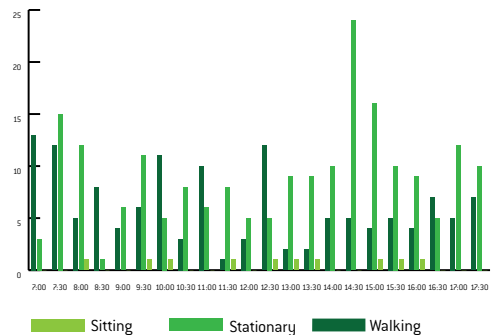
ABJ  
SHOT 6



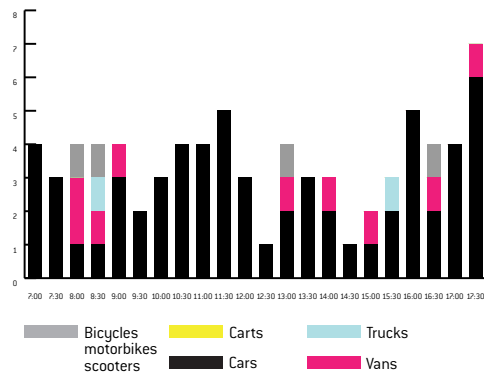
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



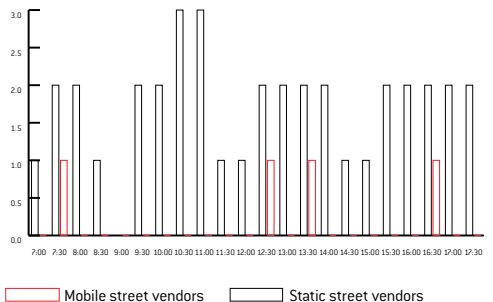
NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



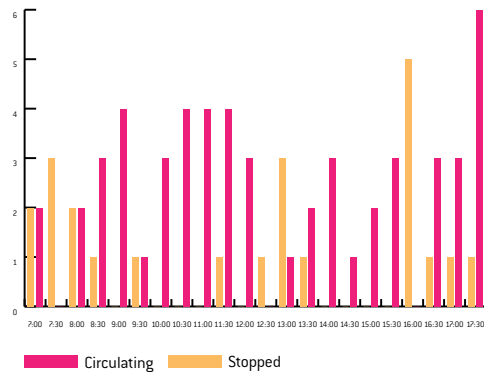
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR

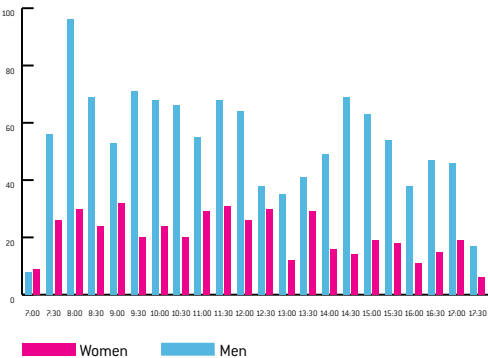


TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR

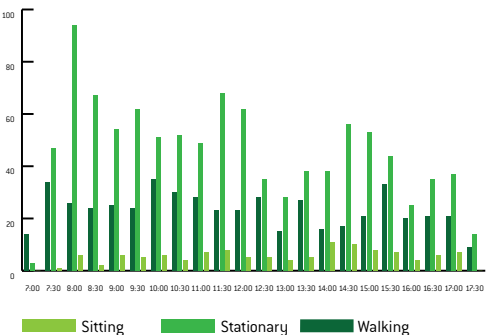


POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

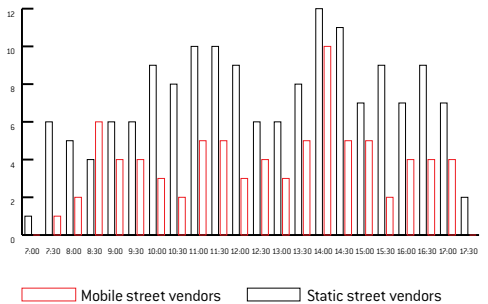
ABJ  
SYNTHÈSE SHOTS



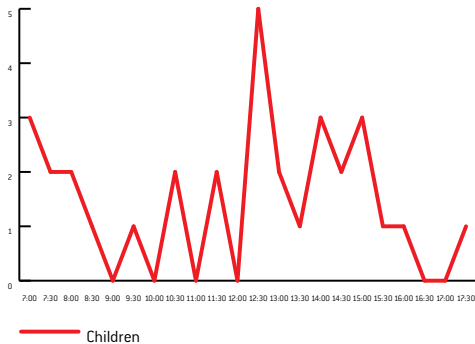
NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN BY HOUR



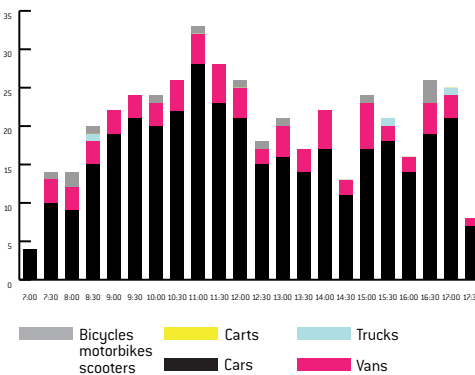
POSITION OF PASSERS-BY BY HOUR



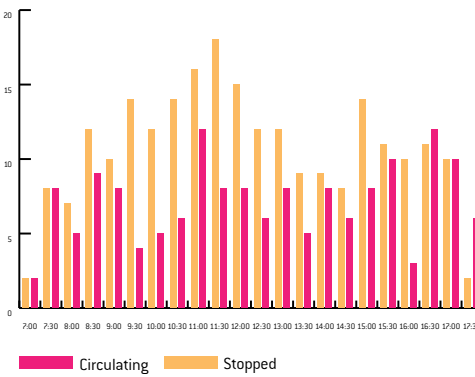
TYPE OF VENDORS BY HOUR



NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY HOUR



TYPE OF VEHICLE BY HOUR



POSITION OF VEHICLES BY HOUR

set up their stalls in areas where potential customers – other women – are most numerous.

2. Although Abidjan is a tropical city, there is little vegetation. The shots we have presented here, while not exhaustive, show little greenery, which is inconsistent with our image of the tropics. In densely populated areas, vegetation is sparse, and seems to be lacking in the city as a general rule.

3. Space is plentiful in Abidjan. Unlike most large cities in West Africa, Abidjan has managed to maintain large empty spaces, as well as smaller ones in its different neighbourhoods. The pavement is without trash or vendors – just a bollard or two to prevent cars from parking on it, which seems to work, as these unspoken rules are actually followed. There was no way of knowing for sure why these spaces are not used by cars or stalls; nevertheless, they exist, some protected by bollards, rocks, or posts, and others not at all.

4. *Traffic*. There is no direct correlation between the hours of foot traffic and those of vehicle traffic. Hence, we can assume that different populations utilize these two modes of transport. The number of cars, though low in the morning, gradually and steadily increases until 11 a.m., decreases until 12:30 p.m., and rises again until late afternoon, with a slump around 2:30 p.m. (the same as for pedestrians). We also occasionally see two-wheeled vehicles during the day.

5. *Sales strategies*. Certain vendors sell certain products in certain places, and their choice is not haphazard. First, a potential clientele must exist. Thus, we do not find vendors in every street – only busy ones. The type of products sold also depends on the potential clientele; tissues, sweets, and cigarettes are sold to taxi-drivers, cold drinks are sold at queues, and men's clothing is sold in 'male' areas.



07:45



09:15



10:15



16:16



09:20



11:20



13:50



16:20





10:30



10:59



13:00



15:00



10:37



11:07



16:36



17:07





07:30



8.30



09:50



09:00



14:50



10:30



11:50



16:30

# SUMMARY FOR THE THREE CITIES

## Chapter 5

We should begin by explaining the use of averages by city in the summary tables. Using this approach for the different shots is interesting in terms of identifying trends in more than just absolute terms. Effectively, depending on the shot and the elements considered, the number of individuals can be greater or lesser. Simple addition was our intention; our goal was to give orders of magnitude (i.e., the number of women in the street with regard to the neighbourhood and precise location of the shot), while recognising that average percentages still provide valuable information. Thus we have percentage estimates (50 %–50 %, 90 %–10 %, etc.), without the need for precise figures.

The tables should therefore be read with this in mind: they show trends and rhythms throughout the day, regardless of the number of people, which is why the y-axis in the tables never has the same value. We will now look more closely at some of the overall trends:

*Men and women.* Spaces, it would seem, have a sex (NAVEZ-BOUCHANINE 1993), meaning that, in public space, there are places for men and places for women. However, our research somewhat contradicts this assertion, showing a women=private/men=public relationship in two of the three cities. In Dakar and Nouakchott, public space is almost exclusively male. In Abidjan, on the other hand, women are very present in the streets.

The table below gives the percentage of men and women in the spaces we analysed for the three cities:

City	Men (in %)	Women (in %)
Nouakchott	91	9
Dakar	88	12
Abidjan	72	28

The streets of Nouakchott are reserved for men, as are those of Dakar (with a difference of barely three points). Abidjan, on the other hand, stands out, with women representing 28% of the population of public space. Hence, the situations of the first two cities and the third are radically different. A simple explanation for this is religion: two are Muslim (though Dakar is ‘officially’ secular), and one is Christian. There is also the fact that the populations of Dakar and Nouakchott

are almost identical ethnically speaking, while Abidjan is home to a greater mix of ethnic groups. In any event, the difference is notable. Nevertheless, these two explanations do not offer a response as to why the figures are what they are for the three cities.

Women have the same hours as men in the three cities, with minor variations: women are most active in the morning, with peak and off hours. For both sexes we saw a strong presence in the early morning (8–9 a.m.). Nonetheless, there were differences between the two, as we will see in the section on city hours.

While more people are in the street in the morning in Nouakchott and Abidjan, in Dakar crowds appear later in the day, perhaps waiting for the temperature to fall before venturing out. Dakar was the only case where we saw an increase in the number of people in the street at the end of the day, though this observation was only valid for men. In the other cases, the end of the day was synonymous with decreases in numbers.

*People in public spaces.* The most interesting discovery here was that, in Abidjan, people simply do not sit down in public. While many people seem to sit in Nouakchott (in the morning and afternoon) and Dakar (in the afternoon in particular), no one sits in the streets in Abidjan. One possible explanation is the climate. In Nouakchott it rains three times a year at best, while in Dakar, the rainy season, though marked, it is nonetheless short. This is not the case in Abidjan, where the ground and walls are permanently damp. There is likewise a social factor: in Abidjan, public space is not an extension of the home, but rather completely separate.

*How to distinguish the centre from the periphery?* Both have distinctive features that make them easy to recognise, such as the use of certain materials (asphalt versus sand and dirt, for instance), the shape of the buildings, etc. Nouakchott has an additional feature: colour. Indeed, from white to brown, we distinguish different ranges of colours (light colours in downtown areas and the brown of the periphery, which blends with the sandy brown of the surroundings).

Beyond this, each of the three cities has its own colours, which are as distinctive as their smells or sounds. However, we will not analyse such sensitive differences here; we simply wish to point out that they exist and are palpable.

*Vendors.* Our analysis points to a correlation between the number of people, vehicles, and ambulant vendors, who maximise their chances of finding buyers. Their presence corresponds directly those of potential customers, and their locations and sales strategies are based on the items they sell and potential buyers. Men's shirts are sold in the streets in front of shops where the clientele is principally men. Beverages are sold in areas where there is little shade, etc. The disorder that seems to reign at first glance, in fact, reveals time-tested strategies that obey a profound empirical knowledge of sales techniques.

The same is true of stalls. For fixed vendors, however, there is an additional consideration: land availability, without which it is impossible to set up a stall in the street.

While the vendors do not change over the course of the day in Dakar, this was less true in the other two cities, although we have no explanation as to why, and would require both confirmation and further exploration.

*Children and beggars.* The streets are teeming with beggars. That is what the casual observer, tourist, or visitor passing through would undoubtedly say. However, a closer look at our images reveals the opposite: there are, in fact, few beggars. The numbers of young *talibés* (in Dakar and Nouakchott) and handicapped people begging are low. However, seeing children begging is shocking for an outside observer; if they see a second, a third, and a fourth, they will undoubtedly have the impression that their numbers are legion for the simple reason that it is extremely difficult to see children suffering and forced to beg. On the other hand, given the hundreds – even thousands – of people one passes on the street each day in these cities, these three or four beggars, in a certain sense, do not ‘count.’ Counting teaches us to look at reality differently, objectively, and allows us to truly measure a given phenomenon: the streets of these three cities are not overrun with beggars. Moreover, those who beg do so only in the city centre.

The same observation can be made about children. Downtown and working-class areas are not places where children play in the streets. In fact, the streets are not a place for children at all. We see young children in the company of their mothers, and sometimes when school lets out, but those we saw most frequently (at least in Dakar and Nouakchott) were *talibés*, who likewise were few in number.

*Vehicles.* Most of the vehicles we saw in the three cities were cars, both private and collective (taxis). However, there were several notable differences:

- In Nouakchott, we saw no two-wheel vehicles, while there seemed to be a fair number of them in Dakar. Also, such vehicles were more present in the centre than in the periphery in the two cities where we observed them (Dakar and Abidjan).
- There were a significant number of animal-drawn carts in Nouakchott, while there were none at all in Abidjan and few in Dakar. In Dakar, on the other hand, we saw many trucks and large buses, but very few in the other two cities.
- In Nouakchott, parking infringes on the space normally set aside for pedestrians (and vendors). In Abidjan, the distance between people and cars is greater, but only in terms of parking. In all three cities, however, the pavement is rarely used for walking, but rather for sales or parking purposes, forcing pedestrians to share the road with vehicles and creating a strange combination of functions in the road itself. Hence, pedestrians are vulnerable and must be

extremely mindful of cars, carts, and buses. Fortunately, people drive relatively slowly in Dakar and Nouakchott, so that this shared occupation occurs relatively easily. This is less the case in Abidjan, where expressways are numerous, and people drive faster, making the coexistence between pedestrians and vehicles more difficult.

– While there is a correlation between the hours of pedestrians and those of motorists, a closer look reveals a slight discrepancy. Those who travel by car and those who travel by foot belong to different social classes, as cars are reserved for an elite minority. Although taxis are more democratic than in many Northern countries, they are nonetheless expensive and, thus, beyond the means of most people.

*Social time.* Social hours were not always the same for the three cities. Dakar gets up earlier than Nouakchott, where meals are later. And while the midday lull is at 2 p.m. in Abidjan, it is at 1 p.m. in the other cities.

Cities sometimes adapt their rhythm to the sun's course. Nouakchott at 1 p.m., for example, is unbearably hot, but it is the work schedule that structures the day – not the climate. Hence, in Nouakchott, there is no long break at noon after lunch, as in some countries (the *descente* – drop – is the end of the workday).

*Shade.* Nouakchott moves with the sun. Installations are not permanent; stalls rotate around trees, vendors stand on one side of their stall, leave when it gets too hot, then come back and stand on the other side to once again benefit from the shade. Thus, the stalls' position changes with the sun's course.

In Dakar, vendors provide their own sun protection and, if anything, it is these protective devices that are repositioned. However, these devices are typically placed in such a way that there is no need to change its position during the day. Stalls do not change places either. In Dakar, however, sun protection is not set up upon opening; rather, vendors wait until the sun actually becomes bothersome for working and/or a threat to the products.

Abidjan presents yet another scenario. Vendors set up their stands and sun protection (which can also serve as protection against the rain) and do not move them, regardless of the weather conditions. These different practices in the three cities are directly linked to the climate.

### Conclusion for the images

We will conclude with six theories directly based on our images, and that are applicable in all three cities:

*Theory 1: The street is a man's world. It is a place for men.* Although some differences can be explained in terms of the time of day (sometimes), location

(always), and city, the fact remains that, in African cities, the street is a place of masculinity.

*Theory 2: No sales without strategy.* Sales by ambulant vendors obey to criteria of location, the type of goods sold, and potential customers. For non-mobile vendors, there is the additional issue of land availability. Effectively, vendors need a place to set up in the street and, hence, authorisation to do so. While non-mobile vendors may be female or male, young or old, ambulant vendors are exclusively young men.

*Theory 3: Shade structures the street and determines how it is used.* Protection from the sun is an essential factor, and, in many cases, schedules and practices are determined by it. Sun is the primary element of the street, and its counterpart, shade, in this way structures the street space. Generally speaking, the climate and weather conditions have a major impact on the city, behaviours (for instance, in Abidjan, people do not lie down on the ground), and lulls and peaks (in Nouakchott, for instance, lulls are directly related to the sun and last longer than in the other two cities).

*Theory 4: The Athens Charter has not succeeded in the streets of Dakar, Abidjan, and Nouakchott,* where the separation of modes of transport just could not win out against the overlapping of modes in African cities. Hence, the street welcomes everyone: the pavement is a market, pedestrians walk in the streets, and cars weave between vendors and passers-by.

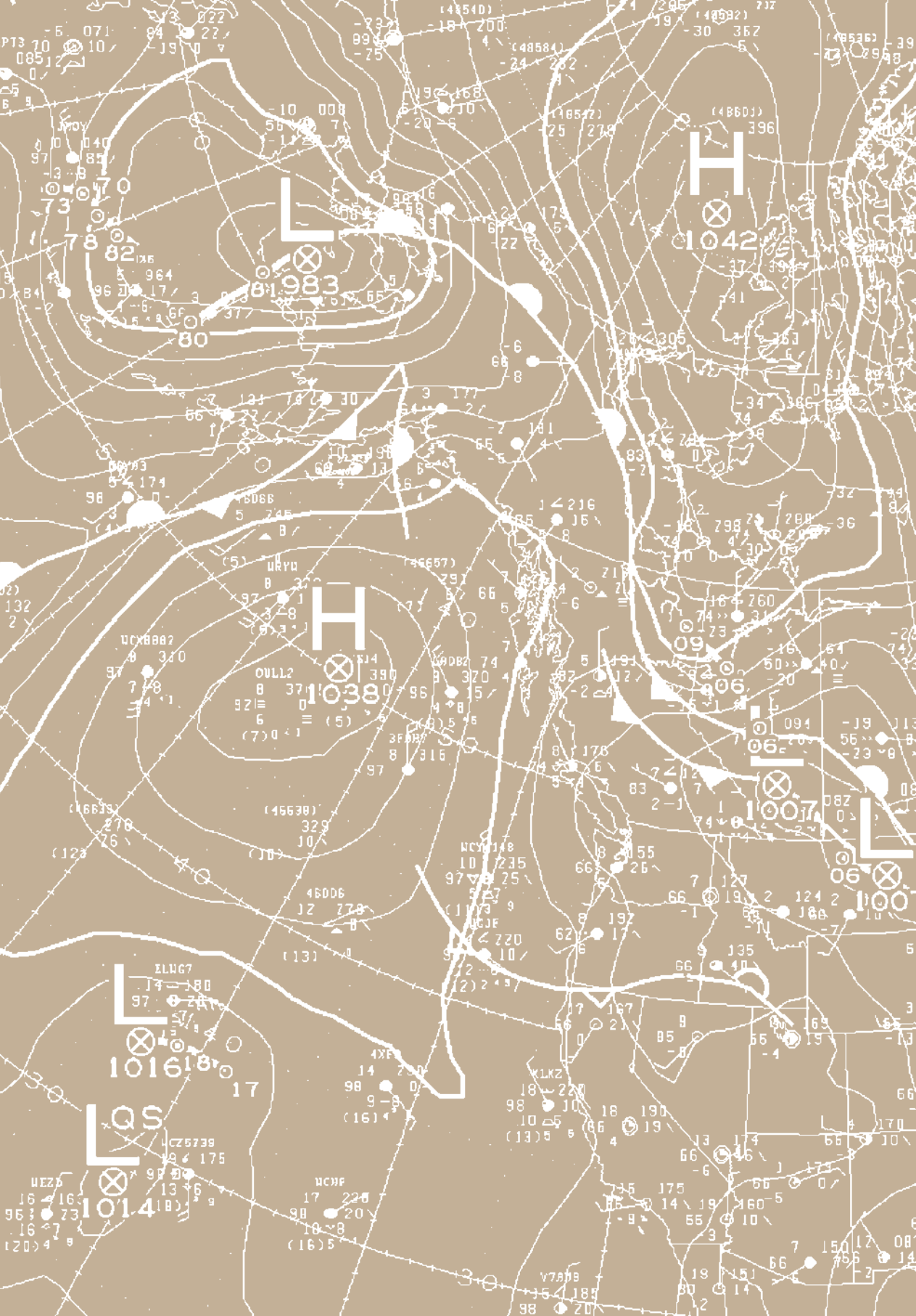
*Theory 5: While the car is the cornerstone of family life in European and American cities, its use in African cities is reserved for a small, rich elite.* Two worlds appear: those who can afford a car and those – the majority – who cannot. Although budget vehicles are soon scheduled to arrive on the African market – following the footsteps of India and China – the proportion of those living in extreme poverty is such that these two worlds will always exist, and the have-nots will always far outnumber the rich.

*Thesis 6: The city is not made for walking or cycling.* While cities are becoming home to an ever-growing number of poor people and fragile populations, the model that has developed is not that of a city for pedestrians or cyclists, but one for cars, hence making travel difficult for most people.









## VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL CITIES

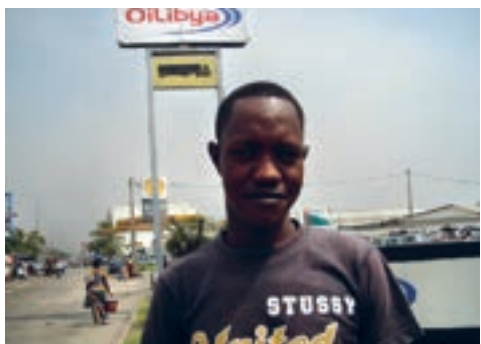
### Chapter 1

*A shared genesis.* The trajectories of the three cities are astounding in the sense that, despite being built at different historical periods, they follow an identical pattern – one of segregation between European and indigenous neighbourhoods. In Dakar, although the earliest plans do not show a distinct separation of the populations, the 1915 plan of the Medina specifically proposes putting indigenous populations far from Europeans to avoid the spread of epidemics that decimated the white population (as Europeans believed that diseases were transmitted and propagated by the indigenous populations).

Starting with the 1928 plan, segregation began to take place in Abidjan, between the Plateau (the European district) and the working-class districts. In the South, Treichville was separated from the administrative and residential area by the lagoon. In the North, the separation between zones was less distinct, with a military camp serving as an imaginary frontier. Later, an industrial zone north of Cocody played the same role, separating a prestigious European residential area from a residential, working class, and decidedly indigenous one – literally two worlds.

A buffer zone between these two types of areas exists in almost every city from this period. Until the present, this separation marked where the indigenous neighbourhoods of the past became the working-class districts of today. Cities' development remains strongly characterised by this basic pattern, beyond which it has never moved.

Segregation between the administrative districts and indigenous neighbourhoods can also be seen in the city plan for Nouakchott. In 1957, when the earliest drafts were drawn up – be it by Lainville, Cerutti, or Hirsch – all three plans strictly adhered to this principle of separation. Obviously, at that time the semantics had changed, and these neighbourhoods were described as 'working class.' But the result was the same: the separation of rich and poor. It should be noted that the city plan was drawn up only three years before Independence and one year after the 1956 Defferre Act, which granted internal autonomy to colonial territories. Although times were changing, it remained a firmly divided city. Today, the buffer zone – formerly Avenue de la Dune (which later became Gamel Abdel Nasser) – clearly delineated an urban boundary. While poor settlements can now be found in all parts of the city, one still sees a situation that could only





be described as 'old fashioned,' with residential areas in the north and working-class districts in the south.

The similarities do not end with segregation, however; they can also be seen in modes of settlement. Town planners sought aerated plateaux on which to build cities, mainly to combat malaria and yellow fever. Later, in Nouakchott, the plateau was used to build away from zones that were susceptible to flooding. In each case, the original cities were founded on plateaux.

French colonials favoured coastal cities, which became bridgeheads for trade in raw materials. The founding sites of Dakar and Abidjan therefore had to meet strict criteria, such as the possibility of constructing a deep-water port. The inlet and positioning of Dakar's port make it a naturally protected space. The same is true of Abidjan, where the lagoon plays this same 'protective' role. Nouakchott, however, is a case apart. While the city has indeed spread to the water's edge, the aim was not to transport goods from the country's interior to the coast. In fact, Nouakchott's deep-water port was not built until much later, to meet the city's needs for provisions. Unlike Abidjan, whose development largely depended on the port, in Nouakchott, it was the city's growth that required authorities to build port infrastructures.

Cities were built on plateaux to facilitate rainwater and liquid sewage drainage, as these systems work by the force of gravity.

*The poor's strategies in all three cities are the same.* As space is limited on the plateaux, poor people are relegated to low-lying areas. Those who squat tend to have two types of location strategies: those close to areas with a strong demand for labour and those within the densest labour market areas. Although this would appear logical, it is only rarely taken into account in urban planning. Likewise, while household budgets and expenses are documented, the relationship between the cost of transport and the location of housing is not addressed. Today, it is crucial to make this question the focus of city planning, as poverty is rapidly gaining ground in the city. The example of Abidjan is evidence of this. The planning of industrial zones did not take into account the population's residential location: hence, on one side of the city was industry, and on the other side housing. The asymmetry was such that the city's authorities soon saw shantytowns popping up near the port, large factories, and industrial zones – in other words, next to labour market areas. An identical phenomenon emerged in Nouakchott in the 1980s, where the poor chose to stay in the city centre despite the state providing them with plots of land on the outskirts. The plots were simply too far away from jobs, and household budgets did not allow for the long commutes required to get to work. In addition, the time needed to travel such distances took up a good portion of the day.

The second principle of the residential location, valid in all three cities, is that people naturally occupy land that is the least fit for construction – land that

no one wants. This includes ravines, steep slopes, land prone to flooding, land saturated with salt (in Nouakchott), plots on shifting dunes, swamp areas, and dumping zones. These settlements are a risk for the inhabitants and for the environment, as it is often most fragile areas that are the most densely populated.

Above all, the poor occupy areas that are not part of any development programme – parcels that are ‘off the map’ so to speak. As soon as planning takes place, the land increases in value; the result is that the poor can no longer afford it. Thus, they find themselves relegated to squatting. Squatting, however, can only occur on land that has no value, if one hopes to not be driven off. Worthless land is that which does not appear in any future projection of the city, and it is there – beyond plans – that cities are created. This is the great paradox of urban planning in Africa: as soon as a significant poor population is present, as is the case in every African city, the city develops where it has not been planned.

*Developers: the usual suspects.* Before Independence, developers wanted the same planning for all of the colonies. This is still true today, even in Nouakchott, as we have seen. We find the same people, the same engineers, and the same architects. Urban planning is ruled by a handful of men, which is compounded by the many documents specifically concerning urban planning in overseas territories. From one manual to the next, depending on the period, one discovers the practices *a la mode* for designing cities.

We should also mention European (especially French) influence on planning. While this was logical prior to independence, France continues to influence urban planning today via consultancy firms or decentralised cooperation. Generally speaking, it is not the country’s elite that draws up the plans; they simply hire the consultancy firms and advisers (from technical advisers to city departments to urban planning consultants). Given that many elites have studied in France and been steeped in the tradition of French (or Swiss, or Belgian, or even Canadian, but always French-speaking) planners, urban planning has remained in the same hands since plans have existed. As far as planning is concerned, decolonisation has not occurred in these cities, which prevents new models from emerging; elites and town planners are familiar with the European principles of a European city. Cities cannot, therefore, experience autonomy or find a model for an African city.

Lastly, we should also mention the influence of financial lenders (and the World Bank in particular) in these three countries. Whether through Priority Investment Programmes (PIP), road infrastructure programmes, directly (through the commissioning of urban plans), or indirectly (by funding amenity and infrastructure projects), the World Bank is responsible for creating the African city today.





The state is still the principal interlocutor with regard to urban planning, despite decentralisation processes that are more or less advanced depending on the country. Whether through state departments or international consultancy firms, planning is decided on the national level. Local councils are sidelined each time, and although some governments invest in participative processes to draw up plans, planning is still largely designed by the state.

It is important for a state to control its capital city (although Abidjan is no longer the administrative capital, it is still the Ivory Coast's largest city), as the latter acts as a showcase for the former. Urban planning can be a mark of success, or at least serve as a 'stage' for a nation's achievements; hence, the state naturally seeks to maintain control over it. Furthermore, in the three countries, there is likewise the question of 'urban macrocephaly,' wherein a single large city provides the majority of service-sector jobs and represents an economy on which the entire country depends – all the more reason for the state to maintain its authority over it.

Countries need cities in order to position themselves on the international stage. The city on its own could do this; Paris does not need France to position itself relative to Berlin or London. However, in African countries, cities do not have such autonomy, and are still instruments of the state's power. What is more, cities are the main receptacles of rural immigration, and controlling them means the ability to influence or not to influence this trend. However, this argument holds little sway in the field.

The state's desire to organise cities is not without consequences. On a daily basis, cities' technical departments must run cities, despite having no say in their planning. How can they allocate budgets and manage space under such conditions? While plans occasionally take budgets into account – to carry out x or y mission – management and infrastructure maintenance costs are not transferred from the state to municipalities, leaving the latter unable to meet needs.

*Planning: different objectives, similar obstacles.* Our three case studies show not only similarities. This can most notably be seen in planning objectives. For Dakar, while planning was initially a question of building the city, it soon became synonymous with organising the inhabitants of a given area. This was also the case for Nouakchott, where planning by large zones attempted to structure the city and assemble its various elements. Abidjan, on the other hand, is slightly different: the president wanted to create a modern state, and intended for Abidjan to be a showcase for this modernity. Thus, urban planning was used to stage a state identity. An example of this is the housing programmes designed to 'develop' the Ivorian people, changing them into 'modern' men and women. This is naturally the case in the other cities as well, but not to the same extent as in Abidjan, where town planning served a cause – that of modernity.

This point is also reflected in the average duration of plans. For Dakar, the duration is between 23 and 24 years, while for Nouakchott it is approximately 15 years. In Abidjan, however, there is a new plan roughly every 10 years. Of course, this is an average, seeing as between 1960 (the year of the country's independence) and 1985 (shortly after the start of the economic crisis), a new plan was produced every five years, illustrating the determination embodied in urban planning and the dedication with which it served the state and its construction.

Although the objectives or purposes of urban planning were not the same everywhere, the ways in which it was implemented were. One recognizes in particular a constant: the inability to plan for the future. The city is planned for a population of 10,000, but 50,000 people arrive – or vice versa. Before the 1980s, there was a general tendency to underestimate population growth; later, the opposite took place, with a tendency to overestimate it. Economic booms and crises are not predicted, giving the general impression of an inability to plan. Cities' development – whether adhering to or going against plans – uses identical documents, thus illustrating the mechanisms at work. Furthermore, as we have seen, most settlements spring up beyond the scope of plans, so that planning can only be partially effective in terms of laying out a procedure to follow.

All of this gives the impression that African cities have not been planned. However, this vision is clearly simplistic. These cities *are* planned, and their governments spend a great deal of time and money doing so, as evidenced by the many plans we have described. However, one consistent and fundamental error they make is that they do not take into account the settlement strategies of the poor, and hence fail to foresee or plan for the increase in precarious settlements and shantytowns. Without taking such dynamics into account, any kind of planning is difficult. What is more, planning relies solely on urban extension, which is based on projections of population curves. The parallel history of the three cities shows that plans lag behind cities and repeatedly make incorrect growth estimates, resulting in a constant discrepancy between plans and reality.

### Urban Problems

The case studies of the three cities have brought to light several common key issues: land, the environment, transportation, and poverty. While each city has its own specific version of these issues, the lesson learned is that urban issues and the ideologies conveyed through plans are the same.

*Land (or lack of space).* Paradoxically, although the cities could theoretically expand in an almost unlimited manner, land is a problem, and there is always cruel lack of space. Although the primary cause seems to be the slow workings

of land distribution and acquisition circuits – giving rise to informal practices, shortcuts, and arrangements in order to bypass formal land distribution modes – this is not the only obstacle. Land is subject to a great deal of speculation, as it is more valuable than developed property and remains, for the time being, a sound investment and an opportunity for financial gain, far exceeding the interest rates offered by classic banking systems. Large-scale distributions of land are both a resource for the state and a way of putting assets on the market that gain in value, more or less exclusively benefitting the ruling class. The direct effect of these distributions is urban sprawl and the demand for facilities and major infrastructure that goes hand in hand with it, which the state is unable to meet.

The state finds itself in a Catch-22 with regard to land issues: on the one hand, it makes a profit by selling parcels (i.e., making available unused land that it owns); at the same time, it must reinvest in facilities and infrastructure to equip these new areas. In the end, it is unlikely that the venture is profitable. It is also unlikely that the situation will improve – in fact, quite the contrary. The relationship between land management and the national budget, while direct, is little understood, as is the cost of urban sprawl for cities. The state makes a profit by selling land and, what is more, can obtain funding for facilities and infrastructure in the form of donations and loans from bi- or multilateral backers, further reinforcing the disconnect between profits from sales and the cost of developing sites.

The final point regarding land is that shantytowns are also an object of the speculation game and thus a means of appropriating land. Some speculators use shantytowns to obtain land almost for free, given that the state sooner or later cracks down on illegal situations. Yet, the vast majority of their inhabitants have no choice but to squat, given that they do not have the means to buy land.

Land speculation in cities influences the settlement strategies of the poor, forcing them to settle on land with no value. While there is a great risk of being driven off private land, there is less of a risk if the land belongs to the state – unless the parcel is located in an area planned for urban expansion. Logically, the city, shaped mainly by its many poor, is built without any planning, on land with no value – a city created despite its plans for itself. This paradox that we have described is not taken into account in plans and master plans. However, if we examine the history of the plans, there is clear evidence that it exists.

*The environment.* Environmental problems are a recurrent theme in all three cities. In Nouakchott, the city's location presents serious limitations in terms of urban planning, despite a flat topography that stretches as far as the eye can see. Aridity is one of the major obstacles, and the city suffers from a perpetual shortage of surface water. One of the government's main concerns when



Nouakchott was founded was the question of the drinking water supply. Fifty years later, this remains a topical issue.

While the quantity of drinking water in the other cities is sufficient, the problem is its quality. Minimally-treated water is a major vehicle for disease: public sanitation, illness, and epidemics are often directly linked to the quality of drinking water. Those most affected are the inhabitants of shantytowns, who have no choice but to consume it directly.

In addition, water distribution is not uniform throughout the territory, nor is it distributed according to the number of inhabitants in a given district. Instead, distribution is based on the neighbourhood's social standing, and although there may be sufficient water for the entire city, it does not mean that everyone in every neighbourhood has access to it.

But environmental issues are not limited to water. There are also the locations of the cities themselves, between the lagoon, the Niayes, and other *sabkha* (i.e., natural areas with fragile balances), which the pressure of urbanisation and increase of shantytowns are upsetting.

In Nouakchott, problems are caused by the extremely fragile ground vegetation, poor soil, and the active wind dynamics in certain places. Massive projects have attempted to consolidate ground vegetation, but the sand, along with the effects of the wind, render unconvincing outcomes. *Sabkha*, salt water tables near the land's surface, significantly reduce the possibilities of expanding the city towards the sea, and also accelerate the aging of buildings. In addition to their salinity, *sabkha* are susceptible to flooding, and the soil's lack of permeability rapidly turns them into marshlands, even in light rain. Human activities have had a major impact on the city's safety; the barrier beach is now an at-risk area due to the removal of sand, urbanisation, and the construction of the Port of Friendship. These breaches in the barrier beach, which protects the city from the sea, pose a constant threat to the city.

Finally comes the question of liquid and solid waste management alongside the consequence of waste: ground pollution. Whether in Dakar, Abidjan, or Nouakchott, solid and liquid waste collection and management, when they exist, are not very efficient. Illegal dumping is widespread, and wastewater, which rarely ends up in water treatment plants, infiltrates the soil. Hence, the soil contains large quantities of fecal matter. Waste management is a key issue for cities and, as large sums of money are at stake for these contracts, it is likely that the current situation will continue for some time.

More importantly, waste poses a threat to the populations. Water from sewage systems, which cover only a small part of the urban territory, is often used to water plants and vegetables in market gardens (in Nouakchott and Dakar). Beyond its welcome role as a plant fertiliser, it is also a transmitter of pathogens that cause widespread sanitation problems. Efficient waste management is important for the wellbeing of the inhabitants and for fighting diseases.

### Traffic, transport, and travel

Travel is difficult in these cities, primarily due to driving practices, lack of road infrastructure, and urban sprawl. Road networks are relatively under-developed; in Dakar, there is a single-lane road out of the city towards Rufisque. However, the construction of a motorway should change this situation in the coming years, as Dakar has chosen to focus its development on road infrastructure. Abidjan must also tackle the lack of dual carriageways. Nouakchott, too, has few paved roads for a city of its size.

In addition to lack of infrastructure, many transport problems are linked to driving practices. Drivers pay little attention to the Highway Code, which results in traffic jams, congested roads, cars parked on the pavement, and an overall impression of chaos in the streets. Congestion increases travel time, as well as the price of journeys by taxi.

Urban sprawl also poses a problem as regards travel. Cities are increasingly spread out and the distances between places greater. Hence, the cost of mobility also rises, meaning that poor populations can no longer afford to be mobile and are relegated to their neighbourhoods – a kind of neighbourhood house arrest.

Extremely difficult traffic conditions are common to all three cities. All, without exception, have traffic problems. To remedy this, World Bank programmes have funded dual carriageways (Abidjan), motorways, bypass roads (Dakar), and paved roads (Nouakchott). Despite these programmes, traffic remains just as dense. It is a well-known phenomenon: building a new lane allows for increased traffic, which then saturates the new lane and requires that new roads be built. Thus, what is needed is not just better roads, but a paradigm shift.

### Poverty

Poverty has been on the rise in the three cities for decades. The 1980s saw the end of economic growth, especially in Abidjan (with the collapse of the price of raw materials) and to a lesser extent in Dakar. Nouakchott seems to have been less affected by international crises, and the rise of urban poverty tends to depend more directly on weather issues (particularly the major droughts of the 1970s). The majority of the inhabitants of these three cities are poor, giving rise to an increased proliferation of shantytowns.

Vulnerable districts pose problems in terms of urban management and planning, but also in terms of health, hygiene, and fire prevention. Clearly, the standard of living in these neighbourhoods is low, and the city is unable to provide inhabitants with basic facilities and infrastructure. Moreover, the fact that there are relatively few jobs in these areas means that informal practices are the order of the



day. Yet, these 'pockets' of the city increasingly elude the state control typically present in public spaces.

These neighbourhoods are characterised by squatting, under-employment, and low incomes. Urban poverty is becoming a 'given' – one that must be taken into account in the future in order to manage and plan urban spaces accurately and fairly.



## URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND URBAN MODELS

### Chapter 2

The history of plans is identical in the three cities; in each case, it is the informal city that, in fact, makes the city – that *is* the city. However, it is also this dimension that eludes planning. The differences between plans and reality can largely be attributed to a lack of anticipation on the part of public authorities.

Plans themselves have not ‘planned’ urban development, but rather have merely upheld decisions made after the fact. Cities build themselves based on their own dynamics; plans simply concretise the results several months or years later. The informal city, which naturally develops outside of plans, further reinforces this. Plans tend to lag behind the veritable city, and even when they succeed in anticipating urban development, the inherent problem of the informal city remains.

Cities use a top-down style planning that does not take into account urban dynamics or the dynamics of production of urban space. It is in this respect that the problem of land is the most striking: the city, in fact, is the sum of the social practices of its inhabitants, rather than the result of technocratic planning.

This discrepancy between urban plans and the urban reality is perceived as a lack of foresight on the part of the authorities, with regard to the possibility of an urban explosion. Figures and population projections systematically miss the mark, with regard to both economic recession and population growth. However, anticipating such phenomena (were this possible) changes nothing, if we do not consider these two points. Yet, plans tend to uphold a paradoxical stance vis-à-vis the informal city; the problem is not the accuracy of forecasting statistics, but urban dynamics.

The history of planning has documented the transition from an urban form born of ‘technical’ aspects and its symbolic shift following independence. Never more than in Abidjan was urban planning an expression of state power, which wanted not only to turn the city itself into a showcase (of success, undoubtedly) but also elevate its human ranks (i.e. its inhabitants) to ‘modernity’ through urban policies and development programs, among other things.

Nouakchott likewise became a showcase for political ambition. Starting in the 1960s, the state sought to gain more control over its population, which meant both modernising and urbanising it. Nouakchott was to be Mauritania’s crown jewel. However, daily living somehow had to fit into this grand vision, leaving the city with the problem of a growing need for infrastructure and limited means for

addressing it. After 1970, the modern city was no longer a goal. Today, under the influence of investors from the Arabian Peninsula, the initial indirect effects of oil and a new administration, Nouakchott is once again considering the importance of its image.

Dakar is experiencing similar phenomena. Recent major works do not *implement* state policy, but rather *replace* the very idea of policy, under the guise of progress; in other words, talk now, act later. Dakar is also aiming to be 'contemporary' by building motorways, big hotels, and prestigious buildings. With the renovation of the airport (i.e. modernisation) and the construction of new runways 30 kilometres from the centre, the city wants to show visitors its modernity and dynamism. In this sense it hopes to play a major role nationally, but even more regionally by becoming an obligatory stopover for this part of the continent and a base for international conferences and other events beyond the national framework.

A great deal of economic development is also necessary for a city to become the showcase of its nation's power. In Abidjan, from 1960 to 1980, the city set up state planning to better convey its ideas of modernity. The model collapsed with the crisis of the 1980s. Today the economic development plans of the boom years are no longer valid. Yet, the city must now manage a large legacy of artefacts built during other periods, made all the more challenging by a lack of resources. Hence Abidjan, Dakar, and Nouakchott are now implementing their urban development programs with the help of international lenders.

With the challenges these cities are facing today (namely, lack of resources) for the impossible task of implementing political programmes aimed at modernising, they should nonetheless question models based exclusively on economic growth. However, the choices made in terms of *how* to modernise in these cities (Abidjan is the most striking in this sense) are effectively based on prestigious facilities and infrastructures that require substantial financial resources to build.

### Planning as practiced

The transition from a diagnostic to an actual plan is not an easy one, as various planning documents prove.

The diagnostic for Nouakchott can be described as brief. Moreover, it does not take into account many of the classic themes of urban planning (housing, sanitation, power supply, and mobility). What is more, those that are addressed, such as water, are only treated topically.

However, while many important themes are not included in the diagnostic, some do appear in the plan itself – as if parachuted in at the last minute. Housing, which is divided into 'areas for working-class housing' and 'residential districts,' without any definition of these terms, is a prime example.



In addition, the statistics for the themes addressed are, at times, seemingly random; rarely are the sources indicated. The data cannot be traced, raising questions of accuracy. In the end, however (and fortunately), they are only numbers, and their impact is negligible compared with urban dynamics. Regardless of whether they are accurate, verified, or even verifiable, they have little impact on the future of the city.

Finally, the reader, urban planner, or politician would undoubtedly be unable to make the connection between the diagnostic, the planning objectives, and the plans themselves, as there is none. The objectives are not the result of evidence but, again, seem to have been simply airdropped in.

The main finding of our analysis is that the SDAU has no city project; it develops neither a future vision of Nouakchott nor an urban plan for the coming years. The city seems to have no ambitions to 'emerge,' to play a role on the international scene, or to implement urban policy – in fact, it has no goals other than to plan amenities. The SDAU has created a kind of an anti-planning that merely consists in updating existing data without taking urban dynamics into account.

The underlying idea for this document is that the government, unable to implement a complex plan, must rely on simple tools, which inevitably produces a simplified version of a plan that skims the surface of real urban issues. Without glorifying the urban encyclopaedias that diagnostics can sometimes be, in Nouakchott's case the opposite is true: the urban complexity is missing entirely. And it is precisely by acknowledging this complexity that proper planning is possible. The streamlining of the tool, in this case, killed the tool.

The situation of planning in Dakar is somewhat different from the one described above. To begin, the diagnostic is well researched: housing, waste, the environment, infrastructures, and facilities (i.e. all of the major themes) are all addressed. Nevertheless, what is missing from this quasi-comprehensive overview of urban issues is the question of land. Despite its thoroughness, the diagnostic is difficult to understand because the figures are not easily comparable. Effectively, the number of sources configured differently each time makes it difficult to grasp the situation.

Dakar has chosen a Russian doll-style city, where parcels form islets, which form groups, which form neighbourhoods, and so on, in an interlocking urban configuration. Based on this seemingly ideal city founded on well-understood factors, Dakar could theoretically plan its amenities and infrastructure based on this interlocking. Behind this lies the idea that an ideal city exists, with units of X- or Y-size, whose planning simply involves arranging elements in space.

Unfortunately, the diagnostic's strengths are not used; there is a disconnect between the items in the diagnostic and the objectives of the planning, as though the great mass of information on the state of the city could not be synthesised to feed the plans.

The issue was the same relative to the costs of urbanisation: though the figures are only partial, we sense the desire to show that choices have economic implications. However, these good intentions disappear abruptly with the diagnostic, and we find the notion of costs reflected neither in the management objectives nor in the plan itself.

Dakar's plans show that it has chosen a specific type of development: that of major works and economic growth, even if the outcome remains to be seen.

Ultimately, effective planning documents depend on a key principle: accounting for demographics and employment. This equation includes two unknowns of the future: the number of jobs and the number of inhabitants. Plans must make provision for population increases in order to set aside the space for urbanisation. The rest must be calculated based on density, which determines the land area necessary for urbanisation.

The Abidjan plan raises methodological questions, thus reflecting the attention given to the urban diagnostic, and in this way is an exception. Of the three plans we studied, Abidjan's was most critical of past plans, even going so far as to propose a re-examination (to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past), questioning both methods and administrative divisions and thus truly contemplating the city's future development.

The diagnostic is meticulous, providing the basis for planning and openly stating the desire to work on urban dynamics. Despite its good intentions to break with former practices, however, it does not achieve its goal; the diagnostic proposes nothing more than the usual figures (population, surface area, litres of water per inhabitant, etc.). What is more, between the desire to use new methods and the document's accuracy, it falls back into a more traditional style of planning, like that of Dakar and Nouakchott. Abidjan cannot seem to choose between its desire to be a showcase and the reality of urban poverty. Between these two extremes and amidst growing environmental concerns, in the end, it does *not* choose. As in the other cities, the idea of a city, the project, and the model are all lacking.

#### Similar ideas

Beyond the specifics points for each city, all three seem to share the same basic development principles. Five common points emerged from our review of the planning documents: spatial segregation, the non-relationship between costs and urbanization, the absence of poor people in the city, the lack of a link between management and planning, and the difficulty of implementing tools.

*A vision of urban development: extension and segregation.* The city develops through urban sprawl, which itself is a result of demographics. It makes no difference whether or not projections take into account the spreading out of households into the areas beyond the urbanised zone (which the documents do not





mention). From very early on, planners were determined to zone. And yet, the size of these zones never meets the effective needs. Hence, informal settlements crop up, their locations constantly defying official plans; in short, the city never develops where or how it is supposed to. Nevertheless, planners and planning authorities continue to develop the same way – by extension, basic layouts, subdivisions, and other development strategies.

Early on in the planning stage, urban extensions are based on projections of surface areas that are random at best. History shows that development areas are almost always either too large or too small, but very rarely the correct size. However, when they *are* actually developed, they struggle to find their place in the city. The most striking example is undoubtedly that of Pikine, which, though built in 1950, still has not achieved a status other than that of urban extension.

Finally, segregation is linked to extension. It is not enough to create development zones: they must also be given values depending on the type of community to be accommodated. Hence, zones fall into two distinct classes: ‘residential’ neighbourhoods and working-class districts. Different rules and rights apply in each case. In other words, it is commonly believed that the poor should not be subject to the same rules as the rich, since they do not have the ‘means’ to follow them. This raises the question of for whom the city is planned – and how.

*Urbanisation without costs.* Recent studies on urbanisation costs (ARE 2001) show that the more a city spreads out, the higher the infrastructure costs. African cities, while not an exception, find themselves unable to meet increasing demands. Yet, such extensions require substantial linear infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, and sewage).

Only Dakar’s plan mentions finances and costs, highlighting the relationship between the way the city is developed and the funds available, albeit without exploiting this information. Despite limited state and municipal budgets, the financial component must be the centre of debate and budget management an integral part of urban management. Plans must realistically determine (and allocate) the resources necessary to successfully implement what has been planned. This is one of the main causes of planning failure: if the zones to be developed (i.e. highways and ring roads which are meant to delineate the urban space) are not sufficiently funded, then the plan serves no purpose.

*The poor do not exist.* The 2001 Master Plan for Dakar highlights poverty, while the current plan (for 2025) completely ignores it. In Nouakchott and Abidjan, the situation is identical in all respects: poverty does not exist within the city limits, or at least no one mentions it. And while international lenders have made poverty their key focus, these state governments have not integrated the

existence of urban poverty into their plans. To be fair, this does not mean that the documents depict the cities as being without poor people, but rather that poverty is marginal enough to not have visible consequences in the urban space and on the production of the city. However, our analysis shows that the city is by and large 'made' by its informal settlements. As such, poverty should be in the spotlight when it comes to thinking about the city. The diagnostics do not take the poor into account, and instead are based on a kind of universal 'average citizen' whom, it would seem, is wealthy enough to fully appropriate and enjoy the city. This citizen travels by car or public transport, chooses where he or she lives, etc. While such populations do exist in African cities, they are in no way the majority. Thus, planning for such a small minority is tantamount to failure to consider the majority, without whom the city would not exist.

*The absence of links between urban management and planning.* Through the diagnostic, which sets out the goals and principles of urbanisation, urban development documents lay out plans for the creation of facilities and infrastructure. However, current and future management of these facilities is not taken into account. There is clearly a gap between planning and long-term urban management. How to manage facilities and costs and the choice of maintenance models are all factors the planner has neglected to consider here, resulting in underused facilities.

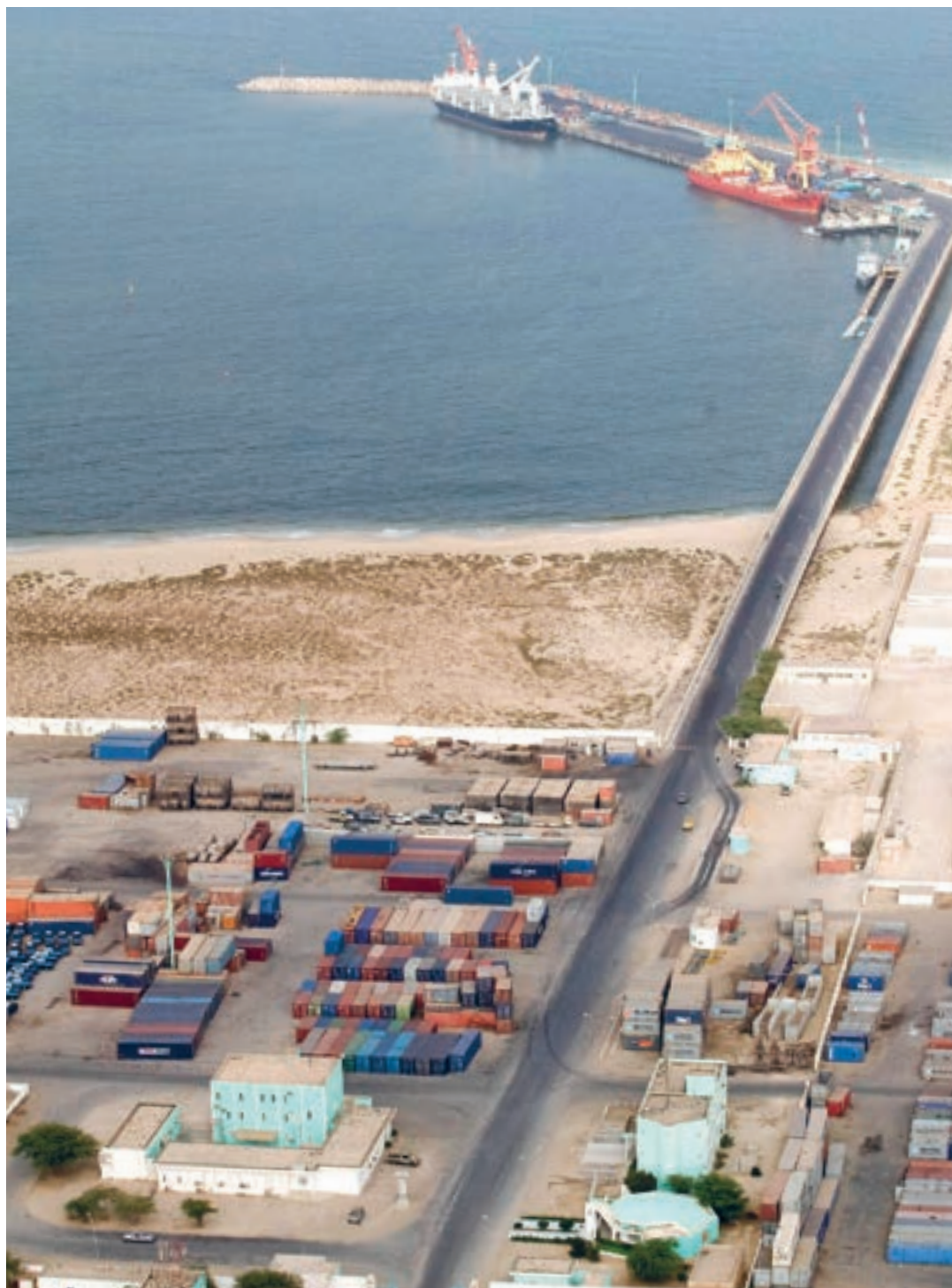
*Difficulty implementing tools.* In the three cities, the plans' only merit, for the time being, is their existence; the rest (i.e. how effective they are) remains to be seen. In Nouakchott, the government is so aware of this situation that, in June 2008, it launched a study to update the SDAU (only five years after its application by decree) because – given the Master Plan's lack of efficacy – it seemed necessary to re-examine the assumptions on which it was based.

Most urban development documents serve as a springboard for negotiations between urban actors and, even if they are not applicable as plans, can fuel discussion between the various administrations.

Frequently, it is the length of time needed to implement urban development plans that is problematic. It can take up to ten years to finalize plans, whereas cities themselves are constantly changing and require frequent modifications and updating.

### Limitations of planning

While planners in Abidjan attempt to critically review past practices, in Dakar they cite them without any analysis whatsoever. In Nouakchott, urban planners simply do not mention previous plans, as the mistakes of the past are of no interest in the present.







URBAN EXTENSIONS IN THE  
OUTSKIRTS OF NOUAKCHOTT.

These planning documents are all based on the same ideas of city and planning and, hence, face the same limitations. All reduce urban complexity, make plans based on the 'average citizen' model, and completely ignore the major themes of urban development.

The reduction of urban complexity can be seen most notably in the lack of consideration of urban dynamics. As such, the case studies show a series of issues without explaining the dynamics. The streamlining of planning tools should render them more effective – at least that is what we gather from the planning documents. And yet, our studies show that the contrary is true: it is through the *inclusion* of complex urban dynamics that planning is both possible and effective.

Thus the 'average citizen' model is born of the failure to consider the poor who, statistically speaking, are the majority and, hence, should be the priority when it comes to urban planning. As we also know, a small elite runs the show, and planning reflects this fact. The plans design a city for a middle class – an 'average' *Dakarois* or *Nouakchottois* citizen we are not even sure exists. Neither rich nor poor, this citizen is the basic social unit of planning.

This approach satisfies no one – neither leaders, who do not see themselves reflected in the planned city, nor the poor, whose living conditions are in no way

improved by plans that design ring roads for future populations we are not even certain will have cars.

Finally, the lack of attention to major themes like mobility and housing raises questions. Although occasionally cited in diagnostics, they lose their substance once taken up by the planning tool.

Despite these three elements the cities have in common, they also share the same objective: to make a modern city. In this modernity, however, poverty is naturally excluded, as are urban dynamics. While modernity is indeed the goal (at least that is what emerges from our case studies), the plans do not reflect this, and thus there is a disjuncture between the former and the latter, reinforced by an 'urban ideal' – and not the urban reality.

The cities' move toward modernity through urban development plans is all the more questionable (with the recent exception of Dakar) as they have largely abandoned the major projects, *allées triomphantes* and other luxury developments projects that characterized dictatorships.

To conclude, the causes of planning failure can be found in: 1) the lack of integration of social dynamics; 2) the planning paradox, whereby the poor settle outside of planned zones; 3) the failure to take into account the history of urban development plans; 4) the lack of prioritisation of issues; 5) the notable absence of poverty from all reflection; and 6) the failure to consider issues relative to the city's image in the planning. International competition is a reality; nevertheless, people, regardless of social class, need to feel that their city is a reflection of them.





# PLANNING, THE PRESS, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND PUBLIC SPACE

## Chapter 3

### From the press to the image: use of public space

The press showed us a street without gender; differences in how men and women use the street are not addressed in newspaper columns. The images, however, reveal the simple reason for this, which is that the street is a place for men – not for women. In fact, the press does not address gender relations at all, not because the sexes are equal (and hence there is no need to discuss the issue), but because the issue itself does not exist: newspapers are written by and for men. At least this is true of the daily paper (women's magazines were not included in our study). So, women have no place in the press or in the street. On the rare occasion the press does mention them, it is merely to point to their role in changing social values that, generally speaking, are bemoaned. Hence, women are shown topless (frequently in Dakar) or scantily clad (as in Abidjan), boosting sales by showing men the cause of their discontent. The situation is paradoxical: women are both vilified and invisible. Thus do we get a clear picture of what life is like for women in public spaces in African cities. However, we can only speak for the public realm here, as our studies did not look in detail at women's place in society as a whole.

Regarding climate, the images reveal the importance of weather conditions in the structuring and use of public space. This point is consistent with the press' analysis, which highlights the many problems associated with the rainy season. However, in terms of in the streets of Dakar, Abidjan, and Nouakchott, the main concern for people is protection from the sun, especially for vendors, who have perfected systems for protecting their stalls.

While the press discusses mobility-related issues, the images clearly show the real issue is for those who must walk. The roadsides, often covered with sand, are usually impassable, and given the intensity of the sun, no one ventures out into the streets in the midday heat. Thus, pedestrians are faced not only with the problems of distance, climate, and urban sprawl, but also the layout of the street itself.

Markets and shops are important themes in the press and perfectly reflect the reality of life in the city. The street is, above all, a place of exchange and business, where spatial strategies are important. Beggars, prostitutes, and phone

card vendors all have their favourite haunts, which correspond to the criteria of sales strategy. Hence, there is a direct link between the occupation of space and practices.

Our findings based on our images is consistent with what we saw in the press – a strong commercial presence in the streets, to the point that pedestrians are forced to share the road with cars, as the pavement and any other empty spaces are appropriated for sales activities. Informal sales activities are increasing in Abidjan (TOURE 1985), representing only the visible part of all informal activity, while other such activities develop in the private realm.

Vendors occupy more than just the pavement, spilling over into the road, with the kerb as their boundary. While this boundary is generally respected, pedestrians are relegated to sharing the road with vehicles. The overall impression is that of a giant outdoor market. The press highlights this and the images confirm it: the street is a place for sales.

This omnipresence of commerce – which overtakes the city's every nook and cranny – turns walking into a dangerous exercise for pedestrians. Dakar's road programmes encourage car use, making getting around difficult for non-drivers. These two phenomena are consistent with the goal of fully mechanized mobility. Overall, the press tends to shed a light on the phenomena revealed in our images, providing us with a more in-depth understanding of the city. For instance, it addresses the problem of extreme heat through the issue of periodic water shortages (which our images do not show). However, our images show that the sun and extreme temperatures are important considerations on a daily basis, not only during shortages.

By combining our press analyses and images, we obtain substantial knowledge of the issues of public space and how the latter is used. A comparison of the case studies and urban development plans reveals other aspects of the city, most notably the co-existence of two worlds in the same space.

At the street level – the one of customs and practices – it is the sun's course that determines people's activities and how they are carried out. The installations we see in our images are the result of the various strategies used by actors in the street – literally, the 'mobile people.' The street is a dynamic, changing environment.

The informal nature of the street, which the press describes in detail, is also visible in the photos. However, the images go a step further by adapting well-established regulation, the rules of the game, and how people use the space. Informal practices, in this sense, adhere to very precise and formal criteria. Our analysis thus challenges the press' idea that informality, in fact, thrives on haphazardness and chaos.

The themes discussed by press are for the most part visible in our images of the street. Each provides specific information regarding social practices and

street practices. Whether in a market or a busy street, the way stalls are set up and where vendors (and people in general) position themselves are part of a world of codes that is in no way random: they do not set up their stalls just anywhere; rather, their locations are chosen based on their potential clientele and, hence, sales logic. For non-mobile vendors there is an additional criterion: available space to display their wares. As not all ideal sales locations can be used, other rules overlap. As such, we sometimes saw empty squares and vendor-less crossroads and roundabouts. While the saying, *nature abhors a vacuum*, is true, people's appropriation of the street does not rely on this principle alone. Our investigations identified seven structural elements of public space:

*The hot season* (climate). In these cities, summer means shortages 1) of water, with needs increasing with the rise in temperature; and 2) of electricity, due to air conditioners, refrigerators, and other 'cold machines.' In development terms, these shortages are directly related to the inattention of the SDAU diagnostic. Infrastructure should be capable of adapting to the change in seasons. The climate is important in Dakar, and the rainy season affects the region each year at the same period. The press comments on, questions, and criticizes the situation, and water damage is often mentioned in the newspapers. However, planning makes no specific provision for managing the city during the rainy season. Once again, the plans de-contextualize the city they are meant to plan, with the bolder of them representing nothing more than a generic model of the 'African' or 'Southern' city. Of the structuring elements of public space, weather is a recurrent issue. The findings were the same for Abidjan and Nouakchott.

*Behaviours*. The press creates a kind of typology between urban and non-urban behaviours. Anarchic traffic is *not* urban; littering the street is *not* urban. While the definition of what is urban and what is not seems to meet consensus in the press, evidence of this is not visible in public spaces. Rather, one is more likely see either 'selfish' behaviours that make living 'together' impossible or altruistic behaviours. Thus do we avoid the problem of defining *urban* and *rural*, as this is not really the point. Moreover, despite abundant literature on individualism in the city and the loss of family landmarks, distinctions between the two contexts – urban and rural – are not valid in the case of the African city, as the two ways of life are inextricably linked. For urban planning, understanding behaviours and the links between families and ethnic groups teaches us a great deal about the logics behind the development of informal settlements (the phenomenon by which the city grows parcel by parcel). Such modes of appropriation are closely tied to what the press calls 'rural behaviours.' What the press really scorns, in fact, are so-called informal practices. However, informal practices exist in all

aspects of urban life, and are not just limited to road traffic and waste management. Informality is also a rule of thumb in social relationships, and while this may pose a problem on the road, it nonetheless allows the land market to create added value, allows businesses to develop and even allows the state to benefit by collecting tax from street stalls. Clearly management approaches are largely informal, which leads to inequitable management of public space and obvious segregation between social classes. Space management takes place based on individual interests, not the common good. Without revisiting the topic at length, the problem of urban management must nonetheless be introduced. Planners tend to separate urban planning and urban management, and SDAUs are no exception. In light of the planning documents, urban management does not appear to be a priority.

*Poverty.* Much of the population lives in poverty. Public space is marked by this fact in that the street has become a resource. A geography of poverty has also emerged in the outlying districts, on land that is less suited to urbanisation. While the existence of poverty is a reality, one would not guess it looking at the master plan.

*Strong state presence.* While the state is present in public space, as the press points out, it is also present in master plans, as it oversees all urban planning. Although the municipalities are the primary beneficiaries of planned actions, negotiations take place at the state level.

*Lack of image.* Nouakchott suffers from a lack of image, particularly its centre. The idea is simple: it takes a minimum of décor to 'make a city' – to be a Doha, Tunis, Rabat, or Dubai. Press articles complain of animals roaming freely and Bedouins walking around with their carts on main streets as though they were in the bush. In short, man is not yet 'modern' enough to take ownership of the 'modern' city. Such descriptions likewise apply in Dakar and Abidjan, as the problems are the same. There is a great deal of pressure in the press for authorities to be more attentive to the city's image, and for people to 'elevate themselves' to citizen status. Planning, on the other hand, ignores image altogether.

*Separate worlds.* Different districts do not have the same value, and their management takes place on a selective basis, the press tells us. This is notably the case in Dakar and Abidjan. Yet, urban plans claim the opposite and propose a unitary spatial pattern – from block to neighbourhood, and neighbourhood to city. The disparity undoubtedly lies in the financial resources available. On one hand are good intentions, and on the other, the inability to meet all the demands; hence, the need to make trade-offs.

## From planning to public space

The gap between the two urban scales in the planning, as we have seen throughout this work, is one of our key findings. There are few or no direct links between how to think about the city and how to understand the street – no link between the macro level of plans and the micro level of urban public space. The themes are simply not the same, and when they do overlap, they do not address issues in the same way.

If we begin with the street, logically we would find issues relative to the street in the planning. Yet our analysis shows that the case studies and press highlight major urban issues in a similar way. However, when we look at these issues relative to planning tools, there is a discrepancy.

In this respect, planning does not respond to the urban reality but rather is based on an idea of the city, or rather, an idea of making the city. This is the main concern of urban planning in West African cities. Planners take recipes that have never been tested and throw in the cocktail of urban dynamics of the contemporary city.

The climate is also an aspect – yet another one that planning ignores. Be it road damage, flooding, or landslides in ravines, rain has an important impact on the city. The city is not simply a generic space in the contemporary world; it is a space that has roots, and that feels the effects of climate, sunshine, etc.

Poverty is another example of a phenomenon that strongly structures spaces not considered in the planning. The documents for the three cities are similar in this respect; the cities are all planned the same way, by ignoring the poor in favor of (as we have seen) the ‘average’ citizen. The city remains the place where the poor integrate society and make their living (albeit often by small jobs, begging, or prostitution).

The street is also the place of civil and civic activities for whole populations who have no other forum to exercise their rights, as well as a place of protest. It is likewise an extension of the private sphere, where activity in the home spills over into the street. Its central place and role must not be ignored by planners or the state, by extension (all of which lack interest in the poor). For many people, the street is synonymous with life.

Many practices in the street are informal –regarding land, the occupation of space, or even relationships between people. The example of a taxi is striking as an example of the superposition of formal and informal management strategies. To bring order to the anarchy of the pricing practices of taxi drivers, the state requires each vehicle to have a meter with a rate per unit. However, during rush hour traffic jams and the rainy season, shopping quickly becomes unaffordable for most people, resulting in a decline in the use of taxis. So taxi drivers, who also must earn their living, act outside the formal framework by proposing



unmetered trips. Customer and driver negotiate a fare (prices depend largely on the day, time, etc. – so many factors that affect supply and demand).

This example illustrates the importance of urban planning – in this case through public policy – in managing the city, but above all demands that we reflect on mechanisms and dynamics of urban phenomena. However, urban plans are clearly still a long way from taking such data into account.

Finally, the existence of informal practices above all shows that the economic situation most people are faced with does not allow them to live in the 'legal' system. Yet, they must survive. Urban plans do not make mention of this, even if it is further evidence of growing impoverishment. By not taking poverty into account, urban plans do not tackle the ensuing informality, and thereby continue to ignore existing dynamics.

These findings allowed us to test the three hypotheses presented at the beginning of the book.

*H1:* Decades after independence from French African countries, African cities continue to develop according to the rules established during their founding. This is also true of planning tools, which correspond to an idea of 'city' and to outdated colonial European planning practices.

Our findings clearly prove this hypothesis. We saw that the original segregation patterns of the colonial cities when the elites first settled (European, and later, in the case of Nouakchott, Mauritania) endure today. Whether in Pikine or in Yopougon (south of Nouakchott), the separation of these two worlds – colonial and indigenous (today: rich and poor) – permeates planning like an immutable model of the city. We could easily take this hypothesis further, as we have seen that planning is not based on the city but on a city ideal and an idea of planning.

In the end the tools do not change. The scale of planning changes, with increases in a city's surface area; we go from a drawn space to a planned one, but, generally speaking, it is the inhabitant-employment duo that determines the size of development area extensions.

*H2:* Issues of public space are essentially identical; as management and planning approaches are the same, the outcomes are therefore also the same.

Despite different political forms and economic and social contexts, the cities' identical trajectories reveal a cookie-cutter type model of the African city. The issues highlighted in the three case studies are identical. There are, of course, local specificities, such as the water shortages that deeply impact Nouakchott but not the other two cities. Beyond these differences, the issues are the same in all three cities.

Identical ways of managing and planning the city undoubtedly make for similar issues, but we should nonetheless clarify: similar urban management styles alone are insufficient. The conditions in the cities must also be the same, which



is the case here and, in this instance, is linked to the economic crisis that has been raging for decades and the informal sector that accompanies it. The conditions for the development of the informal sector are thus a factor in the standardisation of issues in West African city streets.

*H3:* This standardisation of urban space and its models results in the standardisation of street practices and lifestyles which no longer depend on the context or environment, creating a disconnect between the city and its surrounding environment.

To say that there is a disjuncture between the city and its context is false; we saw it in our press analysis and photographic studies. The cities of West Africa we studied certainly have some practices in common and urban forms that depend on similar building methods. Differences between men and women and methods of protest – to cite only two examples – show that these cities are not identical, despite the standardisation of cities worldwide. In any case, the city is not disconnected from its environment, and practices are in no way uniform.

#### Towards self-organizing, people-centric planning

The two levels of analysis of the cities show very different findings. The press and images paint a specific picture of poverty in the urban setting – an image of the hardships urban populations must face. The press either sides with the poor (as in Dakar), remains neutral (as in Nouakchott), or lambasts them (as in Abidjan). Whatever the case, the press talks about the poor, and both articles and images offer a vision of the challenges of poverty.

In contrast, the Master Plan provides only a technical solution to urban problems. The diagnostic is detailed, and the conclusions are relatively clear, but the proposed solutions do not take urban dynamics into account. Mobility problems become traffic issues. The answer? A program designed to build new roads. This example is not unique. In fact, all areas of urban management could serve as examples here. There is clearly a disjuncture between reflection at the macro and micro levels.

Contrary to popular belief that African cities are not planned and are impossible to plan, our research found that both were false. The city *is* planned; it is just that this planning is inadequate, which is one of the reasons for its failure. It is also possible to plan. In the next chapter we will develop recommendations for planning in African cities based on the findings from our studies.

The city is planned, plans exist, hundreds of thousands of Euros and years of work are invested, entire planes are filled with experts on the African city. African consultants produce tons of paper, plans, and megabytes of digital data,

hundreds of Powerpoint presentations, thousands of informal discussions take place. One cannot say planning does not exist in African cities.

Many authors, planners and other urban managers who claim that the African city is not planned only contribute to perpetuating the myth that it is a kind of spontaneous construction made by legions of poor, and of whom we can ask nothing. We examine it without understanding the underlying mechanisms, somewhat fascinated by the disorder and chaos because that is how it is portrayed, thus making it difficult to intervene. Behind these ideas lie a decolonisation that did not take place and the belief that the world is divided into two classes of inhabitants. Hence, the deep racial segregation of history – which today is social – lives on in the idea of the African city.

However, it is more accurate to say that the planning that exists in Africa is not efficient. Here are some of the reasons:

- Planning is done based on an ‘average citizen’ who represents a middle class, such as might be found in Northern countries. This citizen has a car, family, and sufficient resources for his mobility. Yet, this citizen for whom these cities are planned is not representative of the majority of the population; in fact, by African standards, he or she is a member of the elite, which means that the city is in fact planned for a small minority.
- Planning by urban planners is based on an idea of the city and not on the city itself. Overall, urban planning is context-less; the climate and seasons have no importance, and the city becomes an abstract, decontextualized object. This is further reinforced by the fact that makers of cities are the same everywhere – a handful of consulting firms, a few World Bank directors, and African elites usually trained in France.
- The city is mainly developed by informal extensions. Planning creates its own failure, because shantytowns can only develop outside of planning areas;
- Planning ignores poverty and thus disregards the majority of the city’s inhabitants. This failure results in increased segregation;
- Planning does not take costs into account. Investment programmes and other housing development projects have little chance of coming to fruition due to very limited resources. In general, only roads seem to find the necessary funding;
- Above all – and most importantly – planning does not acknowledge urban and social dynamics; it is simply carried out without any understanding of how the city is built.

The disparity between the treatment of the macro and micro levels suggests that the difference between scales has not been considered. However, the city should be understood by the aspirations of its inhabitants, not by the application of urban models. We therefore assert that understanding the street and the practices that take place there should be the focus of planning. Individuals, with their living and survival strategies, must be at the heart



SMALL SHOP IN NOUAKCHOTT.

of planning. Only when population dynamics have been taken into account will it be possible to reflect on planning and lay the foundations for future development of the city.

The failure of successive plans should be the catalyst for a new conception of planning no longer based only on the inhabitant-employment duo and not simply by extension, but one that works on the individual dynamics of the city's actors: self-organised, people-centric planning. In other words, urban planning must draw on the dynamics of actors, which can only take place by attempting to understand them prior to taking action, so as to highlight possible levers for change.

Undoubtedly, in a catastrophic vision of the global economy, the African city could be considered a model city given its extensive experience. But for the time being, it proposes nothing in the fight against poverty – quite the contrary. In fact, it is the vehemence with which urban planners and elites seek to make the African city a city 'like the others' that prevents them from finding innovative solutions. Whether through the simplified tools of the World Bank or President Wade's major projects for Dakar, the model of the city is the same. Hence, it is necessary to reinvent a city model that is consistent with reality, and not the elites' idea of what a city should be.

Issues with regard to the climate must also be reintroduced into planning. Without any particular nostalgia for colonial cities, one must recognize that they did consider factors such as heat, rainfall, runoff, and ventilation. The contemporary city has long since forgotten such basic concerns. The current model is that of a decontextualized, global/generic city, with no direct link to the context in which it exists – a city disconnected from physical reality, made of busi-

nessmen, airplanes, and international conferences. Far from the idea of challenging Friedmann's and Sassen's work on global cities (FRIEDMANN, WOLFF 1982, FRIEDMANN 1986, SASSEN 1991, KOOLHAAS 1994, SASSEN 2002b, SASSEN 2002a), or the more prospective works of Koolhaas (KOOLHAAS 2000) on the generic city, the reality described in research on the global city does not take into account another reality: that of hundreds of millions of mostly poor inhabitants who live on the margins of elite trends.

Yet, it is mainly for the inhabitants of these cities – those who are not mobile, who are condemned to living in what amounts to house arrest – that the city should be designed and made useful.



## A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

### Chapter 4

The goal of this final chapter is to offer recommendations in order to render operational the findings from our analyses, attempting neither to be exhaustive nor to develop a planning tool, but rather to lay the foundations for future development beyond the scope of this discussion.

Our main finding concerns the lack of knowledge of urban dynamics. We have emphasised time and time again that the urban planning in these cities does not regard demographic and industrial development as factors that influence urban development. However, while demographics play an important role in urban production, they alone do not explain all of the phenomena involved. Knowledge of other phenomena (the building of the city (CANEL 1990), mobility as a factor of change in the urban form (KAUFMANN 2008, WIEL 1999) and safety in public space) are rarely studied with regard to African cities. Thus, we will now highlight some of the more important elements we discovered over the course of our investigation, which may be useful in filling the gaps in the knowledge of West African cities.

#### African cities today

*Mobility.* While most studies emphasise aspects linked to urban transport (GODARD 2002b, GODARD 2002a), we found after reading many newspaper articles on the subject that the data implicit therein highlights elements linked to poverty, making reference to literature on transportation costs. Indeed, successive urban crises point to the economy at the household level and reveal that a growing number of people live 'under house arrest' in their neighbourhoods, essentially tethered to their residential locations due to lack of financial resources and, hence, are not mobile. While Bairoch (BAIROCH 1985) clearly underlined the importance of transport costs in the development of the city, it might be useful to centre our focus on the limited means of urban inhabitants for travel and commuting. The failure of residential extensions in Nouakchott (to counter shantytowns) and the informal settlements cropping up in employment areas in Abidjan both point to the importance of the cost of mobility.

*Security and public spaces.* Public space was a key aspect of our research and is thus commented on extensively. However, issues of safety and urban form

are not addressed in our work. Yet, the creation of gated communities (OWUOR *et al.* 2006), the appropriation of the street as a semi-private space (i.e. during markets), and the managing/regulating of public space all have a direct impact on the urban form. In other words, the production of urban space is a result of how the street is managed and appropriated by individuals for essentially private use. Whether in a strictly safety-oriented perspective or a public one, safety concerns strongly structure the city. Paradoxically, one feels as though the rest of the city – where no specific security measures have been put in place – has been abandoned and that anything goes.

*Urban boundaries.* In the 1980s, *Building the African City* (CANEL, GIRARD 1988) tackled the issue of the production of the city from its fringes, addressing informal production and explaining its dynamics (land, social, etc.) to provide a comprehensive view of how the city grows. Thirty years later, however, these figures require updating (a comparison of the reality *then* versus reality *now*). The book's release was simultaneous with the crises of the 1980s, and thus does not take this period into account. How is the city built today? By what dynamics? Is it still mainly produced by migrants? Are there more 'natives' today? Is the settlement process (from finding land to the move itself) the same as in the past? Such findings would help us understand the dynamics at work in today's oil-stained expansion of the city.

*Imaginaries.* We have largely dealt with the ideas that underlie the city and have seen that the three cities in our study were built on the same basic principles, despite being founded over the course of more than a century. We also have seen that the ruling elites in the different cities all have the same idea of modernity and of what a city should be, even if these ideas are not implemented the same way in all three cases. Consciously or unconsciously, the elite imposes models of urban development imported from Dubai or Paris. In either case, the imagination of the people is never addressed. How do they perceive their city? And what is a city, for that matter? What are they looking for in this city? What would it need to fit this image? Few authors tackle such questions. Moreover, the city's image and people's definition of it are two topics that are not taken into account in urban planning and management. Yet, we believe that it is precisely through such topics – together with the other dynamics we have identified – that we must approach the city and its planning. Understanding a people's (or peoples') image of a city gives us an understanding of their dynamics within it.

*Major facilities.* The city's image is also inextricably linked to its large buildings. Hypermarkets, government buildings, factories, and luxury hotels – all of these large-scale artefacts structure the urban space. The pivotal role of large markets (PAULAIS 1998, PAULAIS, WILHELM 2000) in the urban structure of the city is known.



Many authors demonstrate the key role played by large facilities in urban public space; yet, the mechanisms that lead to their creation are largely unknown. Is it merely land availability, or are business strategies actually at work? How is the choice of the neighbourhood made?

#### Findings on current planning tools

The study of the three plans has revealed the limitations and failures of planning, for reasons we will reiterate below:

- The planning diagnostics we studied were nothing more than a set of facts, figures, and data, and in no way offered a critical analysis of the situation or urban dynamics.
- Moreover, the diagnostics are generally incorrect. As they are not comprehensive and are based on random figures, they do not correspond to the reality and, hence, are not useful.
- The themes addressed in the plans are not those that should be addressed in a document of this type.
- The length of implementation is too great. From the first studies to the adoption of a master plan, years – even decades – can go by. Once the plan is finally implemented, the reality of the conditions may no longer have anything to do with those that came to light during the initial reflections.
- They lack firm footing in the government. Plans are designed outside of the context for which they are developed, by agencies, consulting firms and small government departments. However, at no time is the document used as a springboard for negotiations or discussions on the future of the city among the different players involved.
- Planning authorities (even consulting firms) have little idea of what a master plan is and how it should be used. Exceptions exist, of course, as certain project managers, directors, and assistant directors are well aware of this problem. However, it is clear that real experts in departments that actually do urban planning are few and far between.
- There is no connection between or communication regarding the different projects being developed in these cities. The example of the Twize program in Nouakchott is striking in this way (BOLAY, CHENAL 2008). An extensive program for thousands of housing units was introduced by the government, the World Bank, and GRET (an NGO), without any link to the Master Plan (ADU 2003). Yet these units, built in outlying neighbourhoods, have hardened the city limits at its periphery. This project somehow completely escaped official planning, and is one of the many examples of the city being ‘made’ without planning.
- Urban planning does not take the larger context into account (i.e., the city’s place and role on the regional, national, and international scenes).

### The great paradox of urban planning

The first paradox inherent to urban planning is that poor populations always settle where nothing is planned. As the cities we have studied grow primarily through the informal practices and informal settlements, the city's development takes place outside of official planning – a situation that will undoubtedly continue for many years to come, at least as long as plans alone continue to determine areas of future development. Today, however, it is possible to envisage plans that do not zone the city by areas for development but rather offer guidance with regard to means and rules for determining the location of new developments.

Indeed, if we provide instructions, that is, a set of criteria administrations can use to determine locations for new housing and development areas on a case-by-case basis and according to needs, the problems described above can ultimately be avoided.

The second paradox is that today, cities are planned physically, based solely on spatial data, with no indication of *what* they should be *like*. While early city plans indicate street dimensions and how to create coherency within a given area, current plans only zone, without taking spatial qualities into account. This is not only due to the change in scale, which makes it impossible to draw an accurate picture of the city, but also to the transition from three-dimensional planning to two-dimensional planning.

### Key principles

Based on the above findings, we can recommend several basic principles that are valid regardless of the city or country:

1. *Overcoming paradoxes.* The first principle is one that allows us to overcome the paradoxes described earlier. Effectively, abandoning planning 'by zone' and favouring criteria that will help determine future extension areas as the need arises should help limit circumstances such as those that currently prevail, whereby the city develops outside of plans.

2. *Context counts.* The city is part of a larger context, not a separate entity whose boundaries set it apart. Planning must be designed based on an international context. What role should the city play on the international scene? How can planning strengthen this position at the global scale? While Nouakchott's position in this sense is still limited, the influence of cities like Abidjan, Lagos, Dakar, and Kinshasa (to cite only a few African cities) far exceed their own borders.

The city must also define its role in an African context. What place should Dakar hold for the continent and the West African region? As a beachhead? Or an obligatory stop en route to other parts of the continent, etc.? The answers to

these questions have a direct impact on planning, especially as regards airport facilities.

The city must play a specific role in the country. Most states suffer from urban macrocephaly. Given this, how does a city position itself? We know that land plays an essential role in migration, and that ample availability is attractive to rural migrants. Even if they do not stay in the city, they buy parcels as a financial investment that may later be sold or used by family members in the event of a major food crisis or drought in the countryside.

3. *Integrating research findings.* We have focused on the shortcomings of planning tools when it comes to urban dynamics by showing that part of the failure of planning in general reflects this lack of consideration. It is therefore crucial to integrate findings from various studies on specific issues into the planning. While not *all* knowledge is necessary for creating a planning tool, the latter should allow for the gradual integration of knowledge as it becomes available. Planning tools should be active and capable of taking into account fast-changing dynamics – not a static framework.

The diagnostics of the three plans we studied all showed their limitations: all are based on figures that do not take into account social and urban dynamics. Yet, in order for a diagnostic to be effective, it must evolve from an analysis of figures to one of practices and mechanisms.

The themes addressed in the diagnostics must also be questioned. In what way are the elements studied relevant to the plan? How are they being used? Our study shows that most of the figures in the diagnostics were not actually used in the plan, and thus serve no purpose.

4. *Time considerations.* Things move quickly in the cities we studied. In the instance of a drought, thousands of people can arrive overnight and stay for several months. In Abidjan during the 2002 crisis, in a reversed situation, thousands of Burkinabés ‘went home,’ leaving housing empty in the city for the first time ever. A second crisis in which thousands returned to Ouagadougou had a direct impact on planning. Hence, time is of the essence. With the exception of Nouakchott, the timeframes of the two other plans are too great to take such changes into account, and thus require modification even before the plan takes effect. Moreover, the diagnostic, which is based exclusively on figures and, thus, is unable to take into account the factor of time, coincides with an ‘image of reference’ that is dated and fixed. When planning documents are finally implemented, years have often gone by. The projected situation and the actual one are no longer the same.

5. *Stop inventing numbers.* It is difficult to trace the sources of the figures used in the plans, with the exception of Abidjan, where the methods are described in detail. We should be aware that in most cases, the majority of the numbers



SALE OF PEPPERS, FRUIT, AND  
VEGETABLES IN ABIDJAN.

are invented; they come from ratios applied to estimations. Consultants and consulting firms seem to be masters in the art of invention. A good example of this are the figures used for Nouakchott, which are based solely on impressions and ratios known in other countries.

Planning based on this type of data is of no use; hence, we advocate abandoning such practices.

6. *Urban complexity*. Elements do not function individually; rather, they interact. We cannot, for instance, consider housing without thinking about jobs, transport, etc. We saw this in Abidjan, with industrial zones far from residential areas (resulting in the development of shantytowns close to employment areas), as well as in the attempt to resettle a portion Nouakchott's population in Dar Naim, on the outskirts (which failed, as people ended up staying in their old neighbourhood).

It is crucial to consider themes in conjunction, not as separate elements, a principle that starkly contrasts that of the World Bank (FARVAQUE-VITROVIC, GODIN 1997), which encourages simplification. However, we contend that, in order for urban planning to be useful, it must take into account complexity in all of its forms.

7. *Integrating policy, planning, and management.* Planning, management, and urban policies are not three independent elements or even interrelated elements, but rather three aspects (or phases) of the same issue. While planning provides spatial guidelines, policies must establish a legal framework and instructions for implementing elements to plan. Management then applies policies and planning. In this perspective, these three phases (or aspects) admittedly occur at different times but cannot be dissociated.

Planning, policies, and management must be fully integrated in a single perspective. This is also true for lenders who do not include these three phases in their programmes.

8. *Consideration of financial resources and simulations.* Financial resources, as we have seen, are not taken into account. One exception, however, is Dakar, where the final pages of the document actually discuss the costs of development. Yet, as we know from experience and from our findings, most of the plans failed due to a lack of resources. Indeed, facility construction programmes quickly come face to face with the financial reality of the city and nation. Therefore, it is crucial to put a cost on planning solutions, to determine the extent to which the propositions can be realistically implemented.



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