

Our research objective

We want to write an ethnography on Adjahui and contextualise the case study by analysing the historical and political interplay of everyday urbanism, unplanned urbanisation, town planning, and real estate development in Abidjan. We will also study public discourses on sustainable waterfront development along the Ebrié Lagoon in Abidjan.

Our research methods

We are a small team of a German anthropologist and Ivorian geographers who have conducted the first part of their field research already. Field research will continue in 2018. We have already collected the following data set:

- An ethnographic census (591 housing units in 52 courtyards)
- 15 interviews in Adjahui
- Transect walks in Adjahui with photo documentation
- Transect walks along waterfronts in Abidjan with photo documentation
- Newspaper articles on urbanisation (Fraternité Matin 2011-2017)
- A study of water transport to and from Adjahui (finalised)
- GIS for the estimation of population numbers (finalised)
- Remote sensing of the waterfronts (finalised)

Our research has been authorised by the Ivorian *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique* and has undergone an ethical clearance process at ZEF.

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Between everyday urbanity, spontaneous urbanisation,
town planning, and real estate development

Research project

December 2017-November 2019



In research
cooperation with

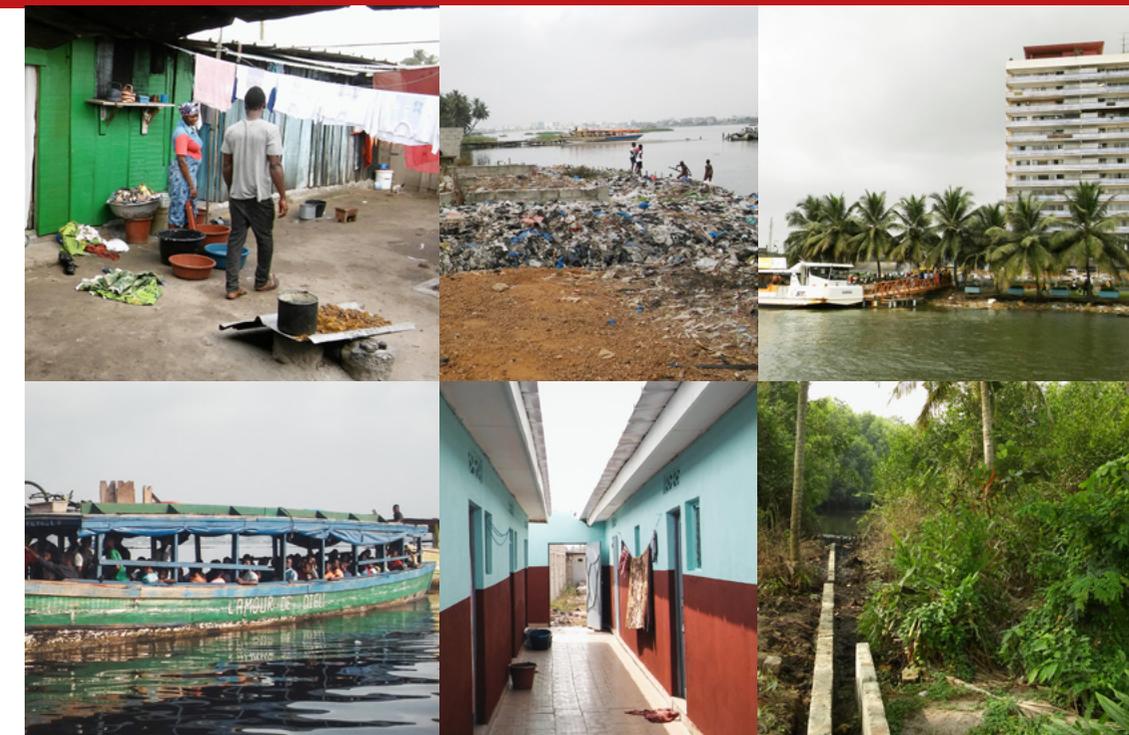


July, 2018

Photos by I. Eguavoen, 2016/2018



Project Website





Waterfront development in Abidjan

Abidjan is a cosmopolitan metropolis of about 5 million inhabitants. Located at the Atlantic Ocean it has got many waterfronts because it is built around the Ebrié Lagoon. On the one hand, the metropolis is examined as case study for coastal African metropolises where sustainability is debated. On the other hand, an increased engagement of real estate companies has been noticed in town planning.

From 2000 to 2010, during the civil war, the urban land area in Abidjan has grown about ten per cent while the urban population doubled because many people had fled to the city and stayed there after the end of the conflict. Many new settlements were established in an unplanned, demand-driven manner and the metropolis moved closer to the lagoon and the Atlantic.

‘Waterfront development’ describes investments in order to convert places by the water. This conversion includes land use changes, new design in urban infrastructure, as well as a changing of the image. Property regimes may also be affected. Waterfront development in Abidjan is often linked to land reclamation.

Our research analyses social and political dynamics around waterfronts in Abidjan, and studies how affected residents organise and navigate through urban space and residential insecurity.

Unplanned settlements (*quartiers d’habitation spontanés*), informal markets and workshops have mushroomed on public land in Abidjan, along the streets and by the waterfronts. Their residents have established communities, homes and livelihoods. Everyday urbanity evolves.

In order to re-establish state control, public health, liquid traffic, and risk avoidance the government conducts forceful evictions (*déguerpissements*). Evictions have focused on lagoon waterfronts and the coast line for re-habilitating the city’s image after the violent conflict, as well as to increase tourist attractiveness and global competitiveness of the metropolis.

In addition, demolitions of residential houses and courtyards by private investors have become a common phenomenon. Though the government has started a large initiative for social housing some years ago, private real estate investment for the middle and upper classes is starting to change the urban landscape, as well as the population of the quarters.



Spontaneous and planned urbanisation



The ethnographic case study

The spontaneous settlement Adjahui is located on a central peninsula in the municipality of Port Bouët. It is not formally acknowledged as a quarter and has remained a white spot in urban planning until a few years ago, when the masterplan of an eco-airport city was developed. The settlement used to be a slowly growing village of mainly Ebrié fishermen surrounded by farms and forest until 2012, when settlers from Moussakro, a spontaneous settlement along the Airport Road, were evicted and took refuge in the peninsula. After some open conflict and the intervention of the mayor, the local Ebrié authorities started to accommodate newcomers and to sell land plots under the customary land regime.

As the rental market for poorer strata in Abidjan is tense and short supply in housing accelerates further by evictions. Prices for housing have drastically increased and push people from poor quarters into even more precarious living conditions in Adjahui, where private investors started to build simple courtyards for tenants. Today, the population is numerous, dense and heterogeneous, consisting of people without financial means, as well as families who have lost their homes due to the evictions and demolishments. But many other people cannot afford security deposits and rents in other neighbourhoods either. Adjahui has turned into an attractive settlement for low-paid workers from the industrial, service and transport sector, as well as for young adults searching for housing when starting a family.