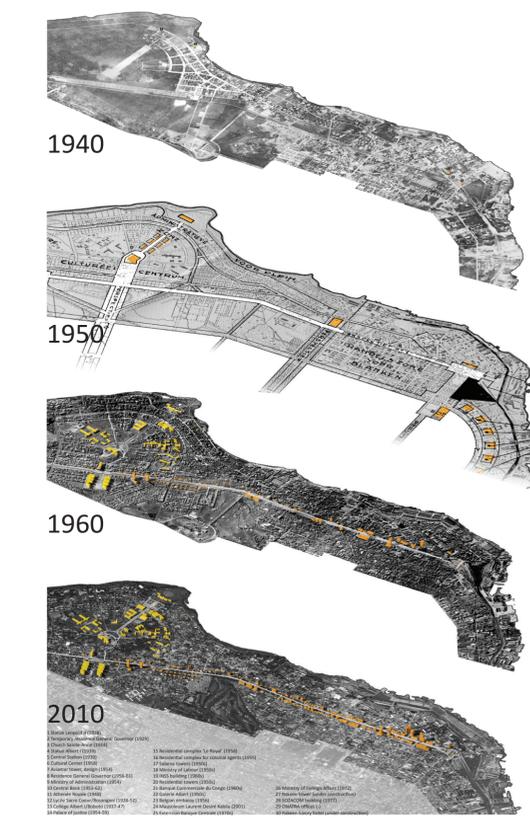


# KINSHASA



## Monumental axes



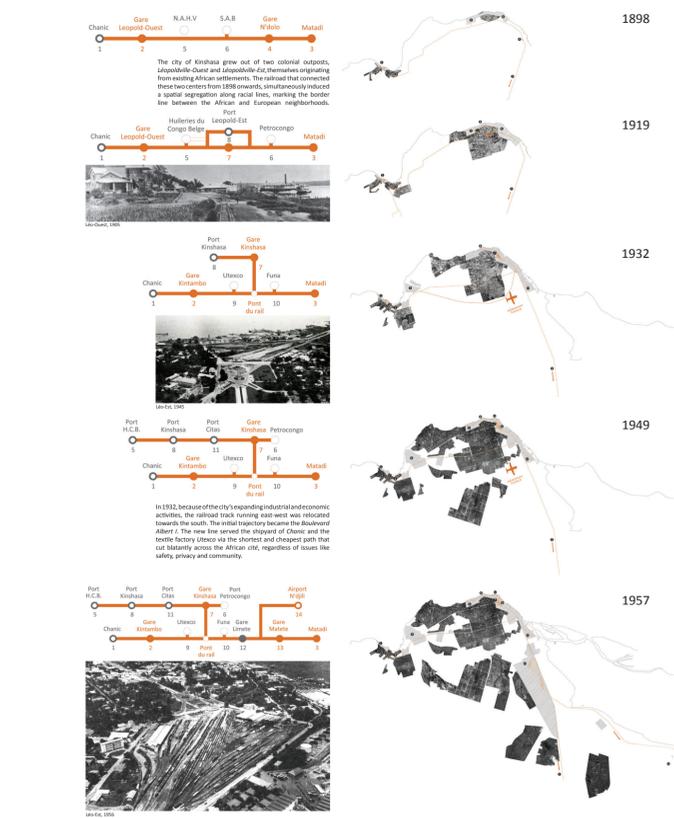
**1940**  
During colonial times, the status of both monumental axes were formalized by monuments, respectively an equestrian statue of Albert 1<sup>er</sup> tropical forest (1936). Explicitly marking colonial power in urban space, these monuments simultaneously underlined the enduring influence of the road network on the Belgian colonial enterprise. They were dismantled in the late 1960s in favor of modernist architecture. The figure in a theme park-like setting situated in the center of the boulevard, the Mound of Liberty that was created in the summer of 2005, at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Congo's independence.

**1950**  
The immediate postwar years marked the emergence of "modernist" Congo. Propaganda celebrated the modernization of the colony, highlighting the construction of modern architecture in the city. Innovative and formally appealing modernist architecture was introduced along the main boulevards of Kinshasa's "liberated" neighborhoods. However, remained paper architecture.

**1960**  
At the eve of independence, the monumental axes were re-planned both political and economic power of the colony's capital city remained unaltered projects. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, remaining square space were filled in with new structures mostly designed by foreign architects. Along the Avenue des héros, modernist architecture was introduced independent state, while the new skyline of the Boulevard du 30 Juin testified to a proliferation of global corporate modernism in the capital of the new state.

**2010**  
In the aftermath of the successful presidential election of 2006, foreign investment that had almost completely dried up in Kinshasa returned to the city. Since then, Kinshasa is witnessing an unprecedented building boom. It has seen, attached to the recent global economic crisis, along the city's main axes, once again prestigious high-rise complexes are erected. While the construction of the *Cité de l'Espoir* tower involves even aim at restoring the "Tubus" model.

## Railroad



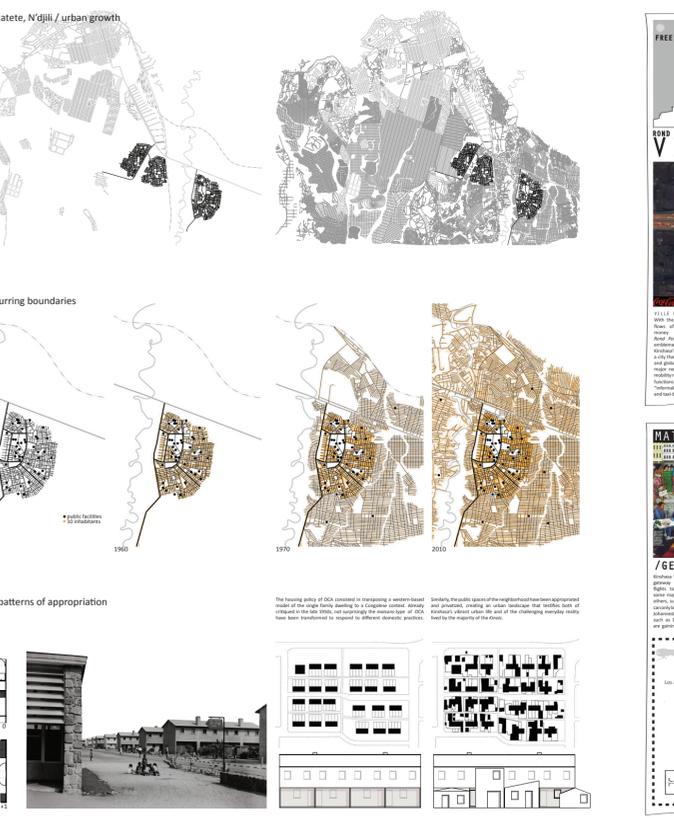
## "Zone neutre"



## Avenue Kasa-Vubu



## "Cités planifiées"



## Rond Point Victoire



Our research on architecture and planning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo ties in with an emerging interdisciplinary attention for the African city. Focusing on the physical fabric and urban form of Congolese cities, we aim to understand how these urban centers were shaped and how they evolved over time. Particular attention is given to discrepancies between urban planning as a tool for projecting the future of the city and the effects of implemented urban policies on the ground. As such, we can unravel the agencies at work over time in the production of these urban spaces.

The research presented here focuses on Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formerly known as *Léopoldville*. We read its current urban landscape as a patchwork and a palimpsest. Patchwork because despite the development of –sometimes elaborate– urban surveys and visionary master plans, planning and building in colonial as well as postcolonial Kinshasa has been very much underscored by pragmatism, short term policies and *bricolage*. Palimpsest because the existing urban territory is composed of constitutive layers that overlap, melt into one another but sometimes are also conflictual, producing spatial ruptures as well as continuities over time.

To highlight these ruptures and continuities, we focus on six urban elements that have been structuring the growth of Kinshasa's urban landscape: the railroad, the monumental axes, the "zone neutre", the Avenue Kasa Vubu, the cités planifiées, and Rond Point Victoire. For each of these elements, a cartography is developed, presenting its role in Kinshasa's urban development from colonial to post-independence times. The work presented here is a fine-tuned version of research produced during a seminar held at the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of Ghent University in spring 2010.

In 1923, Léopoldville /Kinshasa officially became the capital city of the Belgian Congo. The two existing colonial outposts, *Léopoldville-Est* and *Léopoldville-Ouest* were gradually linked to one another, with 2 major axis structuring the expanding European city: the *Avenue Royale* (now *Avenue des héros nationaux*) along which were concentrated the official services of the colonial administration and the *Avenue Albert I* (now *Boulevard du 30 juin*), dotted with the more prestigious residential and commercial high-rise buildings. Representing respectively the political and economic power of colonial times, the landscape of these monumental axes testifies of both visionary urban dreams and failed ambitions.

Already in 1898 a railroad connected Kinshasa to the harbor city of Matadi in order to bypass the unnavigable stretch of the Congo river, thus enabling the colonial exploitation of Congo's many resources. The railroad also structured Kinshasa's urban development, linking the urban nodes of economic interest over time: the trading posts along the river's edge in the early days; the large scale industrial sites (Chanic, Utxeco) and the new harbor infrastructure that emerged in the 1920s; the industrial quarter of Limete that develop in the postwar era. Nowadays, with trains becoming rare, the tracks bear testimony of a bygone age of bustling industrial activity. For the millions of *Kinois* who cross the city on foot, they provide welcome shortcuts through the city's urban fabric.

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