BRAZZAVILLE

7 Brazzaville

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One of the most striking trends in the spatial development of the Republic of Congo has been the rapid population growth of its two major cities, particularly since political independence in 1960. According to the national census conducted in 1974, 38% of the total population were urban dwellers. Ten years later, the national census indicated a substantial increase, with 52% of the total population living in urban areas, and the majority of these people residing in Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. The urban population growth that occurred between 1974 and 1984 signalled a shift from a traditional rural populace to a predominantly urban one. According to UN sources, in 2007, 72% of the Congo's population was living in urban areas (UNFPA 2007). The reasons Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire have grown so rapidly derive from historical, political and economic strategies and events experienced in the country. In particular, several years of 'Marxist-Leninist' policies led to a firm urban bias dominating the country's spatial developments and to dramatic demographic growth in the capital, Brazzaville (Achikbache & Anglade 1988; Sautter 1966; Soret 1978; Tati 1993, 1994a, 1994b). Today, the capital has more than 1 million residents out of a national total of some 4 million inhabitants.

It is pertinent here to explain how the concept of 'urban' is defined in the Congo, as different definitions apply in different national settings. The Congo, which covers an area of 345 000 km^2, is classified into regions, of which there are currently ten. Each region is subdivided into localities, which are classified according to their population size and service-delivery functions. Using the Congo's official French nomenclature, a locality may be a district, a prefecture, a *sous-préfecture*, a *commune* or a *municipalité*. According to this classification, an urban locality is either a commune or a municipality (the latter comprising a minimum population of 10 000 together with certain service-delivery functions). There are six *communes* that constitute the major cities of the country – Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, Dolisie (previously named Loubomo), Nkayi (previously named Jacob), Ouesso and Mossendjo (see Figure 7.1). Various smaller urban centres that perform administrative functions for their rural hinterlands qualify as municipalities. All the other small, densely populated centres are classified as rural. The application of this classification, however, has changed as decentralisation policies have been introduced by the national government. After 1990, Brazzaville became a region comprising six *communes*, one of which is the centre of the capital city.

This chapter focuses on the capital city, Brazzaville, and is structured into five sections and a conclusion. The first section addresses the character of the national state and its political relationship to Brazzaville. It is appropriate here to list chronologically a number of major political events that have taken place in the

Congo since independence (see Table 7.1). A detailed discussion of these events is provided in this section. The long period of Marxist-Leninist rule was followed by multi-party elections and more or less continual violent conflict in the capital city during the 1990s. This section also examines how the city may be described as a site both of power and counter-power. In the next section, the cultural image of the city in the eyes of its inhabitants is identified. Subsequently, city planning in Brazzaville is discussed, particularly after independence in the context of its colonial, and later its socialist, legacies, both of which are visible in the city's built environment. A socio-demographic profile of the city is provided in the next section. The fifth part deals with the influence that Kinshasa, the capital city of the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire, has had on Brazzaville. The final part is a short conclusion addressing the city as a national capital.

The character of the national state and its political relationship to Brazzaville

After independence, central authority in the Congo remained a dominant feature in the development of Brazzaville, and this has severely curtailed the power invested in the municipality. Whereas economic power is located in oil-rich Pointe-Noire, Brazzaville hosts the institutions of national decision-making and is the site of political power. From 1960 until the formation in 1989 of the Sovereign National Conference (*Conférence Nationale Souveraine* [CNS]), a national one-party system – the Congolese Labour Party (*Parti Congolais du Travail* [PCT]) – was responsible for

Table 7.1 Chronology of political events in Congo post-independence

Year	Political event
1960	Independence
1963	New national constitution and assumption of scientific socialism as the official ideology
1968	• Coup d'état
	• A people's republic inaugurated
	• The ruling party takes on the name PCT
1968–1992	• President Ngouabi assassinated (1977)
	• Congo aligned with Eastern bloc
	• Policies explicitly Marxist-Leninist
	• Sovereign National Conference formed (1989)
1993	• Multi-party elections
	• New president inaugurated – shift towards more liberal ideology
	• Violent political conflict in Brazzaville
1997–1999	Civil war between government forces and private militias, particularly in Brazzaville
2002	• National elections and a new constitution
	• President Sassou re-elected
2009	• National elections
	• President Sassou re-elected

producing and promulgating from Brazzaville all national legislation. Membership of the PCT was dominated by residents of the northern regions, and most of the military coups that took place between 1968 and 1992 were led by residents of the southern regions. In short, since the 1960s, this politically divided city has been the site of confrontation ostensibly between two distinct ethnic groups – the Kongos and the Laris (from the south) and the Mbochi (from the north). The Kongos consider Brazzaville as a natural extension of their hinterland, the Pool region, in which Brazzaville is located. The Mbochis, on the other hand, have migrated to Brazzaville from more distant regions and continue to make up a sizeable proportion of the central state's workforce (and of the PCT).

Under the socialist regime during this period, the central government wielded virtually absolute power over the city. It determined the city's resource allocation, and set the limits of power of the various levels of the city authorities. The function of appointing the mayor and all the city deputies was vested solely in the state government. The mayor and the entire city management board were accountable to the national president. The mayor was also obliged to represent the PCT, as were the deputy mayors in Brazzaville's suburbs.

The city government had little financial autonomy, since its budget came from national public funds. Its responsibilities were confined to land management and the provision of social services to urban residents and their households. Permission for any major developments had to be obtained from central government. Reforms introduced in 1981, promoted as decentralisation and the public participation in regional and civic government, were fundamentally ambiguous in practice. In theory, regions were assigned greater power, but autonomous decision-making at regional and city levels proved to be a sham because leaders at these levels were not elected, but appointed by central government from within the ranks of the party faithful.

A major political transition, heralded by the CNS and addressed in a new constitution, led to the first democratic elections in the early 1990s and conferred a special status on Brazzaville as both a commune and a region. This was intended to remove some of the institutional ambiguity that derived from the fact that the capital city formed part of a region hostile to the socialist regime. Brazzaville, therefore, became a tenth region of the Congo, and as such, was supposed to enjoy a democratically elected local parliament twinned with an executive body made up of individuals appointed by central government. The first elected mayor under this new arrangement was the leader of the main political opposition to the ruling party, the *Union pour la Paix et la Démocratie Sociale* (Union for Peace and Social Democracy).

City authorities were given a new range of delegated responsibilities under this arrangement. However, these did not match the resources available to them. The central government continued to demonstrate great reluctance to provide the necessary resources, and the generation of local revenue was restricted by the widespread poverty of urban households. Moreover, city authorities failed to implement good governance principles in their management activities. As the country became entangled in yet another round of political tension, the day-to-day challenges

associated with effective management made it difficult for the city government to implement development projects. Overlapping city and national functions continued to constrain initiatives launched by the chief executive of the city.

The collapse of the one-party system in 1989, which led to the establishment of democracy under an elected presidency, was relatively short-lived. From 1991 to 1997, Brazzaville became the site of armed conflict produced by political rivalry between leaders of the former PCT and those of the newly created parties. Armed militias, locally called cobras, ninjas, cocoyes and Zulus, supported rival groups. The prolonged violence that erupted resulted in the death or displacement of thousands of residents, and the ensuing political and economic chaos led to the intervention of the Angolan army in the city. During these civil wars, Brazzaville was politically divided into northern and southern factions, and effectively controlled by rival militias. This geographical divide, moreover, reflected the ostensible ethnic character of the political conflict.

These violent clashes in the capital city paralysed and destabilised the entire country. The central government offices in Brazzaville no longer operated, as what national authority was left was transferred to the suburbs, from where members of the government struggled to manage national affairs. The city also lost a significant portion of its population, as many residents fled to safer places, like Pointe-Noire, often at a great distance from the capital city. By 1999, when the civil war ended, Brazzaville had lost much of its vitality as a result of both widespread physical destruction and the continuous exodus from the city.

The year 2000 marked a return to a peaceful social climate for most of Brazzaville's population. In addition, the city authorities gradually regained a measure of power over civic affairs. Despite widespread infrastructural decline, agreements that were signed for the cessation of hostilities established conditions for the rebuilding of a city devastated by seven years of violent civil strife. These agreements also convinced international donors of the need to provide considerable funding for post-conflict reconstruction. The European Union and the French government, through organisations such as the European Fund for Development and the Aid and Cooperation Fund, played vital roles in both the financing of humanitarian programmes and entrenching reconciliation. Multilateral organisations such as the World Bank began to address means to alleviate the large debt that the Congo had contracted before the conflict. In addition, the country embarked on a five-year structural adjustment programme (from 2001 to 2005), which required a budget of CFA 11 billion for the reconstruction of Brazzaville. The World Health Organization provided considerable support for this plan of action. This international assistance helped to speed up Brazzaville's recovery.

Some years after the war, Brazzaville was a transformed city, especially in its central business district, with construction sites everywhere to be seen, newly built hotels, buildings renovated that were destroyed in the 1990s, new main roads, repaired bridges and a series of new public projects in the built environment of the revitalised capital city. Visits by businesspeople from Europe and the US, who came to assess

investment opportunities in a country internationally regarded as one of the most promising in the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea, attest to this. The reopening of the railway between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire to allow regular supplies of petrol and concrete to the capital city – an event widely reported in the national and international press – symbolised the promise of a better quality of life for city residents.

The cultural image of the city in the eyes of its inhabitants

From 1960 to today, Brazzaville has always been prominent as the location where major national political change has occurred. Typically, national governments have come to power by means of events – often military coups – that took place in this city. For its residents, however, life in the city holds more than just living through political change. Cultural experiences have been equally important.

The vibrancy of cultural life in the capital centres on such activities as soccer, music, fashion, popular literature and the arts. Generally, the people of the Congo look to Brazzaville as the home of soccer, the place that is home to the most successful local soccer teams (such as the Diables Noirs, Etoile du Congo, Aiglon Cara and Patronnage, to name but a few). These teams are widely considered to be national institutions, and they have brought home trophies at both national and continental levels. This cultural image of Brazzaville is reinforced by the presence in the city of the only stadium authorised to host international sports events. For several years, the Revolution Stadium was the rallying point for fans from diverse cultural backgrounds living in the city.

Until the end of the 1980s, television reception was only available in Greater Brazzaville, pointing to the privileged status of the city in the country, and providing an important exclusive medium for artistic expression in literature, music and fashion. The television network has subsequently been extended to incorporate Pointe-Noire, and a second television network, established during the civil war of the 1990s, *TV liberté* (TV freedom), also broadcasts from the capital city and is widely considered to be an instrument of propaganda for the Congolese Working Class Party, currently in power in the country. Musical and literary expression is also drawn to the capital city, since music finds particular resonance in the national language, Lingala, spoken by almost every Congolese in the city and because the only CD manufacturer in the country is located in Brazzaville. Lingala also played an important unifying cultural role in the city's suburbs, particularly before the civil unrest of the 1990s. With the country's main university, the capital is also the locus of its intellectual life. Most of the political and economic think-tanks are based there, and their ideas appear to somewhat passively influence leaders in the rest of the country.

Residents from the northern regions of the country choose to reside in the suburbs of Talagai, Mougali and Ouenzé, whereas residents from the southern regions mostly settle in the suburbs of Bacongo, Makelekele and Bifuiti (Figure 7.1). In between, there are suburbs which are ethnically diverse. Until 1994, this pattern of settlement was not associated with any form of ethnically-related fear of violence. Brazzaville was

a peaceful, socially cohesive city. In contrast to the role that ethnicity commonly plays in sub-Saharan Africa, the case of Brazzaville points to the political construction of different spatial units of administration and governance – rather than 'ethnicity' – as the fundamental determinant of political contestation and its associated violence.

Urbanisation and planning in the capital city

Before colonialism

As was the case in the rest of what is today known as Central Africa, in pre-colonial Congo urban development was the exception rather than the norm. Although by the end of the 15th century there were a few small settlements along the Congo River Basin that had contact with the external world, these could not really be called urban areas. There are very few details regarding the territorial distribution of the population during the pre-colonial second half of the 19th century. It appears, however, that there were a number of settlements on the coast that were relatively densely populated. This was mainly due to the role of Loango, which at that time served as the capital of Mbanza Congo and was also at the crossroads of the slave and trade routes from the hinterland. In the eastern region of present-day Congo, the population was significantly smaller.

Urbanisation in the colonial period

Urbanisation in the Congo developed concurrently with colonisation, which brought about profound changes to the spatial configuration of the population. The early years under the colonial regime were marked by the establishment of administrative and military posts to demarcate the zones of colonial control for trading purposes. The French colonialists established Brazzaville as a trading city, and in 1890, Ouesso was established in the northern forests as a military post to control the Sangha Basin. Thereafter, colonial authority was concerned with the need to consolidate its control through proximity to the various ethnic groups, and established urban centres and prefectures that had no other spatial justification in their rural surroundings. These urban centres provided the foundation upon which the basic urban structure of Congo developed.

The railway, built by the *Chemin de Fer Congo Océan* (CFCO) company, and the maritime port of Pointe-Noire were major infrastructural elements that contributed to the formation of the main urban areas. The construction of these substantial projects was completed in 1934, and together they symbolised the infrastructural dreams of French colonial power. The railway stations and their associated marketplaces attracted more and more people to the urban centres. These population concentrations were reinforced by the presence of industrial and agri-business centres, such as Nkayi and Loudima, which rapidly became administrative centres serving a burgeoning urban population. In 1930, for instance, around the railway station of Brazzaville, the CFCO built several housing complexes for their local 'indigenous' employees.

After World War II, a shift in colonial administrative policy led to the recruitment of locals in public urban administration and to the promotion of formal primary and secondary education for local youth. This had a considerable impact on the growth of urban centres. It was reported, for example, that from 1952 to 1960, the population of Brazzaville grew from approximately 50 000 to 100 000 (Sautter 1966). A few smaller administrative centres also experienced population growth through the influx of young people seeking educational opportunities.

Job seekers also contributed to urban growth. People came to town to earn a wage and escape rural life, which was increasingly experienced as limited in terms of work opportunities. By 1958, two years before the Congo's independence, there was a noticeable migration of the national population towards the two major cities of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. These migration streams were facilitated by the development of central administrative functions in these two cities, designed to accommodate the functional demands of the new independent state. As a consequence, smaller, secondary urban centres started to lose their inhabitants and stagnate, at least in demographic terms. This pattern persisted during the years after independence.

Post-independence urban development

From 1960, the year of the Congo's independence, to the mid-1980s, attempts were made by the central authorities to plan urban development. Initially, these relied on planning methods initiated in France, the former colonial power. 'Master plans' drawn up with the use of strict urban norms were developed in line with French technicians' intentions to control city growth. A site-and-service approach to the housing delivery process was advocated. However, as migration to the cities kept increasing, the authorities abandoned this approach in favour of what they called a more 'nationalistic' methodology. In effect, the magnitude of urban demands generated by urban growth far outpaced the projections calculated in terms of these master plans. The use of this approach in the early years following independence was in fact a reflection of the political and economic system of that time. The prevailing position was that the state should have strict control over the use of national resources. Land was regarded as state property to be managed and controlled by the state. Traditional authorities were to have no say over the supply of land for residential use.

During this early post-independence period, municipal authorities in each major city were established by the central state ministry in charge of urban development. These municipal authorities were tasked to prevent the development of informal housing settlements and the illegal occupation of vacant land both in the inner city and city peripheries. The authorities resorted frequently to forced evictions to 'free up' illegally occupied zones. This may be one reason why despite the rapid growth of Brazzaville, squatter or informal settlements of the kind seen in urban South Africa and Nairobi did not appear in the urban landscape of the Congo. Negative consequences of this policy and practice included overwhelmingly bureaucratic

housing delivery and frequent corrupt practices favouring elite demands for personalised services. The central state ministry also promoted policies aimed at regional decentralisation. These efforts did not progress smoothly, partly as a result of the reluctance of civil servants to relocate away from Brazzaville or Pointe-Noire. These two cities developed much faster than the rest of the country.

This early centralised approach to urban development became increasingly financially demanding. The Ministry of Public Works and Urbanisation provided the capital city with a portion of the finances needed to implement some of the major infrastructural projects. External funds from multilateral or bilateral donors were critical in building the city. Such finances supported a wide range of urban infrastructure – water and sanitation, transport and communication, housing, public lighting, waste collection and treatment, marketplaces and bus ranks are some examples. Until the late 1970s, the housing delivery strategy of city authorities included subsidies made available by state-owned property development companies and home loans made available by banks. Provision was made for 'decent' housing for public servants and for extended serviced sites in newly zoned urban areas for other residents. All these initiatives were undertaken, however, in the absence of a strategy on how to recover the costs from the recipients of these housing units. By the late 1970s, most of these public services collapsed due to a lack of finances. Moreover, international donors had become reluctant to provide further assistance to a country they perceived as socialist and allied with the Soviet Union and China.

From the early 1980s, the Congolese government decided to prioritise major public works – ministerial headquarters and well-constructed roads – in and around Brazzaville's central business district (CBD). The rationale was to develop an image of the capital city comparable with other large cities on the African continent. Popular perception was that the national leaders were attempting to transform Brazzaville into a city that could match Kinshasa, the capital of what was then Zaire, visible on the opposite bank of the Congo River. To achieve this ambitious programme of construction in the CBD, the government required massive funding. It committed itself to financing the programme through the use of oil-derived revenue and through signing contracts with domestic operators. This commitment was limited, however, as the programme relied heavily on external loans. This led to massive debts being incurred with multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the European Development Fund and the African Development Bank. The booming oil sector – located in Pointe-Noire – had helped access these foreign loans. A second consequence was the further deterioration of urban service delivery to the majority of the capital city's residents.

Brazzaville and its changing urban landscape

To examine the changing built environment of the capital city reveals the shifting ideologies and intentions of both the country's national government and its city authorities. It was not only in the early 1980s that the Congolese government intervened in the city's landscape. It is useful to identify three periods in this regard:

the colonial legacy, socialist-inspired urban development and changes that the city underwent after the socialist period.

The colonial legacy

During the colonial period, Brazzaville first served as the capital of French Equatorial Africa (*Afrique Equatoriale Française*), a colonial domain much larger than the future Republic of Congo. Subsequently, during World War II, Brazzaville served as the capital city of Free France (after the German occupation of France). The reputation gained by the city as a consequence of this dual-capital status led to a period when students from a number of neighbouring former French colonies went to study at the city's university.

Traces of its colonial past are visible in the built environment of the capital's CBD. This was not only an important commercial centre, but also the main residential area of white officials and colonialists, and has come to be known as the old city or *centre ville*. Most dwellings were constructed before independence; some still serve as trading stores, whereas others have been converted into multiple-unit housing. Ownership patterns have changed significantly: in the 1960s and early 1970s, most shops and business premises were owned by Portuguese and French expatriates. Thereafter, under the socialist political regime, these were either expropriated or transferred to local owners. Some of the buildings along the main avenue leading to the railway station (popularly referred to as *la gare*) were converted into ministerial departments or general service offices for the public. Colonial architecture is apparent in the central post office, a number of catholic churches in the *centre ville*, the city hall and the railway station, among others (Figure 7.2). It is worth noting that the national government did not engage in the transformation of the built environment of the CBD during its early decades of rule. Instead, most state-led spatial and physical developments took place in residential areas outside the CBD.

Socialist-inspired urban development

The prioritisation of public works in the CBD in the early 1980s has been described above. The political tone adopted by the military and political elites during the period 1969 to 1989 emphasised a severing of ties with the former colonial government and the capitalist-driven economies of Western countries. This political discourse aligned Congo with a revolutionary approach towards the construction of the nation, and in terms of urban development manifested itself particularly in the erection of monuments and other public works and in the designation of public infrastructure in line with national ideology (see Table 7.2).

Education was at the forefront of this ideological change, with a policy of education for all (*'l'école pour tous'*), which was pursued by successive military regimes. Several schools were built to promote mass education in Brazzaville. Their names were selected to express the ideology of 'scientific socialism' of the liberation movement. Some were named after left-wing activists from other countries, such as Salvador Allende and Amical Cabral, others after national heroes, such as Andre Mastoua.

Table 7.2 Selected public infrastructure and nomenclature of Brazzaville

Public institution/infrastructure	Name/date
Learning/training institutions	• Marien Ngouabi University, 1978
	• Emery-Patrice Lumumba (grammar school), 1971
	• 1st May (grammar school), 1971
	• Libération (grammar school), 1971
	• Drapeau Rouge ('red flag', grammar school), 1971
Roads	• Indépendence (avenue), 1964
	• Trois Martyrs ('Three Martyrs Avenue'), 1971
	• Trois Francs ('Three Francs Avenue'), 1966
	• Matsoua (avenue), 1965
Stadium	Stade de la Revolution (Revolution Stadium), 1970
Museum	Marien Ngouabi, 1982
Parliament building	Palais des Congrès ('Congress Palace'), 1983
Bridge	Pont du Centenaire ('Century Bridge'), 1984

The national university, the *Centre Universitaire de Brazzaville*, was renamed Marien Ngouabi University, in tribute to the first president of the socialist period. Donor funds were used to build the *Ecole National de Magistrature*, a tertiary institution to train public servants. The government instructed Elf, the country's biggest oil company, to locate its headquarters in Brazzaville rather than in Pointe-Noire. This resulted in the construction of one of the tallest buildings in the city, locally known as *Immeuble ELF*, the Elf Building (Figure 7.3). Other developments undertaken at this time included the construction of the head offices of the Ministry of Economic Planning, the National Insurance Company, the Congolese Commercial Bank and a large extension of the General Hospital of Brazzaville. A major electrification programme was also undertaken by a local company.

Changes after the socialist period

The socialist period of rule in the Congo and in Brazzaville came to an end as a result of, inter alia, poorly conceived economic policies and excessive public borrowing. At the end of the 1980s, the Congo had the heaviest debt burden in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, many of the public infrastructural projects were left incomplete as a result of corruption. A significant consequence was the implementation of two structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), introduced under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, from 1986 to 1996. The short-term consequences for urban residents were both harsh and deeply unpopular. Some positive change, however, did emerge from the SAPs. They enforced drastic cuts in public spending and the rolling back of state authority. This discredited, albeit indirectly, the ideology of the one-party state system. The SAPs nudged the city of Brazzaville towards a more market-oriented approach to the provision of basic services. Drastic cuts in public spending that the programmes required put great pressure on the labour market, and social protest escalated as a result. Over time, the

political discourse became less ideological as tensions began to emerge between the socialist discourse on the one hand and the social hardships of residents on the other. In addition, the wave of political liberation that swept across the African continent from the late 1980s and early 1990s brought a consciousness of the advantages of democracy to many Brazzavilleans.

In a series of street demonstrations, strikes and boycotts, particularly, but not solely, in the national capital, residents gave vent to their frustrations and objections. This social movement led to the convening of a conference, the Sovereign National Conference, in Brazzaville in 1989, during which scientific socialism was rejected as the national political ideology. Recommendations included instituting a new pluralist political system, freedom of expression and association, and a market economy. This tidal change in national ideology is symbolised by the replacement of the red flag (the *drapeau rouge*) – the icon of the socialist regime of the Congolese Workers' Party – with the old national flag used in pre-1969 Congo. Significantly, the conference also recommended that the name changes of public buildings and national monuments instituted during the socialist period be scrapped and that their previous names be reinstated. The democratisation process also changed the nature of city management, and its leadership passed to an elected mayor.

A socio-demographic profile of Brazzaville

In demographic terms, since independence, Brazzaville has been one of the fastest growing cities in the whole of Africa. The capital's population has grown tenfold since independence (see Table 7.3) and there are currently approximately 1.2 million residents. Historically, the city was chosen as the national capital because of its origins as a small, densely populated centre (originally known as Mfoa) and its geographical location on the river. However, this has not proved to be enough to provide the city with the political and economic foundations required by a national capital, since the town lacked both a local political class and a basis for economic production sufficient to the task.

In the first decade after independence, as mentioned above, the new elites in the city failed to develop a new urban-planning model and thereby reinforced the city's

Table 7.3 Population change in the urban system of the six *communes* (1960–2005)

Year	Brazzaville	Pointe-Noire	Dolisie	Nkayi	Ouesso	Mossendjo
1960	124 030	54 909	12 266	7 617		
1974	302 459	140 367	28 577	28 957		
1984	585 812	294 203	49 134	36 540	11 939	14 469
1990*	668 464	351 520	51 864	31 118		
1995*	773 647	418 947	54 878	21 416		
2000*	858 884	498 832	57 498	9 324		
2005*	1 019 665	593 402	59 521	9 299		

Sources: *Estimates from projections (see Tati 1993); other figures derived from population censuses (1974 and 1984) and socio-demographic surveys (1960)

former colonial and economic orientation towards the service and construction sectors. The viability of these sectors was dependent on urban growth and the influx of migrants from the rest of the country. Brazzaville reflects this contradiction, in that it has remained both a city with the *centre ville* of a national capital and a periphery characterised by informality and disorder. As the capital city, it promised the national population educational opportunities and healthcare facilities superior to those elsewhere in the country. The consequence has been continuous streams of migrants into the city and the concomitant continuous demand for urban housing. The 1990s were the exception to this pattern when civil unrest dissuaded many potential migrants from coming to Brazzaville.

As a result of these urbanisation streams, the majority of the population of the Republic of Congo has become urban, with Brazzaville as its largest, and still growing, city (see Tables 7.3 and 7.4). Its only rival in population terms is the port city of Pointe-Noire, the administrative centre of the country's oil resources, which has consequently become the country's economic capital. The political elite in Brazzaville, however, have ensured that political functions in this rival city have been kept to a minimum and have been controlled by Brazzaville, as the politicians have a real fear of relinquishing their control of these resources.

The middle classes in the capital city have remained a small portion. By the second half of the 20th century, Brazzaville was a city of proletarian inhabitants, predominantly made up of small traders and employees in the services sector. The vast majority of its residents were involved in non-industrial activities – many made a living from rental accommodation (without reinvesting their income in the city economy). Others were involved in urban agricultural activities within the city itself or in outlying peripheral areas, particularly along the banks of numerous streams and the two rivers (Djoué and Congo) that flow within or next to the city. The proliferation of pockets of collectively and privately owned vegetable gardens, locally known as *cultures maraichères*, is an example of the non-industrial nature of work in the city.

The social and economic consequences of this urban growth have been dramatic: with little influence from a middle class in the private sector to limit the activities of the political elite, formal political activity has been dominated by state bureaucracies

Table 7.4 Projected populations and percentage of the urban population residing in Brazzaville (1990–2015)

Year	Total population (000s)	Urban population (000s)	Rural population (000s)	Urban percentage in Brazzaville
1990	2 422	1 316	1 106	53.5
1995	2 793	1 576	1 217	52.7
2000	3 203	1 868	1 335	52.8
2005	3 610	2 172	1 438	56.0
2010	4 011	2 492	1 520	60.4
2015	4 459	2 862	1 597	60.4

Source: UNFPA (2007)

and tertiary activities (with associated corrupt practices, nepotism and other rent-seeking behaviour connected to this elite). Simultaneously, a parallel, informal and 'illegal' set of economic activities in the agricultural, commercial and housing markets emerged.

The first decade of the 21st century saw a slow return to peace and stability in Brazzaville. This change is most evident in the *centre ville* where new construction and renovation are highly visible. In residential areas some distance from the centre and in the city's periphery, change has been slower and informal practices continue. This is evident in the health and education sectors where, after severe deterioration in the quality and scope of delivery during the strife-torn 1990s, improvement has been slow and largely confined to inner-city areas, with peripheral areas continuing to suffer from poor delivery. A similar situation in the housing delivery process is also evident in a sector that continues to be influenced by privately financed – and often corrupt and parasitic – activities.

Kinshasa and its multifaceted influence on the urban life of Brazzaville

It is not possible to examine the dynamics of Brazzaville adequately without considering its multiple linkages with Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC. The proximity of Kinshasa to Brazzaville has deeply influenced its various areas of urban life – cultural, economic, demographic, political and social – throughout its development. These influences should not come as a surprise given Kinshasa's relative size and economic power, as well as the fact that these two cities are the most closely situated capitals in the world – a fact widely known and proclaimed by residents on both sides of the Congo River. The river represents a natural border that is easily crossed, even in some of the most rudimentarily made dugout canoes.

The strong cultural ties between the two cities are cemented by two common languages widely spoken in both countries: *Lingala* and *Kitumba*. It is, again, not surprising, therefore, that Kinshasa plays an important role in the cultural dynamism of Brazzaville and that there have been, and continue to be, visible and sustainable economic linkages across the river, predominantly driven by traders arriving in Brazzaville from Kinshasa. A daily, inexpensive ferry service transports passengers from one side of the river to the other. Traders from Kinshasa sell all kinds of goods, such as clothes, food products, watches, electronics and alcohol, to name but a few. Female traders commute on a daily or weekly basis to sell food products in the marketplaces of Brazzaville's suburbs, where they have established networks with local female traders. And Brazzavillean women frequently travel to Kinshasa to purchase supplies of various goods, which they then sell in the same marketplaces. Poto Poto and Moungali, two of the older and most widely frequented suburbs of Brazzaville, have become places where a large number of migrants and visitors from the DRC rely on trading activities for their livelihoods. Some of them have lived in the Congo for decades. Elsewhere in the city there are numerous concentrations of foreigners from the DRC, as well as other migrants from West Africa.

Kinshasa was particularly important in the daily lives of residents of Brazzaville during the long period of civil unrest from 1993 to 1999. The supply of food and other vital goods came mainly from Kinshasa, as Brazzaville was periodically cut off from the rest of the Pool region, which the city relied on for its staple food supplies. During the second civil war (1997–1999), in fact, virtually the only food supply depot for Brazzaville was the wharf in the suburb of Mpila (at that time under the control of the Cobra militia led by Denis Sassous Nguesso, a former president during the final period of the socialist regime). This wharf served as the immigration office responsible for monitoring travellers between the two cities (and for selling smuggled petrol from Kinshasa, locally called *Khadafi* after the Libyan president). People on both sides of the river found highly innovative ways of sustaining their trading activities during these harshest of conflicts. Non-governmental organisations also used this access point to provide humanitarian services to victims of the fighting. It is also worth noting that Brazzaville played a similar supportive role during times of unrest in Kinshasa.

Kinshasa's role was also crucial in the post-conflict period of reconstruction. Most of the products required during the early years of Brazzaville's reconstruction came from Kinshasa, since the railway between Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire was not operating. The persistent climate of insecurity in the southern regions of the Congo long after the end of the civil war discouraged the Congolese government from using the railway for the transportation of merchandise, even after its service was restored. Consequently, trade between the two capital cities across the Congo River increased considerably during this period of reconstruction.

Relations between the two cities have not always been harmonious: harassment by immigration officers and police, and demands for bribes upon arrival in Kinshasa, particularly during the regime of the late President Mobutu, were commonplace and fluctuations in the exchange rate between the CFA (in Brazzaville) and the Congolese franc (in Kinshasa) affected trade relations. In the recent past, however, with a return to peace in the two capital cities, trade and other exchanges have flourished, and Kinshasa once again serves as an important supply centre for various goods sought after by Brazzavilleans. The two cities remain inextricably connected to one another.

Conclusion

In terms of its urban space, Brazzaville appears to have expanded, unplanned and sprawling, in concentric semicircles. This is partly driven by the elites' speculation over land and by other profit-seeking behaviour. Nearby towns – such as Kinkala, at 120 km from Brazzaville – which could develop into neighbouring satellite cities within the region, remain cut off from the capital city's formal economic activities. In short, although the *centre ville* has specialised tertiary activities related to international trade, information technology, and new types of services associated with finance, trade and national administration, as well as specialised education, which are needed in a capital city, little attention has been given by the authorities to building a city framework aimed at anchoring the new sprawling residential neighbourhoods and the city's immediate hinterland into the urban core.

The main reason for this has been the fact that the city was and remains an object of rivalry among competing elites in the Congo. Brazzaville is both the main city of the Pool region (with its associated elite groups) and more broadly the national capital (many of the elites beyond this region have migrated to the capital). Accordingly, although urbanisation remains high, the capital city is disconnected from its region because regional leadership is largely excluded from metropolitan decision-making. In addition, the capital city is also disconnected from the country as a whole because national leadership has no viable urban vision for the role Brazzaville ought to play in the national urban system. Since the civil wars, a significant degree of 'ethnic localisation' has taken place within the city at neighbourhood level, reflecting this rivalry of elites.

City leadership is aware of the challenges it faces and of the associated need to close the big divide between residents of different ethnicities – in effect, the need to regain the city's status as a social capital that was built up before, and destroyed during, the civil wars. Progress in this regard is currently slow.

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