

Impacts of real estate development on the greater Abidjan factory in Ivory coast

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Abstract: African cities are experiencing population growth. This growth generates housing problems that are somewhat resolved by real estate development. The city of Abidjan has benefited from a significant number of real estate developments that have contributed to its creation. The objective of this article is to highlight the contribution of real estate development to the creation of Greater Abidjan. Through a methodology combining qualitative and quantitative aspects, we have arrived at results indicating that real estate development has had a considerable social impact as well as spatial effects on the urbanization of Greater Abidjan.

Keywords: *Greater Abidjan, Impact, Real estate development, Urban growth.*

1. Introduction

Urbanization in Africa is proving to be rapid. Initiated mainly during the colonial period, the continent's urbanization accelerated after independence. As proof, the colonial capitals, which were then small towns, expanded rapidly after 1960 and now constitute metropolises. In addition, the multiplication of cities on the continent is remarkable. Côte d'Ivoire is no exception to this observation. Although recent, the country's urbanization is accelerated. Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, has undergone a remarkable transformation in recent decades, largely thanks to real estate development. The city, once modest, has become one of the largest and most dynamic metropolises in West Africa. This evolution has been fueled by a strong demand for housing and infrastructure, resulting from sustained population growth, economic diversification and the modernization of the urban sector [1].

Real estate development, both public and private, has played a major role in the structuring of Greater Abidjan, affecting not only its urban landscape but also its social and economic dynamics. This study explores the impact of this real estate development on the urban fabric of Greater Abidjan, by analyzing its effects on urbanization, social segmentation, the environment and local governance [2]. The purpose of this study is to trace the contribution of real estate development to the fabric of Greater Abidjan.

2. Literature Review

This review focuses on housing production in Ivory Coast, the socio-spatial impacts of real estate development in Greater Abidjan

2.1. Housing Production in Ivory Coast

Housing production is at the heart of any country's development policy. In Côte d'Ivoire, current housing production only offers a few thousand homes per year on the market. While the needs are

estimated at at least 25,000 homes per year for Abidjan and 25,000 homes per year for the interior of the country [3]. If we look at the history of housing policy in Côte d'Ivoire, we see that the promotion of Abidjan, established as the capital of the territory of Côte d'Ivoire in 1934, to the rank of colonial capital, immediately gave rise to land control. As early as 1926, the Office of Economic Housing (HE) was created for all of French West Africa. A 1949 decree set its objectives: construction of healthy, low-cost housing and orientation towards individual home ownership. Following this 1949 decree, the Côte d'Ivoire Real Estate Housing Company (SIHCI) was created in 1952. Following the dissolution of several real estate companies, SICOGI was created, which is also a mixed economy real estate development and management company [4]. In addition to real estate companies, Côte d'Ivoire has also created subdivision structures. Between 1973 and 1987, SETU developed approximately 33,000 hectares of land and produced just over 20,000 equipped lots, including lots of 100 to 150 m² intended for low-cost housing, lots of more than 600 m² intended for the construction of private collective housing and lots of 800 to 1,500 m² intended for villas according to the CAHF [3]. All this shows that housing is at the heart of the development policy. This policy is continuing through the adoption in 2012 of a comprehensive national strategy for mass housing production as well as a series of measures aimed at strengthening supply. This resulted in the construction of 60,000 housing units in Abidjan and in cities in the interior of the country, including 50,000 social housing units and 10,000 low-cost housing units. As part of the social housing program, the State of Côte d'Ivoire has committed to tax-exempting inputs, particularly VAT. Since the normal VAT rate is 18% and the share of inputs represents approximately 70% of construction costs, this represents a reduction in construction costs of approximately 12.5% [5].

2.2. Socio-Spatial Impacts of Real Estate Development

Real estate companies have succeeded in setting the level and quality of residential development in two typical communes: Yopougon, mainly intended for government employees and the lower middle classes, and the wealthy class commune of Cocody, whose construction and development had already been undertaken during the colonial period [4]. This reality in Cocody had already been noted by Haeringer [6]. He also points out that in the other districts, it cannot be said that the intervention of real estate companies has been significant enough and specific enough in terms of quality to set or modify the landscape of the districts. There is a junction that has taken place between the three new urban fronts, but also between these fronts and the old districts (central districts) on the one hand, and between the new urban fronts and the traditional villages on the other hand. The most noticeable junction is that which has taken place between the communes of Abobo and Cocody. It is a junction that is made between two (2) municipalities with opposing social realities. The extension of real estate production has led to the meeting of neighborhoods with different urban projects: the most affluent (Cocody) has joined the most popular (Abobo). "The fact provides information on two (2) things. The first is the power of territorial thrusts: the municipalities of Cocody and Abobo, which were originally 15 km apart by road, are now contiguous. The second is the fragility of elitist isolations. While we are accustomed to observing the progression of "popular" forms towards "bourgeois" forms, we are witnessing the opposite situation here. It is the municipality of Cocody that comes to "meet" that of Abobo [6]).

3. Methodology

3.1. Location of Greater Abidjan

The Greater Abidjan area, which is the subject of this study, is located in the South of Ivory Coast. Located between the latitude of 5.3364 and the longitude of 4.0266 5° 20' 11" North, 4° 1' 36" West. It is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north by the department of Agboville, to the east by the departments of Alépé and Grand-Bassam, and to the west by the departments of Jacqueville and Dabou, Greater Abidjan covers an area of 2119 km² (2,119,000 ha) or 0.6% of the national territory (Map No. 1).

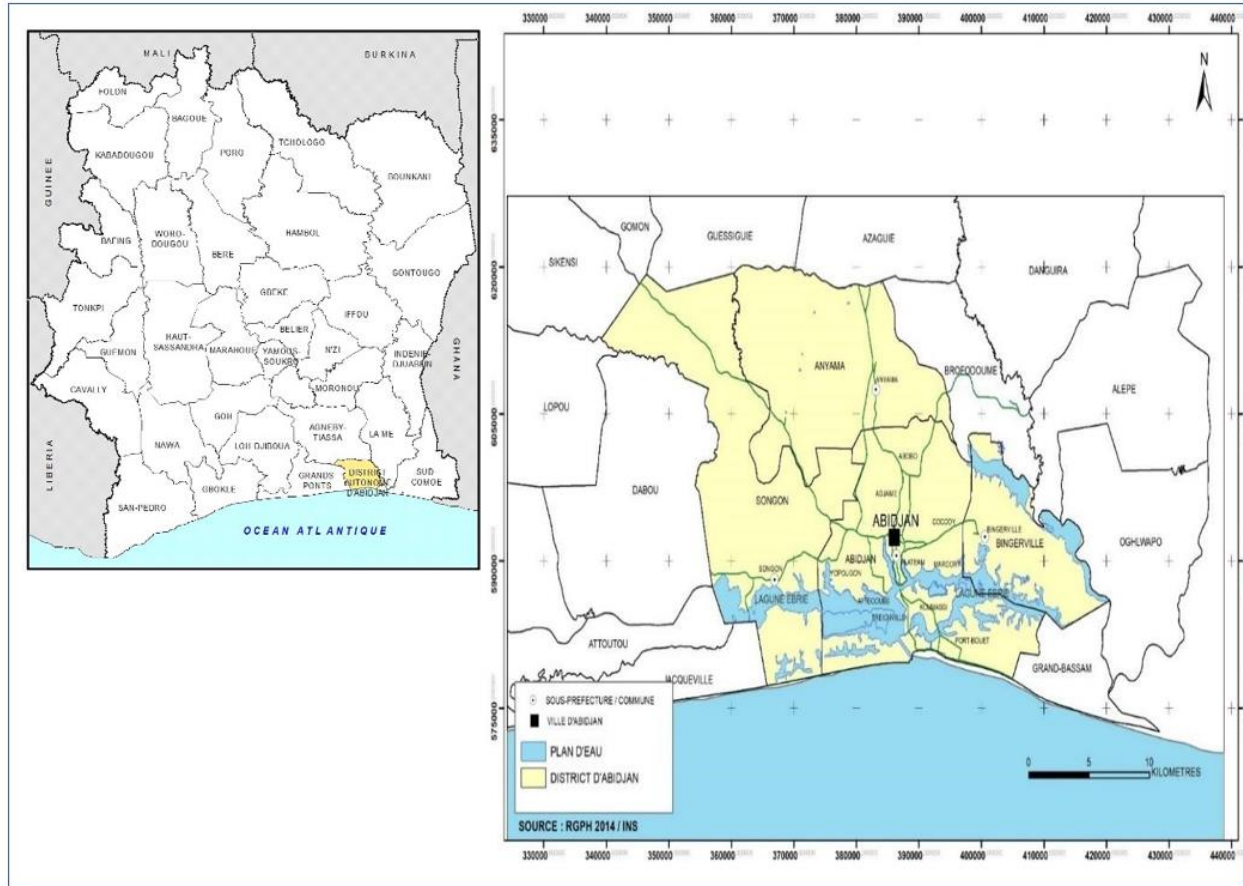


Figure 1.

Location of Greater Abidjan.

Source : KTP Deki, 2024 from INS base map.

3.2. Data Collection

The methodological approach adopted for the conduct of this study is qualitative and quantitative with secondary data from theses, dissertations and articles, internet sources, scientific magazines, technical and administrative documents. Primary data from field surveys were collected and processed.

As for secondary data, the works were consulted for the most part at the University of Cocody-Abidjan and for others, on the internet. This made it possible to have textual data on the impact of real estate development on the making of African cities in general and Greater Abidjan in particular.

As for the field survey, it was carried out by direct observation and interviews. The field observation made it possible to collect primary data relating to housing. As for the interview survey, questions were addressed to 25 real estate developers in the city of Abidjan in order to collect data on real estate promotion and policy in Abidjan. The questionnaires were administered to 200 heads of households in four districts of Abidjan.

4. Results

4.1. A Real Estate Development that Has Evolved Over Time

Real estate development refers to all activities related to the construction, renovation, and marketing of real estate, whether residential, commercial, or industrial. In Abidjan, it includes both public projects led by entities such as the Ivorian Construction and Real Estate Management Company (SICOGI) and private initiatives led by local and international real estate developers.

4.1.1. A Particular Historical and Socio-Economic Context

The post-independence years (1960–1980) were marked by rapid urbanization, driven by rural exodus and sustained economic growth. Abidjan became a major economic center, attracting a young and rapidly growing population. The Ivorian state responded to this growth by implementing social housing programs and instituting urban regulations aimed at structuring the city.

In the early 1980s, economic policies changed, paving the way for a more privatized real estate sector. This led to a dynamism in real estate development, and luxury real estate projects began to proliferate, particularly in neighborhoods such as Cocody, Le Plateau, and Marcory.

4.1.2. A Real Estate Promotion With 3 Models

Real estate developers in Abidjan are organized around three main models:

- The public model: characterized by projects financed and carried out by the State or parastatal organizations, aimed at meeting the need for social housing and developing working-class neighborhoods.
- The private model: which includes the initiatives of private developers aimed at developing luxury residential or commercial complexes.
- The mixed model: combining a share of public and private initiative, seeking to meet the needs of both social housing and high-end residences.

4.2. Real Estate Development and Its Impact on Urbanization and Spatial Structure

The rapid urbanization of Abidjan has been largely determined by real estate programs. Urban transformations have had profound effects on the geographical distribution of the population, the formulation of development policies and the management of urban services.

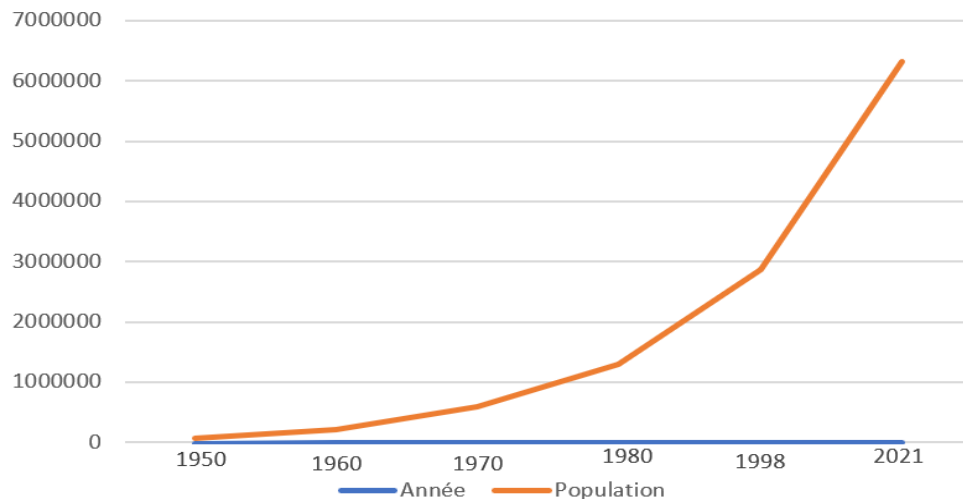


Figure 2.
Evolution of the population of Abidjan between 1950 and 2021.
Source: RGPH, 2021.

The 1998 General Population and Housing Census gave 2,877,948 inhabitants to the city of Abidjan, or nearly 19% of the country's total population and 44% of the urbanized population. Today, this large West African city is home to nearly 4.5 million inhabitants, corresponding to approximately 20% of the estimated national population, with an average annual demographic rate of 3% [7]. The city of Abidjan alone concentrates 36% of the urban population [8].

4.2.1. Urban Sprawl and Densification Resulting from Real Estate Development

Abidjan has experienced massive urban sprawl in recent decades, particularly towards peripheral areas. Neighborhoods such as Yopougon, Cocody, and Abobo have been progressively densified, while new areas such as Songon, Anyama, and Attécoubé have emerged.

Densification has had mixed effects. On the one hand, it has provided accommodation for a growing population, but on the other hand, it has also put a strain on existing infrastructure, leading to problems with water supply, sanitation and transport.

4.2.2. Gentrification and Spatial Segregation

Gentrification has been a major phenomenon in some neighborhoods of Abidjan. In particular, Plateau and Cocody have undergone a process of transformation, where luxury residences have replaced popular housing. This process has led to increased social separation, with popular neighborhoods such as Abobo and Yopougon becoming less accessible areas for the middle and upper classes.

4.3. Remarkable Social Effects of Real Estate Promotion

Real estate development in Abidjan has had a direct impact on social dynamics. It has both promoted social inclusion through affordable housing projects and created social divides due to land speculation and gentrification.

4.3.1. Social and Economic Inequalities

The rise of the middle class has enabled the construction of quality housing, but these projects have often been out of reach for low-income populations. On the one hand, the construction of social housing has helped meet the needs of certain social categories, but on the other, real estate speculation has exacerbated inequalities, particularly with the emergence of luxury housing reserved for an elite. Housing costs have also increased (Figure 1).

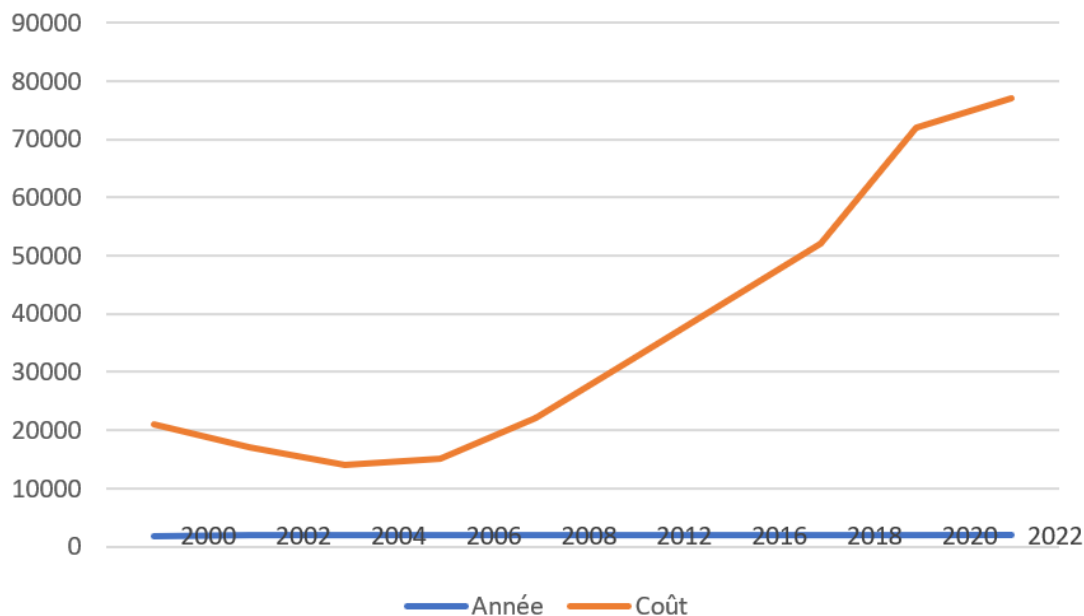


Figure 3.
Evolution of rental prices in average-standard housing in Abidjan.

Real estate in Abidjan has seen an increase in prices in two decades. In two decades, prices have increased 400%. Before the military-political crisis of 2002, housing offered at rental prices was at a reasonable price and accessible to all. Then during the crisis period (2002 to 2008), the city of Abidjan

recorded a decrease in rental costs because the number of housing units was increasing following the massive displacement of its population to calmer regions. This offered the possibility to non-executives to find decent housing in housing and above all at a lower cost. Finally, with the lull accompanied by economic and demographic dynamism in the city from 2008, we are witnessing an explosion in the cost of rent.

4.3.2. Social Segmentation and Gentrification

Gentrification is a phenomenon where working-class neighborhoods are renovated to accommodate wealthier populations, often to the detriment of the original residents, who are then forced to leave the neighborhoods due to rising rents or land speculation. This phenomenon has been particularly visible in neighborhoods like Cocody and Le Plateau, where luxury residences, shopping centers, and offices have been built to attract middle and upper classes.

This transformation has changed social relations and exacerbated socio-economic inequalities by concentrating the most disadvantaged populations in peripheral areas such as Abobo and Yopougon, where basic services and infrastructure are often insufficient. Real estate development has led to a spatial restructuring of the city, with a particularly visible effect in neighborhoods such as Le Plateau, Cocody and Marcory. While these projects have improved living conditions in some areas, they have also contributed to a growing social divide, with the emergence of a process of gentrification.

4.3.3. Transformation of Lifestyles and Mobility

New constructions have changed the lifestyles of residents, leading to a change in urban mobility. Access to public transport, shops and social services has become a central issue, with growing inequalities depending on the neighbourhood.

Social mobility, which refers to an individual's ability to change socio-economic status, has been profoundly influenced by real estate development. Table 1 provides information on the social mobility of respondents over the last ten years.

Table 1.

Evolution of the type of housing

Type of accommodation 10 years ago	Type of housing today	Proportion
Precarious	Precarious	10%
Precarious	Economic	42%
Precarious	Mid-range	8%
Economic	Average Standing	27%
Average standing	High Standing	13%
Total		100%

Although social housing projects have enabled some families to access improved living conditions, the effects of housing development have not been uniform. Inequalities in access to infrastructure have also played a role in social mobility. Outlying neighbourhoods, particularly those that have emerged after urban decentralisation, suffer from a lack of quality infrastructure, such as passable roads, efficient public transport and health facilities. Residents of these neighbourhoods often face economic and social difficulties that hinder their upward mobility.

4.3.4. Impacts on the Working Classes

Working-class neighborhoods, often on the outskirts of Abidjan, have seen their living conditions deteriorate due to informal urbanization, characterized by a lack of adequate planning. Slums have emerged, and low-income populations find themselves excluded from modern housing projects. In addition, the authorities have limited room for maneuver in terms of land regulation and urban planning, which contributes to the proliferation of illegal construction and the precariousness of many families.

In modernized neighborhoods, where the middle and upper classes have settled, interclass relations are often marked by social distancing. The presence of gated residential complexes and private commercial areas creates distinct living spaces where social interactions are limited to closed circles. This contributes to social polarization and a greater individualization of urban society.

4.4. Spatial Impacts Marked by a Transformation of Urban Space

The real estate development process in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, has led to a profound transformation of its urban space. This dynamic, fueled by an increased demand for housing, commercial and office infrastructure, has had significant repercussions on the urban fabric of the city. This phenomenon is not only linked to population growth, but also to the evolution of public and private policies in the real estate sector, as well as to the evolution of the social, economic and political fabric.

Public real estate projects initially dominated, especially after independence, with efforts to provide social housing for a growing population. However, in the 1990s and 2000s, the privatization of the real estate sector led to the emergence of private real estate projects that contributed to a more targeted expansion in the city center neighborhoods (Le Plateau), but also in more remote areas where prices were more affordable.

Large residential complexes such as Cocody-Riviera, Le Plateau, and Marcory have gradually multiplied, redefining the structure of the city. The spatial impact of this evolution is evident while neighborhoods such as Le Plateau have historically been reserved for business and political and economic elites, urban renewal has allowed a gradual transformation of peripheral neighborhoods, often occupied by more modest populations.

4.5. Significant Impacts on Urban Planning

Real estate projects have had a considerable impact on the urban planning of Abidjan, both in terms of transport infrastructure and public services.

The boom in real estate development has had an indirect effect on the improvement of some transport infrastructure and urban services in new neighborhoods. Major projects such as the Abidjan metro, as well as the development of modern roads and expressways, have facilitated accessibility to these new urban areas.



Figure 4.
Developed space housing a real estate development.

However, this expansion dynamic has not been accompanied in all cases by integrated urban planning, sometimes leading to imbalances between the growing urban density and the inadequacy of public infrastructure in some peripheral districts. The lack of public spaces, green areas, and social services in the new districts has created additional pressure on existing infrastructure.

In addition to housing, real estate development has also encouraged the construction of commercial infrastructure and offices. The Plateau business center, as well as areas such as Marcory and Cocody, have seen the construction of modern shopping centers and offices, marking an evolution in the commercial function of these neighborhoods. These spaces have transformed the urban landscape, bringing both modernity and economic diversification to the city.

4.6. Impact on the Urban Environment

The city's expansion has also had environmental consequences. The lack of sustainable planning and management of green spaces has led to increased pressure on the city's natural resources.

Rapid urbanization has led to a reduction in green spaces, increased pollution and overconsumption of natural resources. Peripheral neighborhoods, often poorly served, have seen their environment deteriorate due to informal urbanization and lack of quality infrastructure.

5. Discussions

Real estate transactions are mainly carried out horizontally. The number of apartment buildings and apartments is very limited. Thus, the recent evolution of the Abidjan metropolitan area is strongly marked by a spatial spread due in part to the actions of real estate developers. This trend is not about to reverse if we stick to the expressed demand of potential buyers, more than 92% of whom would like to buy low-rise houses compared to only 8% for apartments. There is therefore a need for the public authorities to take appropriate decisions to encourage vertical construction. From the mid-1980s to 2010, all the developers' programs represent nearly 45,000 housing units on a total surface area of approximately 1,700 hectares; or an average annual consumption of 68 hectares, for official developers alone. The commune of Cocody alone contributed nearly 1,100 hectares; or 65% of the total area and the

municipality of Yopougon for approximately 300 hectares; or 8% of the total area [2]. For the same author, In Abidjan, the situation of housing deficit in general and affordable housing for disadvantaged groups in particular, has led to anarchic urbanization and has led to a significant development of precarious housing neighborhoods. The number of these under-integrated neighborhoods increases from year to year. This phenomenon has increased following the displacement of populations fleeing the crisis of September 2002. Indeed, a study carried out by the BNETD [9] reveals that Abidjan had more than 72 precarious neighborhoods spread across almost all the municipalities and bringing together at least 600,000 inhabitants; or approximately 20% of the total population of the city. This study also specifies that 5% of urbanized areas are made up of precarious housing. In 2004, the BNETD counted at least 110 precarious neighborhoods in Abidjan with about one million inhabitants. The population growth rate is 8% per year, while in the rest of the city, it is around 3.8%. Population growth in these precarious neighborhoods is twice as high as that of the rest of the city. They also record a poverty rate that is twice as high. For Dhouegbeu [1]. The housing crisis in the city of Abidjan has hazards in the land and real estate sectors. Indeed, the lack of housing leads to significant demand and an overbidding on the land and real estate market, demand being very strong compared to supply, prices are rising. Speculation and the surge in land and housing prices in the city of Abidjan is disconcerting. The case of low-cost housing, known as housing for the greatest number, is particularly telling. A majority of the Abidjan population is deprived of access to housing, social housing itself being the subject of intense speculation" reports. In this situation, the poor are disadvantaged since the low-cost housing programs are aimed at households whose income is higher than 150,000 CFA francs, i.e. a middle-class population. Consequently, the majority whose monthly income is lower than 150,000 are excluded. Indeed, housing costs are rising steadily and are not within the reach of the underprivileged categories. Capped at 15 million CFA francs at the beginning of the 1980s, the price of low-cost housing has now risen to a maximum of 20 million CFA francs. Land prices are also rising sharply, from 3,500 CFA francs per m² in the 1960s, the cost has peaked at 30,000 per m² today.

For Ougbe [10], the impact of the housing problem has made it possible to note land speculation. This trivializes the subdivision which leads to anarchic constructions. These land speculations which correspond to the types of subdivision have given rise to several types of housing which impact the urban landscape as well as the population of Kounahiri. Access to housing is the fight led by all the actors in charge of urban planning. It always starts with the acquisition of the building land. The city of Kounahiri is experiencing a very remarkable evolution in the cost of building lots. Some less well-off people had the privilege of buying their land before the 2000s when the cost was affordable (less than 100,000 FCFA). Today, the cost of the lots is no longer within the reach of people who have very little means. And even if they managed to buy land, the development takes quite a long time. So this difficulty in producing housing makes the city disparate, modifies the configuration of the city as it goes along. Indeed, the outskirts of the city which contain the majority of modern housing, have isolated housing. The land is not developed at the same time. It should be noted that the outskirts also have unfinished modern housing. This increases the number of squatters in the city. There are families there who squat their own homes.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Real estate development has had a profound impact on the evolution of Greater Abidjan. While it has enabled the city to grow and modernize, it has also created challenges in terms of social justice, spatial equity, and sustainability. New residential and commercial areas have encroached on green spaces, contributing to a significant reduction in natural areas and a loss of biodiversity. The lack of effective regulations regarding water, waste, and sanitation management has intensified environmental challenges in some neighborhoods, particularly the most recent ones or those built without ecological planning.

The implementation of effective public policies, stricter regulation of the real estate sector, as well as inclusive and environmentally friendly urban planning will be essential for Abidjan's development to be balanced and sustainable for all its populations.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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