

## Unspectacular Secondary Cities in West Africa

### Abstract

For decades, African urban research has largely focused on the continent's capital cities and metropolises. However, recently secondary cities, the unspectacular middle ground between megacities and small towns, are coming more and more into the focus of academic interest. Due to their rapid growth, their political, economic, and social importance is increasing. Arguing, that ordinary urban life mostly unfolds in secondary cities, this postdoc project does not conceptualise them through what they lack, but develops alternative approaches by analysing urbanity in African secondary cities in their own right. This project's aim is to investigate how urban actors shape and reshape urbanity in unglamorous African cities, that is, how they seek encounters and how they distance themselves from each other. Thereby, I will research the different social actors' imaginary of how an urban society should look like. I aim at conducting comparative research on two secondary cities in the Mande region, namely Sikasso in Mali and Kankan in Guinea. Both cities are the second-largest in their countries in terms of inhabitants and both are characterized by their closeness to neighbouring borders. To portray and analyse these two secondary cities, I will draw on ethnographic data that is based on the mapping of the social actors, on discourse analysis and on practice analysis. I will adopt an urban dwellers oriented perspective, that is, I will focus on human agency by considering its three temporal dimensions. More precisely, I will use the ethnographic methods of participation and observation. Furthermore, I plan to draw on discourses, produced through interviews, informal conversations, and naturally occurring talks, to gather rich data.