



Typological Contrasts in Colonial Kinshasa: From Tower Rigidity to Rowhouse Transformation

Abstract

This paper examines the architectural legacy of colonial housing in Kinshasa through two emblematic case studies: the Sabena Towers, constructed in the 1950s for Belgian airline personnel, and the Bandalungwa settlement, a neighbourhood of row houses developed by the colonial administration for Congolese civil servants. These contrasting housing typologies reveal how architecture served as a mechanism of spatial control and a framework for postcolonial transformation. Commissioned by SABENA and designed in a tropical modernist language, the Sabena Towers functioned as a vertical enclave for colonial elites—pilots, technicians, and administrators—providing a self-contained environment detached from the surrounding urban fabric. The rigidity of the tower structure, defined by standardised units and centralised infrastructure, has largely prevented substantial modification, preserving its colonial spatial logic and limiting postcolonial adaptability. By contrast, Bandalungwa's low-rise, horizontally organised rowhouses—developed as part of a broader effort to regulate and “civilise” the African workforce—offered a more flexible typology. In the decades following independence, residents transformed these units through extensions, infills, and informal reconfigurations, creating a vibrant, layered urban fabric that was responsive to evolving family structures, economic practices, and cultural norms. The research employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on architectural redrawings and comparative spatial analysis, and is supported by a critical literature review on colonial urbanism, housing typologies, and postcolonial adaptation. Moreover, the paper examines how architectural form reflected colonial objectives and enabled or constrained everyday appropriation through a comparative analysis of these two housing typologies. Ultimately, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how architecture mediates the intersection of labour, governance, and lived experience across colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Keywords

Architectural Typologies, Colonial Housing, Kinshasa, Tropical Modernism

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Introduction

In the colonial city, housing was never a neutral category; it served as a spatial tool of governance. Across Africa, domestic architecture bridged political ideology and daily life, translating ideas of order, hygiene, and progress into the city's physical fabric. Kinshasa—formerly Léopoldville until independence in 1960—embodies this dynamic through various case studies. Emerging from a modest riverside settlement on the Congo River, the city grew into the administrative and economic centre of the Belgian Congo, structured by a stark division between the *ville européenne* (European city) and the *cit  indig ne* (indigenous town), as shown in Figure 1. This spatial dualism exemplified a morphology of domination: an urban order where geometry, zoning, and typology encoded colonial hierarchies. Within this divided landscape, architecture served both as representation and regulation. Belgian colonial planners used housing typologies to shape domestic behaviours and address social issues. The *ville europ enne* reflected tropical modernism's technological confidence—reinforced concrete, sometimes pilotis, and brise-soleil—while the *cit  indig ne*, through standardised prototypes developed by the Office des Cit s Africaines (OCA, Office of African Cities), embodied the state's aim to produce a loyal, productive African workforce.¹ Spatial segregation thus became an architectural expression of the colonial mission, and the colonial

form was never static or uncontested. Even under official planning constraints, residents transformed imposed layouts through appropriation, extension, and collective use. Every veranda enclosed for commerce, every courtyard roofed for additional shelter, represented an act of negotiation between institutional control and local agency. This paper situates itself within that dialectic, analysing how two emblematic housing typologies—the Sabena Towers, built in the 1950s for European expatriates, and the Bandalungwa settlement, planned for Congolese civil servants—embody the contradictory ambitions of colonial modernism: the pursuit of climatic rationality and the enforcement of social segregation.² Their divergent post-colonial developments illustrate how architectural form can both limit and enable adaptation. Methodologically, the study combines typological analysis, architectural redrawing, and field observation. Rather than viewing the dwelling as a fixed object, the research perceives it as a process—a framework continually rewritten or preserved by its inhabitants. The Sabena Towers exemplify an architecture of control: a vertical, technocratic enclave that crystallised European privilege and climatic rationalism. By contrast, Bandalungwa represents an architecture of participation: a low-rise prototype that, despite its colonial origins, evolved into a living matrix of social resilience and informal creativity. Through this comparison, the paper examines how form, use, and meaning intersect in the transition from colonial to post-colonial urbanism. Ultimately, this research

1. Johan Lagae and L on Beeckmans, "Kinshasa's Evolving Urban Morphology: Colonial Legacies and Postcolonial Transformations" in *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence* ed. Manuel Herz (Park Books, 2015).
2. Filip De Boeck and Sammy Baloji, *Suturing the City: Living Together in Congo's Urban Worlds* (Autograph ABP, 2015).

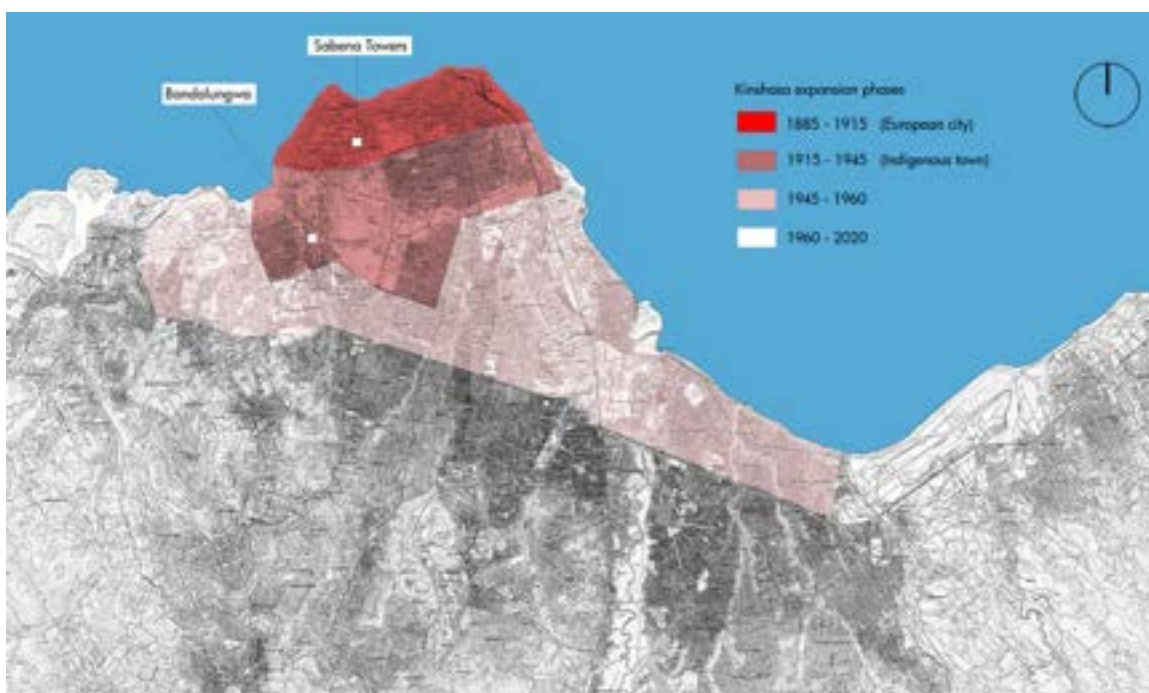


Figure 1. Map of Kinshasa expansion phases and location of the two case studies. Drawing by Manlio Michieletto.

contributes to current debates on tropical modernism and post-colonial transformation by re-evaluating Kinshasa as a laboratory of adaptation rather than a relic of empire. A typological study, combined with ethnographic insight, reveals the silent yet persistent dialogue between domination and emancipation inscribed in the built environment. Kinshasa—through the twin genealogies of the Sabena Towers and Bandalungwa—thus emerges as a paradigmatic terrain where the politics of control and the poetics of everyday life coexist within architectural form.

Methodology

This research employs a comparative and interpretive methodology that combines typological analysis, morphological redrawing, and on-site observation. The approach recognises that colonial housing schemes in Kinshasa cannot be understood solely through formal documentation; they must also be examined through their inhabitation and transformation. The investigation integrates analysis of architectural form with observation of everyday practices to demonstrate how built structures mediate between policy, climate, and social life. The study is organised into three complementary stages. First, archival research provides the empirical foundation. The original plans are analysed to reconstruct the ideological and technical parameters that guided housing production during the late colonial period. Second, a series of architectural redrawings is undertaken to recover the formal logic of the two case studies: the Sabena Towers and the Bandalungwa “Type T” rowhouse. Redrawing is treated not merely as a graphic reproduction but as an act of analytical reconstruction. The Sabena Towers’ plans and sections (Figures 2-3) reveal the precision of their vertical modular system and the duplex structure repeated throughout the towers. Each drawing traces the logic of climatic devices—verandas, cross-ventilation corridors, and shading systems—that defined tropical modernism’s architectural vocabulary. These drawings serve as analytical instruments to visualise how spatial order and climatic adaptation were encoded in the design. Third, on-site observation focuses on material decay, informal extensions, and the everyday re-appropriation of space. In Bandalungwa, particular attention is paid to the vernacular logic of transformation—roof additions, veranda enclosures, and plot subdivision—which illustrates how households negotiate economic and climatic pressures, and how these micro-transformations are recorded, treating each dwelling as a living document rather than a static artefact, and analytically, the study relies on comparative morphology. The Sabena Towers and Bandalungwa are interpreted as contrasting typological regimes: one vertical and closed, the other horizontal and open. Spatial syntax analysis was used to compare circulation networks and permeability levels, while qualitative interviews and photographic surveys provided insights into users’ adaptations. This multi-scalar approach—from building to district—enabled the

identification of continuities between colonial planning principles and post-colonial inhabitation patterns. Finally, the methodological framework integrates postcolonial theory and studies of tropical modernism to interpret how imported modernist principles were hybridised through local agency. Ultimately, the paper treats each modification not as a deviation but as a form of design—an incremental, collective architecture born of necessity and aspiration. The combination of drawing, observation, and interpretation thus constructs a critical lens through which colonial housing can be examined as a field of negotiation between imposed order and lived practice.

Findings and Discussion

The city of Kinshasa, formerly Léopoldville, exemplifies one of the most intricate colonial urban projects in sub-Saharan Africa. Its evolution from a collection of fishing villages along the Congo River into the capital of the Belgian Congo demonstrates how colonial planning and architecture were used to establish spatial hierarchies. In its very layout, the colonial city embodied what M’bao (2022) calls a “morphology of domination”—an urban form designed to uphold racial, social, and economic segregation through the built environment. The origins of Léopoldville trace back to 1881, when Henry Morton Stanley established a station for King Leopold II’s Congo Free State. By the early twentieth century, the site had become a logistical hub connected to the Atlantic via the Matadi–Kinshasa railway, serving as the primary outlet for the export of ivory, rubber, and other colonial commodities. This infrastructural backbone shaped the city’s subsequent form: a linear urban entity extending along transport corridors, with administrative, commercial, and residential zones carefully arranged in stratified layers. From the beginning, zoning and segregation were fundamental to the colonial design. The design, and the *ville européenne* occupied higher ground, characterised by wide boulevards, grand vistas, and spacious villas designed in the spirit of climatic modernism. In contrast, the *cité indigène*—the so-called “African town”—was situated in peripheral, lower-lying areas.³ The physical separation was reinforced through health ordinances and sanitary cordons justified as malaria protection but motivated by racial separation. This dual city, maintained through building regulations and mobility restrictions, served as a cartographic depiction of colonial ideology: Europeans as agents of order and progress; Africans as labouring bodies in need of discipline. Architecturally, this segregation was visible through different building typologies. European neighbourhoods adopted the modernist vocabulary of reinforced concrete and tropical adaptation; African housing, by contrast, was characterised by small plots,

3. Léon Beeckmans and Johan Lagae, *Kinshasa: Architecture and Urbanism in Africa’s Third Largest City* (Leuven University Press, 2015), 36–45.

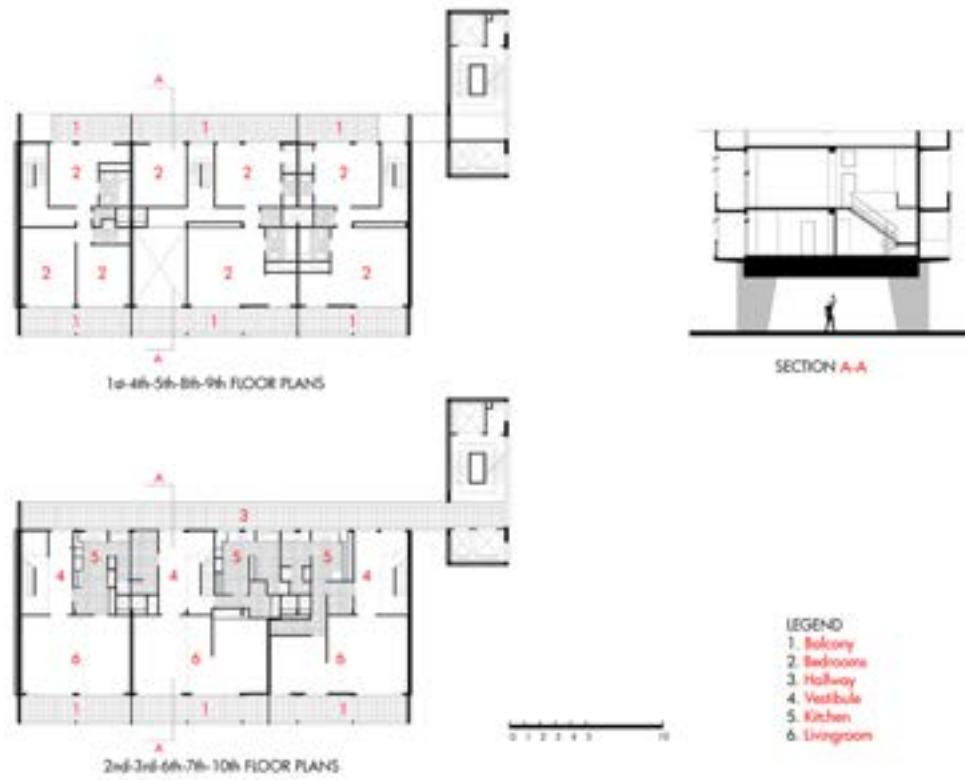


Figure 2. Plan views and section of the duplex, levels 1-10, Sabena Towers. Drawing by Manlio Michieletto.



Figure 3. Plan views and section of the duplex, levels 11-14, Sabena Towers. Drawing by Manlio Michieletto.

standardised floor plans, and limited utilities. The Office des Cités Africaines (OCA), established in 1952, became the main instrument for creating this spatial order. It developed mass-housing prototypes—such as the “Type T” duplex of Bandalungwa—that embodied an industrialised paternalism aimed at transforming “natives” into modern workers. Residents reinterpreted the rigid geometries of colonial plans through gradual adaptation: extending kitchens into courtyards, transforming service verandas into commercial spaces, and turning backyards into informal markets. These acts of redefinition did not dismantle colonial order but subtly challenged it, embedding social and cultural rhythms that went beyond administrative intent. Postcolonial Kinshasa continues to reflect the infrastructural and symbolic hierarchy of its colonial blueprint, even as its meanings have evolved. What was once a segregated order of privilege and exclusion has developed into a layered urban fabric where colonial typologies coexist with informal architectures of survival and reinvention. In this way, Kinshasa exemplifies what De Boeck and Baloji (2015) describe as “a city perpetually under construction,” where the incomplete becomes a permanent state and colonial legacies serve as frameworks for new urban realities.

The Sabena Towers

The Sabena Towers, built in the early 1950s near Léopoldville Airport, stand as a clear symbol of late-colonial ambition. Designed by French architect Claude Laurens for the Belgian airline SABENA, the project aimed to demonstrate that European modernism could be effectively adapted to equatorial Africa, emphasising technical precision, climate adaptation, and monumental isolation. Laurens envisioned the towers as a stacking of duplex apartments arranged along a rational grid of pilotis on the ground level. Each residence, spanning two floors, included living spaces on the lower floor and private bedrooms above, connected by internal stairs and ventilated through deep verandas (Figure 2-3). The north–south orientation minimised solar gain, while reinforced concrete slabs and open façades improved airflow. The alternating pattern of recessed loggias and projecting balconies created a rhythmic façade that balanced climate considerations with aesthetic order. As illustrated in Figure 4, the façade’s alternation of shaded loggias and projecting balconies reflects Laurens’s pursuit of a geometric order adapted to equatorial light. The composition reveals a modular precision governed by a 3.6-metre bay system—an austere geometry typical of European modernism in the tropics. These climatic devices—brise-soleil, adjustable louvers, and overhangs—embody the translation of technical rationalism into a colonial context. These features aligned the towers with the broader discourse of tropical modernism, championed by architects



Figure 4. Exterior views of the Sabena Towers: north elevation (left) and south elevation (right), 2025. Photos by Victor Mukanya Bay.

such as Maxwell Fry, Jane Drew,⁴ and Victor Olgay.⁵ The use of brise-soleil, adjustable louvers, and double roofing demonstrated climate responsiveness; however, unlike the adaptable informality of African settlements, this design served a closed, privileged system. The raised ground floor created a physical and symbolic separation from the ground, with pilotis acting as the threshold between private and public realms. From an urban morphology perspective, the Sabena Towers represented a vertical inversion of the horizontal colonial order. While African quarters extended outward in repetitive rows, the European enclave rose vertically, forming a compact micro-city of modern amenities—elevators, mechanical ventilation, service infrastructure—detached from the surrounding environment. The building thus embodied a “colonial spectacle of modernity,” a visual assertion of technological mastery set against the tropical landscape. Laurens’s design also revealed a theoretical paradox. In his writings, he claimed that architects in the tropics must “forget what they learned in temperate climates” to create an “architecture neuve pour un pays neuf” (a new architecture for a new country).⁶ Though climatically responsive, the Sabena Towers excluded indigenous typologies such as shaded courtyards and communal verandas. The social life of the towers after independence exposes the limitations of this model. Their rigid concrete shells, centralised services, and fixed plan arrangements made adaptation difficult. As state institutions withdrew and maintenance declined, elevators failed, façades deteriorated, and utilities were improvised. The buildings remained frozen typologies, physical relics of colonial hierarchy

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4. Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, *Tropical Architecture in the Humid Zone* (B.T. Batsford, 1956).
 5. Victor Olgay, *Design with Climate: Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism* (Princeton University Press, 1963).
 6. Johan Lagae and Denise Laurens. “Claude Laurens: Architecture. Projets et réalisations de 1934 à 1971” ed. Emiel De Kooning (Ghent University Architectural & Engineering Press, 2001).

inhabiting a postcolonial context that no longer supported their original functions. Nonetheless, the Sabena Towers remain significant as a benchmark of architectural encounter. They illustrate the reach of modernist ideals and the contradictions involved in their transplantation. Their contrast with the flexible, participatory fabric of Bandalungwa—discussed in the next section—reveals the two main trajectories of Kinshasa’s architectural modernity: one defined by enclosure, the other by adaptation and everyday negotiation.

The Bandalungwa settlement

The Bandalungwa settlement embodied the image of a mass-produced environment of control that, over time, became a terrain of resistance and reinvention. Conceived in the early 1950s by the Office des Cités Africaines, Bandalungwa was planned to accommodate Congolese civil servants—teachers, clerks, nurses—whose disciplined domesticity was expected to sustain the colony’s bureaucratic machinery. The settlement’s regular grid, modular plots, and repetitive housing typologies are a rational utopia of order, a colonial dream of modernity reduced to its most didactic form. In its initial conception, Bandalungwa was to be a model cité africaine, a demonstration of how architecture could “civilise” through hygiene and geometry. The “Type T” row house—the most common dwelling unit—featured a compact ground floor for cooking and social activities and a small upper floor for sleeping (Figure 5). Its materials—concrete block walls, corrugated sheet roofing, and a shaded veranda—

combined economy with climatic adaptation. Façades alternated small rectangular openings and shaded loggias (*barza*) to balance privacy and cross-ventilation. The OCA’s reports praised these dwellings for their *simplicité rationnelle* (rational simplicity), arguing that their modular design could be replicated across the Congo.⁷ The plan’s orthogonal clarity, its low-rise profile, and the rhythmic alternation of streets and green corridors reflected a clear spatial hierarchy: collective amenities—school, church, dispensary—at the centre; housing blocks radiating outward; circulation channels monitored and predictable: the street was the space of visibility; the veranda, the space of discipline.⁸ However, this geometry of order proved extraordinarily receptive to transformation. After independence in 1960, as Kinshasa’s population expanded and state management collapsed, Bandalungwa underwent a profound vernacular metamorphosis. Residents modified their homes in response to family growth, economic opportunities, and climatic needs. Verandas were enclosed to create living rooms or storefronts; courtyards were roofed to provide shaded kitchens; upper floors were added where structures allowed (Figure 6). As seen in Figure 6, the once-uniform façades now display an expressive

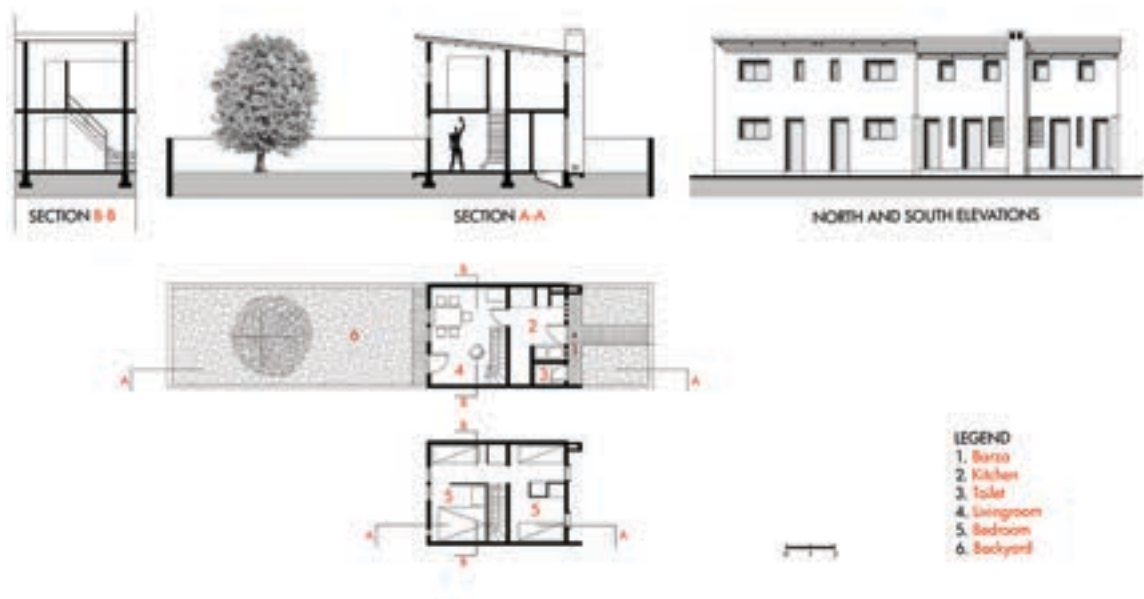


Figure 5. Plan views and section of the type “T” row house in Bandalungwa. Drawing by Manlio Michieletto.

7. Françoise Bost, *Les Cités Africaines au Congo Belge: Morphologie, Politique et Société* (Archives d’Architecture Moderne, 2015), 112–116.
8. Beeckmans and Lagae, *Kinshasa: Architecture and Urbanism*, 141–144.

vocabulary of adaptation: hand-painted signage, extended verandas, improvised balconies, and varied rooflines. What had been conceived as a rigid prototype evolved into a living organism of incremental growth. The original OCA grid persisted, but it now hosted an informal architecture of survival and aspiration. In these micro-transformations, the rigid colonial morphology is reinterpreted through an updated order. The veranda, once a threshold of surveillance, becomes an interface of sociability—a place for cooking, commerce, and conversation. The street, planned for control, becomes a porous network of exchange, where the boundaries between private and public dissolve. Superimposing the original OCA plans with contemporary additions reveals a layered *palimpsest* of architectural change. These transformations follow neither randomness nor rebellion—they obey a pure logic of necessity. The built form expands precisely where structure and access allow, confirming that flexibility was inadvertently inscribed in the colonial prototype. The modular bay and load-bearing walls, designed for repetition, don't enable modification; in fact, the house expands horizontally and vertically, gaining space where available. Unlike the Sabena Towers, whose rigid vertical structure resisted change, the rowhouse typology of Bandalungwa encouraged participation. The act of dwelling becomes an act of design: a negotiation between inherited order and lived reality. In sociocultural terms, Bandalungwa's transformation also redefined gendered and communal spatial practices—women's appropriation of verandas for food preparation and trade reconfigured domestic space into economic infrastructure. The courtyard—originally an auxiliary service zone—became a locus

of production and social interaction. The district's vibrant façades, improvised signage, and layered extensions narrate the passage to informal creativity. The settlement's material fabric thus operates as an archive of transformation—a record of how ordinary inhabitants appropriated, subverted, and ultimately redefined the spatial language of modernism. In this sense, the settlement encapsulates Kinshasa's broader condition: a city that survives through continuous reinvention, where walls and verandas tell a story of adaptation.

Other Indigenous Settlements and Colonial Buildings in Kinshasa

The architectural landscape of colonial Léopoldville cannot be understood solely through its emblematic housing prototypes; it must be contextualised within the broader network of indigenous settlements (*cités indigènes*) and colonial civic buildings that together structured the city's social and spatial hierarchy. From the 1920s onwards, the colonial administration undertook a series of planned African quarters—Ndolo, Kintambo, Ngiri-Ngiri, and later Bandalungwa—each designed to accommodate specific labour categories and administrative functions. Each *cité indigène* followed a similar logic: orthogonal layouts, controlled densities, and simplified building typologies intended to impose European domestic values. Streets were straight and hierarchical, ensuring legibility and surveillance, while housing units were aligned to the central axis. The creation of the Office des Cités Africaines in 1952 institutionalised this process. Jointly financed by the Belgian state and private



Figure 6. Exterior views of the type “T” row house in Bandalungwa: the backyard of a unit still in its original state (left) and the front of a modified row (right), 2025. Photos by Victor Mukanya Bay.

industry, the OCA became the principal agency for housing production in the Belgian Congo. Between 1952 and 1959, it oversaw the construction of more than 40,000 dwellings across the colony, including approximately 20,000 in Léopoldville alone. The OCA's projects—among them Bandalungwa—represented the culmination of a half-century of experimentation with standardised planning, modular construction, and social engineering. Their stated goal was to create “modern cities for the civilised African,” a phrase that encapsulated both the colonial ambition and its racialised paternalism. Beyond housing, the civic architecture of Léopoldville further articulated the spatial hierarchy of the colonial order. The Building Forescom (1946), the Hôtel des Postes, the Hôpital Général, and the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Congo⁹ exemplified a monumental language for a new capital. The legacy of the OCA and its colonial predecessors thus extends beyond their physical remnants; it persists as a structural condition of contemporary urban life, where the forms of domination have been absorbed into the everyday acts of dwelling and making.

Comparative Perspectives: Housing Projects in Sub-Saharan Africa

The architectural and urban experiments undertaken in Kinshasa during the 1950s were not isolated phenomena. Across sub-Saharan Africa, colonial administrations and their associated technical offices pursued similar programmes of housing standardisation, urban control, and social engineering. A sort of panafrican morphology—a network of parallel experiments that primarily sought to spread the principles of tropical modernism on the continent. In British, French, and Belgian territories alike, the production of model housing estates followed a shared logic: rational planning, hygienist ideology, and the segmentation of labour populations. In West Africa, the Colonial Development and Welfare schemes implemented after 1945 introduced the “model village” as a replicable template for African urban housing. The estates of Korle Gonno and Zongo in Accra exemplified the attempt to translate metropolitan urbanism into a tropical idiom. The layout of detached or semi-detached houses on individual plots, surrounded by sanitary buffers, mirrored the aspiration to guide the African worker toward achievement.¹⁰ Similarly, in Dakar, the establishment of the Medina in 1914 formalised spatial segregation between European and African

quarters, prefiguring the logic later implemented by the Office des Cités Africaines in Léopoldville.¹¹ In East Africa, the colonial administrations of Kenya and Tanganyika pursued comparable strategies through the Public Works Department and the East African Housing Board. The Kaloleni Estate in Nairobi (1945) is perhaps the closest analogue to Bandalungwa. Designed by the British architect Ernest Cook, it employed rationalist urban layouts, cross-ventilated houses, and shared open spaces. Intended for African civil servants, Kaloleni reflected the dual ambition of climatic adaptation and social regulation. Yet, as in Kinshasa, residents gradually transformed the prototype through informal extensions, creating a layered environment of domesticity that defied administrative control. In Central and Southern Africa, the mining towns of the Zambian Copperbelt and the Belgian Congo's Katanga region produced another variant of the same logic. Here, the employer, rather than the state, acted as planner. Companies such as Union Minière du Haut-Katanga built vast compounds for African miners, combining prefabricated dwellings and communal facilities. Across these examples, one observes the repetition of a colonial architectural grammar, primarily based on the grid and the module. In Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, and Congo alike, the post-independence state often inherited and perpetuated the logics of modernist zoning, even as informal settlements expanded beyond planned boundaries. The coexistence of planned grids and spontaneous extensions defines the palimpsest city—an urban condition in which historical layers are not erased but continuously reinscribed through everyday practice.

Conclusions

The architectural and urban history of colonial Kinshasa reveals a complex interplay between form, power, and adaptation. Through the comparative study of the Sabena Towers and Bandalungwa, two distinct yet interconnected trajectories of colonial modernism emerge. Each exemplifies a different facet of the colonial project: the pursuit of climatic rationality as a sign of technological progress and the use of architectural typology as an instrument of social regulation. However, these forms also reveal their potential for transformation, demonstrating how inhabitants have continually redefined the city's inherited structures. The Sabena Towers epitomise what might be termed the architecture of control. Conceived as a vertical enclave for European elites, Laurens's design translated modernist ideals of order, hygiene, and efficiency into a segregated tropical context. The towers' climatic intelligence—evident in their pilotis, brise-soleil, and duplex modules (Figures 2-4)—embodied an advanced technical understanding,

9. Bernard Toulrier, Johan Lagae and Marc Jumeau, *Villes d'Afrique: Architecture et Urbanisme au Temps des Colonies* (Somogy Éditions d'Art, 2013).

10. Ola Uduku, “Modernist Architecture and ‘the Tropical’ in West Africa: The Tropical Architecture Movement, 1948–1970,” *Habitat International* 30, no. 3 (2006): 396–411.

11. Manuel Herz et al., *African Modernism: The Architecture of Independence* (Park Books, 2015), 47–52.

yet this very precision precluded adaptation. Over time, as the colonial apparatus receded, the towers persisted as rigid relics, unable to absorb the evolving social and material rhythms of post-independence Kinshasa. By contrast, Bandalungwa demonstrates architecture's capacity to develop through use. Conceived under the mass production ideology of the Office des Cités Africaines, its low-rise, modular dwellings were intended to instil domestic discipline among Congolese civil servants. Yet, these same structures became vehicles for vernacular agency. Through incremental extensions, enclosures, and transformations, residents reshaped the colonial prototype into a living fabric of adaptation. The verandas that once symbolised surveillance became spaces of commerce and sociability; the courtyard, initially a utilitarian void, became a locus of community life. This transformation, evident in the evolution from Figure 5 to Figure 6, illustrates how architecture becomes a tool for negotiating between institutional order and lived experience. This dialectic between rigidity and flexibility, power and participation, encapsulates the broader tension within African modernity. It reveals a reciprocal and transformative process in which imported models were localised, resisted, and ultimately reinvented. Through this lens, the colonial city ceases to appear as a closed historical chapter and becomes instead a living palimpsest, continuously rewritten by its inhabitants. From a methodological standpoint, integrating typological analysis and ethnographic observation is crucial. The act of redrawing—tracing the geometric and climatic logic of the colonial plan—must be complemented by the reading of lived space. Architecture in Kinshasa cannot be interpreted solely through its design intentions; it must also be understood through its appropriations, repairs, and improvisations. The comparative framework developed here—contrasting the Sabena Towers and Bandalungwa, the monumental and the ordinary, the closed and the open—illuminates the enduring duality of Kinshasa's urban condition. The city's colonial and postcolonial forms coexist not as opposites but as overlapping temporalities: one inscribed in concrete, the other in everyday life. It invites a rethinking of modernism in Africa, not as imitation but as translation—a process of reinterpretation that continues to shape urban identity. Ultimately, Kinshasa's architectural modernity resides not only in its heritage and monuments but in its capacity to adapt. In this sense, the study of Kinshasa contributes to a broader understanding of postcolonial urbanism: not as rupture, but as continuity through transformation.

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