

# READING THE DIGITAL CITY IN AFRICA: combining synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

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## What we are talking about?

...A research at the crossroads of ICT4D, internet studies and urban studies on the online communication and representation of a digital city in Africa: Douala (Cameroun)



## Why we did this research?

...in order to understand the coming online of the digital city of Douala and its relation with the physical city

## Why it is important?

...as the gaps between available online information and the physical world shape our knowledge and expertise of the world



Invisible places in the virtual representation may remain unknown to many people (Graham, 2013)

## How the digital Douala is produced?

### What we did?

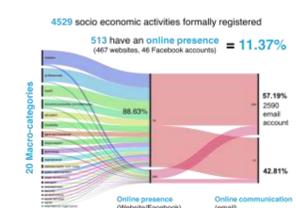
We investigated the online presence of **socio-economic activities** based in Douala from a chronological, spatial and representational perspective

### How did we get it done ?

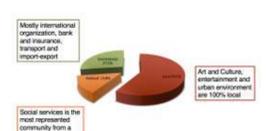
...through document analysis and online research, while descriptive and map analyses have been used to present the results **quantitatively**

### What we found?

#### Online Presence

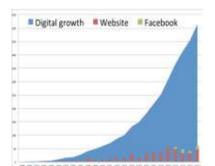


#### Origin



#### Digital history

Constant growth from 2009 to 2013 (2009 important year to the spread of FB accounts)



We need to combine synchronic/diachronic views to get a **comprehensive representation** of how a digital city is produced and how it is evolving

### Synchronic view

### Diachronic view

### Complementary perspectives

### Visible Digital Douala

Douala as an economic and commercial hub; Douala's prestigious areas (costal, richer and connected)

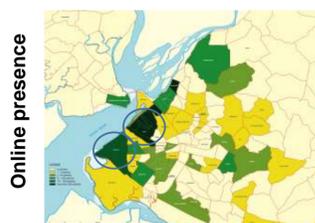
VS

### Invisible Digital Douala

poor, highly populated and spontaneously growth areas; informal economy

#### Online visible spaces

30.5% online neighborhoods  
2 neighborhoods represent 50.3%

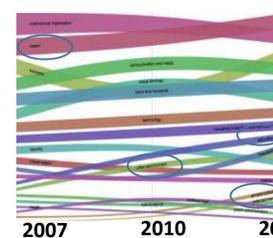
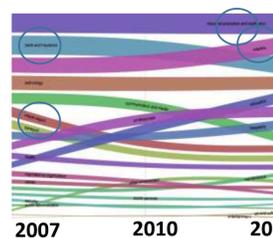


High saturation level of 10 peripheral neighborhoods

The higher the number of formal activities in a given area, the lower is the online saturation rate

#### Online categories of socio-economic activities

47.5% belongs to the **commercial / economic sector**



tendency to go online of the categories linked to **educational, social, cultural and urban activities**

The **online visibility** of the most diffused categories of socio-economic activities with the city of Douala **does not result in higher online saturation**

The categories that show a **significant online growth** in the years 2007, 2010 and 2013 are the ones with **less physical presence in the city**, and whose headquarters are just in Douala, **with few or no branches spread in the city**

The areas where little business activity is formally registered have a greater effort and motivation to communicate their online presence

### Static picture

Parallelism between digital social inclusion / exclusion (Graham 2014, Unwin 2015)

### Changing picture

Social transition of Douala toward becoming an information / knowledge society (Odendaal, 2011, Castells, 1991)