



TRAJECTORY OF "WHITE ELEPHANTS" IN THE DR CONGO FROM 1960 TO 2022

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the phenomenon of failed public investments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the period 1960–2022, known as “white elephants”. 45 large-scale projects, assessed as ineffective or abandoned, are investigated, which generated total costs of over 46 billion USD. The study uses an inductive and comparative approach, across four major political periods, to identify the link between government instability, systemic corruption and the failure of development policies. The results highlight a recurring pattern of decoupling between public investments and the real needs of the population. The conclusions propose a rethinking of governance and a greater accountability of actors involved in the management of public resources.

• Introduction

In recent decades, the concepts of efficiency and accountability in the use of public resources have gained increasing importance in studies of political economy, development and governance. In this context, the phenomenon known as white elephants – expensive public investments that do not bring real benefits to society – has become a symbol of systemic failures in the management of public money. The term refers to grandiose projects, often politically motivated, that end up being abandoned, underutilized or economically and socially useless.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) is a case in point.

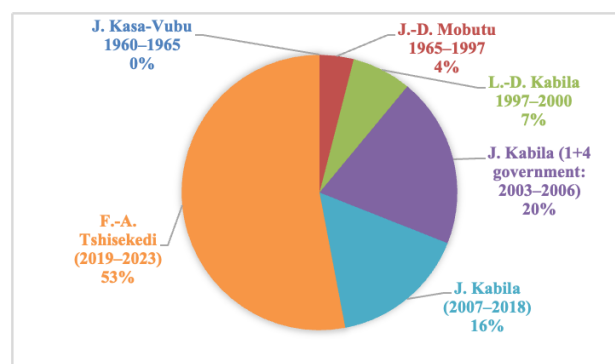
• Material and method

This research is based on an inductive and analytical approach, aiming to identify, document, and evaluate a set of 45 failed public investment projects in DR Congo, known as white elephants. The projects analyzed were initiated between 1960 and 2022 and come from diverse fields such as infrastructure, extractive industry, agriculture, energy or transport.

The analysis was carried out by qualitatively correlating data from various sources, with the aim of identifying a systemic pattern of failure in the planning and execution of public investments in DR Congo.

• Results and discussions

The analysis of the costs of failed public investments reflects an exponential increase in the value of projects classified as “white elephants” in the last two decades. If in the period 1960–1965 no quantifiable investments were recorded in this category, and between 1966 and 2000 the values remained below the threshold of 5 billion USD, starting with 2001 we witness a significant escalation in the financial volume of these projects.



• Conclusions

DR Congo has not lacked money – but vision, integrity and responsibility in managing resources. Behind each abandoned project lies a corrupt decision-making chain, lacking control mechanisms, which favors clientelism and extravagance at the expense of efficiency and equity. This model has generated not only economic underdevelopment, but also profound social injustice, in which marginalized regions have been sacrificed in favor of the political projects of central elites.