

From Mechanical Solidarity to Urban Individualism: A Sociological Analysis of the City of Bukavu

Japan Samba Shindano

M.sc In Socioeconomics And Development Planning Higher Institute Of Rural Development Of Bukavu (Isdr-Bukavu)

Abstract

This study examines the transformation of social bonds in the city of Bukavu by analyzing the shift from mechanical solidarity to urban individualism. The objective is to identify the sociodemographic, economic, and institutional factors that explain the emergence and intensification of individualistic attitudes within a context of rapid urbanization and structural precariousness. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach: a quantitative survey of 150 residents distributed across the communes of Kadutu, Bagira, and Ibanda, as well as 15 semi-structured interviews analyzed through thematic coding. Quantitative analyses (descriptive statistics, regressions, and exploratory factor analysis) reveal that occupation, income, level of education, and marital status are significant predictors of individualism. Perceived insecurity and low institutional trust further reinforce this dynamic. Qualitative data confirm that individualism results from adaptation to economic constraints and the fragmentation of the institutional environment. They also show that traditional forms of solidarity persist but are reconfigured into restricted, flexible, and utilitarian networks. Triangulation highlights a strong coherence between statistical structures and social meanings. Urban individualism in Bukavu thus appears as a functional survival strategy in an unstable environment, revealing a transition toward hybrid forms of sociability.

Keywords: Mechanical solidarity, Urban individualism, Urbanization, Urban sociology.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Bukavu, located on the shores of Lake Kivu in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, has experienced in the past two decades rapid and often unplanned urbanization. According to Mukasa (2018), the urban population of Bukavu tripled between 1990 and 2015, mainly due to internal migration from rural areas and conflict zones. This demographic growth places pressure on urban services, land, and residential space. Economically, Bukavu's economy remains largely dominated by the informal sector.

Mumba & Lumu (2020) show that more than 70% of urban workers operate in informal trade, transportation, crafts, or small-scale services, with limited access to stable formal sector employment. This precariousness pushes individuals to develop independent survival strategies, sometimes at the expense of traditional solidarity networks.

From a social and cultural perspective, the region was historically characterized by strong mechanical solidarity—that is, social ties based on similarity, collective belonging, and family or clan obligations.

Nkulikiyinka (2017) notes that in the peripheral neighborhoods of Bukavu, up to the 2000s, sharing mechanisms (mutual aid, village-based rotating savings schemes, customary obligations) were highly effective. However, Kazadi (2021) observes that urbanization, competitive pressures, and new individualistic values tend to weaken these traditional systems of support.

Following the Durkheimian paradigm, the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity is often manifested in modern urban social bonds (division of labor, differentiation of roles). Bengo (2019) applies this perspective to cities in eastern Congo, arguing that economic differentiation and professional specialization generate stronger individual autonomy. In the context of Bukavu, this differentiation is visible in the rise of services, specialized urban employment, and individualized lifestyles (see Mabika & Mavinga, 2022).

Moreover, institutional instability, weak public infrastructure, land conflicts, and urban insecurity play a major role in reshaping social ties. Kambale (2023) notes that in several neighborhoods of Bukavu, residents invest more in personal networks (family, friends) than in collective trust or local associations, as the latter are often perceived as ineffective or corrupt. This institutional disengagement contributes to individualism.

Finally, cultural transformations and increased access to education, media, and new technologies alter representations of “self” versus “collective.” Kalunga (2022), in a study on urban youth in Bukavu, shows that the 18–35 age group expresses greater personal choice (mobility, marriage, work) and values autonomy. This generation, socialized in an urban and media-saturated context, tends to prioritize forms of individualism while maintaining residual solidarities (close family, mutual support networks). In this context, the central question of this study can be reformulated as follows: Which factors explain the emergence and intensification of attitudes and practices associated with “urban individualism” in the city of Bukavu?

Based on this question, the study formulates the following hypothesis:

The emergence and intensification of attitudes and practices related to “urban individualism” in the city of Bukavu are mainly influenced by sociodemographic and economic factors such as age, sex, level of education, occupation, rapid urbanization, and economic precariousness (income).

Consequently, the overall objective of this study is to identify and analyze the explanatory factors of urban individualism in the city of Bukavu.

The choice to conduct this study is justified by the necessity to understand the profound transformations affecting postcolonial African cities in transition, particularly Bukavu, where rapid urbanization, the growth of the informal economy, and institutional weakness deeply reshape forms of solidarity. While classical approaches describe the transition from mechanical solidarity to individualistic logics in large metropolitan areas, few studies document this phenomenon in intermediate cities of Central Africa, where communal legacies coexist with pressures for autonomy.

This research therefore responds to a dual imperative: on the one hand, to enrich urban sociology by providing a contextualized empirical analysis of hybrid models of sociability emerging in environments marked by precariousness, mobility, and insecurity; and on the other hand, to provide public decision-makers and development actors with evidence to strengthen social cohesion, improve local governance, and promote inclusive urbanization.

Understanding why and how individualism intensifies in Bukavu is thus both a theoretical and a practical concern for anticipating social dynamics that will shape the cities of eastern DRC in coming years.

Apart from the introduction and the conclusion, this article is structured as follows:

- The first section addresses the literature review ;
- The second section discusses the methodological approach ;
- The third section presents and discusses the results.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Mechanical Solidarity

1.1.1. Definition

Durkheim (1893) defines mechanical solidarity as a form of social cohesion that emerges in simple societies where individuals share common beliefs and values. It is based on similarity and homogeneity among members of society. Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), for his part, considers mechanical solidarity to be characteristic of community relationships (*Gemeinschaft*), in which social ties are grounded in traditions and feelings of belonging. Likewise, Tocqueville (1835) refers to mechanical solidarity in the context of homogeneous societies, where individuals are united by shared beliefs and customs, fostering strong social cohesion.

Weber (1922) addresses mechanical solidarity by linking it to forms of traditional domination, where authority is accepted on the basis of custom and tradition, reinforcing social bonds. Bourdieu (1986), in turn, discusses mechanical solidarity in terms of social capital, where relationships based on family and community ties create a form of solidarity among members of a group. Mendras (1970) defines mechanical solidarity as a form of social bond that manifests in rural societies, where interpersonal relationships are marked by proximity and interdependence. Touraine (1978) defines mechanical solidarity as a reaction of groups or individuals who adapt to crises by developing opportunistic behaviors, taking advantage of systemic weaknesses.

Within the framework of this study, we align more closely with Alain Touraine's definition, which is particularly relevant in the following ways:

- It highlights that mechanical solidarity emerges in response to social crises;
- It analyzes how inhabitants come together around shared values and interests to face these challenges, revealing solidarity dynamics that transcend social divisions;
- It identifies mechanisms of exclusion or social parasitism that arise when certain groups appropriate these values for their own benefit in times of crisis, as is the case in the city of Bukavu;
- It suggests the importance of exploring which values unite individuals (such as culture, religion, or economic goals) and how these values generate forms of solidarity, as examined in the context of Bukavu;
- It helps illuminate the fact that in Bukavu, mechanical solidarity may constitute a collective response to external threats (such as the impact of regional conflicts), while also drawing attention to internal threats (such as corruption and inequalities). It enables us to study how communities organize to face these threats, offering insights into social resilience and adaptation strategies. It also reveals how certain individuals or groups may exploit common resources or collective efforts for personal gain.

1.1.2. Measuring Mechanical Solidarity

Mechanical solidarity is a sociological concept describing social cohesion in traditional societies where individuals share similar values, beliefs, and behaviors. This social homogeneity is expressed through the ritualization of cultural practices and the transmission of traditions, reinforcing a sense of belonging

and collective identity. In such societies, conformity to social norms is essential, as it ensures stability and social order.

Moreover, the low division of labor fosters close interpersonal relationships, as members often perform similar roles, contributing to a form of solidarity based on similarity rather than difference. Thus, mechanical solidarity is expressed through a set of mechanisms that unify members of a community in a homogeneous social fabric.

- **Social Homogeneity**

Social homogeneity refers to the predominance of shared sociological characteristics among members of a social group. Individuals within the group exhibit similar economic or cultural features. Durkheim (1893) emphasizes that in traditional societies—characterized by strong social homogeneity, shared beliefs, and a low division of labor—solidarity is primarily founded on similarity. Members of these societies often live in proximate geographical and cultural settings, which strengthens homogeneity.

Social homogeneity is characterized by the relative uniformity of sociological traits within a group (Susan Fiske, 2008). This may manifest through convergence in attitudes, opinions, or tastes, or through the awareness of belonging to the same category (Janine Brémond & Alain Gélédan, 1990, pp. 46–47).

Numerous studies have shown that members of low-status, dominated groups are perceived—and perceive themselves—as more homogeneous than members of high-status, dominant groups (Chappe, Brauer & Castano, 2004; Doosje, Ellemers & Spears, 1995; Chappe & Brauer, 2008). One explanation for this effect of social status is that dominated individuals objectively exhibit less varied behaviors than dominant individuals (Guinote, Judd & Brauer, 2002).

Despite extensive research in Western contexts, judgments of homogeneity in asymmetrical groups have mostly been studied in socially “static” contexts where group status was predefined. However, the social status of a given group is not a stable characteristic.

At the extremes of the social hierarchy, groups (e.g., immigrants, workers, homeless people vs. elites, aristocrats, celebrities) rarely change their dominant/dominated positions. But in the “middle” of the hierarchy, group status is relative: it may evolve over time (e.g., sports teams) or depend on social comparisons (e.g., engineers comparing their salaries alternately to bankers and teachers).

Within this identity-based approach, perceptions of intragroup homogeneity may also be “strategic,” serving to maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). On the one hand, belonging to a dominated group constitutes a threat to social identity (Rothgerber, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and perceiving greater homogeneity within one's group may increase solidarity and improve the group's image (Simon, 1992). However, few studies show stronger ingroup homogenization among dominated individuals compared to outgroups. More commonly, increased perceived homogeneity occurs within both ingroup and outgroup (Chappe & Brauer, 2008). On the other hand, dominant group members perceive their own group as less homogeneous than outgroups in order to justify discrimination toward them and maintain a positive social identity (Wilder, 1986). To preserve identity, dominant-group members may also perceive greater intergroup differentiation. Identifying more differences between ingroup and outgroup may function as a strategy to protect social status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, according to the covariation model, dominant individuals may wish to preserve a positive social identity by distinguishing themselves from ingroup members (Deschamps, 1979, 1991). Thus, perceptions of pronounced intergroup differentiation may coexist with perceptions of greater ingroup variability (Devos, Comby & Deschamps, 1996).

- **Ritualization and Traditions**

The literature on ritualization and traditions helps explain mechanical solidarity by highlighting how ritual practices and customs strengthen social bonds and cohesion within social groups. These rituals, often shared by all group members, foster a sense of belonging and collective identity, thereby contributing to mechanical solidarity, characterized by similar behaviors and values.

In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim emphasizes that in traditional societies, where individuals share common beliefs and practices, social cohesion is maintained primarily through rituals and customs. These cultural elements not only structure social life but also reinforce ties between members of a group.

Ritual practices—observed in religious ceremonies, community festivals, and rites of passage—serve as moments of collective gathering around shared values. According to Benedict Anderson (1983), the construction of collective identity relies on symbols and shared rituals that unite individuals around a common history and culture. This dynamic is especially visible in societies where traditions are transmitted across generations, reinforcing values and behaviors within the group. Consequently, rituals play a fundamental role in building a strong social fabric based on shared experiences. In societies where mechanical solidarity predominates, individuals adopt norms and practices generally dictated by tradition.

- **Conformity to Social Norms**

The literature on conformity to social norms, particularly Durkheim's work, provides a deeper understanding of mechanical solidarity, which manifests in societies where individuals share similar values, beliefs, and behaviors.

In societies characterized by mechanical solidarity, social pressure to conform to established norms is strong, and deviations from these norms may be severely sanctioned. This reinforces social bonds, as individuals feel responsible for one another and share a collective identity.

Contemporary research, such as Putnam (2000), shows that declining solidarity in modern societies can be attributed to increasing individualization and community fragmentation. As societies become more diverse and complex, mechanical solidarity may give way to organic solidarity, where interdependence and differentiated roles shape cohesion. Empirical studies, such as Coleman (1988) on social capital, also stress the importance of norms and trust in strengthening community ties. These norms function as social cement, facilitating cooperation and cohesion. Thus, conformity to social norms is essential for maintaining social order and collective well-being. In sum, mechanical solidarity, as described by Durkheim (1893), is a key concept for understanding how norms influence interpersonal relations and collective belonging in traditional societies. Modern research continues to explore this dynamic, highlighting the challenges contemporary societies face in the context of growing individualism. In this chapter, Moussa Konaté adds that “Economic and social changes tend to weaken community ties in favor of increasing individualism” (Moussa, 2010, p. 45). References to existing literature enrich this analysis by offering varied perspectives on how norms shape interactions and collective identity.

- **Low Division of Labor**

Mechanical solidarity, central to Durkheim's sociology, manifests in societies where the division of labor is relatively low. In such contexts, individuals engage in similar activities, fostering shared experiences.

This phenomenon is especially visible in traditional societies where lifestyles are largely homogeneous. Members share beliefs, values, and norms that reinforce their sense of belonging.

For example, in small agricultural communities, inhabitants often share similar practices and rituals related to cultivation and harvest, contributing to strong social cohesion (Durkheim, 1893). Durkheim argues that this collective conscience is essential for maintaining social order, as it regulates individual behavior and ensures stability (Durkheim, 1912). Mechanical solidarity thus plays a crucial role in preserving traditions and cultural values by maintaining continuity over time. In modern societies, where individuals occupy diverse and interdependent roles, cohesion relies less on similarity and more on complementary functions.

For Moussa Konaté, “Solidarity has historically played a role in traditional African societies, but today it is often weakened by social, economic, and political changes” (Moussa, 2010, p. 55). As societies evolve toward greater complexity and a more pronounced division of labor, mechanical solidarity tends to be replaced by what Durkheim calls organic solidarity. The division of labor manifests through professional specialization, diversification of social roles, expansion of specialized services, and interdependence.

Durkheim (1893) emphasizes that this transition is necessary for the functioning of complex societies, where diverse skills and functions are essential for stability.

Although modern societies evolve toward more complex forms of solidarity, principles of mechanical solidarity continue to influence some communities, illustrating the diversity of social dynamics today. On this point, Tönnies distinguishes between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*): community refers to social relationships based on natural ties, friendship, or ethnicity, often marked by emotional closeness and strong cohesion; society refers to more formal and rational relationships based on individual interests and economic objectives, generally less personal and more transactional. However, Tönnies stresses that these two types of relationships coexist in modern society, though industrial society tends to favor *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887).

1.2 Urban Individualism

1.2.1. Definition

According to Wirth (1938), urban individualism is characterized by the specific lifestyle of city dwellers, where population density, social heterogeneity, and mobility foster behaviors centered on individual autonomy rather than traditional forms of solidarity. For Simmel (1903), urban individualism results from the experience of the metropolis, which imposes constant adaptation to social and economic stimuli, leading to a retreat from affective ties and a rationalization of interactions. Durkheim (1893), in a complementary perspective, identifies individualism as a process linked to the social division of labor in modern societies, where individuals progressively detach themselves from mechanical solidarities in favor of relative autonomy, while remaining integrated within forms of organic solidarity. According to Wacquant (2008), urban individualism manifests through social competition and the isolation of actors in contemporary urban spaces, particularly in contexts of marginalization and socio-spatial segregation. Castells (1996), for his part, emphasizes that urbanization and economic globalization amplify the centrality of the individual within social networks and urban dynamics, reinforcing the primacy of personal choices over collective norms.

Finally, Putnam (2000) analyzes urban individualism as a progressive weakening of civic and community ties, highlighting the reduction of trust-based interactions in dense urban environments.

In the context of this study on mechanical solidarity and urban individualism, we adopt Durkheim’s (1893) perspective in particular, insofar as his definition makes it possible to grasp the transition from

traditional solidarities to forms of individual autonomy while maintaining an analytical framework relevant for understanding the evolution of social ties. Indeed, his approach provides a robust analytical lens to assess how urban transformations affect both collective cohesion and the emergence of individualistic behaviors, which lies at the heart of our research problem.

1.2.2. Measuring Urban Individualism

Urban individualism is measured through a set of complementary indicators reflecting citizens' behaviors, relational practices, and social perceptions. Research generally mobilizes variables such as personal autonomy, emotional distancing, relational anonymity, withdrawal, or civic participation—often used to assess social capital. These dimensions are supplemented with data on sociability, mobility, and digital connectivity, which shed light on the ways urban identities are constructed through networks. Thus, measuring urban individualism relies on a multidimensional approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative analyses to capture the complexity of contemporary urban lifestyles.

1. Personal Autonomy and Emotional Distancing

Georg Simmel established the theoretical foundations by showing that the metropolis generates an intensification of sensory stimulations and a “reserved attitude” as a protective mechanism: the urban individual develops forms of emotional withdrawal and rational control of interactions to manage the overload of stimuli and information (Simmel, 1903). This intuition remains relevant today in interpreting how city dwellers regulate proxemics and intimacy in highly dense environments, as the attentional filtering mechanisms identified by Simmel are echoed in contemporary research on the management of public space and urban mental health.

Richard Sennett further refines this argument by emphasizing how modern urban culture values the protection of privacy and the right to be “left alone” in public: withdrawal becomes a strategy to preserve personal integrity in the face of social performance demands and permanent visibility (Sennett, 1977). Recent studies reinterpret Sennett in light of digital transformations and show that emotional distancing can be amplified—or paradoxically put into tension—by digital platforms, which simultaneously connect and fragment urban social experiences.

2. Anonymity, Impersonality, and the Segmentation of Interactions

Louis Wirth (1938) formulated the classical thesis that urban size, density, and heterogeneity foster superficial and functional social relations: anonymity and impersonality become structural characteristics of urban life. This analytical lens continues to inform contemporary studies examining how diversity and density shape trust, local cooperation, and the proliferation of ephemeral interactions. Recent empirical tests, however, nuance the hypothesis of generalized urban malaise: for example, Okulicz-Kozaryn (2018) shows that urbanity is sometimes correlated with lower levels of happiness, but that these effects are mediated by contextual variables (inequalities, safety, infrastructure). In other words, urban anonymity does not mechanically lead to weakened social ties; instead, it reshapes them depending on local conditions. These contemporary studies encourage moving beyond a monolithic vision of urban anonymity and analyzing it as a spectrum of experiences shaped by urban policies and socio-economic contexts.

3. Withdrawal and Isolation (Protection of Privacy)

The literature on “withdrawal” combines psychological explanations (adaptive strategies) and sociological ones (decline in opportunities for public sociability). Sennett (1977) highlights

transformations in the use of public space and the erosion of sociability practices, while contemporary studies on urban loneliness and solo living (Klinenberg, 2012) complement this picture by demonstrating that living alone does not necessarily equate to social isolation but increases the prevalence of autonomous and self-directed relational experiences.

Consequently, urban withdrawal must be understood as a complex phenomenon: it can be both an adaptive response (individual protection) and an indicator of institutional fragility (decline in meeting places, inadequate services). Recent studies examining mental health effects show that urban design and the creation of “third places” (cafés, associations, cultural spaces) can mitigate negative impacts, pointing toward the need for proactive urban interventions.

4. Decline of Social Capital and Civic Disengagement

Robert Putnam (2000) popularized the idea of declining social capital—manifested through reduced association membership, lower trust, and civic fragmentation—which strengthens individual orientation at the expense of collective engagement. His thesis has inspired extensive research on the correlates of this erosion (electoral participation, volunteering, interpersonal trust) and on converging factors (mobility, media, professional changes) that explain civic disengagement in modern contexts.

More recent studies confirm Putnam’s relevance while adding nuance: empirical research shows that the form of social capital is changing (more loose networks, fewer formal associations) and that technology and urban migration reconfigure trust networks. The issue, therefore, is no longer simply “less sociability” but “what kind of sociability?” Contemporary networks may fulfill some functions of social capital while failing to produce others (local solidarity, collective action).

5. Networked Individualism and Instrumental Connections

Manuel Castells (1996) introduced the notion of networked individualism: individuals’ identities and actions are increasingly mediated by informational networks that enable selective and mobile connections based on interests and flows rather than stable territorial belonging. This perspective clarifies the transformation of urban belonging—which becomes translocal and oriented toward projects or niche interests.

Barry Wellman and Lee Rainie (2012) extend this analysis empirically: networked individualism describes relational systems in which individuals maintain large, multi-platform, multi-level personal networks, reshaping sociability routines (mobility of ties, greater diversity of contacts). Recent studies question the impact of these networks on local solidarity: while they increase access to information and distant support, they do not necessarily ensure the territorial cohesion required for local collective action.

6. Mobility, Self-Reference, and Flexible Identities

Mobility—geographical, social, and professional—is frequently associated with modern urban individualism. Urban citizens increasingly define themselves through personal trajectories, lifestyle choices, and professional networks rather than through inherited community bonds; this logic of self-reference intensifies identity flexibility and the primacy of autonomy. Contemporary work (Klinenberg, 2012) shows how the rise of single-person households and residential mobility reshapes urban sociability and expectations of autonomy.

Recent urban studies also examine how mobility interacts with inequalities: the capacity to benefit from “chosen” individualism often depends on resources (time, money, safety) and urban infrastructure. Thus, mobile individualism is experienced differently depending on social position and local institutional structures, inviting a combination of micro-interactionist and structural analyses.

vii. Digitalization, Datafication, and Contemporary Transformations

Recent studies highlight the importance of digitalization and the datafication of urban practices: today's cities are shaped by platforms, sensors, and devices that transform interaction modalities, visibility, and population governance. Research from 2023–2024 shows that datafication can reinforce forms of individualism by making interactions more instrumental and measurable, while also enabling new “bottom-up” solidarities through participatory data practices. These studies call for reflection on trade-offs between individual efficiency, privacy, and urban commons.

1.3 From Mechanical Solidarity to Urban Individualism

Since Émile Durkheim, classical sociology has drawn a fundamental distinction between two models of social cohesion: mechanical solidarity, characteristic of traditional societies, and organic solidarity, typical of modern societies marked by the division of labor. In his work *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), Durkheim describes mechanical solidarity as resting on the similarity of individuals—beliefs, values, ways of life—which generates a strong collective conscience, little functional differentiation, and a social bond stabilized by homogeneity.

However, in contemporary urban societies, a phenomenon emerges that appears to counter this form of cohesion: growing individualism. Sociologist Robert Putnam (2000), in *Bowling Alone*, argues that social capital—networks, norms of reciprocity, and mutual trust—has significantly eroded in the United States. Putnam shows that traditional forms of civic engagement (bowling leagues, neighborhood associations, clubs) are declining and that more and more individuals engage in solitary leisure activities, symbolizing individual withdrawal. He links this trend to factors such as suburbanization, demographic shifts, and especially the rise of “individualizing” technologies (television, Internet), which reduce face-to-face interactions and weaken social capital.

Putnam's analysis can be read as a modern manifestation of the transition from mechanical solidarity to a more atomized form of social bond: while Durkheim described solidarity based on resemblance, Putnam observes that contemporary urban individuals are increasingly connected, but in a deterritorialized manner—no longer primarily through homogeneous local groups, but through wide and fluid personal networks. This dynamic is precisely captured by Barry Wellman's theory of networked individualism. As early as 2001, Wellman and his collaborators showed that the Internet (and more broadly, communication technologies) foster a more individualized form of sociability: people compose their own personal networks, connected not mainly by local groups but through loose, multi-sited, reconfigurable ties.

This shift—from proximity-based sociability to networked individualism—implies a transformation of social capital: interactions do not necessarily disappear but change in nature. According to Wellman (2003), traditional local communities lose influence in favor of more flexible personal networks, which may be less solidaristic in classical terms.

Several recent authors have examined the urban implications of this tension between mechanical solidarity and individualism. For example, Kovács, Juhász and Lengyel (2021) studied the micro-geography of social capital in cities: their results show that the social networks of residents of lower-income neighborhoods remain more spatially concentrated—in other words, despite networked individualism, some urban groups continue to build strong localized sociability, revealing a tension between proximity (mechanical solidarity) and outward-looking ties (individualism). Moreover, Bokányi, Juhász and Karsai (2021) demonstrate that commuting patterns can play a universal role in diversifying urban social networks, as daily movements foster contact with people from different

backgrounds, attenuating the compartmentalization of networks.

Additional analytical work, such as that of Fan, Su, Sun, Noyman, Pentland and Moro (2022), highlights how social mix in urban streets does not depend solely on population density: the diversity of exchanges among social groups in urban space can be fostered by local amenities (commercial density, varied uses), contributing to a form of cohesion that transcends Durkheim's mechanical solidarity.

Theoretically, one may also draw on the reflections of sociologists such as François de Singy (2024), who analyzes individualism not simply as isolation but as an identity bifurcation: the modern individual constructs a reflexive "personal self" and a "social self" composed of social roles, while maintaining meaningful relationships through "significant others" (friends, family)—a nuance that challenges the idea of a complete disappearance of solidarity.

At the conceptual level, contemporary sociology underscores that mechanical solidarity has not entirely disappeared in modern urban societies: although weakened, it may persist in the form of community groupings, niche sociabilities, or identity-based ties, especially in the face of growing individualization. This point is echoed in contemporary analyses of social cohesion, which reaffirm the relevance of the Durkheimian model for thinking about social capital today.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to capture both the measurable dimensions and the lived meanings of the transformation of social ties in Bukavu. This choice aligns with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2018) logic, according to which combining the two approaches strengthens internal validity through methodological triangulation. The quantitative dimension relies on an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) aimed at identifying the latent dimensions of mechanical solidarity and urban individualism, while the qualitative dimension, centered on semi-structured interviews, seeks to deepen the understanding of representations, practices, and underlying social rationalities.

This is therefore a descriptive and explanatory study conducted within an urban sociological framework, with the city of Bukavu—the capital of South Kivu Province—as its field of investigation. Three communes were selected for comparative purposes: Kadutu, Bagira, and Ibanda. This choice is based on their socio-economic and spatial diversity: Kadutu is characterized by high density and a vibrant informal commercial sector; Bagira by its residential and artisanal vocation; and Ibanda by its concentration of public administration and modern services. These structural differences allow us to observe the coexistence of traditional forms of solidarity and emerging individualistic logics, in line with the findings of Bengo (2019) and Kalunga (2022) on urban stratification in South Kivu.

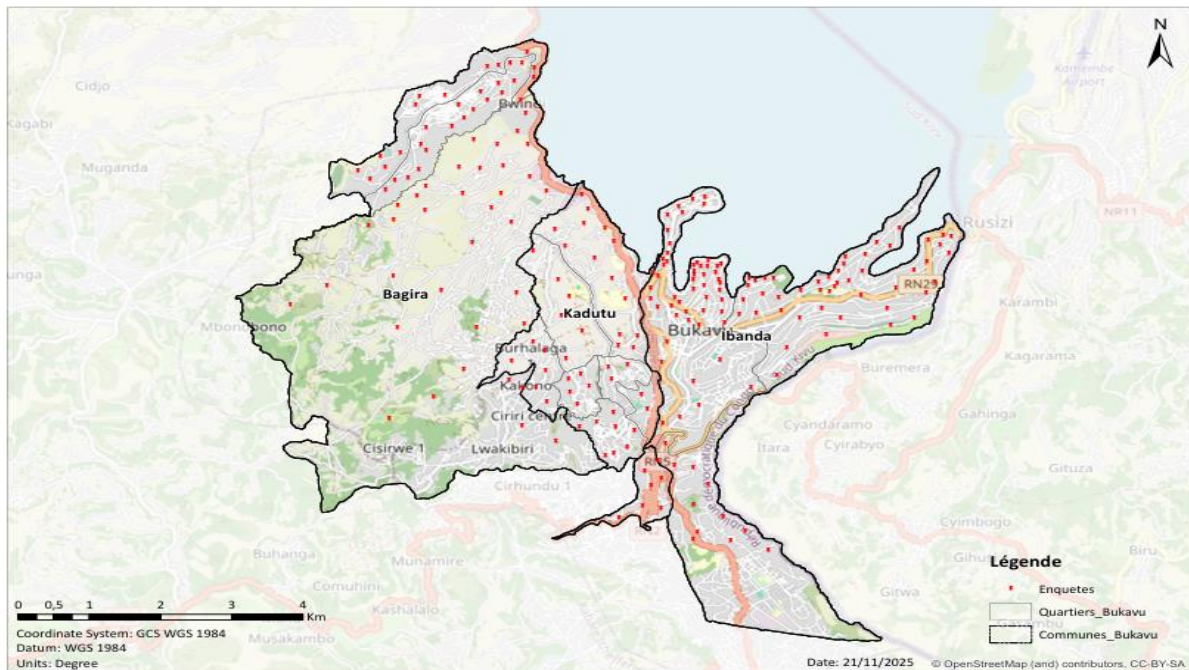


Figure 1: Map of the City of Bukavu and Geolocation of Respondents by Commune

The target population of the study consists of adult residents (aged 18 and above) living permanently in the city of Bukavu. The sampling frame was constructed from data drawn from communal registers and neighborhood lists, supplemented by field observations and rapid household enumerations.

Because these administrative sources were incomplete or unevenly updated, the sample was built using a two-stage stratified sampling procedure: first, stratification by commune (Kadutu, Bagira, Ibanda), followed by simple random selection of households within each selected neighborhood.

The sample size was set at 150 individuals, taking into account the number of items in the questionnaire and the minimum statistical requirements for an exploratory factor analysis. Indeed, according to methodological recommendations by Gorsuch (1983), MacCallum et al. (1999), and Fabrigar and Wegener (2012), between 5 and 10 observations per item are required to ensure adequate factorability of the data.

The questionnaire included 15 main items; with a sample of 150 respondents, this provides a sufficient basis to extract and interpret stable factors while remaining realistic given field constraints.

The geographical distribution of the sample was proportional to commune size: 60 respondents for Kadutu (high density), 50 for Bagira, and 40 for Ibanda, in order to ensure representativeness of the different urban contexts.

To this end, the survey questionnaire comprised four main sections: (i) sociodemographic characteristics; (ii) practices and values associated with mechanical solidarity (family support, neighborhood relations, customary recourse); (iii) attitudes and individualistic behaviors (autonomy, personal choices, relational distance); and (iv) perception of the institutional and security context.

Items were formulated as statements evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The objective was to measure the degree of agreement or disagreement on various aspects of collective and individual life. The semi-structured interview guide was constructed around six thematic axes: (a) residential trajectory and urban integration, (b) forms of mutual aid and social resources, (c) perception of changes in solidarity, (d) autonomy and individualism, (e) the role of local governance, and (f) perspectives on social cohesion.

The interviews, lasting on average 45 to 60 minutes, were conducted with 15 participants selected purposively (4 members of the village community from Madaka in the territory of Walungu; 2 leaders of a mutual-aid association from Kalehe in the Mbinga Nord and Buzi groupings; 5 individuals belonging to MUTECA Alfa; and 4 students from ISP Bukavu belonging to a mutual-aid group) according to the logic of theoretical—or semantic—saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Quantitative data were collected by trained enumerators proficient in French and Swahili under scientific supervision. Each questionnaire was administered face-to-face to ensure respondents' understanding of the items.

Qualitative data were audio-recorded (with prior consent) and then fully transcribed before coding. The entire process adhered to ethical principles in sociological research: anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and the participants' right to withdraw (as in Babbie, 2020).

Quantitative analysis followed several steps. First, consistency and completeness checks were performed on the questionnaires. The data were then entered and processed using SPSS software (version 20).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) identified the latent structures among items, using the principal axis factoring method with oblique (Varimax) rotation. Validity conditions (Bartlett's test < 0.000; KMO index > 0.6) were verified. Cronbach's α coefficients were used to estimate the internal reliability of the identified dimensions. Descriptive analyses (frequencies, means) and explanatory analyses (multiple regressions) were then applied to test the formulated hypotheses.

For qualitative data, analysis employed an inductive thematic approach inspired by Miles and Huberman (2014). Interview transcripts were coded, grouped into categories, and interpreted in light of the quantitative results in order to enrich the understanding of the transition from mechanical solidarity to urban individualism. Triangulation between the two methodological strands strengthened the external validity of the study and better linked empirical findings to Durkheimian theoretical frameworks.

3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of results concerning mechanical solidarity and urban individualism in the city of Bukavu sheds light on the social dynamics shaping a rapidly transforming urban space. In a context marked simultaneously by a strong community heritage and by the expansion of individualized practices linked to demographic growth, daily mobility, and socio-economic recomposition, the findings highlight forms of coexistence—sometimes tense—between traditional cohesion logics and new individual aspirations. The discussion that follows aims to interpret these trends by showing how mechanisms of proximity, trust, and mutual aid coexist with behaviors of withdrawal, increased autonomy, and social segmentation, revealing a hybrid urbanity in which relationships between collective belonging and personal trajectories are continually redefined.

3.1 RESULTS FROM THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The thematic analyses from NVivo coding reveal that respondents' urban experiences are organized around four major semantic cores: residential trajectory, transformation of solidarity ties, emergence of individualistic logics, and perception of the institutional context.

First, residential trajectories indicate settlement patterns driven by the search for economic and educational opportunities, but also characterized by a progressive rupture with village solidarities. Respondents from Madaka evoke a “gradual loss of communal living” as urban anonymity, residential mobility, and economic pressure intensify. Leaders of the mutual-aid associations of Mbinga Nord and Buzi note a shift in mutual-aid practices, moving from customary lineage-based systems to more

functional and selective forms structured around immediate needs.

Among members of MUTECA Alfa, urban solidarity is expressed more through affinity-based, professional, or opportunistic networks than through adherence to a territorial community. Younger respondents, notably students at ISP Bukavu, describe a “competitive and fluid” environment in which ties are woven more around academic interests or personal projects than around community belonging.

The data also show that situations of vulnerability constitute a central marker of the transformation of mutual-aid practices. Respondents report that family support remains mobilized in critical moments but is less systematic than in the village. Several interviewees say they refrain from asking relatives for help to preserve their dignity or avoid judgment, while others emphasize that scarcity of resources in urban settings limits solidarity capacities.

Leaders of traditional mutual-aid groups observe that young people “now prefer flexible networks,” such as WhatsApp contribution groups, modern tontines, and student associations, perceived as faster and less restrictive than customary forms. This semantic shift reflects a reconfiguration of urban social capital: mutual aid becomes contractualized, specialized, and reorganized around chosen rather than inherited micro-networks.

The analysis highlights a clearly assumed rise of individual autonomy. For most respondents, individualism is perceived not as a rejection of solidarity but as a condition for survival in an unstable environment. Students value independence in their choices of studies, housing, or activities, even if this weakens neighborhood ties. MUTECA Alfa members associate autonomy with the ability to secure one’s livelihood without systematically depending on others, making resourcefulness a marker of success.

Respondents from Walungu evoke a tension between cultural expectations of mutual aid and urban economic imperatives, emphasizing that “the individual must fend for himself” amid growing precariousness. This recurrent semantic field—autonomy, independence, personal choices, self-reliance—illustrates a normative transition in which the individual becomes the central unit of social reference.

Finally, perceptions of local institutions constitute a transversal factor explaining weakened solidarities and heightened individualism. Most participants express skepticism regarding the capacity of urban authorities to address issues related to security, sanitation, or community governance. Insecurity is described as a powerful factor of withdrawal, accentuating relational caution and eroding social trust.

Rapid urbanization, densification, and land precariousness are interpreted as elements that disrupt social cohesion, especially in neighborhoods with high residential mobility. Respondents indicate that the absence of a reliable institutional framework pushes residents toward individual strategies or opportunistic alliances rather than more stable collective forms.

Overall, thematic coding reveals a dual movement: on one side, the persistence of residual solidarities—mainly family-based—and on the other, the rise of individualistic logics shaped by economic instability, urban constraints, and institutional uncertainty. This oscillation between community heritage and individual rationality constitutes the core matrix of the urban experience of the 15 respondents, illustrating a social transition in which mechanical solidarity recomposes itself into hybrid forms adapted to the demands of contemporary urban life.

3.2 SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE SURVEY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CITY OF BUKAVU

The city of Bukavu, located in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, is a microcosm where diverse

socio-economic and cultural dynamics intersect. In this context, examining the sociodemographic profiles of respondents is crucial to understanding the mechanisms of mechanical solidarity and urban individualism. Although often perceived as opposites, these two concepts interact in complex ways within contemporary urban environments, particularly in rapidly changing societies such as Bukavu.

The analysis of respondents' sociodemographic profiles reveals a diversity that shapes attitudes and behaviors. Variables such as age, gender, marital status, education level, occupation, and income are key indicators that help elucidate how individuals position themselves regarding values of solidarity and individualism. For instance, the younger population, often more inclined toward individualistic behaviors, contrasts with older generations who may maintain stronger community ties characteristic of mechanical solidarity as defined by Émile Durkheim.

Education and occupation also play a decisive role in shaping individual attitudes. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to value autonomy and personal initiative, thereby reinforcing individualistic behaviors in an environment where economic pressure is high. In Bukavu, where the informal economy predominates, self-employed workers and entrepreneurs must navigate a competitive landscape, which pushes them to develop individual strategies for success. This phenomenon may weaken community solidarity, as individuals focus more on their own interests and achievements.

The coexistence of mechanical solidarity and urban individualism in Bukavu raises important questions about social cohesion. While mechanical solidarity is rooted in ties based on similarities and shared values, individualism can lead to the fragmentation of social relations. This dynamic is exacerbated by socio-economic challenges faced by the city—poverty, unemployment, insecurity—which encourage individuals to withdraw into themselves for survival.

Thus, examining the sociodemographic profiles of respondents in Bukavu provides valuable insights into the tensions between mechanical solidarity and urban individualism. Understanding how these factors interact can inform the development of policies and initiatives that promote greater social cohesion while respecting individual aspirations.

Table 1: Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents in the City of Bukavu

Libellés		N=150	100%	Means (Ecart-type)
Age	18-25 ans	23	15.3	44,78 (8,114)
	26-35 ans	26	17.3	
	36-45 ans	34	22.7	
	45 ans et plus	67	44.7	
Sexe	Féminin	56	37.3	
	Masculin	94	62.7	
Etat civil	Célibataire	34	22.7	
	Marié	100	66.7	
	Divorcé	12	8	
	Veuf (ve)	4	2.6	
Niveau d'Éducation	Primaire	34	22.6	
	Secondaire	67	44.7	
	Supérieur	49	32.7	
Profession	Employé	43	28.7	
	Étudiant	15	10	

	Indépendant	92	61.3	
Revenu Mensuel	Moins de 100 USD	27	18	
	100-300 USD	23	15.3	300.93
	301-500 USD	56	37.3	(61.00)
	Plus de 500 USD	44	29.3	

Source: Our compilations based on the survey data

The demographic distribution of respondents in the city of Bukavu reveals a relatively older population, with 44.7% of individuals aged 45 and above, while young people aged 18 to 25 account for only 15.3%. Academic literature highlights that age can influence both collective and individualistic values. Indeed, studies show that younger generations tend to favor greater autonomy and an urban lifestyle, although this pattern may vary depending on the socioeconomic context (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). In the specific context of Bukavu, local surveys indicate an intergenerational shift in values, with a stronger claim for autonomy among young adults aged 18 to 35 (Kambale, 2020). The mean age of participants is 44.78 years (standard deviation of 8.114), underscoring the predominance of older generations in the studied population.

The gender distribution is predominantly male, with 62.7% of respondents being men. This dominance may reflect access biases or recruitment effects in the field (Mugisha, 2018). Regarding the dynamics of solidarity versus individualism, some African studies highlight gendered variations: women tend to rely more on solidarity networks such as savings groups and community mutual aid, while men often prioritize individual economic strategies (Chant, 2013). However, these behaviors vary depending on the sector of activity and the socioeconomic context.

A majority of participants are married, representing 66.7% of the sample. This high proportion suggests that family obligations remain important, acting as a protective factor for mechanical solidarity, which is often based on clan and familial commitments (Bourdieu, 1980). Research on traditional solidarities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shows that marital status frequently strengthens mutual commitments within the family (Mokolo, 2019).

The level of education is mainly secondary, with 44.7% of participants, followed by those with higher education, who represent 32.7%. Nearly one-third of the population has attained a higher education level. Literature on schooling and urbanization indicates that education often promotes autonomy-oriented attitudes and individualistic values, particularly regarding personal choices and social mobility (Becker, 1993). However, the impact of education strongly depends on the content of school curricula and the professional integration of graduates.

The results show that the majority of participants (61.3%) work in the informal sector or are self-employed, which aligns with the literature on Bukavu, where informality predominates (Kanyamuhanga, 2021). This phenomenon of informality can foster both solidarity through professional mutual aid networks and individual survival strategies. The reported average monthly income is USD 300.93 (standard deviation of USD 61.00), with 37.3% of participants falling within the USD 301–500 range. This distribution indicates that a substantial portion of the population lives below the USD 300 threshold. Low incomes, economic insecurity, and land competition contribute to the maintenance of mutual aid networks to cushion shocks, while paradoxically promoting individualistic behaviors characterized by personal survival strategies (Sarrasin, 2022). Studies in eastern DRC reveal that insecurity and precarity lead households to favor closed family networks rather than collective mobilization (Mavambu, 2020).

3.3 EXPLANATORY FACTORS OF URBAN INDIVIDUALISM IN THE CITY OF BUKAVU
3.3.1. EXPLANATORY FACTORS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF URBAN INDIVIDUALISTIC ATTITUDES IN BUKAVU

The emergence of individualistic attitudes in the urban context of Bukavu is influenced by a multitude of demographic factors that shape individuals’ behaviors and values. Among these factors, age plays a predominant role, with young adults often more inclined to adopt individualistic behaviors due to their quest for autonomy and independence.

This phenomenon can be attributed to a changing socioeconomic environment, where competitive pressures and economic uncertainties push individuals to focus on their own interests. Furthermore, the level of education, which is often correlated with greater personal initiative, also fosters individualism. Educated individuals tend to value self-assertion and innovation, prompting them to develop personal strategies to navigate a competitive labor market.

Moreover, other demographic characteristics, such as marital status and occupation, also contribute to this dynamic. Single individuals or those without children may feel fewer social constraints, allowing them to adopt more individualistic attitudes. Likewise, self-employed workers and those engaged in the informal economy, who dominate Bukavu, are often driven by the need to distinguish themselves and succeed through their own efforts. This combination of demographic factors creates fertile ground for urban individualism, thereby transforming social relationships and traditional community structures.

In this context, it is essential to understand how these attitudes emerge and evolve, as they have profound implications for social solidarity and community cohesion in the city of Bukavu. The table below presents the reality of Bukavu based on the investigations conducted:

Table 2: Explanatory factors for the emergence of urban individualistic attitudes in the city of Bukavu

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Age	0.074860	0.070618	1.060067	0.2900
Sexe	0.017317	0.452061	1.435600	0.3522
Etat civil	0.030072	0.048125	0.622733	0.0039
Profession	0.060994	0.101390	0.993551	0.0013
Niveau d’étude	0.017317	0.012243	1.441753	0.8600
Revenu	0.260994	0.253390	0.145751	0.0203
C	2.535357	0.243450	10.82502	0.0000
R-squared	0.612689	Meandependent var	3.714407	
Adjusted R-squared	0.502511	S.D. dependent var	0.538064	
S.E. of regression	0.537388	Akaike info criterion	1.609273	
Sumquaredresid	84.03665	Schwarz criterion	1.659266	
Log likelihood	-233.3678	F-statistic	1.246682	
Durbin-Watson stat	1.683400	Prob (F-statistic	0.293020	

Source: Our compilations based on the survey data

The model explains 61.2% of the variance in individualistic attitudes, indicating a good fit. However, a significant portion of the variance remains unexplained, suggesting that other factors could influence these attitudes. Age is not statistically significant. Although a one-year increase is associated with a slight rise in individualistic attitudes, this effect is not robust. The literature presents mixed findings on the impact of age on individualism. For instance, Inglehart (1997) suggests that young people may adopt

more individualistic attitudes, whereas studies such as Buchanan et al. (2020) indicate that older individuals can develop individualistic behaviors due to economic precariousness.

Gender does not show a significant effect on the emergence of individualistic attitudes. Nevertheless, studies like Bennett et al. (2017) highlight that gender differences can influence mutual aid practices, suggesting that subtle variations in helping behaviors may exist according to gender, even if these are not reflected in measured individualism.

Marital status is significantly positive. This may seem paradoxical, as marriage is often associated with greater solidarity. However, research such as Wilcox and Nock (2006) suggests that married individuals may develop autonomous strategies to protect their household, which could explain this trend toward increased individualism.

Self-employed and informal workers exhibit a significant increase in individualistic attitudes. This is consistent with the literature, notably De Soto (2000), who argues that participation in the informal economy enhances entrepreneurial autonomy but may also reduce collective trust, particularly in highly competitive contexts. Education level has a significant effect on individualism. Studies such as Dohmen et al. (2018) show that education is often associated with more autonomous values, reinforcing the idea that higher education levels encourage individualistic behaviors. Income also has a substantial effect on individualism. An increase in financial resources is often correlated with greater autonomy and individual choice, as highlighted by Frank (2005) in his work on economic individualism.

The econometric analysis reveals significant dynamics regarding individualism within the population of Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. In a socio-economic context marked by challenges such as poverty and unemployment, the lack of statistical significance of age in the emergence of individualistic attitudes suggests that both young and older individuals face similar challenges in a precarious environment. This convergence of attitudes could promote intergenerational initiatives, thereby strengthening community solidarity. Indeed, when generations share common experiences of precariousness, they may be more inclined to collaborate to overcome socio-economic obstacles.

Furthermore, the gender analysis indicates that, although no significant distinction was observed in terms of individualism, this should not obscure more subtle gender dynamics. In Bukavu, helping practices can vary by gender, making it essential for development programs to consider these specificities. By integrating a gender perspective, policies can better address the distinct needs and roles of men and women, thereby promoting more effective community mutual aid.

Additionally, the tendency of married individuals toward more individualistic attitudes can be interpreted as a strategy to protect the household in the face of economic uncertainty. This raises questions about the perception of marriage in a context of precarity, highlighting the importance of policies that support families while strengthening economic autonomy, such as vocational training programs targeted at couples.

Moreover, the rise of individualistic attitudes among self-employed and informal workers underscores the importance of the informal economy in Bukavu. In a challenging labor market, individuals tend to adopt autonomous strategies to navigate precarious conditions. Consequently, it is crucial to support this informal economy through training and financing programs while strengthening networks of trust and cooperation essential for community resilience.

Education, as a significant factor in individualism, indicates that educated individuals in Bukavu are more likely to adopt autonomous values. This trend may be attributed to increased exposure to modern ideas and economic opportunities. Therefore, investing in education appears to be an effective strategy

to promote autonomy values while maintaining a balance with community solidarity. Finally, the significant impact of income on individualism highlights the link between financial resources and individual choices. In a context where many residents live in poverty, this dynamic may exacerbate individualistic behaviors. Thus, policymakers should implement strategies to improve citizens' living standards, such as social assistance or microcredit programs, to reduce tensions between individualism and solidarity.

3.3.2. EXPLANATORY FACTORS FOR THE INTENSIFICATION OF URBAN INDIVIDUALISTIC ATTITUDES IN THE CITY OF BUKAVU

The intensification of individualistic attitudes in Bukavu results from a complex interaction of socio-economic and demographic factors shaping individual behaviors. In a rapidly changing urban context, marked by economic challenges and social transformations, individualism emerges as an adaptive response to uncertainty and growing competition.

Young adults, often more exposed to these changes, develop individualistic attitudes in pursuit of autonomy and personal success. This phenomenon is reinforced by increasing education levels, which promote critical thinking and individual initiative, encouraging individuals to prioritize their own interests in an environment where opportunities are often limited.

Moreover, demographic characteristics such as marital status and occupation play a crucial role in this dynamic. Single individuals or those without children may feel fewer social constraints, allowing them to adopt more autonomous behaviors. Similarly, self-employed workers and those engaged in the informal economy in Bukavu, facing competitive pressures, must develop individual strategies to navigate an uncertain labor market. This combination of factors contributes to the intensification of urban individualism, transforming social relationships and redefining norms of solidarity within the community. In this context, it is essential to explore these explanatory factors to better understand the implications of individualism on social cohesion and community dynamics in Bukavu.

Table 3: Explanatory factors for the intensification of urban individualistic attitudes in the city of Bukavu

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
Age	0.044833	0.030622	1.060067	0.0090
Sexe	0.027366	0.252061	1.435600	0.0422
Etat civil	0.030072	0.028125	0.622733	0.0039
Profession	0.060994	0.101243	0.993551	0.0013
Niveau d'étude	0.023315	0.012233	1.441753	0.0000
Revenu	0.017317	0.253332	0.145751	0.0203
C	2.535357	0.243450	10.82502	0.0000
R-squared	0.532623	Meandependent var	2.714357	
Adjusted R-squared	0.562511	S.D. dependent var	1.538066	
S.E. of regression	0.837334	Akaike info criterion	1.709275	
Sumquaredresid	74.03665	Schwarz criterion	1.559264	
Log likelihood	-233.3678	F-statistic	1.445682	
Durbin-Watson stat	1.483400	Prob (F-statistic	0.593020	

Source: Our compilations based on the survey data

Based on field surveys in the context of the city of Bukavu, age appears positively associated with the

intensification of individualistic attitudes. This means that with each additional year, there is an increase of 0.0448 in the individualism indicator. This trend can be interpreted in light of mechanical solidarity theory, where young adults generally seek independence and autonomy, whereas older generations may hold more collectivist values.

Gender shows that individualistic attitudes vary according to sex. This could indicate that women and men adopt different individualistic behaviors, supported by studies showing that gender norms influence social attitudes (Eagly & Wood, 1999). In the Bukavu context, this may reflect social roles and cultural expectations shaping individual behavior.

Marital status is positively associated with the intensification of individualistic attitudes. This suggests that married individuals, due to their commitments and associated responsibilities, adopt more individualistic attitudes to navigate economic and social challenges. This observation aligns with literature indicating that married individuals may develop more autonomous strategies to cope with complex urban environments (Graham & Pettinato, 2002).

Self-employed and informal workers show a significant intensification of individualistic attitudes. This aligns with competitive pressures in Bukavu's informal economy, where autonomy and individual initiative are crucial for economic survival. Studies such as Portes & Haller (2002) show that in contexts with limited formal employment, individuals develop more individualistic behaviors to adapt.

Education is strongly linked to the intensification of individualistic attitudes. This supports the idea that education promotes autonomy and critical thinking, which can lead to more individualistic behaviors (Becker, 1993). However, potential inconsistencies in the data should be checked, as they may affect the robustness of these results.

Higher income is associated with a moderate increase in individualistic attitudes. This may indicate that individuals with greater financial resources feel freer to adopt individualistic behaviors, supporting the notion that economic conditions influence social values (Inglehart, 1997). In Bukavu, these findings highlight a shift toward more individualistic attitudes, which may have significant implications for mechanical solidarity. According to Durkheim (1893), mechanical solidarity is characterized by social bonds based on similarities among individuals. However, as individualistic attitudes increase, community ties may weaken, leading to social fragmentation.

3.4. TRIANGULATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data shows a strong convergence between observed statistical trends and the social meanings expressed by respondents. Quantitative analyses indicate that sociodemographic factors—such as income, marital status, occupation, and education level—significantly contribute to the emergence and intensification of individualistic attitudes in Bukavu. Positive and statistically significant coefficients for several variables suggest that individualism is not a random phenomenon but a structured process embedded in urban socio-economic transformations.

This quantified trend resonates with semi-structured interviews, where participants almost unanimously describe economic precariousness, professional uncertainty, and increased individual responsibilities as direct drivers of autonomy and self-reliance. The recurring discourse of "everyone manages as they can" illustrates, at the micro-level, the structural dynamics identified statistically, confirming that the rise of individualism is inseparable from material living conditions.

Additionally, factor analysis and explanatory models highlight that education and occupation play a significant role in redefining social practices, especially for urban youth. This quantitative finding aligns

with qualitative data, where students and young graduates emphasize decision-making independence, social mobility, and self-sufficiency as near-natural requirements of contemporary urban life. Their discourse reflects an "aspirational" form of individualism, driven not by deliberate rupture from traditional networks but by the pursuit of a personal trajectory in a competitive environment. Triangulation thus shows that education and integration into the urban economy reshape normative frameworks, reinforcing the primacy of individual choices already highlighted in quantitative results. Moreover, quantitative data reveal a notable correlation between perceived insecurity, low institutional trust, and increased individualistic attitudes. This statistical observation resonates with respondents' accounts, who attribute the weakening of neighborhood ties to rising incivilities, lack of local authority, and inconsistent municipal interventions. Participants describe the urban environment as "uncertain," "impersonal," and sometimes "dangerous," leading them to reduce interactions, carefully select relationships, or rely on specialized micro-networks rather than the broader community. This link between risk perception and contraction of social ties confirms that urban individualism is less a normative choice than a protection strategy, which statistics hint at but respondents explicitly articulate. Triangulation also highlights a paradoxical dynamic: quantitative analyses show the persistence of certain elements of mechanical solidarity (moderate association participation, perceived family obligations), while qualitative data nuance this by revealing that these forms of mutual aid, although present, are profoundly reconfigured in their modalities and intensity. Family or customary solidarities become "targeted," "conditional," or "occasional," whereas associative networks evolve into more flexible structures, such as modern mutual aid groups, digital savings schemes, or professional cooperatives. This hybridization reflects a transition described by respondents, where solidarity does not disappear but transforms to adapt to urban constraints, confirming quantitative results while situating them within a broader socio-historical continuum.

Ultimately, triangulation demonstrates remarkable coherence between structural trends identified statistically and social logics interpreted from interviews. Both data sources converge toward the idea that urban individualism in Bukavu is a complex, multi-determined phenomenon arising from a combination of socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors. The complementarity of approaches reveals a profound transformation of social ties: mechanical solidarity is fragmented, contracted, and reinvented, while individualism, far from being purely self-centered, emerges as a rational, pragmatic response to urban uncertainties. Triangulation thus allows for a deeper understanding of how Bukavu residents negotiate, in daily life, communal heritage and autonomy imperatives, revealing a society in the midst of identity and relational reconfiguration.

3.5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Overall, the survey results, both quantitative and qualitative, highlight a profound recomposition of social ties in Bukavu, confirming analyses already established in sociological literature on urban dynamics in Central Africa. Following Mukasa (2018), rapid, unplanned, and densely populated urbanization is a central factor in transforming traditional solidarities. Quantitative data show that variables such as income, occupation, marital status, and education level significantly influence the emergence of individualistic attitudes, while qualitative analysis reveals that these transformations occur within a pragmatic logic of survival amid economic, land, and security constraints. This articulation between material conditions and individual behaviors reinforces the idea that Bukavu residents adapt social practices not through cultural rupture but via functional adjustment.

Mumba and Lumu (2020) emphasize the predominance of the informal sector as a key driver: in an

uncertain labor market marked by income instability and lack of social protection, residents develop autonomous strategies to secure daily survival. Qualitative findings confirm this dynamic, with respondents stressing that "everyone must fend for themselves," while quantitative results indicate that individuals with medium or high incomes express more individualistic attitudes, reflecting a rise of autonomy as a social norm. This process aligns with transitions described by Bengo (2019) and Mabika & Mavinga (2022), where a shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, based on role differentiation and professional specialization, redefines social relations in Eastern Congolese cities.

Methodological triangulation confirms that customary solidarities, though still present, are profoundly recomposed. Literature, including Nkulikiyinka (2017) and Kazadi (2021), previously observed the gradual erosion of traditional networks in favor of weaker, more flexible forms of mutual aid. This study clarifies the mechanisms: family solidarities become selective and circumstantial, while new networks emerge based on affinity, professional interests, digital groups, or modernized associations. This hybridization reflects a shift in social capital, now less determined by lineage and more by social utility, contractual reciprocity, and rapid access to resources. Youth, especially students and urban cooperative members, embody this shift by adopting chosen relational logics rather than inherited ones, echoing Kalunga's (2022) observations on the rise of generational autonomy in Bukavu.

Triangulation also highlights the decisive role of insecurity and institutional failure, considered by Kambale (2023) as catalysts for social withdrawal. Statistical analyses show a significant correlation between perceived insecurity and contraction of social ties, while interviews reveal widespread mistrust toward local institutions, blamed for inefficiency or absence. This trust deficit weakens social cohesion and reinforces individual protection and mobility strategies. In this perspective, urban individualism appears less as an ideological choice than as a rational response to multiple uncertainties characterizing Bukavu's urban context.

Following Creswell & Plano Clark (2018), triangulation enriches understanding of social dynamics by showing that statistically observed trends make sense in light of life narratives, emotions, perceptions, and concrete strategies of respondents. The mixed-method approach goes beyond a purely behavioral reading of individualism, revealing deeper logics: a constant tension between the necessity of autonomy and the persistent desire for belonging. This study confirms Glaser & Strauss's (1967) recommendations on theoretical saturation and supports the inductive thematic analysis approach advocated by Miles & Huberman (2014). Analysis shows that mechanical solidarity does not disappear; it transforms and contracts, giving rise to hybrid solidarity typical of transitioning urban societies.

In conclusion, results indicate that urban individualism in Bukavu arises from a complex interplay of socio-economic, institutional, and cultural factors. Traditional solidarity persists but is strongly reshaped by survival imperatives, informal economy demands, residential mobility, and weak institutional frameworks. Individualism, far from absolute social disintegration, constitutes an adaptive strategy enabling individuals to navigate an environment characterized by uncertainty and competition. This study highlights hybrid forms of sociability emerging in this context, marked by a fragile balance between communal heritage and individual rationality.

It also provides perspectives for public interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion: local security initiatives, community support mechanisms, participatory governance programs, and promotion of modernized mutual aid networks. Understanding urban individualism in Bukavu thus involves grasping a major social transition, where city dwellers negotiate daily their belonging, responsibilities, and aspirations in a constantly evolving urban space.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that urban individualism in Bukavu results from a combination of structural, economic, and institutional factors that jointly transform social practices and modes of solidarity. Rapid urbanization, economic precariousness, recurring insecurity, and weak local institutions are key determinants in redefining social ties. Results show that while traditional forms of mutual aid do not completely disappear, they recombine into smaller, more flexible, and selective networks, marking a transition toward hybrid solidarity. Confronted with demanding urban conditions, individuals develop self-reliance strategies that reinforce individualism as a social regulation mode and pragmatic response to daily uncertainties.

The study also reveals that urban individualism is not synonymous with isolation or total social rupture but rather represents a gradual adaptation of city dwellers to an ecosystem marked by mobility, competition, and instability. Younger generations, more exposed to educational and technological influences, particularly embody this transformation. Methodological triangulation strengthened the robustness of analyses by combining quantitative trends with qualitative meanings, offering a nuanced and in-depth reading of contemporary socio-urban issues.

Thus, the article contributes to a better understanding of social tie recomposition in Bukavu and opens perspectives for public or community interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion, local security, and participatory governance. Restoring institutional trust, supporting formal and informal mutual aid networks, and promoting inclusive urbanization emerge as essential strategies to address this ongoing social transition. Finally, the study calls for continued research on intergenerational dynamics, digital solidarity networks, and institutional transformations shaping social life today and in the future in Eastern DRC cities.

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