INTERNET CONTRIBUTION

Mrs. Esther Boupda holds a PhD from the University Michel de Montaigne (Bordeaux III, France, 1994). She is a Teaching Researcher in the Department of Geography at the University of Douala where she has been specializing in Transport Geography, in which she has accumulated experience over the past thirty-five years. She has been teaching Transport Geography for the past twenty years at the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences as well as the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences. Her research field covers Transport in Africa and particularly in Cameroon. Her expertise focuses on Urban Transport in Sub Saharan Africa, Urban Planning and International Maritime Transport. She is a consultant in many projects including in the context of the International Solidarity Network for Transport Research in Sub-Saharan Africa (SITRASS) since 2001. She participates in all conferences organized by this institution.
The City and the Port of Douala: Between autonomy and interdependence

Dr. Esther Boupda
Professor Researcher, Geography and Transport Economics
University of Douala
Cameroon

Abstract
The port and the city of Douala have grown since 1884 expanding on both sides of the Wouri River. Since independence in the 1960’s, relationships between the two entities have been strained because of a lack of coordination in terms of their strategic visions for growth. Today, the split is even more visible in the way that both entities are dealing with the many development projects that concern them both but which each is managing alone instead of through a joint approach.

Introduction
Ports are areas of contact between maritime and land traffic which ensure a link between two modes of transport otherwise adapted to fit traveling needs on two very different surfaces with different characteristics (Vigarié, quoted by Ducret, 2004). Port activities have increased over time and become increasingly diverse. Their development is happening almost everywhere, jointly with the cities that are hosting them, resulting many a times in a harmonious combination baptized cityport, which refers to the complementarity, interactions, and imbrication of a city and its port. Today, a special attention is paid to city-port relations to varying degrees, in a context where the observed divisions in the case of Douala have amplified the negative impact be it spatially, economically, socially and even culturally. Despite the overt tensions, and following a mixed period, this article seeks to generate a path to reconciliation between the port and the city of Douala, in a context where their inter-relationships have sometimes taken a turn for the worse.

I. 1884-1960: joint development of the city and the port

1. Background
The port and the city of Douala both lay within the middle part of the Cameroonian coast, between coordinates 4° 02’53” North and 9 ° 42’15” East. The two entities grew on the banks of the Wouri River, 40 miles away from the Atlantic Ocean coast and attached to a muddy estuary. The port currently covers a quarried area of 540 hectares while the city of Douala was raised on top of a vast deposit basin underneath the South Cameroonian plateau. The population of Douala is estimated at over 2.4 million inhabitants and growing at a rate of 5% p.a., fuelled by the concentration of both formal and informal activities.

2. Consolidation of the joint development
Founded in the 15th century by European occupants, the port of Douala was initially a trading post that, for the better part of the centuries to come until the second half of the nineteenth century, remained a small anchorage accessible only to ships drawing no more than 5.40 m. In 1914, following the discovery
of a 50 m-large dockable wharf, traffic reached 62,000 tons. Urban planning documents drafted by German colonizers in 1890 and 1914 feature not only the port, but also a transport network as well as plans to organize town planning including the Freie Zone that would separate the European area from the indigenous settlement areas (BOUPDA, 1994).

Under the German and then French colonization, every urban planning project is developed with a spirit of collaboration and inter-connectedness as illustrated in the urban plans prepared in 1922, 1946 and 1959. Between 1950 and 1960, port traffic increases from 500,000 to 773,000 tons. Meanwhile the city of Douala gradually transforms to keep pace with the needs of its port.

II. 1960-2016: the split

After 1960, traffic continues to increase, but the efforts to improve standard facilities start to stagnate. The city and the port cease to be organized along the lines inherited from the colonial period. Government authorities centralize the management and development of the port from Yaoundé, the political capital: Cameroon National Ports Authority of (ONPC) is created in 1971 and the Autonomous Port of Douala (PAD) is created in 1998.

1. A permanent modernization process of the port...

The first blueprint for ONPC had planned for: (i) port expansion; (ii) construction of a container terminal; (iii) a mooring area for logging trucks; and (iv) a dedicated multi-use activity area. For instance, the Dangote cement terminal, which is already in its expansion phase, currently sits on a site originally dedicated to the cultural festivities of the Sawa local tribe. As a result, the Essengue village is urbanizing fast as all attempts to relocate the local populations have failed so far.

2. … versus urban re-appropriation projects of port wastelands

The central areas of port cities are characterized by a great diversity of use, prompting local actors to resort to what C. Ducruet (2005) calls "urban regeneration". It is in this same logic that local authorities of the Communauté Urbaine (CUD) launched the Sawa-Beach project in 2003 on a plot of 1,000 hectares located at the interface between the port of Douala and its airport, which was already undergoing spontaneous urbanization. The proposed program plans for the creation of a mixed-used activity zone.

At the same time, the airport authorities are considering part of this same area for an expansion project. This obvious lack of consultation and coordination by the various authorities has already resulted in: (i) on the one hand denied access of the port area to city dwellers and (ii) on the other hand, a mismatch between the development of the transport network and port traffic growth.

III. Towards a better consideration of the joint potential of both port and city and better recognition of the interdependence between the two entities

Given the shared and common interests between the two entities, the relationships between the port and the city of Douala should improve to enable synergies to emerge around joint projects. Many ports in the world, including in Africa, have understood the challenges and the extent of their role. They are keen to undertake renovation and restructuring projects in collaboration with their host cities, aimed at providing city dwellers with a pleasant life under a sustainable development framework. The port of Douala, which is the engine of the economic, territorial, social and cultural development of Cameroon, should take the initiative of leading such a strategy, at a time when it is rethinking its own Urban Master Plan (Schéma Directeur de Développement). The city of Douala, host to the largest wholesale market
in Central Africa and 70% of Cameroon’s industries, represents the largest market for its port. It also offers sufficient available land for the port to plan ambitious expansion and/or alternative design possibilities to address the shortcomings that were caused by its development to date. There is therefore a need to rebuild the port-city interface to allow it to accommodate new functionalities that are more appropriate to current requirements. To this end, one could envisage the following five considerations:

i. an urban and port renewal as well as a reorganization of commercial and maritime activities in Essengue. This renewal could improve the efficiency of the urban transportation system and facilitate access to the port;

ii. the preservation of the fish market and future fishing port in Youpwe as part of an industrial, commercial and cultural project under the “Sawa Beach” project;

iii. the relocation of the Maritime Museum in the port building that is adjacent to an architectural platform created with an original design;

iv. in the current fishing port of Youpwe, the port area could further expand to include additional meaningful, competitive and profitable activities, connected to Wouri River banks. Such port area could be linked to other parts of the city through a public ferry;

v. the recovery and revival of the Wouri River banks featuring the development of a new transport infrastructure via a public ferry network.

CONCLUSION

Given the broken links between the port of Douala and the city, it has become necessary to re-establish these links via a common and joint vision of development and management of transport and mobility issues. The city-port governance is therefore an important topic to reflect upon, under the leadership of relevant public authorities, in order to revisit everything that relates to transportation and land use, especially in African port cities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


