



Research Article

Addressing urban sprawl in Douala, Cameroon: Lessons from Xiamen integrated coastal management

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Abstract

This paper addresses the dynamics surrounding urban sprawl on the coastline of Douala, Cameroon. Douala is the economic capital, main seaport and the industrial nerve of Cameroon. Also, Douala harbours about 80% of the Cameroon's industries. Due to the centralized nature of economic activities in Douala by the State, urban development is more noticeable here than any other city in Cameroon. The fast developing nature of the city coupled with limited human/physical capital and poor management policies have resulted to intense anthropogenic pressure on coastal resources.

This article examines the key actors shaping the urban planning process in Douala and expatiates on the gaps constraining sustainable urban planning in Cameroon. Moreover, Xiamen's socio-economic and environmental outlook before and after the implementation of integrated coastal management (ICM) is discussed. It is showcased that, the delegation of additional powers to local governments to implement new environmental laws and accepting of bilateral and multilateral assistance by the Chinese Central Government served as a crunch since the introduction of ICM. Moreover, the political will bestowed by the Xiamen municipal authorities, the participation and inculcation of relevant participants/stakeholders, the establishment of a multi-agency council and the acquisition of sea-use zoning scheme are all key points that symbols Xiamen's ICM accomplishment. Today, with the successful implementation of ICM, Xiamen has built dual status of a vibrant economy and comprehensive ecological environment.

The conclusions of this effort portray that sprawl in Cameroon is caused by inadequate policy implementation, outdated master plan, insufficient information, disparity in resources distribution among the different regions of the State and the gaps expounded by the traditional management. Grounded in the knowledge drawn from Xiamen ICM, the paper recommends the creation of an autonomous coastal interagency in Douala to address the gaps disrupted by sectoral management, and thus, improve coastal management in Cameroon.

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1. Introduction

Globally, coastal areas are convergence zone for human settlements. On a universal scale, coastal areas cover about 20 percent of the Earth's surface, yet they harbour almost 50 percent of human population living within 200 km of the coast (Derrick Ngoran & XiongZhi, 2013). The continuous occupancy of the coastal environment with limited resources and increasing economic hardship has resulted in an uncoordinated spatial layout of urban settlement, labelled urban sprawl. Urban sprawl, though not a new phenomenon, remains a daunting challenge for most policy makers in the world. Cameroon, a country located in central Africa is not an exception to sprawl. The challenge is further compounded by the fact that urban sprawl is not well circumscribed as there is no universally accepted definition for it.

This study, therefore, addresses the gaps in Cameroon's urban planning with Douala City being the case in point. Douala is the economic capital, main seaport of Cameroon and the industrial nerve of Cameroon. Douala city harbours about 80% of the Cameroon's industries (Ngoran, 2014). Due to the centralized nature of economic activities in Douala by the State, the city has witnessed a tremendous growth more than any other city in Cameroon. The fast developing nature of the city coupled with limited human and physical capital and poor management policies have resulted to intense anthropogenic pressure on limited coastal resources.

Integrated coastal management (ICM), a successful urban planning approach as exemplified in Xiamen City is also x-rayed and valuable lessons from this approach are recommended to urban planners in Cameroon.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of key terminologies and typifies the urban outlook in Douala. Section 3 looks at the stakeholders involved in the urban planning process in Cameroon. Section 4 presents the gaps in urban planning while Section 5 showcases the strength of ICM in urban planning and draws a logical conclusion.

2. Overview

2.1. Roots of urban sprawl

According to Wassmer (2002), the term, "urban sprawl", was first used in 1937 by Earle Draper of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), USA, in a national conference of planners. At this conference, Earle Draper considered urban sprawl to be both an unaesthetic and uneconomic manner of settlement. The first time urban sprawl was used in an opening paragraph of an article was by the sociologist, William Whyte, in Fortune magazine in 1958 (Wassmer, 2002). The Real Estate Research Corporation inaugurated in 1974 in USA, presented a contentious debate on positive and negative effects of sprawl (Real Estate Research Corporation, 1974). Franz, Maier, and Schröck (2006) argues that the public and policymakers often use the term as a medical analogy where urban sprawl is seen as a disease with undesirable symptoms. Many cures are offered for this disease, but there is no solid understanding of the underlying causes and mechanisms.

Today, urban sprawl, though not a new phenomenon, continues to be a serious challenge to most governments around the world and more specifically to lesser developed nations as well as countries witnessing rapid economic growth.

2.2. Definition of urban sprawl

The term "urban sprawl" is difficult to define precisely due to the amount of ambiguity, misunderstanding and confusion associated with the term in different fields of studies. According to Lechner and Maier (2009), the term urban sprawl is so abused that it lacks a precise meaning and defining "sprawl" has become a methodological quagmire. Maier, Franz, and Schrock (2006) advanced six reasons to substantiate while urban sprawl is so difficult to define.

- Causes, characteristics, and consequences of sprawl are ill-defined.
- It is hard to distinguish sprawl from related terms, such as suburbanization, urban growth, or suburban development.
- The term is used in a scientific context as well as in public and political discussions. Also, it is used by the various scientific disciplines in different manners and from different perspectives.
- The term is so broad, that it leaves plenty of room for interpretations/misinterpretations.

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