

TOURISM POLICIES AND THE HOTEL PARK DEVELOPEMENT OF CAMEROON (1950 – 2003)

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Abstract

The hotelier component represents an important side of the touristic activity success. In countries that have an emergent economy, as Cameroon, the tourism and the hotel business have shaped activation as a lever to the whole economy, since the second half of the 20th century. The present paperwork proposes an analytic overview of the evolution of the hotelier park in two of the main cities of the country, Douala and Yaoundé. The evolutional aspects are historically staged, correlated within the political framework and emphasize the tourist phenomenon overall. The goals of our research emphasize qualitative and quantitative upheaval recorded by the urban hotelier park for the identification of the causal terms between the phenomenon type relations/context and the possible substantiation policy in the future.

Key words: *Hotel Park, Yaoundé, Douala, tourism policy, history.*

JEL classification: *N77, O55*

1. INTRODUCTION

With a great and rich potential for tourism, Cameroon or "Africa in miniature", as it is called due to its various ethnic groups and ecosystems, possesses fine sand beaches, lush forests, a mountain 4100 meters high – Mount Cameroon, a variety of wildlife, folklore and traditions, many still alive. It is in the light of these beauties, which many tourists and other people like businesspersons, visitors or branded hotels visit Cameroon. These visitors represent the great majority of hotels consumers that are indeed one of the major investments needed for tourism development of a country.

Yaoundé and Douala, the geographic context of this study, are chosen for their diversity of hotels. Although they are quite different, by their statute and economic power, they usually welcome business tourists. Yaoundé by its statute as political and administrative city is the political capital and had quite a great number of hotels while Douala, Cameroon's economic capital, is the first city in hotel facilities. Therefore, Douala is the destination for businesspersons and tourists.

Tourism policy means the management that the Government of Trusteeship and the Cameroonian government have begun to develop the tourism sector. We are mainly interested in the activity of the tourism sector, mainly in hotels.

As methodological tools, we choose to divide the period concerned into three stages. The administrative management of hotels has its origin in 1950, with the creation of tourism in Cameroon and lasts until 2003, when the Ministry of Tourism started an offensive action against the illegal hotels (Apa, 1950).

For this approach the authors defined, cleared and covered the fields of investigation including the various plans of economic, social and cultural development of Cameroon, the areas of planned development of the various five year plans, as well as the areas chosen for the implementation of these plans and the space orientation of the action of the administrative structure. The aim of such a study would be to emphasize the development of hotels in those cities.

This work is based on the work of historians, geographers, sociologists and economists, but also on the information collected directly from the field. It analyzes the impact of tourism on the hotel park in Yaoundé and Douala and it is organized around two key ideas: the hotel infrastructure developed through tourism policies between 1950-2003, the trademarks of their plans and the mismatch between expectations and achievements.

2. THE HOTEL'S INFRASTRUCTURES VALUED THROUGH THE TOURIST POLICY IN YAOUNDÉ AND DOUALA: 1950-2003

Despite their recent activity, the hotels' infrastructures in Yaoundé and Douala have evolved. This evolution led to the equipment of these cities with facilities ranging from roadside inn (first form of collective accommodation planted in the country), to classic hotel, going through various forms such as "case de passage" (where you can spend the night), secondary residences, retirement homes for nuns. Nevertheless, these structures have witnessed various tourism policies that influenced their development.

There are three types of policies, temporally differentiated:

- the beginnings, started from 1950;
- the five-year plans of tourism policy, between 1960-1982;
- The recent one: 1982 – up to now is the most effervescent.

2.1 The tourism policy from 1950 to 1960

The French legacy after the World War II is a continuation of the German one. This last one consisted in building hotels along the routes that the colonizer used in its exploratory movements within the country. However, the French people make a particularly touch in the choice of sites for tourism, encouraging the consumption of existing attractive potential and the building of accommodation and pastime facilities throughout the country. Their guidance has influenced the future policies of hotel investment and of delimitation of touristic interest centers (Apa, 1995).

Between 1950 and 1960, the choice of sites for hotel construction is not by chance, it refers to their attraction. Indeed, the predominance of political and administrative function explains the need of adequate facilities, at least in Yaoundé case. The economic and strategic position of Douala in the Cameroonian economy makes it a place for accumulation of hotel investment. In 1960, Douala has already held nearly 246 of the 600 rooms available representing around 41% of the total accommodation capacity of Cameroon (Apa, 1995).

2.2 The tourism policy from 1960 to 1982

At the beginning of the First Plan of economic, social and cultural development of independent Cameroon, the hotel capacity was available across the country in areas and towns fulfilling at least one of the administrative, political, economic, commercial or touristic functions (Mbogo, 2005).

During the Second five-year Plan from 1966 to 1971, Yaoundé had 244 rooms in 10 hotels and Douala had 146 hotel rooms in two hotels (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1961). By this plan, the increasing capacity in hotels and camps was increased. For this purpose, the government had decided to participate in building a world-class hotel in Yaoundé. In addition, the State should make every effort to facilitate the construction of hotels by the private sector in the cities where the facilities were inadequate, especially in Douala, Maroua, Foumban, Victoria and Kribi (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Planning, 1971).

According to the Third Plan, from 1971 to 1976, the tourism industry was extremely profitable and should have received high priority. At that time, accommodation facilities in Yaoundé and Douala were as it follows: Yaoundé had 519 rooms in 12

hotels and there were 258 rooms in 7 hotels from Douala (Ministry of finance and planning, 1971). On the general guidelines and objectives of the Third Plan, the State decided to increase the capacity of hotels and camps in accordance with the norms of international tourism.

An investment code is also set up whose aim is to attract hotel investors. The state guarantees the return of investment. It exempts the rights to import materials for the construction and operation of hotel complexes either new or existing ones. Institutional agreements may be set after the introduction and consideration of forecast operations. Moreover, given the specific nature of the hotel industry, the measures allowing the industry to meet the national objectives assigned to it under conditions of normal returns are to be studied. It is also the problem of price and control. The amount of investments in the touristic sector will reach 7200 million during the Third Plan, as it follows: the increase of the hotel capacity (6560 million), social tourism (120 million), improvement of itineraries and sites (520 millions) (Ministry of finance and planning, 1971). The hotel capacity has increased especially in Douala and important options were considered at the end of the Third Five-Year Plan. They occur during the Fourth Plan from 1976 to 1981. The coast had 943 rooms for 31.8% of the overall rate of Cameroon, 1234 beds for 28.70%. The Center-South-East had 776 rooms for 26.2% for 1107 beds 25.8%. The observation is the following: until the Third Plan Yaoundé and the Central Province had the largest number of hotels in Cameroon. But from 1976 to 1981, Douala has acquired a very substantial number of hotels, responding perfectly to the expectations and resources of a very large clientele (Ministry of Tourism, 1993). Only these two cities gather about three quarters of arrivals and overnight stays recorded annually in residential facilities. They are also the head of a starting point for tours.

The Fifth Five-Year Plan that runs from 1981 to 1986 called for the renovation of Mont-Febe Sofitel (see photo 1). This renovation has led to its reclassification to the “five stars” category. In terms of strengthening, a number of hotels were built on public funding. Given the achievement of private developers, the hotel capacity of Cameroon extended to 7146 rooms from 1985 to 1986, thus experiencing an increase of 2,100 rooms compared with the period 1980-1981, or to 41.62 % that represents a rate of annual increase of 7.21%. The creation of these 2100 new rooms also corresponds to a rate of 73.4% of projects in the Fifth Plan.

2.3 The tourism policy from 1982 to our days

This policy may be characterized first by continuing the five-year plans, with the sixth Plan of the period 1986-1991. The strong economic expansion of the country in the last decade has resulted in a significant increase in business trips (business tourism), which led to the development of hotels in Yaoundé and Douala, and in some other towns of province. The plan focuses on vocational training. Despite the encouraging results, there are obstacles such as low capacity of the average hotel (two and three stars) (Ministry of Tourism, 1993).

But in order to achieve the goals during the five-year plan, the concern of government was to continue, as it did in the past, the efforts to optimize the administrative structures of accommodation and shelters, and to ensure that this sector has a sufficient number of qualified staff. Particular emphasis is placed on the business and luxury tourism. The state has in view the project to build two five-star hotels in Douala and Yaoundé (one of them is Hilton hotel, Photo 2). As it was necessary to renovate the hotels belonging to the State and those in which his participation is in the majority in order to safeguard the image of the Cameroonians hotels. This plan also supposes the creation of a hotel credit during the sixth plan to meet the financing needs of this sector.

In 1997 the Cameroonian government developed a ten-point program to build the future of Cameroon. It placed tourism in the fifth priority of that program. In an increasingly competitive environment and for the achievement of its promotional activities, Cameroon endorsed this thinking of René Baretje, tourism economist, which states: *"The conquest of tourism goes through the conquest of tourists; not by means of improvisation, but of order"* (Baretje, 2000).

A legal and institutional framework, particularly favorably to the growth of this sector in Cameroon, has also been established. Among other things, we must mention the promulgation in 1998 of a framework law on tourism activity, and the signing of the subsequent legislation one year later. The hotel infrastructure occupies an important place (Hélé, 2000).

"The national marketing plan" introduced in 2000, allowed in 2003 Cameroon to have 820 hotels, with 13,972 rooms and 15,542 beds, from which 54.8 in Douala and Yaoundé, with the revenue of 27372 billion CFA francs earned by hotels (Ministry of Tourism, 1993).

3. BRANDS OF PLANS AND THE MISMATCH BETWEEN FORECASTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

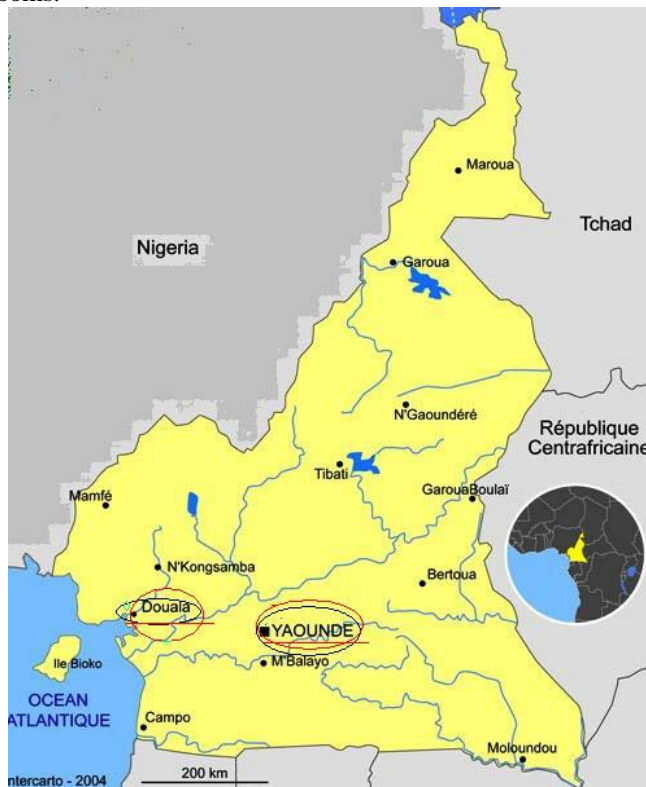
Despite its essentially indicative characteristic, planning was a reference point in the development and schedule of actions to be taken. Thus, the first five-year plans for economic, social and cultural development had provided direct investments of nearly sixty-six billion CFA francs for the increase and improvement of the capacity of accommodation of the country. This investment represents 92.56% of all forecasts used for the development of the touristic sector (Anonymous).

Three quarters of the planned projects were related to Douala and Yaoundé, two major centers of economic, political, and administrative interests. Among its various planning for economic, social and cultural development, Cameroon chose a harmonious development of tourism. Periodically, medium-term objectives and priority actions were set and areas and centers of interventions were defined. In this context, the hotel, which embodies the accommodation and location in a given geographical area, is par excellence the instrument for the identification of regions and areas of the tourism development of the country, henceforth, of those areas frequented by tourists. It can measure the extent of these frequentations through the arrivals and nights spent by customers and show the value and importance of visited sites (UNESCO, 1995).

After Douala, Yaoundé turns out to be the second pole promotion of accommodation facilities development. The essential part of this accommodation capacity is made up of classified hotels and unauthorized institutions. Thanks to the State investments, the number of first-class rooms rapidly increased since 1977. The development of hotels was mainly seen in the category with all modicums: a yearly average of 9.48% of rooms. As the requirements of businesspersons and the search for a more consistent profitability were a constraint for the investors three or four stars hotels were chosen (Mamadou, Touzard, 1981).

The creation of various sector plans of tourism development didn't always lead to the expected results and many critics aroused. These plans emphasize the description of goals to reach as well as the description of their accomplishment, but there are very few precise measures to provide monitoring of programmed investments. The application of these plans is also placed outside the principle of strictness that ensures the management of tourism development in a country like Cameroon. The official political discourse is still a hope for the emergence and development of this field of activity. But we rather witness a background dominated by uncertainty, heaviness, imposing of choices of projects and investment terms (Mamadou, Touzard, 1981).

In this context, the hotel supply of Cameroon would be around 12,500 rooms in 1985 with a yearly increase of 7% in rooms, taking into account the rooms which number was not fixed in the first and second plans. However, the available accommodation capacity on that date consists of 6811 rooms and 8726 beds. In 1993, after a development, we can record a number of 394 hotels totaling up 14,445 rooms and 8496 beds. The distribution of accommodation capacity according to the type of ownership and to category reveals a contribution of the State, in the actual capacity, of around 25% mainly concentrated in the three to five stars hotels. On the 1st of December 1999, this accommodation capacity counts 16,000 rooms.



Position of Douala and Yaoundé in Cameroon

<http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/cameroon.pdf>

4. CONCLUSION

The accommodation facilities are under the influence of tourism policies including these of 1950, 1960 to 1982 and these of 1982 up to present. These tourism policies are responsible for the creation of hotels in the cities of Yaoundé and Douala, as well as in other towns of Cameroon.

The primacy of political and economic functions was for a long time responsible for the development of hotels in Yaoundé and Douala. These two cities gather the majority of hotels in Cameroon.



Photo 1, Hotel Mont Febe, Yaoundé, 2-nd stage policy, (source: Catherine Akamaba)



Photo 2, Hotel Hilton, Yaoundé, third stage policy

Source: <http://images.google.ro/imgres>

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