

## Low Urban Attractiveness of Edea in Cameroon: An Appraisal of Local Constraints

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### Abstract

*Edea is located at a strategic position at crossroads of significant urban centres such as Douala and Yaoundé. Edea's evolution began with the construction of the hydroelectric power station in 1950, which attracted many large industrial establishments and agricultural developments. Many people got jobs, housing and camps were developed for workers, and schools and health centers were constructed. Sad to say, the economic crisis that struck Cameroon in the 1990s caused decline in productivity and closure of some of these industries leading to loss of jobs. Other neighbouring towns around Edea became points of interests as emerging urban centers with industrial and economic activities. Edea today can be described as a town, which has low urban attractiveness, as there are no significant changes compared with other towns in Cameroon giving its industrial and economic history. The aim of this study was to identify the indicators of its low urban attractiveness. A concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design was used to address this research question and this was supported by documentary analysis. A household-based survey was used with a sample of 383 observations and semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted. The key informants and survey showed contributing factors to the low attractiveness of Edea, including ethnic crisis, insecurity, inadequate economic development that is now over-shadowed by the informal sector, inadequate waste management, pollution, and a deteriorating local climate. However, with the development of undeveloped site tourism sites, and rehabilitation of infrastructure and equipment, Edea can return to becoming a city of attraction for residents.*

**Keywords:** *Metropolis-attractiveness-potentialities-Edea-strategic position.*

### Introduction

Towns are complex systems that evolution is driven by internal and external factors that gradually shape their structures, organisation and dynamic regeneration (Dupont, 2019; P151). Christine Kessides in studying the major challenges that sub-Saharan Africa should overcome given its fast-growing urbanization, suggested sundry strategies in this respect; She depicts the specificities of this rapid urbanisation context as followed: (i) How can these towns under development be transformed into constructive development partners or development factors for the continent? (ii) What are the necessary requirements to achieve this? (iii) What are the setbacks or what are the opportunity costs that will weigh down on African countries if these objectives are not met? and (iv) What are the strategic and operational choices that majority of African countries should envisage to maximise the benefits of those opportunities offered by rapid urban growth? (Kessides, 2006)

The sustainable development goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development of UN (Assembly & others, 2015) recommends the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Consequently, tourism in peripheral areas, provided that

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adequate resources and infrastructure are made available can enhance sustainable development leading to better socio-economic development and quality of life (Świdyńska & Witkowska-Dąbrowska, 2021).

In this perspective, there exist attractions profiles determined by the statistical characteristics of entry movements or visits over a specific period. Various attractions in the town draw visitors in different ways. Sites such as Universities and hospitals attract many visitors coming from all-over the town, sometimes covering long distances to reach there. Moreover, some areas of the town offering proximity services such as restaurants, schools and small clinics instil little attraction from neighbouring areas (Alhazzani et al., 2021).

However, greeneries and settlement areas, when distributed equally, offer opportunities for diversified activities among with the chance to commune with nature. It has been proven that frequent visits in parks increase the dynamism of physical exercise on the site, reduce health challenges and improve the quality of life (Tassew & Fikresilassie, 2024).

The *Jeune Afrique économique* of 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025 has thus made a classification of the most attractive African towns. The criteria varied based on the town, its weaknesses and strengths. Cape Town occupies the leading position for its exceptional quality of life and good governance. This was followed by Kigali given its exemplary cleanliness, Johannesburg however, despite its problems of security distinguished itself by its attractiveness for foreign investors. Then was Rabat for the protection of greeneries, whereas the towns of Yaoundé and Douala came at the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> position as stemming from the questionable local governance. Literature generally consider three blocs: (i) the economy (employment, diversification, settlement cost), (ii) the quality or services and living environment (health, education, security, public spaces) and (iii) the connectivity (regional accessibility and logistics corridors) (Mouratidis, 2021) (Wesz et al., 2023). These dimensions make up a practical matrix contextualized according to operational reports and academic studies.

This article aims at putting forwards the different barriers to the attractiveness of the town of Edea at the crossroads of major metropolis among which the political and economic capital and a port city or harbour town. Thus this question: What are leading factors to the low attractiveness of Edea among its metropolis? Answering this research question will help in one hand to identify and analyse economic and infrastructural factors that hinder the attractiveness of Edea, and in the other hand to appraise the impact of social factors and governance on the low attractiveness of Edea. To achieve these objectives, a concurrent triangulation mixed-method in a survey design was used whereby both primary and secondary data were sourced.

### Theoretical and conceptual framework

The notion of "attractiveness" is not as visible or vivid for geographers. In fact, leading dictionaries do not provide a definition and their authors take a liking towards the concept of attraction, sometimes described as a function or attribute (Lévy and Lussault, 2003). For instance, attractiveness is defined as "*the measurement of the strength of attraction of a given place, in general, considering the sum of attracted flows to that location*" (Edouard, 2019). Attractiveness therefore appears here as a mean to quantify the flows generated by an area. However, other authors have recently replaced attractiveness at the centre of their studies on localities. It is the case with this author that defines the attractiveness of a territory as "*its capacity to conserve or to attract new activities and employment*" (Mulkay, 2006). These two authors define the attractiveness of an area as an attraction's capability or potential, which can be a natural or man-made potential; thus, attractiveness is considered here from the perspective of the attracted object (population or capital), not under the attractive characteristics of the area. This approach reflects the demographic and economic vision that the authors have of the notion of attractiveness, but does not consider qualitative aspects related to the factors that characterize the attractiveness of localities.

Considering the qualitative aspects, the attractiveness of a given locality embodies three complementary notions (attraction-attractor-attractiveness), and this definitions seems to better inform the concept (Chaze, 2017). According to them, attraction is defined as "*the force that tends to bring together entities. From spatial perspective, this notion expresses or qualifies the location balances of power (Influential or hierarchical balances of power, no*

*matter the form they take: Concentration, diffusion or flow from a gravity centre around a central point)*". Allurement is somehow perceived as "what is susceptible to focus attention, what seduces, that is the potential to focus one's attention. Its spatial translation explicates at the same time what is at the source of the attraction (caused by urban or rural hubs: For instance, models of Christaller central locations) and the outcome of this very attraction (reinforcements of hubs, constitution of networks, organization of urban spaces)". The notion of allurement can be assimilated to that of attracter. Attractiveness according to authors derived from the power of attraction, which is defined as "the potential to pull and to attract people and activities, investments and competences on a territory". It can then be added that attractiveness as well derived from allurement or attracter of a place. When relating the three notions, we can define attractiveness as the attraction's potential of a territory from the attracter (or allurement) that it portrays or exhibit.

*The attractiveness of a territory* (that of a town for instance) is structured around two attributes or features: Its characteristics that embodies the actors and the factors of attractiveness for that territory, and its governance that reveals a multidimensional character (Gérardin & Poirot, 2010). In the context of this study, only the sub-dimension of factors of attractiveness deriving from the characteristics of this conceptual apprehension is of interest.

With regards to the factors of attractiveness of a territory, it involves those in charge in one hand, the households or specific categories of households on the other hand, the investors when they want to establish or develop their activities on the territory (Gérardin & Poirot, 2010). What is actually observed with Edea is that its status of industrial town has played a role on the economic attractiveness (The economic fabric was fuelled by few economic operators that invest in local industries, services and trade), then its residential attractiveness (urban households that also set up there have led to settlement dynamism through the construction of lodgings, houses for habitation, community halls...) of its agglomerations.

*\*The attractive factors on households* take on the contribution of the territory to the ability of household to adapt and take advantage of the potentialities that it offers. A territory like a town will be more attractive for individuals when it enables them to benefit from bigger opportunities (Sen, 2000). It means the credo of being (right to feed, dress, lodge, being able to prevent preventable diseases etc.) and the right and capacity to act or to do (right of movement, access to education, access to market and work, to benefit from leisure or to participate to social and political life...)(Sen, 2000); however, the ideal is not to conform the credo of being by acting only with regards to the purchase power and investments undertaken by individuals (purchase of food, spending on lodging, services, leisure etc.). According to Sen, what matters is the capacity or real right of an individual to undertake a given activity. According to the resources available, an individual chooses between diverse combinations of activities (functioning as termed by A. Sen) that he is capable to realize. The territory, notably a town, plays a vital role in the conversion process of individual resources (financial, intellectual, social / relational and human resources) in real realm of right to be and act. The territory provides complementary resources to the households in the form of aids, urban space for leisure such as parks or leisure places, cultural richness or activities freely accessible at affordable fairs, and professional / vocational training.

*\*Attraction on investors* is the capacity of a territory to provide them with conditions to set their activities, by so doing motivating them to set up or to establish on that territory. That attractiveness depends on three main factors: The characteristics of the needs or requirements of the enterprises that envisage developing their projects, the characteristics of the territory itself and the extent of competition among territories or localities. Such economic and spatial criteria are more perceptible in Edea characterized by a highly fluctuating market that instead indicates a decreased economic attractiveness.

Based on these facts, factors that are susceptible of attracting enterprises are numerous: Cost and qualification of manpower, transport and communication infrastructure, available services to enterprises, potential suppliers, and sufficiently large market if the enterprise does not export its production out of the territory (if this is the case, it goes along with services offered). No enterprise limits itself at only considering a single factor when it has to determine a place to set up. If it is looking for affordable manpower, it cannot, however, depart from adequate infrastructure, from some services offered to the enterprise and even some suppliers (Gérardin & Poirot, 2010). The attraction of a territory on an enterprise does not depend solely

on technical factors related to the factors of production and the demand of the local markets. Enterprise sometimes needs a qualified manpower that it should attract from other territories.

## Research Methodology

To properly carry out this research, the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data was necessary, ranging from survey with household, key informants of the town and documentary analysis.

## Area of study

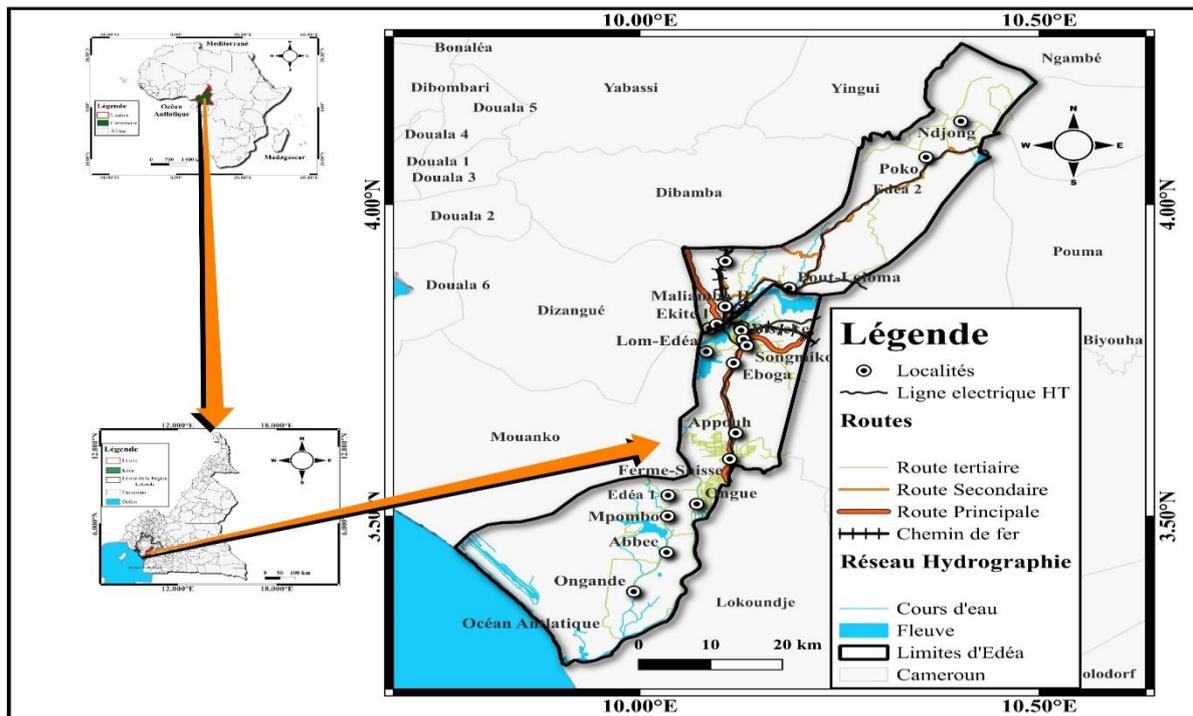


Figure 1 : Location of the study area.

Source: Author, 2025

## Collection of qualitative data

The qualitative data were gathered through document analysis and semi-structured interviews key actors. With regard to documentary analysis, it was conducted at the libraries of the University of Lome (Togo), the University of Douala and Yaoundé (Cameroon), and the University of Kumasi (Ghana). Aside from these libraries, also data was also extracted from websites (Google Scholar) and academic theses. Furthermore, documents from the municipality of Edea and the councils of Edea 1 and 2 (Aime et al., 2020) . were consulted. These information sources allowed us to become informed about subjects such as urban planning, attractiveness of a territory, development of towns to metropolis and in particular a variety of writings on secondary towns of the size of Edea in Africa. In semi-structured interviews, we found those actors who had been involved in the planning of the urban development of Edea(CLOS, 2015). Within that context, we held reasoning exchanges with mayors, those in charge of state decentralized services, technical agents, community-based organizations (CBOs), traditional and religious leaders. In the table below, we identify the various actors involved in the interviews.

**Table 1: Stakeholders that were interviewed**

Stakeholder / Actor	Number
Divisional officer	01
Sub-divisional officer	02
Mayors	03
Decentralized services of the State	15
Personnel of the councils	10
Traditional leaders	10
Religious authorities	05
Urban planners, architects	02
Community-based organizations (CBOs)	03
Total	51

Source: Author, 2025.

### Collection of quantitative data

The process of selecting surveyors within various localities to carry out data collection and administering the questionnaires on behalf of the investigators was done using an approach that takes into consideration the homogenous representativeness of the mother population. However, the last official population census was done in 2005 and has not been updated to date, and numerous administrative amendments that have taken place make the statistics out-dated, obsolete. In order to palliate this short-sightedness, we relied on demographic projections of 2020, which rendered a more appropriate estimate of the population study population. In this regard, we opted for a probabilistic sampling approach in order to bring about an optimal representativeness of the sample. The sample size was estimated from the entire population of Edea using the Schwartz formula (DOUNWOURGUE & KOLA, 2025).

Using the Schwartz formula, the sample size "n" (383) was estimated using  $Z = z$  value corresponding the 95% confidence level or  $Z \alpha/2 =$  Level of significance = 1.96, a prospected proportion (p) of 50% percent and d being the margin of error of 5%:  $Z (2) p (1-p) / d (2)$  or  $n =$  The final yields a sample of 383. Using the last household size survey conducted in Cameroon in 2005 as project projection. But using the urban planning master-plan, a household in Edea is taken to be 5 persons. The population is calculated using  $PoPn = poP0(1+t) n$ . Where  $PoPn =$  population for year n,  $Po P (0) =$  population in the reference year.  $t =$  growth rate, and  $n =$  difference between target year and reference year.

**Table 2: Population, number of household and projections**

ZD EDEA	Number of households (N)(2005)	2025 Population	2024 Population	2024 households	Sample

Plateau administratif	299	1495	1 970	394	9
Bonamikengue	448	2240	2 952	590	14
Centre commercial	86	430	567	113	3
Domaine Sanaga	504	2520	3 321	664	16
Amour	1103	5515	7 269	1 454	35
Bisseké	1671	8355	11 012	2 202	53
Mbanda	1832	9160	12 073	2 415	58
Gare	522	2610	3 440	688	17
Pongo - edea	1362	6810	8 976	1 795	43
Elog - bélé	295	1475	1 944	389	9
Mboué	194	970	1 279	256	6
Haoussa	668	3340	4 402	880	21
Béon	189	945	1 246	249	6
l'Île d'ALUCAM	129	645	850	170	4
Ekité	1029	5145	6 781	1 356	33
Mongombé	56	280	369	74	2
Malimba	1431	7155	9 431	1 886	45
Malimba farm	22	110	145	29	1
village - pilote	41	205	270	54	1
Kopongo	74	370	488	98	2
Ntoumba	127	635	837	167	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12082</b>	<b>60410</b>	<b>79 623</b>	<b>15 925</b>	<b>383</b>

Source: Author, 2025

Data analysis was carried out using the statistical software R, which produced both cross-tabulations and graphical representations of the statistics. The semi-structured interviews were transcribed with the help of the platform Sonix.ai, and edited with Microsoft word. The verbatim transcripts were used for the study. Additionally, a mind map was created to visualize the particular perceptions related to place (Paulet, 2002). A mind map was suggested to be a valuable tool to examine the extent of knowledge or lack thereof pertaining to a spatial phenomenon. This also allowed for a spatial breakdown of perceptions of the residents based on socio-demographic factors such as age and residential quarter. For the quantitative portion, the obtained data was described for categorical variables according to frequency and proportion.

### **Territorial and geographical justifications of the decreasing attractiveness of Edea**

The town of Edea has experienced a decline in its attractiveness to residents regardless of its strategic location to a major metropolis. The interviews conducted during the field survey have identified a number of reasons for the decline in attractiveness. Some of the leading causes depicted are lack of dynamism (03), informal sector (5), identity and ethnic crisis (05), unemployment (05), disregard to zoning in the master plan (05), ineffective decentralization (10), political city (10), accessibility (10), and lack of social cohesion (10).



**Figure 2: reason of low attractiveness of Edea**

Source: Author, 2025

Figure 2 highlights the various recurring limitations to Edéa's urban appeal that were identified during interviews with various stakeholders in the city

#### **Climatic en environmental factors as deterrents to settlement at the peripherals of Edea.**

Climate is a huge indication to the attraction of coastal cities. Edea has an equatorial climate of Guinean type with high humidity, annual rainfall of greater than 3000 mm, and high temperature with an average of 27.5 °C (Figure 3). This configuration has positive benefits: a large supply of water and a seaside/coastal and tourist potential. Unfortunately, this climate pattern provides significant constraints as well: technical discomfort (not comfortable), vector-calendar focused diseases (malaria), seasonal and/or recurring floods because of the overflow/flood stage of the Sanaga river, and landslides. All of these factors or conditions act to inhibit residential attractiveness and/or economic investments, even in some cases with seasonal and climatic migrations in mind

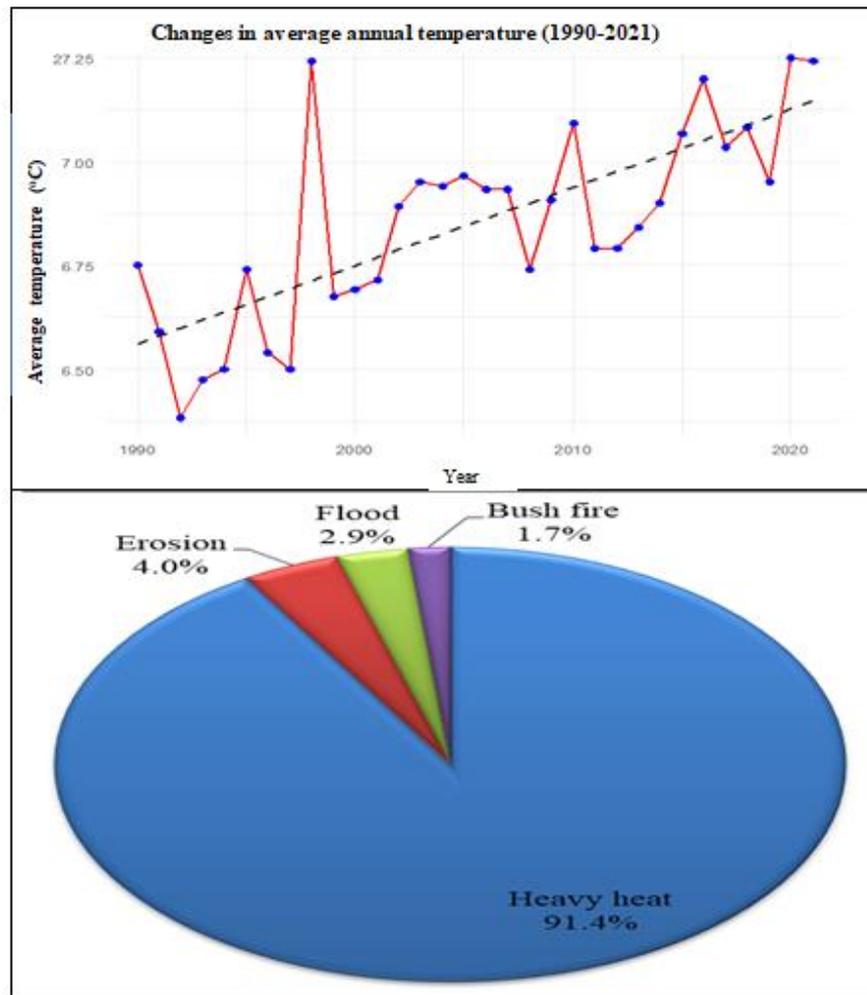


Figure 3: Climatic factors as barriers to the attractiveness of Edea

Source: Author, 2025

The results of the household-based surveys support these climatic data with 91.3% of the sample claiming to be exposed to heavy heat followed by 4.0% that complained of erosion and 2.9% of floods (figure 2). The table below makes an analysis of the climate in Edea.

Table 3: Synthesis of climatic factors

Climatic factors	Advantages	Problems
High temperatures with average around 27.5°C	Favourable to seaside and touristic activities	Technical discomfort during dry season (March –April)
Heavy rainfall $\geq 3000$ mm/year	Abundant availability of water resources and fertile soil	Flood and landslide with physical casualties
High humidity	Rich biodiversity	Proliferation of mosquitoes and waterborne diseases
4 seasons	Diversified agricultural activities	Heavy rains that disturb the economic activities
Closeness to the Sanaga River	Hydro-electric and touristic potentials	Recurrent overflows of Sanaga River leading to floods

Edea is a locality that faces challenges with waste management that is still poorly organised as shown on plate 1 revealing dumping sites not managed with many being informal.



Plate 1: Anarchical management of waste in Edea

Source: Author, 2025

In addition to these results, household-based surveys revealed (figure 2) that 63.3% of dumping sites are informal and that just 25.1% of trash cans in the town are from the company Hysacam in charge of waste disposal and cleanliness.

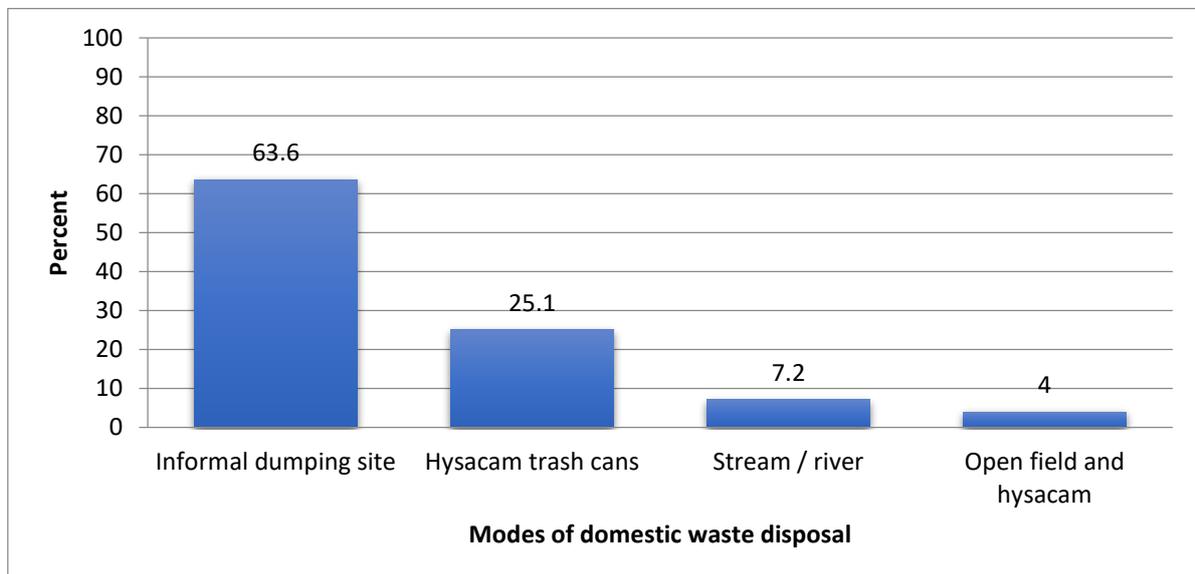


Figure 3 : Modes of domestic waste disposal in Edea

Source: Author, 2025

### Basic and social infrastructure: Accessibility, spatial dispersion and under-exploitation

In terms of health care, the situation is considerably below the national average. The Edea health district is the only health jurisdiction that has health care services in the Sanaga-Maritime division. As far as care, it

has two (02) reference hospitals, one (01) annex regional hospital, and one (01) district hospital, sixteen (16) frontline health facilities (public, private, confessional) and unequally distributed, with 1 medical doctor for 6200 inhabitants. Moreover, while the Edea district hospital and regional hospital annex may be suitably equipped and well covered here is not the case with the suburbs where complaints abound about the lack of personnel and medico sanitair equipment. There is also a problem of access to care because the road are not viable. In terms of education, the number of available equipment is quite suitable quantitatively, but the quality is poor and the equipment is poorly used (figure 4).

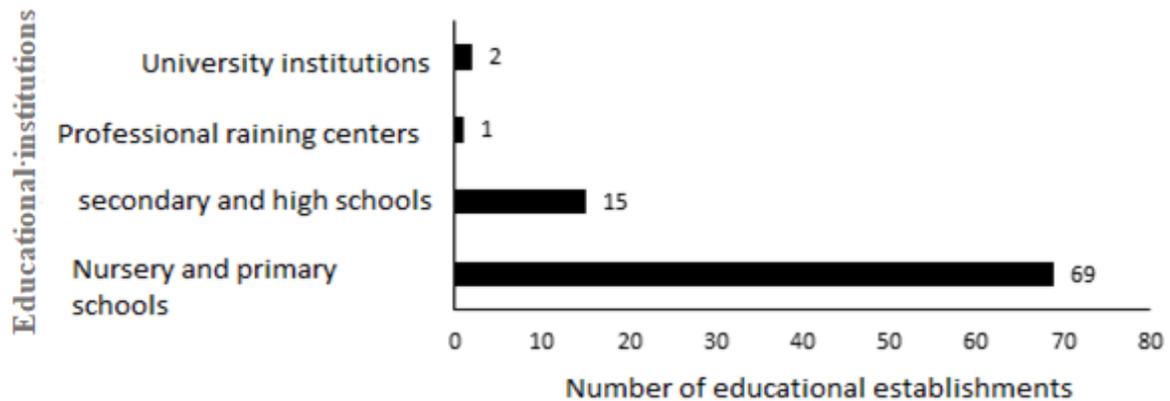


Figure 4: Number of university, secondary and basic education institutions in the town of Edea

Source: Annual report MINEDUB, MINESEC, MINEFOP, 2023

### Socio-economic and politico-institutional factors

#### A local governance sluggish to put in place developmental policies and initiatives towards the urban attractiveness of the town of Edea

Indeed, Edea is located in a geographic paradox, in the sense that the town has the basic central and commercial services yet still has an outdated government administration that is slow to catalyze the potentialities of the city to help attract persons and economic actors. There has been delay in the execution of major projects in the town as drafted in the urban policies, such as the planned development of the road network for the town of Edea elaborated in 2014 under a partnership between the urban council of Edea and the ministerial department in charge of town planning; the refurbishment of social accommodation abandoned by SIC which was elaborated in 2018 is still pending; the projects for the development/refurbishment of the equipment at the market known as 'Marché de bord', and the construction of a commercial centre that has languished in the archives since its initiation in 2012 that have yet to come on stream. These projects that are not implemented clearly testify the inadequacies in term of governance in the town of Edea and this actually hinders its attractiveness.

The list of unimplemented projects serves to highlight inadequacies in terms of governance in the town of Edea that are in fact strong contributors to its unattractiveness in terms of welcoming visitors. The administrative authorities responsible for urban planning and urban management still have not set in place any incentives to foster an environment for investment in the area, especially in terms of productive sectors. For example, the tourism sector, which initiated the construction of a municipal office of tourism and leisure has not created any touristic circuit given the low territorial bargaining attractiveness, plus the poor state of the leisure infrastructure (such as Hotels, restaurants and leisure centre are all in short supply in the town). The DDMINTOUR does not have any touristic carnet although the town has potential touristic sites that could positively stimulate the local economy. Furthermore, the strategic location of Edea at the junction between the coastal cities of Douala and Kribi, both of which welcome a considerable number of tourists and visitors, could have represented an asset in terms of establishing a touristic connection to the

other cities, as visitors could stop and stay in Edea for a short time. Edea could also serve to reduce visitor congestion on the actual coastal city of Kribi during holidays.

### Decline of major economic functions since 1985

Historically as an industrial town, Edea was among the prosperous towns in relation to industry and employment during the period between of 1970 and 1980. Edea's economic and industrial roles or functions are currently in decline perhaps mainly because of the severe economic crisis in the 1990s, the crippling structural adjustments of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) or initiative in 1995, and the economic degradation that occurred with the Highly Indebted Poor countries initiative. The decline of the towns industrial functions and overall attractiveness, which could be stimulated in part by industries moving elsewhere or closing down, are evident from the privatisation, restructuration and closures of many industries in Cameroon, albeit Edea mayorly (Marie-claire Ngono, 2019), especially in terms of industrial-employment opportunities and overall attractiveness of the town. The town was particularly affected by the surrendering of the State in its financial support to enterprises, especially in Edea, leading to diminishment of production compared to slow industrial employment (table4).

**Table 4: Number of industrial employees in Edea between 1985 and 2003 following the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme**

Industrial enterprises	Before 1985	1993	2003
SONEL/AES SONEL	250	122	83
SOCAPALM	401	120	107
CELLUCAM	1983	FERMEE	/
SOCATRAL	286	154	130
ALUCAM	1308	656	481
SPFS	222	100	/

*Source : Labor inspection office, labor office, Edea ; National Institute of statistics ; Report of activities of SOCAPALM ; Central Direction of General Statistics of Edea (Inspection du Travail, Bureau de main d'œuvre : Edéa ; Institut National des Statistiques, Rapport d'activités de la SOCAPALM. ; Direction de la centrale d'Edéa, Statistiques générales).*

Table 4 illustrates a substantial decline in the number of people employed in industrial enterprises in Edea. The restructuring of Aluminium du Cameroun (ALUCAM) and Société Camerounaise de Transformation de l'Aluminium en Tôles (SOCATRAL), as well as the privatisation of Société Nationale de l'Energie (SONEL) now AES/SONEL, and Société Camerounaise de Palmerais (SOCAPALM) previously owned by the state, symbolised its withdrawing from these enterprises, which subsequently resulted in the temporary lay off of many employees. The Cellulose du Cameroun (CELLUCAM) and ALUCAM were particularly affected, the business activity for the former collapsed due to financial difficulties, while ALUCAM removed over 85% of its workers, from 1308 in 1985, and employed only 841 in 2003. Similarly, the SPFS has ceased its production factories, and the privatisation of SOCAPALM and SONEL led to retrenchment of personnel, from 250 and 401 in 1985, respectively, while rising from 83 and 107 in 2003, demonstrating an adjustment of 33.7% of the workforce in SOCAPALM and 26.7% in SONEL.

Thus, this adjustment has compelled populations to leave the town, as well as a socio-professional re-integration since 1990 to escape the crisis (Table 4). In this dynamic, the informal sector steadily established itself in Edea

**Table 5: Distribution of assets by employment categories in 1981 and 1991 before and after the structural adjustment of the economy of Edea**

Categories of employment	Number in 1981	Number in 1991
Labourers	3060	1436
Traders and craft men	1400	1500
Skilled and semi-skilled employees	1585	1025
Independent workers and others	860	1020
Farmers / Fishermen	325	405
<b>Total</b>	<b>7230</b>	<b>5386</b>

Source: BCEOM, 1980-1881; 1990-1991 cited by Ngo-Molla, *Op.cit.* p41; 76

From Table 5, illustrates the extent of the losses in employment in Edea over the ten years between 1981 and 1991. Indeed, it can be observed the loss of more than 2000 jobs aggregated over all sectors of activity present in Edea. More remarkably, the tertiary and service sector were noticeably impacted, with a relatively high accumulation of jobs from fast growth driven by the peak of industry and as a consequence of socio-professional transformations. For traders, bank workers, among others, the crisis brought them into a significant recession. However, the primary sector (agriculture, fishing), smaller trade, and other services have shown some moderate recovery thanks to some of their older employees working at or being reorganized from industrial activity.

Today, Edea is facing stagnation of a poor underlying economic fabric. Most Small - Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have closed their local operations due to the lack of market attractiveness. The tax list for the local economy has largely transitioned to the informal economy and shifted the tax base (with the accompanying losses cascading down to no property tax assessments collected either) to the result of nearly all activity being under a simplified fiscal regime, a poor signature of a local economy - and investment opportunities besides being high-risk - where salaries would not support public or private investment capital. In 2024, a total of 4192 people were employed in Edea, which was one of 4630 taxed entities acknowledged by Sanaga Maritime (Table 6). This was significant in that most of the activity was informal (3911 employed), multiple and another significant finding was that activity is managed through SMEs and individual service economy, which would likely analyze to lower income generation potential.

**Table 6: Number of tax payers to the economy of the town of Edea**

Sectors of activity	Lists of tax payers	Number globally registered	Percentage per sector of activity
<b>Microfinance and banking enterprises</b>	Microfinance/ Cooperative banks and saving and credit unions, mobile-money operators.	13	0,31%
<b>Urban transport</b>	Moto taxi, bush taxi, Inter-urban taxi	323	7,70 %
<b>General commerce, big cosmetic and leisure activities</b>	Corner shop, big cosmetic shops, big hardware store, general commerce, snack-bar, bar discotheque, cabaret, drink depots, lodging	342	8,15 %
<b>Very small commerce and diverse</b>	Small stores, bars, drinking spots, cafeterias, open-air restaurant (doughnuts bakery, food-shop...), street trade (sale	2464	58,77 %

<b>services not structured</b>	of foodstuff, manicure and pedicure, tapestry, slaughter house, fish cold store, small hardware store), small hair dressing saloon, tailoring, small repairs' services (wheel gluer, panel beating, welding, electronic repairs...), brick making, car wash		
<b>Craft industries</b>	Local or traditional processing plant (Traditional oil making, traditional soap making...)	05	0,11 %
<b>Technological sector</b>	Coupling of electronic gadgets, metallic coupling, large scale sale of electronic apparatus	103	2,45 %
<b>Structured professional services</b>	Libraries, documentation, cyber-cafe, printing house, stationary, glass work, boiler making, bid hair dressing saloon, carpentry, garage, pharmacy, contract work, forestry	259	6,02%
<b>Money transfer, telephony</b>	Call box, mobile-money transfer's box	318	6,17 %
<b>NGOs and associations</b>	Education, training and social welfare's centres, religious groups, traditional groups	107	2,55 %
<b>Agricultural activities</b>	Big famers, industrial livestock, modern fishery, operators in the agricultural sector...	215	5,12 %
<b>Other activities</b>	Public services, municipal, BTP	43	1,02 %
<b>Total</b>	-	4192	100%

SOURCE : Fichier global des contribuables de la Sanaga-maritime, 8 AOUT 2024, CUE et Direction Départementale des Impôts –Sanaga-Maritime, 2024

Table 6 unequivocally denotes the local economic stagnation, highly informal (urban small trades are so overwhelming that they can represent "revenue"), of an economy that is neither bolstered nor nourished in any other serious manner. The economic fabric does not renew itself, which accentuates the lack of interest to establish in Edea from young graduates or project carriers; all this supports the idea that the town of Edea faces a decrease in its economic attractiveness formula due to the departure or disappearance of big industrial structures, a bad diversification, and low entrepreneurial dynamism (lack of varieties in the economy limit professional opportunities for Youth and redirect migration to Douala and Yaoundé). Its local economic fabric remains fragile, poorly organized, and less dynamic. Barring focused investments, diversification, and support to SMEs the Edea region could lose its strategic advantages as a business sector long term sustainability measure from its location.

### Deplorable quality of life in urban areas fuelling willingness to leave forever

The foremost issue that could negatively impact the quality of life the population in Edea hopes for, is urban poverty and rising unemployment. According to the Rapport Diagnostic sur la Situation Economique des Communes (RADDEC de 2021), the purchase power of the urban population in Edea is low (median daily disposable income of 555.6 XFA in 2015 and 575.5 XFA in 2020 all below the national poverty line of 748 XFA). The unemployment rate also seemingly at an alarming rate; it is estimated at 68% (2020) and 73% (2018) according to the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). With such index, one realises the instability of economic functions of the town of Edea and deteriorating social condition of the populations; this could push the populations away from town to big metropolis for better living condition. It was also noted insecurity in Edea, after speaking with the gendarmerie who described Edea as a 'centre of urban insecurity with criminals coming from Doula hiding in Edea to get away from the police. This all confirms figure 3 that suggests 61% of cases in Edea are of theft followed by 38.4% of aggression.

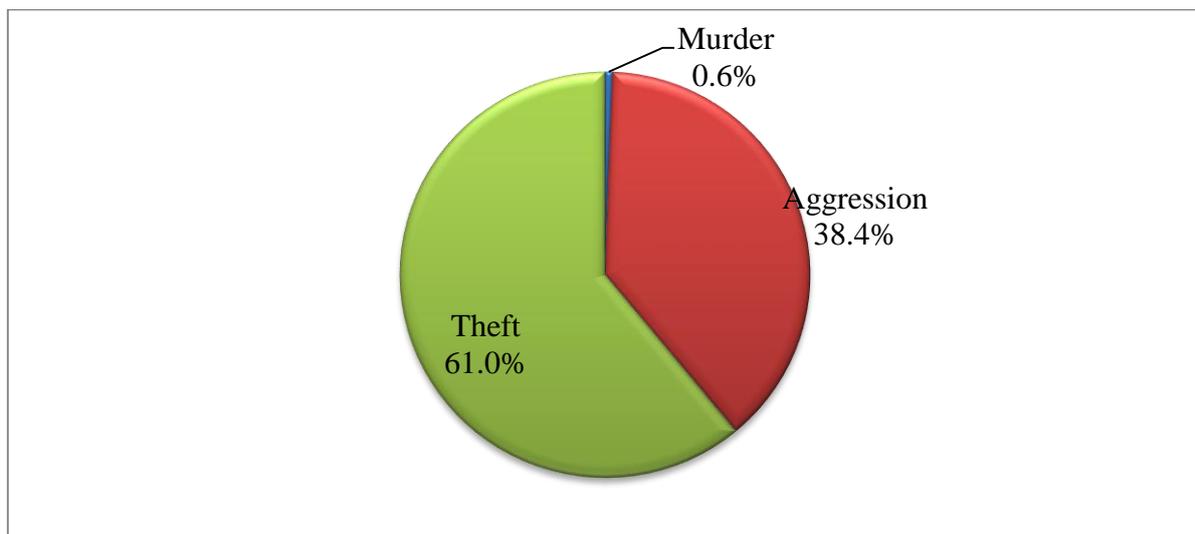
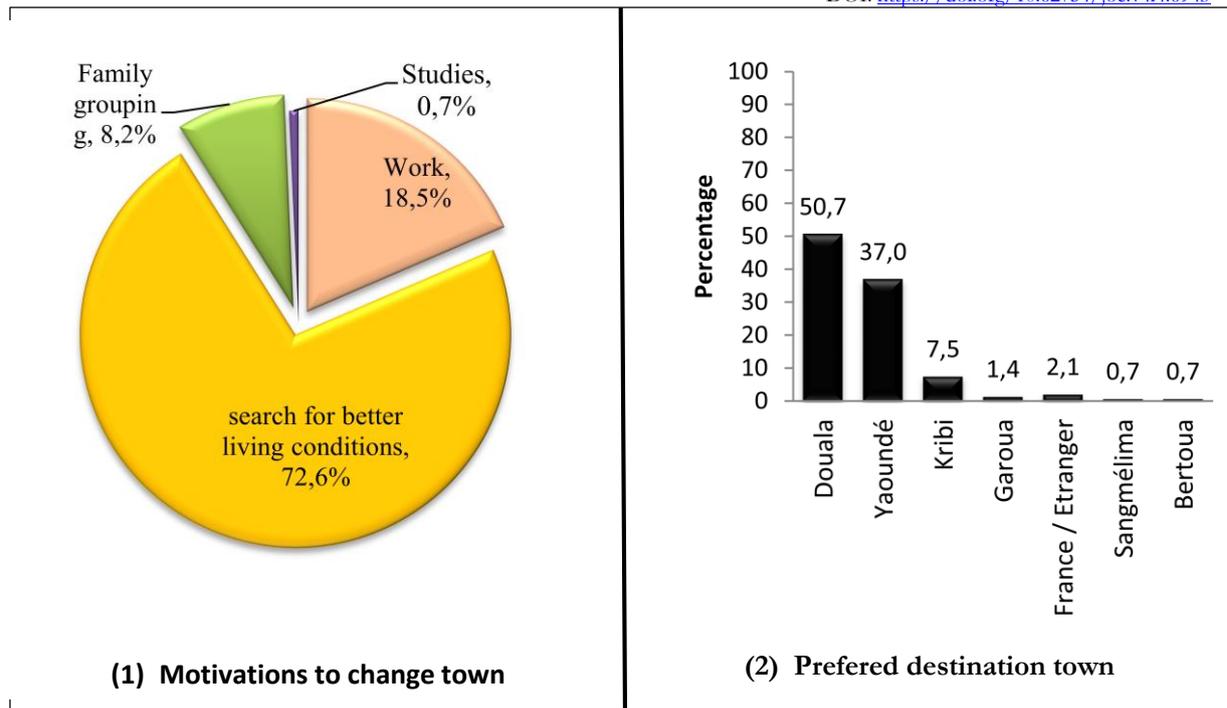


Figure 4 : State of insecurity in Edea

Source: Author, 2025

In this regard, a substantial proportion of surveyed households (41.7%) expressed a desire to relocate from the town of Edea, and their motivations for (1) leaving and (2) where they planned to (potentially) relocate were primarily grounded in the social economic challenges they faced in the various aspects of their lives (see Figures 4 and 5).



**Figure 4: Motivations and choice of new destinations if one definitely leaves Edea**

**Source:** The author, 2025

From the above statements, it shows that the social constraints present or characteristic to the town of Edea could stimulate the desire of some individuals to migrate to other urban centres. For socio-professional reasons (18.5%) and studies (0.7%) are part of the motivations of these urban dwellers, the general search for improvement in living conditions remained the main factor fueling these intentions (72.6%). Concerning the children's migrants, urban centers Douala (50.7%) and Yaoundé (37%) are the urban cabinets when they finally migrate.

## Discussion

Edea is an urban settlement at the crossroads of a metropolis, having advantages and disadvantages with respect to its urban attractiveness. This study's findings show clearly that the town has industries and produced the first hydroelectricity, but it encounters many obstacles to its appeal as an urban settlement. These obstacles were expressed as: "environment", "social", and "economic". Climate is said to be a pivotal factor to urban attractiveness, especially in coastal cities in sub-Saharan Africa (Hall & Page, 2014)(Wasonga et al., 2022). The equatorial Guinean climate in Edea has substantial rainfall (>3000mm), high average temperature (27.5°C), and humidity, all providing opportunities as well as constraints in terms of human settlement, economic development and town image. Furthermore, extended rainy seasons disrupt economic activities, and expose infrastructure to floods and landslides, especially near the Sanaga River (NJOUENWET et al., 2021). Humidity promotes vector-borne diseases, such as malaria, limiting living or residential comfort and placing pressure on the health system (Organization & others, 2021).The recent episodes of unusual increase in temperatures(Change, 2001), revealed by the GIEC (IPCC, 2022), increase the climatic vulnerability of the town and influence the seasonal movements of tourists and visitors. These constraints reduce the competitiveness of Edea towards neighbouring metropolis like Douala and Yaoundé better equipped to face climatic chocks,

The quality of life is an indicator of territorial attractiveness. The Commission on the Measurement of Economic and Social Development Performance (La Commission sur la Mesure de la Performance

Economique et du Progrès Social), believes that the quality of life should be highly taken into consideration for a sustainable attractiveness. For this commission, an attractive town *“should increasingly place emphasis on measures to ensure the well-being of the population as well as on economic production, and that it is necessary that these measures related to well-being to be made sustainable”*(Stiglitz et al., 2009) (Mouratidis, 2021). Unfortunately, the context of the development of the town of Edea instead presents a degradation of the quality of life of the populations faced with precarious conditions of life with respect to lodging, social security and savings. Secondary towns are often marginalized by policies in favour of capital cities and this leads to the inadequacy of security equipment and police’s activities. Moreover, towns where there is growing insecurity faced a slow economic development, a drain of capitals or investments and a low residential or living attractiveness (Profile, 2006)(Canton, 2021).

Edea has an important informal sector in its economic activities, whereby most of these informal actors are small traders and bars / drinking parlours. It is in this vein that it was believed that towns with a highly dominant informal sector have the tendency of remaining less productive and attractive(Duranton & Venables, 2020).

Governance challenges are equally to be reckoned with in achieving the attractiveness of a town(Chofor Che & others, 2019), notably emergent towns because the more the town enjoys an efficient institutional framework or structure, and an urban policy favourable to investment in all economic sectors, the more the town is subjected to a recurrent attractiveness for the setting up of development projects aimed at attracting investors, visitors and tourists (Danwé et al., 2012). Town like Edea, close to metropolis, becomes dependent of governance policy-making, without being able to mobilise its own strategic resources(Aime et al., 2020)(Saha et al., 2018). Though less populated than Douala and Yaoundé, Edea faces challenges with waste management. The inadequacy of waste management policy in public spaces indicates the inefficiency of authorities. The heaps of waste all over the city testify the failure of local and national authorities, and this leads to resentment, anxiety and decrease in citizens’ confidence towards authorities or governance(Arrey & Mondoleba, 2021)(Tvedten & Candiracci, 2018).

Preference for Douala and Yaoundé is justified, given their high demographic-adsorption potential of migrations nationwide, which is explained by the big nature of their markets, multiples opportunities for training and employment, economic convergence and development, and social and cultural delectations or entertainments that they offer(Jacquemot & Yango, 2020). All these further and sufficiently justify the decreased attractiveness of the town of Edea.

To make a synthesis of this analysis, it is important to highlight the fact that metropolis are always attractive because they are leading hubs (employment, leisure, investments, and infrastructure) despite the existence of urban problems. Whereas, secondary towns like Edea though probably more peaceful, with quietude or calmness, are faced with inadequacy of infrastructure and governance which render them paradoxically lesser attractive.

## Conclusion

The town of Edea is located in the littoral region of Cameroon and has a rich history and economic future. Edea was once a strategic town particularly with its location on the Douala-Yaounde highway, with natural resources, a hydroelectric power plant as well as having roads and railways, but it now faces some factors which has hinder its development, factors such as insecurity, waste disposal issues and poor governance. Nevertheless, Edea had some potentials it could leverage to become a socially and economically developing centerpiece in the county's development. In addition to its proximity to the Sanaga River, Edea is also the perfect nexus between Douala and Yaounde which is important in commercial bridges. The Sanaga River has enormous hydroelectric potentials. The realities illustrated in this context of the research study echoes what many secondary towns in sub-Saharan Africa are facing. It could have an important role in urban planning and land use, reorganization of metropolis and intermediary hubs in the vibrancy of the regional economy. However, the attractiveness of these towns still needs to be addressed with urban planning, an effective decentralization or devolution policy, investment strategies that would truly enable secondary towns to be feasible alternatives to major metropolis. For this reason, Edea could be a testing laboratory or

place for urban inclusive policy, taking into consideration sustainable management and increase institutions and economic attraction to transform its classification from a secondary town to development hub or regional balance.

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