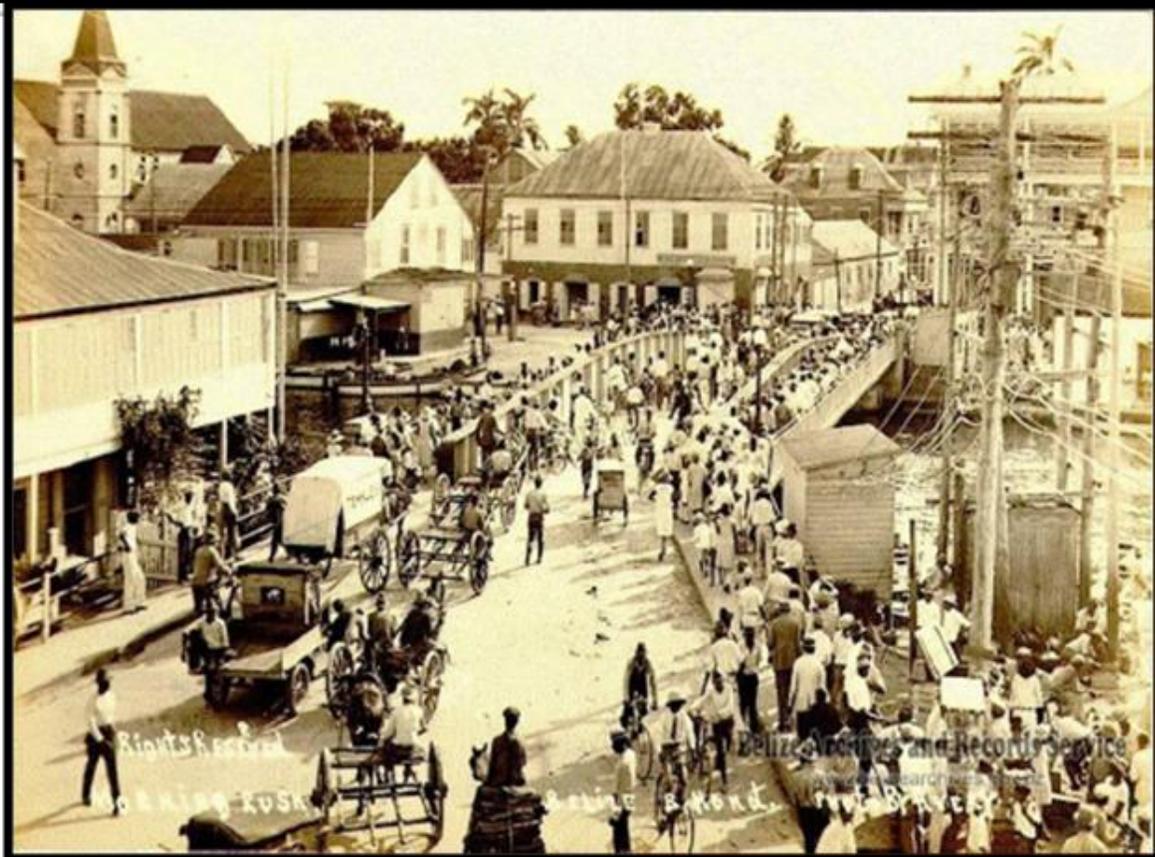




**Inter-American
Development Bank**

2011

Annex 02 – Existing Issues of Belize City’s Historical Development



PADECO

i.E.

The Expansion of Belize City

The figures show the extent to which Belize City has expanded westward over the past 40 years.

Figure 1: Belize City Urban Development (1969)

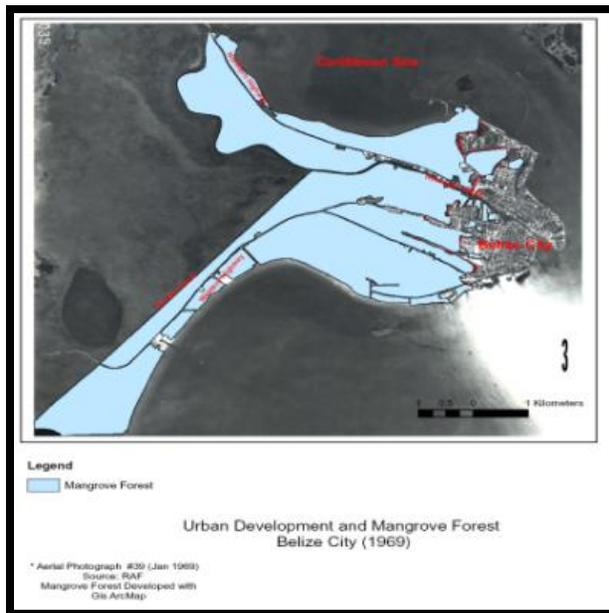


Figure 2: Belize City Urban Development (1988)



The series of preliminary maps shown here suggest that one of the most dramatic changes to affect the planning and design of Belize City as well as its downtown historical environment is the ongoing growth of population and of the functional spatial area within which Belizeans live their lives.

The primacy of Belize City is declining, and will continue to decline. The study’s hypothesis is that this decline in the primacy of Belize City is taking the form of the expansion of Belize City’s functional area beyond the existing administrative borders.

Figure 3: Belize City Urban Development (2005)



A New Functional Area has Developed

The functional spatial area is extending well beyond the immediately local and the traditional historical downtown around Regent and Albert streets, and even beyond an extended downtown from Central America Boulevard to the coastal line. As the series of maps and diagrams above clearly suggest, the area where the citizens of Belize live their lives is extending well beyond its administrative boundary. This is an urban area, which is not defined by its administrative or historic boundaries.

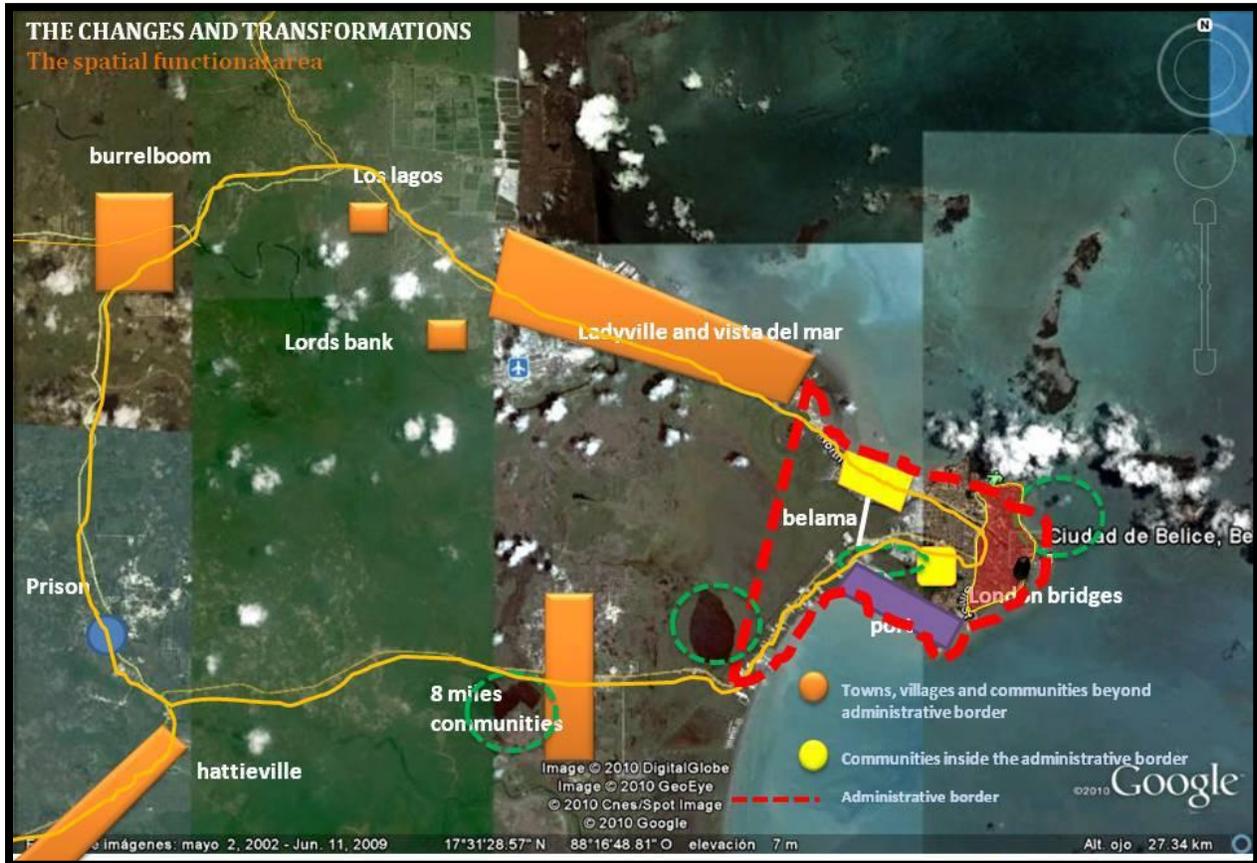
An important question is what defines this new area?

This extended new functional spatial area forms the scale at which economic and housing markets seem now to operate. Housing, transport and job markets do not correspond to the local authority boundary. Economic flows often overlap local authority boundaries in Belize City. The functional area over which the local economy and its key markets operate will not necessarily adhere to its administrative boundaries. Instead, key economic markets (such as housing and transport) broadly correspond to a sub-region that may be called ‘**Greater Belize City**’.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that challenges in Belize City go beyond the administrative boundaries of the city; the mindset is still influenced by a traditional configuration of the city as a well-defined spatial environment. However, urban reality is now made up of more or less complex urban systems and sub-systems, the fabric of which is partly the result of people’s mobility, their means of transport, as well as the location of their jobs and where they live. Belize City and its belt of towns tend to disseminate into communities and neighbourhoods, which are neither urban nor rural. Consequently, tackling the challenges facing the city today requires a sustained coordination between these different communities and administrative levels concerned. The need for metropolitan governance as well as urban and local governance is evident.

The new functional spatial area maybe composed by new communities of interest (networks of work and of friends, networks of customers, of shops, and of suppliers and of leisure facilities) located along the two major highways (northern and western) and include the variuos towns (such as *Ladyville and Vista del Mar*), villages (such as *Hattieville*), and communities (such as *Lords Bank*) growing and expanding along these two northern and western corridors (Other places to be found in this territory are: *Belama, Lord’s Bank, Los Lagos, Burrelboom, and, 8 miles*, etc) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Greater Belize City commuter towns and Bedroom Communities



Source: PADECO/iE

Most of these settlements along the two major highways are commuter towns and bedroom communities; they are urban communities that are primarily residential, from which most of the workforce-citizens-students-commute out to Belize City downtown to earn their livelihood. Many of these commuter towns might act as suburbs of Belize-city downtown to where these workers/citizens/students/ travel daily. In a sense these commuter towns belong to Greater Belize City. As they conform to a ring of commuter towns around Belize City’s urban area, they can be considered as a Belize City commuter belt.

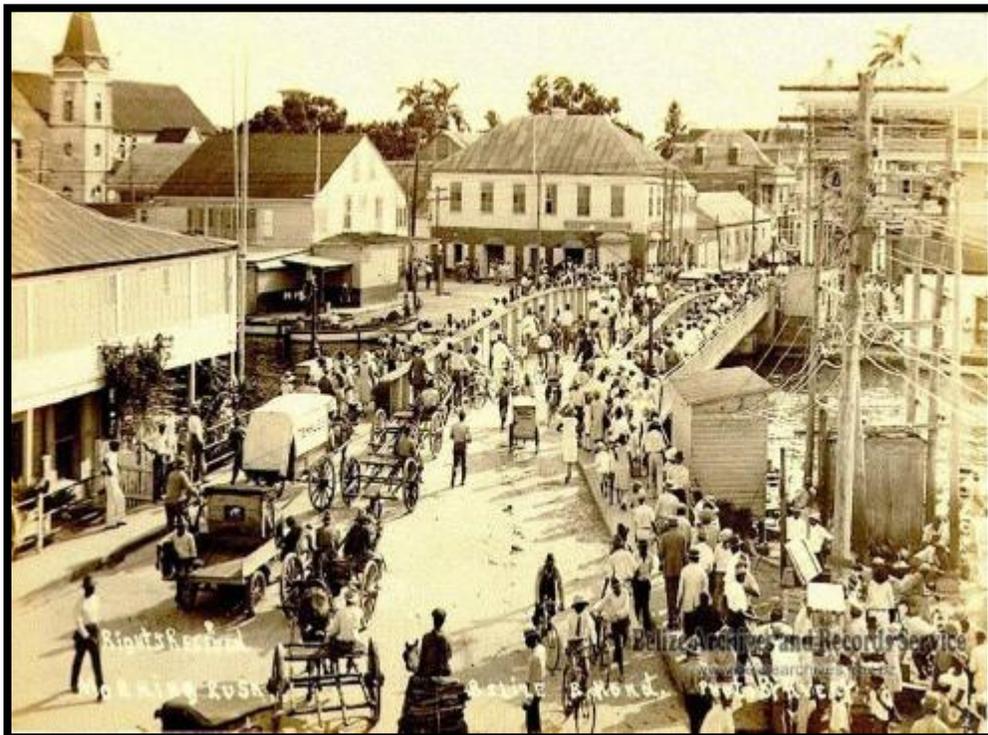
The spatial structure of Belize City is that of a monocentric city where most jobs and amenities are concentrated in a more or less high density central node, that extends to the north and to the west, with a radial movement of people and commuters travelling from suburbs and bedroom communities in a commuter belt, to the center of the city.

Belize City Seaport - Historical Development

First stage: At first the port function and Belize City were integrated at the current Belize City downtown. This was a founding moment (an originating city port) characterized by a close spatial and functional association between the city and the port. In these early stages of this evolution, the port and the city lived in symbiosis. This was a port for the development of trade. With the improvement of trade, the small port in Belize City’s downtown that may have provided access to other settlements along the river, may have caused spatial changes in the shoreline; and the waterfront became the heart of the city’s economy.

At that time, the waterfront (at the mouth of the river next to the moving bridge) may have also served as a place for social interaction. Visiting Belize Port City at the time meant becoming acquainted with a microcosm that seemed to include all nationalities, cultures, and ethnic groups. The Belize waterfront at the time may have been the theater of coming and going. Consequently, at that period, there was a close spatial and functional connection between port and city. At first then, the port and the city were integrated at the current city downtown.

Belize City Old Port at the Rivermouth



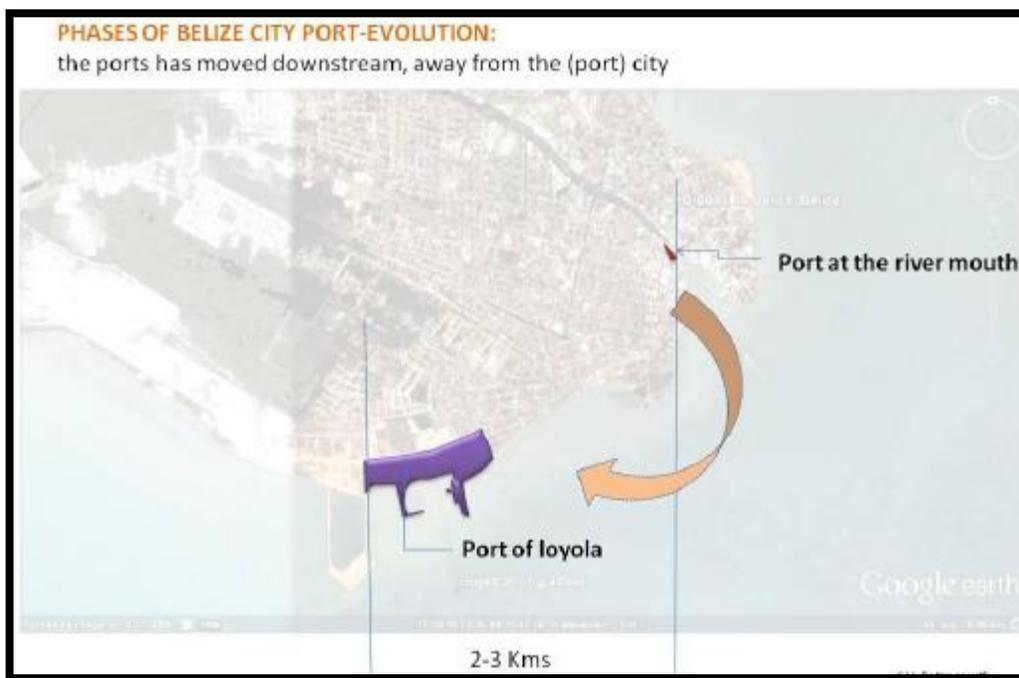
Source: Belize Archives and Records Service

Second stage: Over time, and in what appears to be a second stage of evolution, both spatially and functionally the port and the city become increasingly separated and segregated from each

other. At a certain point in time, all economic (industrial) activities and port facilities in Belize City’s downtown began to move to outer city zones and leaving empty urban lands behind.

It may have been the promise of the container that may have eliminated the need for a great deal of traditional port infrastructure developed in the first stage above. Finger piers with warehouses on the wharves that were designed to protect cargo in transit from the elements are no longer needed. Yet, in situ transformation of these waterfront facilities in downtown was the exception rather than the norm; typically they were abandoned in favor of new locations at Loyola Port. This is because the pre-container port facilities at the old downtown port were typically associated with Belize riverfront and downtown locations. These locations became increasingly undesirable because containerization is also associated with a drive for ever-larger ships. Larger ships require deeper water, and this requirement may have contributed to a migration of port facilities towards the ocean-front locations at Loyola Port.

Separation of the Port from the City Centre



Source: PADECO/iE

The new port facilities were built further downstream than the facilities in the former era, resulting in a growing geographical separation of the port and city. The port and city spatially drifted apart. The port is geographically moving away, it is disconnected from the city while at the same time the geographical overlap between the port and the city in terms of land use diminishes. The once substantial and longstanding symbiosis between the seaport and Belize City seems to have been eroded via a more or less large scale port which consumes large areas of land, to expand over the course of various stages. Economically and geographically, port and

cities have grown apart; the city begins to develop next to a port that is a “city” inside the city; as the Port Authority becomes different from the municipal authority. The downstream migration of the port facilities is the most obvious physical manifestation of the disconnection between the seaport and the Belize City.

One would have then expected that as result of this evolution (from stage 1 to stage 2), an expanding city port with economic vitality would have emerged in these areas beyond the city confines; a modern industrial city port, that would retreat from the river waterfront to the Loyola seaports. One would have also expected a change in the landscape of the waterfront: the port of Loyola would have become a place of industrial activity; where factories, huge size warehouses and docks would be constructed in the place of wooden piers and new port zones would be developed, and, where waterfronts would be mostly used for industrial and utility activities, such as port facilities, manufacturing industry, boat building and maintenance, water supply, drainage, sewage treatment plants, electricity power generation.

Yet the port of Loyola does not seem to have evolved into this landscape of industrial activity. What seems to have resulted from this evolution is a rather underdeveloped port. Belize City seems still to lack a port with a high economic vitality. One should also have expected that as result of the changing linkages between port and city, older downtown port areas would have been redeveloped for urban uses, which may have included urban waterfront developments such as housing, commercial functions, and offices. One should have then expected that this evolution of the port function would have speed the transformation of the older and former obsolete port areas in Belize city downtown into new types of land uses. Yet this process has not occurred either and what we have instead is a rather deteriorated environmental unsafe downtown area.

So while the abandonment of the old port in Belize city downtown by “deeper”-sea shipping at Loyola may seem a short-term negative, it actually opens up a priceless opportunity to create a new image for the city and its region. Yet, the unique potentials for new urban developments that the old waterfront offers seem to have gone unnoticed in Belize City. That is, the opportunity-opened by the expansion of the Panama canal- to expand the Loyola Port further downstream may lead to the urban renewal not only of the older port ensemble at downtown, but, of the port of Loyola area, including the Yarborough area, and ultimately to an enhanced port–city proximity reflecting patterns of urban change and a renewal of the port–city link.

It seems then as if the Belize port has been trying to evolve from: an ‘**entrepôt port**’ (the colonial free port); a port within the (at the colonial time) enclosed downtown Belize City. Goods were stored and traded in the city, the quay and the bridge were also public streets, into: a **transit port**; a port alongside a more open expanding beyond downtown Belize City and the flow of goods begin to bypass the city.

Belize City Seaport – Opportunities

The port of Belize City at Loyola, seems to have reached this second stage (a transit port). The question is what would follow next in this process of port evolution?

The port of Loyola may have the potential to expand into an **industrial port**; a port alongside a functional city; where goods are processed in the port area. This will be some sort of commodity port in which the manufacturing of the handled goods forms an important part of the activities in the port area. This port would have many different sectors and the producing industry that uses the incoming freight flows will be well represented in the port area. The port will also be an important location of inland waterway transport (for instance, along the bourdon canal and the river).

As mentioned, the Panama Canal expansion opens opportunities for the Caribbean to become an important hub for this maritime traffic (figures 1, 2).

Caribbean Transshipment Market



Source: Rodrigue, J-P and T. Notteboom (2010) "Comparative North American and European Gateway Logistics: The Regionalism of Freight Distribution", Journal of Transport Geography.

Efficient transshipping hub ports (gateway ports or hub ports) will be the most valuable. For Belize City Loyola seaport to be well placed in this process, it will need to invest in increasing

its capacity and be redeveloped into a transshipping hub; a distribution port, a port the economics of which will develop in a global value-driven chain system, or the role it may play in global production and distribution systems. That is, a port that will be rediscovered by the city as a part of the urban landscape. The city in turn will be rediscovered by the port as a potential nerve center for logistic organization and telecommunication.

Thus, the Loyola port area is still capable of fully accommodating new demands for new business sites and for the extension of the port and the development of new port areas (companies, harbours and other infrastructures). In other words, a next phase of the redevelopment of current port areas - an increase in the port area- may still be possible. An important intervention will be to redevelop the port functions and uses of the underdeveloped derelict areas. It is therefore recommended that the maritime potential of the port be fully assessed.

But this time a proposal for extension of the port will have to incorporate both, environmental constraints. Opening new terminals will require a complete environmental impact review, or mitigation plan, as well as the needs of the city to expand and develop new city areas within its own borders geographically very close to the Port. It is not only the abandoned port areas in downtown which could be redeveloped for city uses, but the Master Plan for this area should also propose to redevelop parts of the Loyola port near the city for port activities, as well as to reserve space and land for the natural heritage and its ecosystem services.

It may then appear that the interface between the port function and Belize City may next evolve and develop into a spatial system comprising the expansion of the port function at Loyola; a passenger port, a public port at Yaborough, the changing land use in downtown old port; and the ecological system mainly comprising environmental ecosystem services, climate change and energy issues. Thus, the Loyola Port will soon be faced with challenges in the fields of land supply, the environment and the accessibility of the port area.