

PROGRAM "ECHANGES UNIVERSITAIRES", founded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Urbanization in China - Examples from the Pearl River Delta

The project in brief

Division

Development Cooperation

Country / Region

China / Pearl River Delta

Partners

Prof. Dr. Rita Schneider-Sliwa, Department of Environmental Sciences, Geography / Urban and Regional Studies, University of Basel

and

Prof. Dr. Xue Desheng, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou

and

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Background

China is experiencing rapid economic growth with concomitant societal, regional and political changes. Such changes open up many opportunities for foreign industrial investment but also allow for widening development differentials within China's urban industrial and rural areas. In 2007 University of Basel's Department of Geography/Urban and Regional Studies and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning of Guangzhou's Sun Yat-Sen University agreed on visits to the Pearl River Delta and Switzerland, respectively, and to start cooperating in field trips, field research, especially assistance to Chinese doctoral students coming to Germany and Switzerland and Master theses for Swiss students who want to study urbanization in China's Pearl River Delta. At present, the KFPE program "Echanges Universitaires" funds these Swiss Master's projects outlined below.

Aim of the project

The theses deal with urbanization, commercial and industrial development at three different scales

- **Micro-Scale of an urban village (Xiadu Urban Village).** Urban villages are poverty areas within modernized Chinese cities. Here, local communities subsist at poverty levels and with less standard infrastructure than the rest of the city, and social fabric and local self organizing is trying to make up for much of the deficits left by state or local government policies. The Master thesis of Patrizia Zanola is devoted to the life in an urban village and self help organizations. This thesis will be supervised by geographers and social scientists from Sun Yat-Sen University.
- **Meso-Scale of an urban district.** Using **Guangzhou's Haizhu District.** Elizabeth Brencic portrays how China is massively investing into districts of potential and building up modern, manhattanized downtowns. This thesis will be guided by persons directly linked with the Urban Planning Bureau, as well as with Sun Yat-Sen University's Urban and Regional Studies Centre.
- **Macro-Scale of metropolitan area development.** The study of Michael Probst will be devoted to analyzing the Master planning for building the first "twin global city" **Shenzhen-Hongkong.** This thesis will be supervised by persons from the Shenzhen Urban Planning Bureau, a geography professor from Hong Kong University and our contact partner from Guangzhou University.

Project target

Promotion of cross-cultural learning and research in urban development planning. Fostering research skills of young Swiss professionals in international contexts of Swiss national interest.

Target group

Young professionals working in international urban development; international urban planning community.

Duration

April 2009 to April 2010

Contact

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Details of the Master's theses

Social organization in urban villages in the Pearl River Delta, South China - The case of Xiadu Cun, Guangzhou.

Patrizia Zanola (Master's thesis)

Background. Globalisation and economic growth have led to massive and rapid urbanisation in China. Since the late 1970s, when the country has launched policy reforms to open up towards the Western world, coastal cities of the country have witnessed enormous economic and urban growth. The consequences of this process however do not only include positive aspects such as the reduction of poverty, but also the aggravation of massive urban disparities and social and spatial inequalities. In order to guarantee a harmonious and thus sustainable urban development these factors need to be minimised. In China one of the manifestations of these developments is the phenomenon of *chengzhongcun*, which are **urbanised rural villages**. Although these urban villages have spatially become part of the urban area, they represent special neighbourhoods due to their physical and social features that hinder them to be fully integrated into the city. Due to China's land use regulation, which divides rural and urban space, urban villages are administrated by the village committee, whereas urban areas are subject to municipal authorities. Consequently, construction patterns differ essentially and spatial inequalities have occurred. Socially, the villages accommodate mainly working migrants, for whom peasant-owned rental housing in the villages is oftentimes the only possibility to access affordable housing. These factors have added to the general perception of urban villages as being 'malignant tumours' in the city, which have to be eliminated.

Objective. This study investigated the impact of the urbanization process, encroachment and the threat of being removed on the inhabitants of an urban village, and how they organize themselves to meet their needs. It is argued that social self-organisation and self-help strategies based on social relations among the inhabitants of urbanised villages is one of many assets of the village that should be preserved instead of being eliminated. As urbanisation progresses and urban villages are to be ripped down, it is essential to analyse their benefits for the city and potential first, so as to integrate these assets to redevelopment plans in order to achieve a sustainable result. Especially social aspects have been neglected so far, although these relations constitute a major role in Chinese culture.

Main Research Questions. The first question addressed the importance of social relations for migrant workers and former farmer families in urbanised villages. The second question was concerned with the degree of interaction and importance of relations between the village and the surrounding city. The third question analysed the potential of social relations of the village, i.e. its social capital, and the fourth question explores the potential for redevelopment of the village. The urban village chosen for the study was Xiadu Village, located in Haizhu District of Guangzhou City, the capital of Guangdong Province in South China. Since Guangdong province is one of the most dynamic areas of China, including the Pearl River Delta, it is the most attractive region for working migrants in China. Furthermore, the village is located in one of the busiest districts of the city, next to Sun Yat-Sen University campus. The village is particularly apt for the study due to its location, size and history, which have played an important role for its development and integration to surrounding areas.

Data and Methods. During a field trip to the site in January 2010 a survey was made to investigate the social relations among the inhabitants of the village, consisting of migrants and villagers. The questionnaires were designed according to the two target groups and supported by case studies. Furthermore, the ways in which the village interacts with its surroundings were explored. The data were analysed according to social capital theory. Furthermore, expert interviews were carried out with village authorities and urban planners in order to complement the views on the past, present and future of the village. The data were processed with SPSS and GIS. Given the contemporary redevelopment discussion of urban villages in Guangzhou the question of which redevelopment approach and model might be best for the village and the surrounding areas was central. The study contributed to the current redevelopment debate for urban villages.



Figure 1 Harsh contrast between new Xiadu and adjacent residential communities (source: author's photographs 2010)

Results. The results show that in the case of Xiadu, social relations among migrants within the village were important, whereas farmers can rely on support by authorities. Furthermore, the village was conceived as well integrated with its surroundings with a fair amount of social and economic interaction. Yet, despite the importance of social relations for migrants to thread their everyday life, social capital is still low, for people have not yet found effective ways of capitalising their social assets. The results show that Xiadu disposes of many assets that are beneficial for the village inhabitants as well as for the city as a whole. A redevelopment preserving these assets and eliminating only the disadvantages would therefore be the best solution for the future development of the area.

Conclusion. Given the small of the study time and place restrictions, the transferability of the results to the hundreds of thousands of urban villages in China is limited. However, it yields important information about Xiadu Village and might be helpful for the redevelopment of the area. Although the topic is of crucial importance for the urban future of society, research in the field is quite young and literature about it is still scarce. Therefore, further studies investigating the interaction between urban villages and the city are required.



Figure 2 The Little North Gate: Connection Gate between SYSU Campus and Xiadu Cun. Students stream in to Xiadu Village for everyday necessities.

Research Partnership. Because of the cooperative agreement between Sun Yat-Sen University and Basel University no major problems have occurred during the field trip. The basic problem consisted of the language barrier, which however could be bridged thanks to good cooperation and interpreters. The scholarly environment of SYSU is extremely well developed including satisfying infrastructure. The inclusion of different people in the research has lead to cross-cultural learning on both sides, which is an extremely valuable experience and particularly helpful for future research.

Guangzhou - Making a Global City - The Contemporary Model of Urban Planning in Guangzhou. The Case of Guangzhou's Haizhu District

Master's Thesis by Elizabeth N. Brencic

Meso-Scale of an urban district. Using Guangzhou's Haizhu District this study portrays how China is massively investing into districts of potential and building up modern downtowns to create a new global city in the southern part of China. This thesis illustrates four of the most influential contemporary projects that are to help Guangzhou achieve its ambition goal. Additionally, Guangzhou's strategies are illustrated and the importance of cross-cultural learning is underlined. An attempt is made to present the political procedure that goes hand in hand with Chinese urban planning but also which foreign models show parallels to the contemporary projects. This thesis was guided by persons directly linked with the Urban Planning Bureau, as well as with Sun Yat-Sen University's Urban and Regional Studies Center.

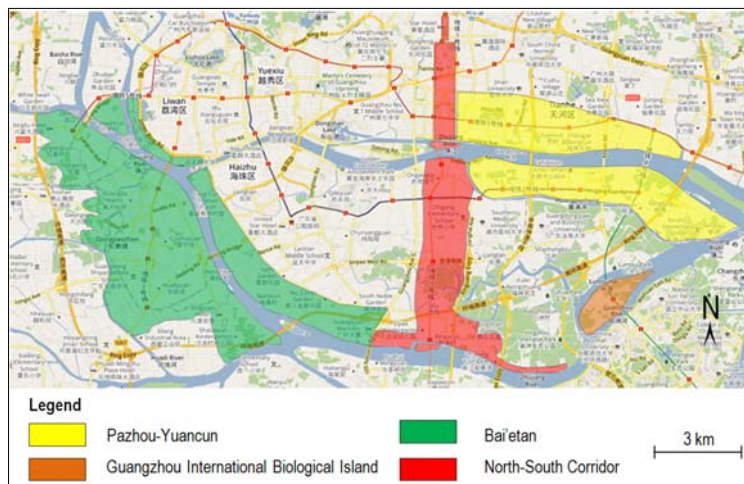


Figure 3 The location of all four contemporary projects in Guangzhou, China



Figure 2 The new landmark of Guangzhou:TV-Tower

Aim and Objective. The objective of this research was to analyze four of the most influential contemporary urban planning projects that are being conducted in Guangzhou's Haizhu District. Firstly, the project itself was to be researched. Secondly, the collaborations or consultations that were necessary to create the projects were investigated and finally, the political procedure of how the projects developed was explored. These approaches would thus offer insight as to how a city 'of today' tries to develop into a global city by having the great advantage of being able to learn from other already existing global cities and their path of achieving their goal. This shows which past strategies and models were acceptable to Guangzhou in making a global city out of a usual city. The thesis also shows how Guangzhou adds new aspects to modern urban planning, as for example, the influence of their Lingnan culture, and shows how important cross-cultural learning is.

Achieved and Unachieved Goals. The research conducted for this thesis was combined with a one month stay in Guangzhou. After several interviews, several goals that were set could be achieved. The interviewees were able to pass on important knowledge referring to every project. Unfortunately, no planning documents of any kind could be given for the final thesis as three projects out of four were still being created and Chinese laws prevent passing sensitive documents to foreigners. The interviewees still were able to give precise information as to what each project should offer at the end. Due to one interviewee was it possible to find exact cross-cultural collaborations that were essential to generate state of the art plans. The hardest part of this research was to find information regarding the political processes of each key project. Many interviewees would not discuss it, as they found it to be too complicated and potentially harmful to themselves. Furthermore, it was near impossible to find written literature regarding this topic. Therefore, this MA thesis offers all information that could be found and it can be seen as a starting step for further research.

Obstacles. Unexpected obstacles occurred throughout the nine months of researching and writing this thesis. Prior to leaving for Guangzhou it was essential to conduct as much literature research as possible to be well prepared and informed. During this period it was evident, that information regarding political procedure in Chinese urban planning hardly existed.

Most articles were outdated or very imprecise. One expectation was to clarify this aspect in Guangzhou but was unfortunately, not the case. A further obstacle that also occurred in Guangzhou was the research based on interviews. Unfortunately, no interviews were organized during the first two weeks. Thus, this MA thesis is basically set on seven interviews, whereas more were expected. It proved to be very difficult to find accurate interviewees that were able to "find time" for an interview which can be taken as a proxy for being courageous enough to answer to foreigners when foreign research contacts still underlie official approval and are potentially harmful. Obstacles that were confronted in Switzerland were to find important information in the internet. The internet was the main source of information and the most precise and

updated information was written in Chinese. Thus, it was very difficult to find information or accurate pictures or maps for this thesis and required a large amount of work. Due to the help of various Chinese students, that translated and conducted research for this thesis, was this paper able to offer brand new and accurate information regarding the research area.

Important Results. The most important result concluding from the nine past months of research is the gained insight to Guangzhou's urban planning strategies, as they include cross-cultural learning for the four projects that are to make Guangzhou a global city. The close collaboration with SOM, HM and OBERMEYER, which are all architecture and urban design offices, show how today's urban planning is most accurate when cross-cultural learning is integrated. Guangzhou tries to obtain the best projects possible for the city and has taken important lessons from Berlin's approach to becoming a global city and at the same time adhering to the main world city characteristics that were already presented back in 1966 by HALL. Guangzhou thus aims at creating a global city that fits the international uniform but is not afraid to add their Lingnan culture and thus add a new, important aspect to urban planning that will hopefully be included into general urban planning across the world.

Conclusion. The Haizhu District contains four projects that will help make Guangzhou become a global city. It cannot yet be called an alpha global city nor a best-practice model but is, according to GaWC's inventory (2008), on a skyrocket speed towards maybe even becoming both. Cross-cultural learning is a vast part of Chinese urban planning and is well adapted. Various parallels have been listed that occurred between Guangzhou's ongoing projects and foreign models. At the moment, it is still too early to state if Guangzhou will ever make it to becoming an alpha++ global city, as more aspects must be analyzed, as for example sustainability. If Guangzhou manages to keep its feet on the global stage and stay a strong swimmer in the world economy, Guangzhou has the best cards to play with and stands a great chance in achieving its goal.

Recommendation. This thesis presents an interesting topic which is not well covered by the literature. Further research regarding this topic and study area would be beneficial as one should analyze as to how sustainable the projects prove to be. Additionally, it would be necessary to analyze Guangzhou in 2020 and see if Guangzhou was able to achieve its goal in becoming a global city or not. This knowledge would be very beneficial for further urban planning studies.

Metropolitan Planning for a Global Twin-City: Shenzhen-Hong Kong

Master's thesis by Michael Probst

Objective. This thesis intended to document the past, current and future comprehensive planning of the Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong. The thesis addressed following questions:

- What main links and structures (social, economic, traffic infrastructure etc.) do already exist between Shenzhen and Hong Kong?
- How do Shenzhen's and Hong Kong's present state-of-the art planning strategies evolve from the earliest broad-brush planning concepts and what structural and legal reforms did the urban planning systems undergo during this period of time?
- How do Shenzhen's and Hong Kong's present planning strategies 'plan' for the Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong?
- How are the present planning strategies of Shenzhen and Hong Kong embedded in the national and the regional Greater Pearl River Delta overall planning strategies? To what extent do Shenzhen's and Hong Kong's planning strategies take the national and regional overall planning strategies into account?
- Which are the most important city-connecting mega-projects?
- How do special area plans fit in? Where are the areas of expansion and future development (housing, commerce, finance, industry, high-tech industry, R&D, education facilities, tourism etc.)?
- What role does the empty space between Shenzhen and Hong Kong play (particularly the Northern Territories)? What role do the marshlands, the Closed Area, natural reserves and present New Towns play in this connection?
- What role do the less developed areas of the Greater Pearl River Delta Region play in the relocation of dirty industries from Shenzhen which wants to turn its image from an industrial production site (work bench of the world) to a modern high-tech and high-end service metropolis?
- Will new structures replace old ones (structures will be pulled down)? What are the plans for relocating (old) industries, commerce and people? What are the time frames of such plans?
- Which are the main challenges regarding the metropolitan planning for the Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong? What are some solutions?
- Who are the actors (investors, planners, developers)? Did/does Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) play a major role?
- How and to what extent is the state, private enterprises or public-private partnerships involved in planning, investment and building?

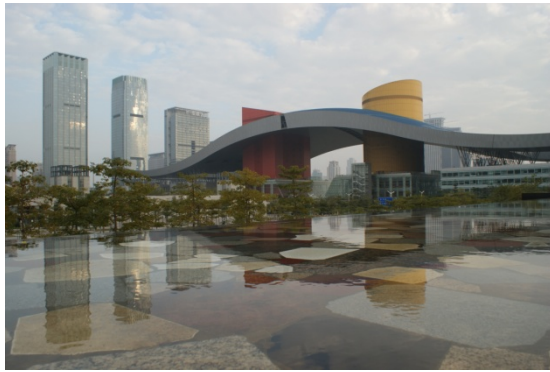


Figure 4 Shenzhen Civic Center



Figure 2 Shennan East Road, Shenzhen

Relevance. As of now, nowhere in the world exists a twin-megacity of such dimension in a joint planning process; it is an absolutely new field of study. Hence there is still relatively little profound knowledge in this field. The objective is to show how a global twin city is being planned. In view of the fact, that urbanization processes make many cities grow together and that more Global Twin-Cities will emerge it is important to show how such processes are being steered. These future Global Twin-Cities will be confronted with similar or the same problems and challenges like the presently emerging Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong, most likely except for the fact though, that Shenzhen-Hong Kong is being formed on the premise of "One Country, Two Systems" concept. The more is known about the formation of the Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong, the more efficient future Global Twin-Cities all over the world can be comprehensively planned and managed. In this way resources will be saved and unhealthy rivalry between two neighboring, potential Global Twin-Cities as well as planning errors can be avoided. Furthermore, the knowledge obtained about the challenge of unifying a "socialist" and a "capitalist" city can be used in a wider Chinese or even international context.

Field research. No major problems emerged during the field research in China, since it was excellently organized by the Institute of Geography of Basel and since the Chinese counterpart did its best to allow an as fruitful research as possible. The biggest problem was the fact that, whereas six expert-interviews were conducted with planners from Shenzhen, only one expert from Hong Kong could be interviewed. Other minor problems during the field research (involving police and military) occurred in connection with the intention of taking photographs of construction sites and parts of the Closed Area, which are of particular interest for the study. Further obstacles, which were entirely foreseeable though, were for example the lack of information about Shenzhen's former and present planning system and strategies in English and the fact that the Chinese experts speak (or prefer to speak) Chinese only. Thus a competent interpreter is absolutely indispensable.

Most important results and conclusion. The working hypotheses that the Central Government, for various strategic reasons, strongly supports the unification of Shenzhen and Hong Kong with a large scale, highly efficient comprehensive urban planning in Shenzhen Municipality and that in almost all cases Shenzhen Municipality's comprehensive planning is initiating the discussion concerning projects related to the unification of the two cities (whereas Hong Kong is in a predominantly responsive position), was confirmed. This is for example reflected in the fact, that the studies for crucial city-connecting projects like the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, Qianhai modern service industry cooperation zone and the new Heung Yuen Wai/Liantang border control point, are already completed on the Shenzhen side, whereas on the Hong Kong side the studies concerning these projects are still about to be carried out. Thus, contrary to Shenzhen, in Hong Kong the related construction activities did not commence yet. The main reason for this unequal development are the different political systems of the two cities: Whereas in socialist Shenzhen urban planning is very progressive and at large scale, in democratic Hong Kong urban planning is a people-orientated process at smaller scale. Consequently Hong Kong's planners are often facing situations in which they are presented with a fait accompli; instead of having been actively involved in the planning process from the very beginning. This induces a certain planning inertia. On the other hand it has to be said that in Hong Kong's latest planning strategy (HK2030Study) clear intentions to cooperate more closely with the GPRD region in general can be identified; the cooperation with Shenzhen in particular though is not much emphasized (which is partly caused by the fact that Hong Kong SAR unlike Shenzhen Municipality is directly under the CG's control and therefore on the same political level like Guangdong Province). This also clearly shows, that the "One Country, Two Systems" concept can be considered to be the hugest obstacle to overcome regarding the integration of Shenzhen and Hong Kong. At this, it turned out that a good way to eliminate obstacles emerging in connection with the "One Country, Two Systems" premise is, that planners from each side organize themselves in workshops and cooperation meetings. Furthermore, great efforts are made to dovetail the developments in the GPRD as a whole, which of course also facilitates the integration of Shenzhen and Hong Kong not only by forming the common basis for each cities future planning strategies, but also by encouraging the dialogue between the two. Finally, by its very nature the unification of Shenzhen and Hong Kong into one Global Twin-City Shenzhen-Hong Kong is to a greater degree associated with the adaption of Hong Kong to Shenzhen than the other way round (which has to find its way into the minds of the people first).

Given the present speed of development and urbanization in the PRC and given the fact that Shenzhen serves the CG as an unique experimental field of high national importance for the realization of new political, economical and administrative

reforms, it is highly possible that by 2047 (when according to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the democratic system of Hong Kong theoretically could be changed into the socialist system of the PRC), the Global Twin-City Shenzhen Hong Kong will be a leading international finance, trading, logistics, high-end service and high-tech industry center with a global city-status comparable to that of London, New York or Tokyo including comparable cultural, social and ecological standards. To reach this ambitious goal however, it will be indispensable to continue joint efforts towards the reinforcement of the local and regional competitive position, the improvement and safeguarding of the quality of life, the provision of attractive framework conditions for innovative enterprises (involving for instance administrative reforms and the provision of highly efficient and ecological traffic infrastructure) and last but not least - in response to the advancing globalization and the associated manifold consequences - the strengthening of the local and regional features by cross-linking economy, science, administration and politics.