

Planning Rhetoric and Urban Development in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

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Abstract

One of the first Special Economic Zones in an opening China, Shenzhen municipality is a “globalizing” socialist city. Shenzhen’s integration with the global economy has led to a diversifying local economy and a rapidly growing society with various planning problems. This paper maps out the modernization experiment of Shenzhen, focusing on the evolution of the planning rhetoric and the urban development process. The Shenzhen SEZ, first planned by the Central Government, has faced almost continuous challenges since its establishment. As a small border town, Shenzhen was first destined to be a Special Economic Zone in 1980. In the 1990s, it was recognized that the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone had to be planned together with Bao’an and Longgan Counties. The aim is to build Shenzhen into a multi-functional world-class city. In reality, Shenzhen have changed from an industrial city focusing primarily on simple processing and assembly works to high-technology establishments and tertiary sector activities. To cope with these changes, planners have to restructure not only physical spaces but also institutional set up. Planners are also challenged by sustainability demands of conserving the environment and promoting social welfare when economic development takes place. Shenzhen proved to be a difficult yet exciting experiment for socialist planners to build a “modern” city in an age of globalization.