

## Abstract

Most of the existing planning theories (*theories in* urban development, *of* planning practice and justifications *for* planning) and debates about their inter-relationships are derived from the contexts of basically “demand-constrained” (capitalist) economies. Some authors have attempted to theorise urban planning in transitional economies (Nedovic-Budic, 2001; Tang, 2000; Thomas, 1998). However, theorisation based on concrete planning practices in a city in the transition from a “resource-constrained” to a “demand-constrained” economy is an uncharted terrain. This paper attempts to take up this challenge and through a detailed case study of Shenzhen, China’s first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), explores the relationships between *theories in*, *of* and *for* planning in a transitional economy. Shenzhen’s experience proves that a perceptive understanding of urban development can provide us with important clues for understanding the nature of and theoretical justifications for changing urban planning practices. In return, the reformed planning practice helps sharpen our reflections on the constraints and options of urban development in a transitional economy. In this sense, urban planning practice, at least in the case of Shenzhen, is both “path-dependent” and “path-shaping”.