

Strategic Planning Practice in a Global Perspective:the Case of Guangzhou, China

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Abstract : As the vital city in south China since the ancient time, Guangzhou has been losing its leading role among the rising neighboring cities, especially, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, since the late 1980s, with the overloaded infrastructure and deteriorating urban environment in its old inner city. Fortunately, with the new expansion of its administrative area in 2000, the local municipality considered it as a great opportunity to solve a series of alarming urban problems. Thus, for the first time, strategic planning was introduced to China for providing more convincing and scientific basis towards better urban future. Differed from traditional Chinese planning practices, which rigidly and dogmatically focused on future blueprints, the strategic planning of Guangzhou proceeded from analyzing practical challenges and opportunities towards establishing reasonable developing objectives and proposing corresponding strategies. Moreover, it was pioneering that the municipality invited five planning institutions for proposals, among which, the paper focuses on the one proposed by China Academy of Urban Planning & Design from its theoretical basis to problems' defining and analyzing the process, as well as planning results. Since it was closer to the following municipal decisions and had a more far-reaching influence for other Chinese cities' following practices. In particular, it demonstrated an innovative exploration on the role played by urban developing rate on deciding urban growth patterns ('Spillover-reverberation' or 'Leapfrog'). That ultimately established an unprecedented paradigm on deciding an appropriate urban spatial structure in future, including its specific location, function and scale. Besides the proposal itself, this article highlights the role of interactions, among actors, as well as proposals, subsequent discussions, summaries and municipal decisions, especially the establishment of the rolling dynamic evaluation system for periodical reviews on implementation situations, as the first attempt in China. Undoubtedly, strategic planning of Guangzhou has brought out considerable benefits, especially opening the strategic mind for plentiful Chinese cities in the following years through establishing a flexible and dynamic planning mechanism highlighted the interactions among multiple actors with innovative and effective tools, methodologies and perspectives on regional, objective-approach and comparative analysis. However, compared with some developed countries, the strategic planning in China just started and has been greatly relied on empirical studies rather than scientific analysis. Moreover, it still faced a bit of controversy, for instance, the certain gap among institutional proposals, final municipal decisions and implemented results, due to the lacking legal constraint. Also, how to improve the public involvement in China with an absolute up-down administrative system is another urgent task. In future, despite of irresistible and irretrievable weakness, some experiences and lessons from previous international practices, with the combination of specific Chinese situations and domestic practices, would enable to promote the further advance on strategic planning in China.

Keywords : evaluation system, global perspective, Guangzhou, interactions, strategic planning, urban growth patterns

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