

THE BIG JUMP FORWARDS: AN EXAMPLE OF CHINA'S PURSUIT TOWARDS A NEW PATTERN OF GROWTH

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Shantou is a seaport with 5,4 million inhabitants in the province of Guangdong, People's Republic of China, and a Special Economic Zone since 1980. The five Special Economic Zones- Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Xiamen and Shantou cities and Hainan Province - represent the most progressive policy for reform and trade. In spite of this special status, Shantou, originally by far the biggest and most prosperous of the Special Economic Zone cities, has been struggling to match the rapid growth of the other four Special Economic Zones.

The Institute of Urban Planning and Design of Nanjing University and the Shantou Urban and Rural Planning Bureau have jointly written the Shantou Strategic Development Plan. This well-received new strategy, which followed extensive public consultation, creates a fresh solution based on the self-organizational character of the city, the people and its culture. It reveals and respects the indigenous fabric of local space, culture, society and economy that contributes to the transformation of Shantou into a 'Coastal Metropolitan Garden City'. On top of this, the strategy creates a new vision able to integrate desirable and often conflicting aspirations such as better and faster development. In Shantou, planning practice is being reshaped through new thinking and new planning approaches.

View over Shantou Bay

AUTHENTIC AND VIBRANT SHANTOU

Shantou was one of the first ports of China that in the early 20th century was opened for trade with European countries and the United States of America. The city of Shantou housed embassies from many trading countries. Historically, the inhabitants of the Shantou region, Chao-Shan-Jie region¹, in short the Chaoshan region, have an outward-looking character. At present, more than half of the estimated number of 30 million Chaoshanese live outside the region or abroad, particularly in Southeast Asia, Europe and the Americas, and have family ties with the home city. This means that the inhabitants of Shantou have an open-minded approach to new ideas and foreign influences. The Chaoshan region has three major cities; Chaozhou with 2,7 million inhabitants, Jieyang with 5,9 million inhabitants and Shantou with 5,4 million inhabitants.

Shantou is by Chinese standards not a very big city. The city has grown in the last decades like many other Chinese cities, but has not exploded like Shenzhen or Guangzhou. Most of the old town of Shantou is still intact. This means that Shantou's historical identity has not been swept away by modern apartment buildings. Although Shantou's main business is its harbour and the toy and textile industries, it is not a very dominant port or industrial city. There are plans for more than one CBD, but without a decent public transport system it is wishful thinking. Like every other Chinese city, Shantou has an urban planning exhibition centre with an enormous city model, a multimedia presentation, floors with more detailed models and an impressive wall display arising from contemporary urban planning competitions for several prime and future developments in Shantou.

Compared with other Chinese cities, Shantou is an authentic city. Comfortably situated on an enclosed bay and on the border of the subtropics and the tropics, Shantou has a natural setting and superb climate that matches resort cities in other parts of the world. The combination of three rivers, green hills, islands and wetlands provide Shantou with a highly interesting setting and scenery. Shantou is now at a crossroads, a point at which important decisions must be made. Instead of focussing on attracting more industries, Shantou

could focus on additional sectors such as tourism, high-tech agriculture and higher education. Moreover, it has the potential of becoming a healthy and attractive alternative to the heavily polluted cities in mainland China. This new identity could attract families and pensioners towards Shantou.

In many ways, Shantou is a complete and vibrant city. The busy Shantou Bay with its many ships sailing to and fro connects the present city with its past. The waterfront offers opportunities for both traditional shipping activities and leisure. The green hills opposite Shantou Bay connect the city with a natural park. The grid structure with broad boulevards has the capacity for a light rail network. Shantou has all the necessary elements to become an important 'Coastal Metropolitan Garden City' as is suggested in the Shantou Strategic Development Plan.

SHANTOU STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Shantou Strategic Development Plan and the successive and legislative Shantou Master Plan are the result of a strong international partnership. Teams from Nanjing University, assisted by teams with selected experts from China and abroad, participated in research studies and intensive planning workshops about the future of Shantou. The Urban Planning Institute of Nanjing University organised a three-day seminar at which the participants were invited to exchange and discuss the results of all the research and design studies. An open source seminar like this, and in the context of the preparation of a formal strategic spatial policy document, is quite unique in China.

Another unique element has been the intensive local public participation during the conceptual phase of the Strategic Development Plan. The City of Shantou spent several months in organising all kinds of participation with local officials, academics and cultural elites, entrepreneurs and common citizens. The participation process provided the teams with a better understanding of the local culture, economy and ecology. This process certainly ensured that the Strategic Development Plan was widely accepted and welcomed both by local authorities and by the citizens and entrepreneurs of Shantou.

For these efforts, the Shantou Urban and Rural Planning Bureau and the Institute of Urban Plan-

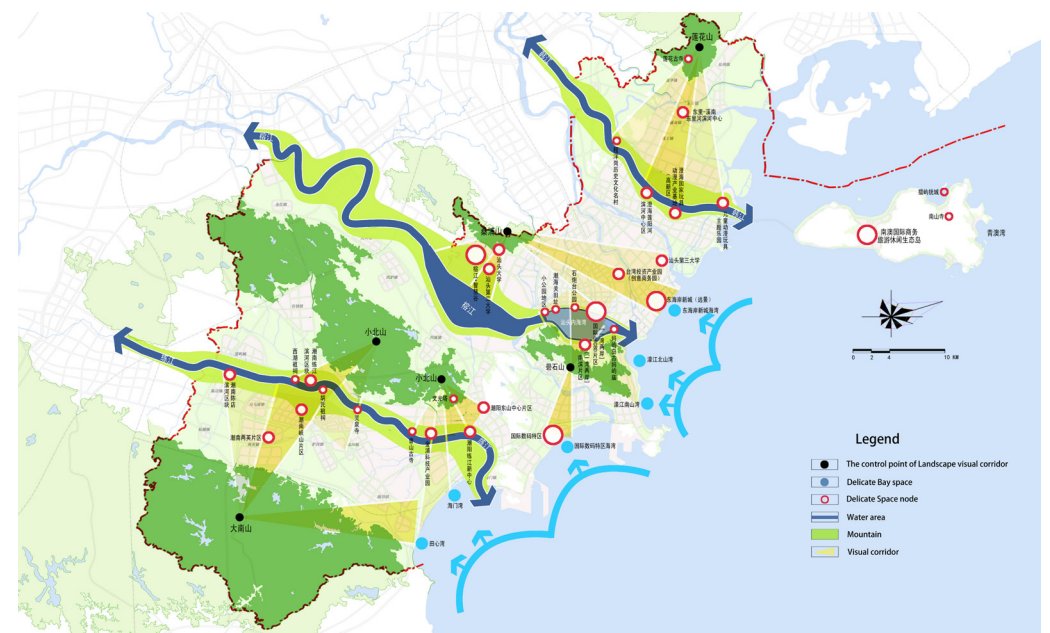
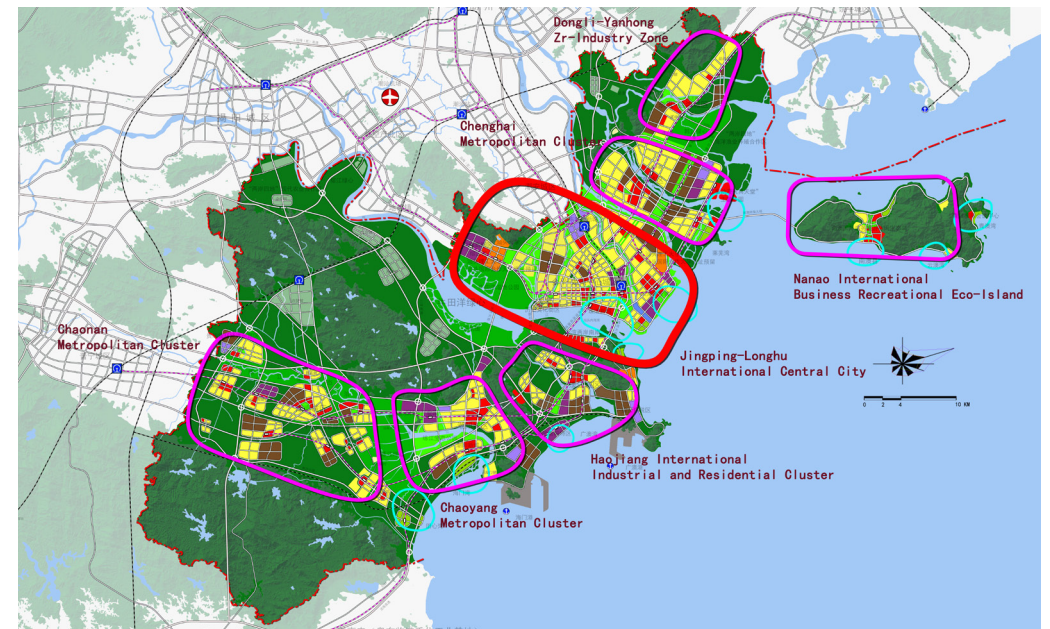


Figure 1: The general spatial structure of the Shantou Strategic Development Plan distinguishes seven development zones. The central zone contains the old centre and the new CBD

Figure 2: In the Shantou Strategic Development Planning rivers, wetlands and large green mountainous areas are kept free from urbanisation

ning and Design of Nanjing University were awarded the ISOCARP 2012 Award of Excellence. The integrated strategy and the focus on sustainability and organic transformation that supports the Shantou Strategic Development Plan will underpin the city's regeneration and economic development. Shantou's tradition, culture and current public sector is recognized as providing an opportunity to practice small spatial planning at an affordable cost and with minimum change in the existing situation, and for applying smart planning that enhances socio-economic and spatial development.

The Shantou Strategic Development Plan has an open eye for the past, present and future identity of Shantou. Shantou has a large, historic and unique centre and the city is surrounded by fabulous landscapes but it does not have a touristic infrastructure. It has broad avenues in a perfect grid but it lacks a modern tram system. It is

a harbour city without efficient connections with mainland China. It is an industrial and entrepreneurial city without an active creative class.

The industries of toys and textiles are concentrated north and south of Shantou respectively in extensive clusters of smaller and larger factories amongst scattered and rapidly diminishing plots of agricultural land. In many ways, Shantou is a prime example of the real China, rather than the modern China. The puzzle that the Shantou Strategic Development Plan has to solve is that many parts of Shantou are in urgent need of urban transformation and that the financial resources of the Shantou government to invest in these transformations are limited.

(clockwise from top left)

Figure 3: A ship undergoing repairs at Shantou Harbour

Figure 4: Locals enjoying leisure activities such as swimming and fishing

Figure 5: Promenade alongside the Shantou Bay

Figure 6: View over Shantou Bay



FAST FORWARD VS. STABLE ORGANIC GROWTH

The Shantou Strategic Development Plan marks a significant change in Chinese planning practice. Where other Chinese cities and regions stimulate a hyper dynamic urban development, the Strategic Development Plan, inspired by Shantou's tradition, culture and current public sector and governance, advocates an organic regeneration and organic urban development process for Shantou. This creates a playing field for spatial planning and socio-economic development that has a human scale and is effective at the same time. The Shantou Strategic Development Plan is also inspired by the new reform, new planning policies and a new form of urbanisation that is supported by the new Chinese central government. That new direction must lead to cities that are more in harmony with nature, respect cultural heritage and existing communities and are more sustainable than the present practice of urban development.

The Shantou region has a unique, rich and resilient culture that is quite different from cultures in other parts of China. Chaozhouhua, the language that is spoken in the Shantou region does not resemble Cantonese or Mandarin that is used in the more populated regions of China. The local culture is organised in extended families and family clans in and outside China and is focussed on self-organisation and running interrelated and independent family businesses rather than on individual development and fast and centralized mass industrialisation. This means that China's 'three golden decades of reform' of reform and the opening of the economy have had a different effect on the Shantou region than on the other four Special Economic Zones.

Realising that in the last few years the general socio-economic context in China has changed and that the Chinese 'standard model of modernisation' does not apply to Shantou, the strategic economic and spatial policy for Shantou requires an adjusted form of planning. Rather



Figure 7: Shantou cuisine served at street food stand

Figure 8: Downtown Shantou – mix of old and new buildings

Figure 9: Temple in downtown Shantou

Figure 10: Leisure activities in amusement park

than creating another Chinese megalopolis, the Shantou Strategic Development Plan proposes an organic and adaptable growing process around six key principles. Branding Shantou as the homeland of Chaoshenese culture and as an ecological 'Coastal Metropolitan Garden City' are the first two principles. Strengthening the Chaoshanese economy, domestically and abroad, and stimulating private and social investments, rather than relying on public and governmental investments, are the next two principles. The focus on small, short term, meaningful, influential and affordable interventions; and building reserves for larger, long-term and essential urban transformations are the last two principles.

Shantou is, like the other three cities that have the status of a Special Economic Zone, one of the south east coast harbour cities of China. Shantou lies in between Zhuhai and Shenzhen, situated 300 kilometres to the south of Shantou, and Xiamen, situated 400 kilometres to the north of Shantou. Three decades ago, before the start of the Special Economic Zone policy, Shantou was by far the largest and richest city. But now it is the least developed Special Economic Zone in many aspects, with a GDP per capita that is half of the provincial average, even a little below the national average. Given its advantageous location and resources as well as its political and economic status, Shantou had, and has the opportunity of going through the same hyper dynamic economic and urban development like Zhuhai, Shenzhen and Xiamen. However, Shantou stayed behind.

The very question that the Shantou Strategic Development Plan is addressing is how Shantou can benefit from this position, what it can learn from other cities and what are Shantou's specific strengths. Conveniently situated in the nearby hinterland of Hong Kong and Macau, Shenzhen and Zhuhai spectacularly grew from fishing villages into a megalopolis with over ten million inhabitants and into a successful industrial region for the world's largest companies. As a trading and industrial city, Xiamen cleverly astutely took advantage of the close cultural and economical ties with Taiwan attracting large domestic and foreign investments. Shantou, on the other hand, has no other choice than to rely on its own identity, authenticity, natural setting and unique local culture of self-organisation and overseas family ties.

NEW GROWTH, NEW THINKING, NEW FRONTIERS?

Traditional physical planning and urban form and design may need new thinking and new styles of planning practice to be effective. The planning history of Shantou in the last three decades may indicate that a city or a region with a specific character and culture may have other drivers of economic development and urbanisation than other cities or regions. Whereas the grand model and the dazzling multimedia presentation in the Shantou Urban Planning Exhibition Centre present a highly densely urbanised and populated agglomeration where every tiny bit of open and flat land is utilised, the Shantou Strategic Development Plan advocates the very opposite. In a country where in the next fifteen years, until 2030, houses and cities need to be built for another 45 million inhabitants² this is almost a provocation rather than a brave message³.

The preservation of delicate wetlands, recovering and reconstructing the watersheds of the three rivers in the Shantou region, transit-oriented transformation on a regional and local scale, the restoration and the rehabilitation of Shantou's historic city, certainly are not completely new topics for planning academics and planning professionals in China. The challenge for Chinese planning practice in general and especially for Shantou, is to enable and facilitate economic and demographic growth and to combine and integrate this growth with spatial quality, cultural heritage and sustainable urban development, in order to create a 'better city' and a 'better life'. This combined focus on growth and quality, also called 'New Growth', is now being tested in the planning of Shantou.

For a city like Shantou, valuing what already exists and what is essential for its cultural identity, investment and urban development, with a focus on improving the quality of infrastructure, cultural heritage, ecology, the environment and public transport, could be of strategic importance in the competition with other cities in China. It could attract inhabitants from inland cities who are looking for more healthy living conditions in an almost perfect climate and it could attract some of the 15 million Chaoshanese who live outside the region back to their roots and place of

origin. Finally, as domestic tourism is growing fast in China, it could also give a boost to the nearly absent tourist industry of Shantou.

Successful plans almost always involve successful community engagement. Shantou's new frontier in planning also lies in the attitude that Shantou prefers small, smart and meaningful actions above large scale blueprint master planning. Through the participation exercise it emerged that a gradual and systematic improvement and organic urban development has, in the long run, more quality and success than radical, rapid and speculation-driven urban development. This paradigm shift in planning stimulates a new way of thinking that, for Shantou, may lead towards an evolutionary rather than the revolutionary urban development process that has become common planning practice in Chinese cities.

SYNCHRONIC PLANNING

In April 2013 the Shantou Strategic Development Plan was evaluated during a three-day seminar at Nanjing University.⁴ More than 60 Chinese and foreign experts as well as Shantou officials met in the conference centre of the campus of the university and discussed the next steps. Out of the constant flow of presentations about disaster risk management, hyper density, social integration, demographic developments and mobility and transport emerged a clear picture about the present status of Shantou. Shantou has steadily developed into a middle-sized city but in the next decade important, decisive and synchronically planned steps should be taken on public transport, water management, cultural heritage, tourism and ecology. It is a gigantic and complex jigsaw puzzle in which all the pieces and layers need to fit together in order to become a comprehensive city.

One of the important and decisive planning steps is transport oriented transformation and there will be the subsequent introduction of Bus Rapid Transit to connect Shantou with the smaller settlements, a light rail or tram system to connect the various residential areas with the centre and sub-centres and a metro network that connects Shantou with Chaozhou, Jiayang, their combined airport and the high-speed railway network that crosses the Chaoshan region. Currently, an uncon-

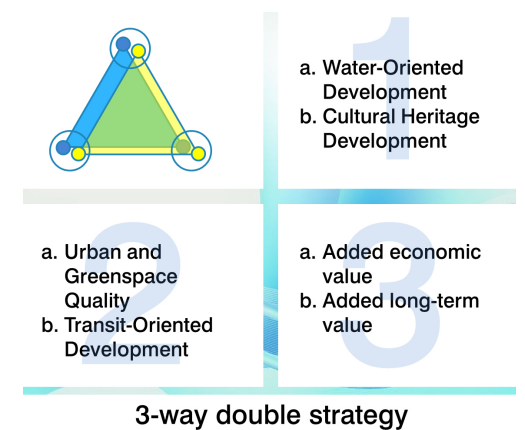
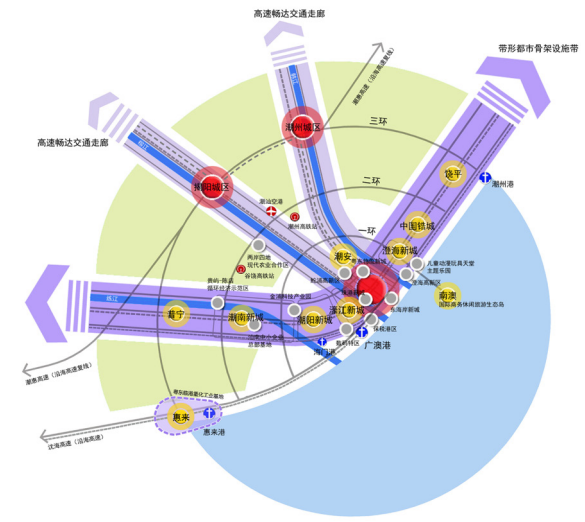


Figure 11: The Regional and Transportation System as proposed by the Shantou Strategic Development Plan

Figure 12: The 'three way double strategy' for the Shan Nan Desakota Area, south of Shantou, as proposed by the team of Dutch experts

trolled and dangerous mixture of trucks, buses, cars, scooters and motorised tricycles causes daily chaos on the wide and flat avenues of Shantou. The introduction of public transport and dedicated lines for cyclists may lead to more civilized and efficient urban transport.

Shantou is a delta city on an inland bay that is connected to the sea. No less than three rivers and several creeks pass through it towards the bay and the sea. Shantou has a delicate relationship with the bay and these water bodies. Although the river deltas and the natural port are the home base for an extensive fishing industry and provide an opportunity for trade, transport as well as leisure, the urban water system and urban development need to be in balance. The Shantou Strategic Development Plan gives clear directions that the wetlands along the Shantou Bay and the estuaries of the rivers passing Shantou will be free of future urban activities. But there is much more to do. The canalized creeks and the water system in the urbanised areas are to be cleaned, rehabilitated, maintained and can be used for water storage.

DESIGNED IN SHANTOU

After the ISOCARP 2012 Award of Excellence, Shantou and ISOCARP, strengthened their relationship. An Urban Planning Advisory Team (UPAT) made up of nine international planning experts from ISOCARP worked for a week in Shantou and developed a comprehensive strategy for the regeneration of the historic city.⁵ For the occasional visitor, the historic centre evokes a mix of reactions. The first and instant reaction is the thrill of discovering and exploring a pure and authentic old city with a carefully designed urban fabric and facades with distinct early 20th century European influences. The city centre is almost untouched by development and modernization. It had been rebuilt in 1922 in a mix of European and Chinese styles after a typhoon had hit the city of Swatow, as it was called then. Potentially, the historic centre of Shantou has a golden opportunity of becoming a tourist attraction with boutique hotels, shops and restaurants.

The UPAT concept is a small example of organic planning. A small team meet on site for a week of creative and intensive analyses, planning and design; they leave when the job is finished.

The analyses and the design work in Shantou, in close communication with the Shantou Rural and Urban Planning Bureau, provided guidance for the elaboration of the Shantou Strategic Development Plan. The visiting design team emphasised that the old city of Shantou is a unique, authentic, charming and resilient old city with a rich heritage, wonderful buildings, a unique city pattern and a human scale. This could be used as an urban anchor for the whole city. The old city should be organically regenerated to enable it to regain its central urban role as the liveliest part of the city, with a unique charm and rich street life. The old city must have a balance of mixed uses, including residential, commerce, tourism, leisure, public functions and parks. This is a prerequisite to re-establish the ties between Chaoshanese people outside the Chaoshan region with their roots in Shantou.

A second example of organic planning that served the follow-up of the Shantou Strategic Development Plan is the 'three way double strategy' that a team of Dutch experts defined for the Shan Nan Desakota Area, south of Shantou.⁶ The Shan Nan Desakota Area has an area of some 600 km² and has some 1,3 million inhabitants. This area is rapidly changing from an originally agricultural use towards a mixture of small and larger industries and very high density housing. In the process of rapid urbanization and industrialization historic and useful structures, such as the water structures, were neglected and polluted. It is to be expected that another effect will be the disappearance of the present traditional and small-scale agriculture within a decade. The three way strategy implies that there are three major aspects. And the double strategy implies that each aspect has two closely connected parts. Thus, water oriented development is closely related to culturally oriented development. The improvement of the quality of urban and green spaces is closely related to transit-oriented development. And added economic value is closely related to added long term value and an increase in property values.

Figure 13: Proposals for revitalising the old city of Shantou, combining the traditional with the contemporary approach. Source: The ISOCARP UPAT Team 'Organic Regeneration of the Historic Down Town of Shantou', 2013

Proposal for the city centre



Proposal for recreating street life without cars





Figure 14: Image from the “New Reform, New Planning, New Urbanisation” Seminar at the Nanjing University, held during 4-7 April 2013. This seminar focused on the necessary paradigm shift of planning in the Chinese new reform epoch and on the way this shift of planning should be applied in the Shantou Master Plan

Figure 15: Proposal for revitalising the Queshi Bridge area at the waterfront of Shantou Bay near the historic town of Shantou. Source: The ISOCARP UPAT Team ‘Organic Regeneration of the Historic Down Town of Shantou’, 2013



THE BIG JUMP FORWARDS

The Shantou Strategic Development Plan and its follow up, the Shantou Master Plan that is now in the making may not mark the start of a process towards another Chinese megacity. It certainly marks a big jump towards new planning approaches. The engagement of communities and stakeholders in the planning process led to the realisation that the Chaoshan region, with its own language and culture that is distinct from other Chinese regions, needs a different and more delicate approach. Shantou is also an example where, for the improvement and transformation of the existing city and its infrastructure, synchronic planning is more appropriate than linear planning. Synchronic planning values the complexity and the potentially fast changes of the city. The city is an integrative framework and, when well coordinated in time and place, many small, organic and meaningful interventions can make a big difference. The complexity of the city also requires the planning stages of survey, analysis and design to be combined rather than to be made one after the other. In linear planning, the existing and pervasive planning paradigm, surveys and analysis of the planning area usually oversimplify the delicate, cultural and complex reality of the city that eventually leads towards cities that all look the same. Synchronic planning



practice in Shantou recognises the unique character and qualities of Shantou.

One of the most interesting innovations of the Shantou synchronic planning process is the ‘Econurbation Strategy’. This is a framework where the ecological, physical, cultural and economic features of Shantou comprehensively come together in the new Shantou as a ‘Coastal Metropolitan Garden City’. The coastal element is that the rivers, the bay and the shores of Shantou will form a continuous ecological network that connects the city with its natural environment. The garden element is to emphasise that natural elements, the hills, parks, green avenues with abundant trees and green residential areas will dominate the image of the city. The metropolitan element connects and matches Shantou with other metropolitan coastal cities in the world that have a very high density, a highly attractive and car free urban fabric with mixed functions and with high culture, and flourishing tourist and creative industries. ■

Endnotes

- 1 Chao-Shan-Jie Region is derived from the names of the three cities in this region: Chaozhou, Shantou and Jieyang.
- 2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_China.
- 3 45 million is a little less than the present population of Spain and more than twice the population of the states of New York or Florida.
- 4 New Reform, New Planning, New Urbanization. Planning Innovation for the New Reform Epoch, Taking Shantou as a Sample. ISOCARP (International Society of City and Regional Planners) and SFURP (NJU-UEPC Sino-French Centre for Urban, Regional and Planning Studies) Joint Seminar. 4-6 April 2013, Nanjing University.
- 5 The Shantou Urban Planning Advisory Team (UPAT) Workshop, Organic Regeneration of the Historic Downtown of Shantou, was hosted by the Shantou Rural and Urban Planning Bureau and the Institute of Urban Planning and Design of the Nanjing University and organised by ISOCARP, the International Society of City and Regional Planners, 10-16 March 2013. <http://www.isocarp.org/index.php?id=1217>.
- 6 The Team of Dutch Experts worked in Shantou 20-26 January 2013. The workshop with experts on water management, transport planning, urban design, landscaping, urban agriculture and architecture was hosted by the Shantou Rural and Urban Planning Bureau and the Institute of Urban Planning and Design of Nanjing University.

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