

Evaluation of plan implementation in the transitional China: A case of Guangzhou city master plan

Li Tian^{a,*}, Tiyan Shen^b

^a Department of Urban Planning, Tongji University, 1239 Siping Road, Shanghai 200092, China

^b School of Government, Peiking University, 5 Yiheyuan Road, Beijing 100871, China

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of plan implementation is very complex, and empirical study is scarce due to the methodological difficulties. Over the last two decades, there has been a great deal of urban planning activities and rapid city development in China, but there is a lack of evaluation of plan implementation. This research aims to help bridge this gap, and it explores to what extent a plan has been implemented and what factors have affected plan implementation, taking the Guangzhou city master plan as a case study. It adopts the grid overlay method and compares the land use plan and actual land use to obtain the result of accordance, deviation and unfulfilment. The discrepancy between the land use plan and actual land development is examined based on both land use type and the spatial planning management unit. By analyzing several cases at the site development control plan level, this paper explores why the land development is not consistent with the land use plan.

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Introduction

Failure to implement plans has long been considered a significant barrier to effective planning (Berke et al., 2006). Calkins (1979) names the lack of plan implementation as “new plan syndrome”: Plans are continuously redone or updated without regard to the implementation status of the originally prepared plan. The lack of an understanding of the degree to which plans are implemented and of the determinants of effective implementation has hindered planners from making better plans.

Evaluation of plan implementation is very complex. First, the methodological issues have to be considered. Plans are made to guide the future physical development of cities. However, objectives such as the social, economic and ecological development of a city are difficult to measure quantitatively. Second, the question of what type of plan should be implemented remains controversial. In other words, is the degree to which a plan is implemented related to its quality (Laurian et al., 2004a, 2004b)? Third, the timing for the measurement of the impacts of a plan is important, since the long term impact may not materialize for many years. Also, in what forms can plan implementation be evaluated? Should the evaluation focus on the physical plans of communities (traditional core of urban planning) or object-oriented plans? Last but

not least, planners are not omnipotent and cannot control market forces or demand for land. Thus, many of the factors that influence implementation are outside of the planner’s control (Altshuler, 1966). All of these factors have made the evaluation standard of a plan ambiguous and consensus difficult to achieve.

In the fast-growing cities, the evaluation of plan implementation is even more difficult. Substantial flexibility in planning is needed to accommodate rapidly changing urban landscapes, and the frequent adjustment of plans makes the evaluation hard to proceed. The rapidly changing urban situation, the unique trajectory of urban development, and the backdrop of globalization have opened an arena for Chinese planners to apply various urban planning theories and test their effects. On the one hand, plans have proved to be a vital instrument of urban policy and a catalyst for urban change. Physical plans put forth graphic images of the future that can rally stakeholders to act (Neuman, 1998). On the other hand, due to the lack of financial and political considerations, traditional physical planning was not adequate to cope with the rapid development of a transitional economy, and the lack of *ex post* evaluation of physical plans has cost Chinese planners many opportunities to improve and reform traditional planning in China.

In the last decade there has been burgeoning literature on changes in the traditional urban planning approach of China (World Bank, 1993; Wu, 2002; Xu and Ng, 1998; Zhu, 2000). However, there have been few publications addressing the evaluation of plan implementation. In order to help bridge this gap, this research focuses on the following factors, taking the Guangzhou city master plan as a case study:

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +86 013524711878; fax: +86 21 65988370.

E-mail address: Litian262@hotmail.com (L. Tian).

- (1) To what extent have plans been implemented in Chinese cities.
- (2) Which factors affect plan implementation in the fast-growing Chinese cities.

Following this introduction, the second section of the paper discusses the literature related to plan implementation. The third section examines the urban planning framework in China, and the following section presents an empirical evaluation of the implementation of Guanzhou city master plan. This paper concludes with a summary and recommendations for future research.

A review of literature on evaluation of plan implementation

While there is a large body of research on the evaluation of policy implementation, there has been a curious lack of parallel inquiry into evaluation in the planning field (Talen, 1996a, 1996b). Although some work has attempted to link policy-implementation theory to planning practice, planners have not yet developed an equivalent ability to link plans and plan implementation practices to subsequent impacts (Berke et al., 2006). Given the lack of methods to empirically evaluate plan implementation, many plans are impressionistically rather than empirically assessed (Laurian et al., 2004a, 2004b). As a consequence, planners know very little about the effects of a specific plan on the city development process. Although measuring the effect of plans on urban development is a formidable empirical challenge, and differences between local institutions and across metropolitan areas make it difficult to compare the planning implementation outcomes, a fuller understanding of the relationship between plans and their outcomes should help policy makers both to better understand the likely impacts of plans and to tailor them to achieve desired outcomes (Adams et al., 2005).

Modelling the effects of planning has been relatively little researched, partly because their quantification is very difficult. Silver and Goode (1990) and McGough and Tsoloacos (1994) adopted macroeconomic models to analyse national or regional data, but

planning variables are absent. Recently, Bramley and Leishman (2005) adopted panel data to explore the impact of national and regional policies on local housing market, and Henneberry et al. (2005) used the cross-sectional data to estimate the impact of planning on commercial property markets in England. US studies usually employ hedonic pricing model to examine the effects of zoning and growth controls (Kline and Alig, 1999; Podogzinski and Sass, 1991).

There are usually two types of evaluation approaches to assess the implementation of plans: non-quantitative and quantitative methods. The non-quantitative method is frequently used; however, the evaluation criteria can be subjective and depend on the understanding of the evaluator of planning objectives, process and outcomes. Alexander and Flaudi (1989) developed a model, plan/programme-implementation-process (PPIP), and gave five criteria for comprehensive evaluation: conformity, rational process, optimality *ex ante*, optimality *ex post*, and utilisation. Moreover, a proposed framework, including a series of evaluation questions, was provided to avoid the extremes of policy and plan evaluation implied in the traditional model with its standard of conformity and the 'decision-centred' model with its standard of utilisation. However, no empirical studies were provided for this type of evaluation. Innes and Booher (1999) proposed consensus building as a new framework of evaluating collaborative planning, and provide a series of process criteria and outcome criteria as principles of evaluation. While assessing the role of Atlanta regional development plans in guiding local development policies, Waldner (2008) compared regional and local policies to check if regional plans have influenced local comprehensive plans.

The quantitative approach is seldom applied due to methodological and data difficulties. Nevertheless, it has proven to provide solid support for the assessment of the role of plan in implementation. Since the late 1970s, several categories of quantitative approaches have been developed with the advancing computer technology. For example, Alterman and Hill (1978) used grid overlays to quantify "accordance and deviations" between land use plans and actual land use. Regression analysis was used to test the explanatory strength of political and other factors that could

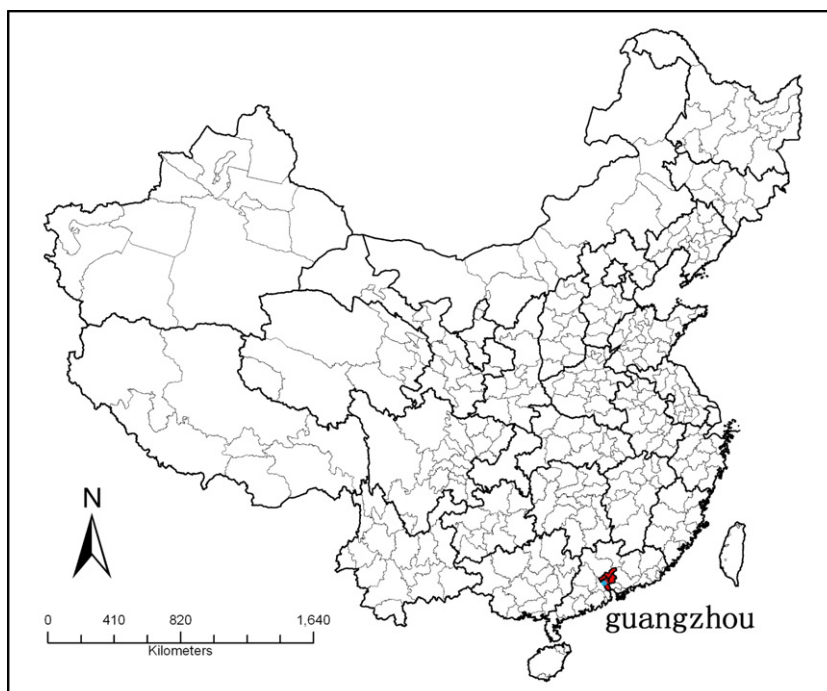


Fig. 1. The location of Guangzhou in China.

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