

Topic: From Economic Zone to Eco-city: Urban Governance and Urban Development in the Tianjin Binhai New Area

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Abstract

China is the largest country in the world in terms of population. Chinese society is shifting from rural to urban lifestyle. New satellite towns are constructed everywhere across the country. Institutional regimes (laws, regulations and codes of conduct) seem flexible enough to react to market economy driven demands. Outsourcing of traditional government tasks to the private economy is observed. At the same time sustainable urban development becomes a more and more important asset when cities seek to attract investment and qualified human resource to broaden their tax base. Yet, decisions are still made that seem to hinder sustainable development (e.g. the extreme difficulty to develop mixed use plots or the absence of bicycle lanes in new master plans).

The central question of this study is the constellation of actors involved in large scale urban projects that are developed on a private public partnership basis, and if this model is fit to promote a sustainable urban development.

The case study area is the Tianjin Binhai New Area, which today consists of six 'Special Development Zones'. The study compares the urban governance structure of two of these zones: the Tianjin Economic & Technological Development Zone (TEDA) established in 1984 and the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-City (SSTEC) initiated in 2007 and currently under construction.

'Special Development Zones' seem appropriate case study objects for urban governance research: They are drafted-from-scratch non-agricultural settlements with residential quarters, public facilities and a social organization thus can be considered urban. With their preferential policies these zones are super autonomous and institutional innovation is rapid. Through public private partnerships with overseas enterprises new technologies and standards are introduced to urban planning regulations.

The research method applied is an actor based approach. Relevant groups of actors of both zones are identified. In a two round Delphi survey expert opinion will be gathered from these actors. During the first round of interviews a guideline questionnaire is used to obtain opinions on issues of urban development and how these tasks could be shared reasonably between public authorities and private investors. During the second round experts will be confronted with opinions that differ from their own to see where consensus can be reached and where conflicting interests persist.

The results are expected to reveal strengths and weaknesses of the governance structure and the model of actors within which these large scale urban projects are conceived, executed and operated. The comparison of the two governance models of one early and one new zone with different focus (economic growth and environmentally sustainable economic growth) will give insight in the evolution of the ppp model in China.