The evolution of spatial planning for Beijing

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1 Beijing: challenges of spatial development in the Olympic City

Since the founding of the P.R. of China, Beijing has experienced two basic development stages of spatial planning. From the 1950s to the early 1980s, planning in Beijing followed the principles and models of socialist physical planning in the Soviet Union. Urban planning had to follow the principles and targets of the national economic plan. From 1980 onwards, urban planners in Beijing began to change their orientation and shifted their interest to learn from advanced western countries and from their own experience. Today, spatial planning has to serve the newly established market economy and is seen as a tool to make up and compensate for “market failures”. However, during this transformation period from a planned economy to a market economy, Beijing, China's second largest city, lacked a healthy market economy and democratic institutions. With a booming local economy, mainly driven by construction, housing and office development, as well as excessive household consumption, the city is flourishing. However, one challenge of the rapid, uneven urban development is the visible increase in social and spatial disparities in the city. Consequently, socio-economic and spatial imbalances characterize the spatial development of the city of Beijing. Now the city is experiencing the numerous urban challenges many other mega-cities in the world are confronted with. Consequently, the local government will have to address such challenges to avoid further aggravation of social tensions, and further spatial fragmentation and polarisation. Traditional master planning, it seems, is not quite suited to addressing such challenges.

Since 2003, experiencing the enormous growth of the urban agglomeration of Beijing, spatial planning has gradually been complementing traditional master planning. This has happened as it became more and more obvious in recent years that physical master planning, as practised in China, could no longer cope with the reality of political action, nor with the complexity of communication and implementation processes in the city. From 1953 to 2004 Beijing planners had produced subsequent master plans for the city. These master plans were guiding documents for the community of planners and policy advisors when dealing with the development of land use and large infrastructure networks. Obviously, they were territorial signals for the emerging property market in the capital city. Strategic spatial planning, in turn, as it is being introduced little by little, aims at developing visions and frames for future action in the wider city region. The planners of the wider city hope that the strategic spatial plan will be accepted by the political leaders of the city and the Central Government, as well as by the local society, the local economy and by the many actors responsible for providing land, infrastructure, and public utilities.

This paper describes the evolution of spatial planning for Beijing since 1953 and presents the recently launched, ambitious strategic plan for the city. It will analyse the politico-administrative framework of strategic spatial planning in the city, sketch the challenges of spatial development in the city region, briefly refer to the impact of the land regulatory system on urban development, and assess the chances for the new strategic plan to guide the future spatial development of the city region. Moreover, the paper will evaluate, from both a Chinese and a European perspective, whether the new spatial strategy, as intended, will trigger off a more polycentric spatial structure of the city. It concludes with some critical reflections concerning future spatial development in the capital city.

In 1978, after 29 years of relative political and economic isolation, China opened to the outside world. In that year, the population of the Province of Beijing was about 8.5 million. The new economic policy, launched upon the initiative of Xiaoping Deng, focused on the economic development of the coastal cities, and triggered off enormous economic growth in these cities. While the annual population growth rate in the P.R. of China during 1978 to 2000 was only 1.25 percent, the urban population grew by 170 percent during the same
In 2003 the city of Beijing had a population of 8.7 million, in a territory of 630 square kilometres (Fig. 1; Fig. 2). The wider hinterland of the city, which is more or less identical with the province of Beijing, covers a territory of about 16,000 square kilometres. It stretches 100 km to the north, and 30 km to the south, and 100 km from east to west. The population forecast for the whole region (Province of Beijing) for the year 2020 is 18 million.

In 1988, local governments in China were granted the right to transfer land to private investors. Since that year, the spatial expansion of cities has exploded all over the country. From 1990 to 2002 the built-up area of Beijing city expanded from about 623 to 941 square kilometres, which is more than 50 percent. During these years, the annual growth rate of GDP in the Capital Province of Beijing was around 16.5 percent (Fig. 3; Fig. 4). In 2006, there were 2.82 million cars registered in Beijing, of which 1.56 million were private cars. This immense growth of motorization is one of the main reasons for the rapid expansion of the city. Since the 1960s, one ring road after the other has been built to accommodate the traffic in the city. In 1999 the city fringe was marked by the fourth ring road, followed by the fifth in 2003 and the sixth in 2008 (Fig. 5). A recent research study presented a map which showed two additional ring roads (Fig. 6), and the foreseeable spatial development of the larger Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan agglomeration will certainly lead to a further extension of the regional motorway network.

While bicycles still dominated Beijing in the 1990s, they have since gradually disappeared from the main roads. Until recently, public transport was provided primarily by buses. Only very few underground and rail lines had been built so far. It has been the explicit policy of the government to promote private-car ownership for macroeconomic reasons. This is done mainly to create a huge home market for the Chinese motorcar industry, one of the sectors seen to be essential for the development of the Chinese economy. Since Beijing was selected to host the 2008 Olympic Games, public transport has received more political attention. New lines are under construction or proposed to be built by 2015.
Due to the enormous growth of motorization and the increase in distances driven by car, air pollution has become a serious challenge for the city, in addition to the sandstorms which regularly bring sand from Western China to Beijing. The local air-pollution index shows that in 1998 the air was heavily polluted on 265 days of the year. Even after the air-pollution control regulation, introduced for the Olympic Games, on more than 120 days the sky over Beijing is polluted. Open green space is still rare in the city. Only the north-western segment of the outer fringe of the city is green; all other suburban districts lack larger green open spaces, which could serve as “healthy lungs” for the city.

The other big concern of the city is water supply. Drinking water comes from the mountains in the north of the city, where a huge water reservoir provides most of the 9,450 thousand cubic metres of water consumed daily in the city (2005) by industries, public-sector institutions, and private households. Already today, during summer, water has become a scarce resource in the city, and regulations have been introduced to limit the consumption of water. A project to bring water from the Yangtze River via a new Central Route Canal to Beijing is under implementation.

The 2008 Olympic Games has urged the city to address some of the challenges mentioned with the highest priority. Improvements in public transport have been made. A new park, the Olympic Park, has been added to the system of green spaces in the city. Regulations to improve air and...
water quality have been initiated, and polluting industries have been shut down or are being closed and are to be trans-located soon to other provinces of the country. In addition, the conservation of the historical heritage in the inner city has finally found more dedicated political support.

2 The politico-administrative framework of spatial planning in Beijing

China is a unitary state. One legal system is established in the whole country. The politico-administrative system can be summarized as follows:

(1) The Central Government is very powerful. A large number of political and administrative institutions, with thousands of administrative and technical employees, manage the highly centralized planning and decision-making processes. When the political leadership feels it necessary, the central government can intervene directly in local affairs as it sees fit. Nevertheless, mayors of big cities and governors of provinces have a high degree of independence, as long as they orchestrate their actions in line with the political directives handed down from above.

(2) As a rule, authorities at the central level nominate lower-level officials. And the National People’s Congress ratifies their nomination. This is considered to guarantee a high degree of consistency of policy directions.

(3) The organization of China’s local authorities is consistent with that of the central authorities. A local department is not only responsible to the local authority, but also to the same organs at higher levels. For example: a city-planning department is “controlled” by the local mayor, though similarly by the provincial or national city planning departments above. Consequently, the politico-administrative framework in the P.R. of China is characterized by a high degree of horizontal and vertical fragmentation, which provides a great deal of space and opportunity for political and administrative manoeuvring.

Spatial planning is just one field in the public sector where strategic planning is done. Other related policy fields represented in the public administration are economic and so-
cial development planning, territorial planning, transport planning, and watershed planning. Referring to different legislative frameworks, the respective administrative institutions pursue and produce their own vested policies and plans, which, not surprisingly, are often contradictory or overlapping. No integrated planning takes place, and no regulatory verdict forces them to coordinate their policies and plans. In such an environment, more than once, conflicts between urban planning and territorial planning occur. This happens mainly due to the fact that urban planning deals exclusively with the already built-up area, while territorial planning is in charge of land which is not yet developed. In day-to-day politics, the two sectoral administrations always strive to enlarge the boundaries for planning in order to gain more power over the territory. This makes effective coordination very difficult.

China’s urban planning system was legally established in the 1980s. The first Town Planning Act of the P.R. of China passed the Congress as late as 1989. On April 1st, 1990 it came into force. This Act, which fully reflects the spirit of the planned economy system, was valid until recently. On January 1st, 2008 a new “Town and Country Planning Act of the P.R. of China” came into effect. This Act extends the planning responsibility of cities to adjacent county areas, which, as a rule, were covered by the administration responsible for land resources.

According to the Town and Country Planning Act, China’s planning system contains four categories of plans (Fig. 7). But in reality, only two categories have been produced: Master Plans and Detailed Plans. Until recently, regional (spatial) planning, be it on the provincial or the national level, was almost non-existent.

In China, Master Plans have been seen as the “locomotive” of all urban-development actions; thus, they are still important legal, administrative and political documents for urban development.

The Master Plan is a comprehensive plan for guiding urban development. As a rule, the document is produced by the local planning administration, though with some support from planning consultants or from planners of the National Academy of Urban Planning. It sets the goals and the principles of urban development; defines the standards of urban design, construction and heritage conservation; and addresses land use, infrastructure planning, transport, and park and recreation systems in the city. Usually, the Master Plan is valid for a time span of between 5 to 20 years. In principle, all investment in the city must follow the policies and the spatial designations made in the “blue print”. The main feature of the
Plan is the land-use map, which legally defines where and to what extent land can be developed in the near future, usually over a time period of 20 years. In the directly-controlled municipality (province) of Beijing, it combines an urban settlement-system plan for the whole territory of the province, and a comprehensive plan for the city of Beijing only.

In recent years, however, the political weight of master plans seems to have been decreasing, while strategic spatial planning at the larger provincial level, and community-related planning at the sub-district level are gaining importance.

The master-plan elaboration procedure in Beijing is clearly structured. First, the planners produce a draft plan, for which all relevant government departments provide the necessary information and decision support. Then representatives of the local authority and invited experts evaluate and agree on this plan, before it is sent to the central authority, which has the final decision-making power and will approve the plan to make it a legally defined document (Fig. 8).

However, under the influence of globalization, Beijing's rapid economic development and accelerated process of urbanization, planners and politicians have realized that this kind of very static, land-use-oriented plan has ceased to be an efficient instrument for guiding urban development. Therefore, in 2003, a new approach to urban-development planning was introduced in Beijing: *strategic planning*. This plan has been launched to compensate for the lack of regional planning of the Greater Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan metropolis, an urban agglomeration with a population of more than 20 million. As in many other countries, strategic planning is an informal planning instrument in China, which precedes the making of a master plan (Fig. 7).

There are some hidden reasons for the boom in strategic planning in China since the late 1990s. On one hand, city governments were seeking rather long-term, flexible city strategies and plans with a wider regional vision to guide future urban development and face up to all the foreseeable challenges in the new era. On the other hand, after the new socialist market economic system was established in 1992, and particularly since the land-use and tax-institute reform, which changed the relationship between central government and local government, local governments had their own interests in pursuing self-determined, local economic development. Moreover, the opportunity to use informal strategic planning as a tool to transform more farmland into urban land became a key reason for local governments to launch such a strategic plan. This negative phenomenon has become known in China as the "enclosure movement".
3 The reform of Land Use Institute and Tax Institute in China, and their influence on urban planning and administration

Urban development processes in Beijing cannot be assessed without some understanding of the land-ownership system in the country. For this purpose, a brief introduction is given thereafter.

In 1949, the P. R. of China, following the rationale of socialism, established the concept of public land ownership. The Constitution clearly stipulated that "no organization or individual is allowed to occupy, buy, sell, and lease land, or illegally transfer land through other forms". This was the hallmark of the old system of state-owned land use: land is not marketable and has no market value; it is not registered and not transferable. Land-use rights cannot be transferred between land users. A single administrative system of allocation decided on the use of urban land. The state provided land to users, for example to state-owned enterprises or institutions, without asking for financial compensation, and for an unlimited time period.

Starting in the 1980s, China began to reform the institute of land use and management, mainly in two areas. One was the land-administration system reform. In 1986 the state passed the Land Management Act and established the State Land Administration Bureau. The other was the land-use system reform of 1987, which separated land-use rights and land ownership, and changed the conditions: from unpaid and indefinite land use to paid and limited land use. Thus, land could enter the market in accordance with its real market attributes. By separating the principles of land ownership and land-use rights, the state retains the ownership of the land and can transfer land-use rights to users at a certain price and for a certain period through auction, tender, negotiation and so on; the transferred land-use right can be sold, transferred, rented and mortgaged. This has been a fundamental reform of China's land-use system, which breaks the long-term, free, indefinite, non-mobile and administrative allocation of land use, and creates a new system for the distribution of land through a market institute.

Due to this land-use reform, land has become the main financial resource of the local government, and the supply of land has gradually become an important means of economic control, since local government has the right to transfer land-use rights and enjoy the benefits accruing from this process. Selling the state-owned land is obviously the easiest – and a reliable – way for the local government to make money. That is why "land disorder" has become such a big issue in China. From 1996 to 2005 – that is in less than a decade – farmland in China has decreased by 66 thousand square kilometres. This came about mainly due to structural adjustments in agriculture and the creation of ecological zones, but speculative development around the cities caused a permanent loss of arable land. In this process, much land has been wasted by extensive use, not counting the costs of energy, water and mineral resources.

However, the Tax Institute Reform rather intensified this land problem. As the most important source of fiscal revenue of China's Government, tax is a key economic element of macro-economic regulation, and exerts a great impact on China's economic and social development. During the traditional planned-economy period, China implemented a complex tax-levy and tax-distribution system. With the progress made since the 1994 tax reform, China has preliminarily set up a streamlined tax system geared to the socialist market economy. In December 1993, the State Council issued the "Decision of implementing a differentiated tax system", which entered into force in January 1994. Subsequently, Article 8 of the Budget Law of P. R. of China (in force from January 1995) makes it clear that the state separates central tax from local tax.

According to this new tax system, China's tax revenue is divided into two categories of central income and local income, and the central revenue makes up the bulk of the whole tax revenue, approximately 20 % to 30 % of the total revenue. The statistical data shows that, in 1993, the central and local revenues respectively constituted 22 % and 78 % of the total financial revenue, and in 1994 this proportion changed to 44.3 % and 55.7 %. Compared with the local revenues before the tax-system reform, the local tax income declined by 30 percent. However, along with the decline in revenue,
there has been no corresponding reduction in social responsibility for local governments. Because of the huge gap between financial income and expenditure, 20% to 30% of local expenditure has to rely on the transfer of fiscal subsidies from the centre.

In the existing performance-evaluation system, based on local economic development or growth of GDP as a major indicator in the examination, the local governments try every possible means to find new sources of revenue in order to achieve good performance. Under the current system, the best way to expand local government revenues is by using the "land-market system", which includes four major dimensions: (1) utilizing funds coming from transferring or leasing land as a local government revenue source; (2) selling local industrial land at low cost in order to attract businesses and investment, and subsequently to stimulate local economic development; (3) expanding urban land through demolition to spur local tax revenues with the real-estate industry; (4) using land as collateral for bank loans in order to acquire money for infrastructure and urban construction. Local governments have been eager to become land developers and managers and to promote urban construction. This, however, seriously weakens the regulatory and controlling ability of the central government. Therefore, in September 2006, the State Council issued the "Notice on issues related to strengthening the macro control of land", which aimed to limit the complex and non-transparent land deals.

To sum up, the reform of the Land Use Institute and Tax Institute exerts a great influence on urban development, mainly because the Master Plan determines legally how much – and which – land can be zoned. As a rule, every local government tries hard to raise population forecasts during the process of making master plans in order to argue for an increase in the number of greenfield sites to be developed. Once the master plan is approved, the resulting land "treasure" of the local government would be approved by the Central Government. In such a political environment, planners are trapped between supporting the local government, their employer, by forecasting a much higher population increase, and following their individual ethos, and social responsibility. As a rule, they submit a higher demographic forecast to meet the local desire, and use the pressure coming from the criticism of expert committees and the central government to pare it back gradually. It is widely acknowledged that the forecasts can never be precise, but the magic numbers become the important base of the master plan.

Strategic planning cannot escape this puzzle either. A strategic plan is an informal plan, which does not need to be authorized by upper-tier government. Thus, strategic planning has become a tool of the local government to promote their own vested interests. They invite planners to argue for more land to be developed in a city, and justify the unrealistic forecast by all kinds of more or less convincing reasoning. And they use the strategic plan as a negotiating tool in the plan-making process for the legally defined master plan. For obvious reasons, some local governments base their city development on the strategic plan and deliberately delay the revision of an old, outdated master plan. This does certainly not apply to Beijing, though the demonstration of interdependencies between urban planning and land and tax policies in China, briefly sketched above, gives a brief insight into the rationale of urban decision-making and urban management in China's cities, including Beijing.

4 The evolution of master planning in Beijing

For Beijing, six subsequent master plans have been made since 1949: the first master plan was published in 1954, the subsequent ones were made in 1958, 1973, 1983, 1992 and 2004 respectively (Fig. 9). Due to political circumstances, the first three master plans were no more than the outcome of planning research. They were never approved by the central government. The 1983 Master Plan of Beijing is the first legal document that has been used officially to guide urban development. The 1992 Master Plan was valid until 2004, before the present 2004 master plan was launched and approved. The continuity of planning policies and urban spatial structure can easily be seen from these six master plans.
• **1953:** In the 1953, Russian-influenced master plan, Beijing was seen to be the national political and economic centre of China. Consequently, the place for political functions was located in the ancient city. All new development centred around the old city and ring roads (Ring-Radiation) became the dominant feature of the urban spatial structure. At that time, industrial development and the layout of industrial land were particularly essential for the city.

• **1958:** In the 1958 master plan, western urban-development concepts, particularly drawn from Paris and London, influenced the Beijing planners and caused them to build satellite towns to accommodate urban growth. They proposed what they called “scattered groups” of urban development, which meant residential quarters around the central city separated from each other by green corridors. In the later master plans this spatial concept was resumed. It had a profound impact on the spatial structure of Beijing.

• **1973:** When producing the 1973 master plan, planners tried to eliminate the harmful effects of industries located inside the city and suggested moving them to the urban fringe. This plan also proposed gradually building a number of small cities and towns on the edge of the built-up city, responding to the population growth of the city. The path was opened up to suburbanization.

• **1983:** In the 1983 master plan, Beijing was defined as the national political and cultural capital of China, while reducing its role as an economic centre. The plan re-emphasized the scattered spatial structure and aimed at “gradually transforming the old city”, adjusting and completing urban infrastructure on the urban fringe, and linking outer suburban development to the city. When working
on this plan, the Beijing planners paid more attention to a greater dispersion of urban functions by developing selected suburbs and backward areas of the city. This plan, however, laid the foundations for the massive demolition of the old quarters of the city, which started to take place in that period.

- **1992:** The vision of the 1992 master plan was to transform Beijing into a modern and international metropolis. The so-called “Two-Shift Strategy” aimed to shift development from the inner city to suburban areas, and to shift emphasis from urban expansion to inner-city improvement. In addition, the plan intended (in the end unsuccessfully) to limit the further growth of the urban population and to control further land consumption.

Over 50 years, the spatial development of Beijing followed a model of concentric circles. The consequences of locating all economic, cultural and political functions in the historical centre of the city were a tremendous pressure on heritage conservation, infrastructural shortcomings and continuous traffic congestion, aggravated by industrial pollution and the gradual demise of the urban ecosystem. The accumulation of urban problems apparently called for a paradigm shift to break up the monocentric spatial system of the city.

During the last decade of the 20th century, the planners of Beijing realized that traditional statutory master planning could no longer address the enormous challenges of rapid urbanization in the Capital Province of Beijing. Consequently, prior to producing the 2004 master plan, a kind of research-based strategic planning had to be undertaken to explore the spatial dimensions of development in the whole Capital Province.

Consequently, in 2003, the elaboration of a new strategic plan for Beijing was put on the political agenda, mainly for three reasons. First, the demographic, economic and spatial growth of the city region has exceeded all previous assumptions. Second, the 2008 Olympic Games provided a good reason to present a future-oriented vision of the city to the outside world. And, third, the exploding motorization and the resulting congestion costs had called for a more polycentric spatial development of the city region.

In order to face these challenges, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Urban Planning decided to start a process of strategic planning. To prepare in time for the Olympics, the elaboration of this plan happened under extreme time pressure. It was done from January to June 2003 in a period of just six months. This plan can be seen as the birth of strategic city planning in the Capital Province of Beijing.

The new **2003 Strategic Plan** for the Capital Province of Beijing aims to transform the city from a monocentric to a polycentric city. It has become the hope for turning around spatial development in Beijing. This strategic plan analyzes and understands Beijing from a more regional perspective. Differing from the traditional comprehensive master-plan concept, this plan addresses key issues of urban development in the Beijing city region and is more flexible in terms of decision-making, and more independent from central government agencies. The plan was prepared in collaboration with local planning consultants. The city government invited several city-planning and design institutes to present their ideas about future spatial development in the city. These were the China Academy of Urban Planning & Design (CAUPD), Tsinghua University (TU) and Beijing Municipal Institute of City...
Planning & Design (BMICPD). These three planning institutes have proposed different views (Fig. 10), Double Cross, Two Corridors & Multi-centre and Arch Structure. All three proposals envisage a decentralized, multi-centric space development for Beijing in a regional context. The amalgamated final concept is “Two Axes, Two Corridors and Multicentricity” (Fig. 11). “Two axes” is the cross-axis defined by the historical city of Beijing and composed of the east-west Changan Avenue and the north-south ancient centre axis. It reflects the quintessence of the traditional spatial pattern in Beijing. “Two Corridors” refers to the eastern development corridor and the western ecological corridor. “Multi-centricity” refers to the medium-sized and small-sized town nodes spread across the region. Through such a spatial concept, the new strategic plan tries “to carry forward the history and tradition, decentralize the urban functions on the basis of ecological environment protection, and achieve common prosperity in Beijing city and its surrounding areas”.

The local government of Beijing uses the strategic plan as a preparatory exercise for traditional master planning. In contrast to the master plan, the strategic plan is not a legal document and the plan does not need the formal approval of the central-government administration. This demonstrates a new development in the system of urban planning in China. And it manifests the increasing power of city governments, which use the strategic plan as an instrument to develop their own local development visions, independent from the central top-down command system.

The polycentric vision of the plan, however, is not very convincing. Even under conditions of a state-dominated economy, it is far too optimistic to believe that this strategic plan will bring the turn from a monocentric spatial structure to a polycentric one. Too many space-related political and infrastructural decisions in the past have clearly reinforced the mono-centric organization of spatial functions in the city. And the development of a grid-shaped public transportation system, which could change the spatial structure, will certainly require several decades to show effect. In addition, in the absence of a system of long-established, medium-sized cities in the immediate hinterland of the capital city, the proposed newly built satellite towns will not alter the economic rationales of the real-estate sector. This did not happen in Paris, nor in London, where such strategies were developed and implemented a few decades ago. Neither city has really become a polycentric city, albeit some back offices, middle-class housing and technology industries have been developed to benefit from governmental subsidies to support decentralisation. However, there may be a chance for a more polycentric spatial development pattern in Beijing, once the megalopolis region of Beijing, Tianjin and Tangshan is strategically developed into a polycentric economic zone. The spatial structure of a metropolis cannot be changed by a strategic plan, nor by a master plan. It will take centuries of continuous infrastructure investments and locational decisions of public and private institutions and enterprises to influence the functional organisation of space. This
is certainly true for market economies and it is valid for China with its increasingly hybrid economic system.

Based on the ideas and the outcomes of strategic planning, the 2004 Master Plan was soon completed in Beijing (Fig. 12.) The major decisions made in the strategic planning process were quickly converted into a legal urban plan. This master plan achieved a number of substantive and procedural innovations, which have even been written into the new “Town and Country Planning Act” as basic planning principles for master planning in the whole country. For example, the municipal government organized the plan together with the head of urban planning in the city, and under the responsibility of the mayor. That is why the Beijing master plan received so much attention and wider social participation. The horizontal sectoral cooperation went especially well, mainly due to the particular commitment of the mayor. Experts played a leading role during the planning procedure. They pushed the plan and its planning goals. Although, up to now, there is no real public participation in China, the public in Beijing was involved in the master-planning process to some extent by means of exhibitions and some public hearings. Moreover, urban-development aims, such as sustainable development, ecological environment protection, harmonious urban and rural development, and regional cooperation, received much more political and professional attention. Thus, some of the shortcomings of the traditional rigid, mandatory master-planning process were avoided in the planning process for the 2004 Beijing Master Plan. That is why this master plan subsequently became a model for master planning in other Chinese cities.

5 Outlook

With new spatial challenges in the Capital Province of Beijing, planners in Beijing have realized that traditional master planning cannot cope with all the spatial implications of demographic and economic development in the capital city. Consequently, they have understood that legally defined statutory master planning for the city of Beijing has to be complemented by a kind of more informal strategic spatial planning, which explores possible futures in a larger territory to prepare political decision-making processes for the development of larger infrastructure systems (mainly roads, public transit, water and sewage). For the time being, this larger territory is the Capital Province of Beijing. However, in the longer run, the even larger megalopolis Beijing-Tiensin-Tangshan will be the territory to consider when envisioning the spatial future of the Capital region of Beijing. This will be particularly essential when deciding on the location of a new international airport in Beijing, a project for which first studies are being undertaken.

There is much evidence that, at least in the medium term and under the umbrella of national spatial planning, spatial planning for Beijing will be done at five levels, or territorial scales:
(1) After the Olympics, strategic spatial planning for the City District level within the city of Beijing will soon gain political and professional importance. Such strategic planning will become indispensable when addressing the quality-of-life issues of the population, when renewing the city of the 1970s and 1980s, conserving the remaining historical heritage and revitalizing derelict industrial quarters in the city.

(2) Master planning at the City level will continue to maintain its statutory function, though this plan will lose some of its political weight.

(3) Strategic planning at the level of the Capital Province of Beijing will become a continuous concern of all planners dealing with the future spatial development of the capital city, with transportation and with water supply, with green-belt and nature conservation, and with promoting a more decentralized spatial development in the Province.

(4) Mainly for economic, logistic and environmental reasons, the wider territory of the Beijing-Tianjin-Tangshan Metropolitan Region (population 2006 around 25 million) will have to be the subject of longer term interprovincial strategic planning. Particularly the decisions on the airport and the harbour have to be seen in this context. They will subsequently impact on the spatial extension of Beijing and Tianjin to the east and west respectively. A certain spatial-and functional division of labour within the three cities will have to be determined.

(5) Finally, strategic spatial planning for an even larger territory, the Bohai Megalopolis, will have to be envisaged. This megalopolis, which is one of the three larger economic development zones in China (the other two are the Pearl River Delta Megalopolis and the Yangtze River Delta Megalopolis), will include the metropolitan regions of Dalian and Qingdao and accommodate a population of at least 100 million. This megalopolis will represent the economic context of longer term strategic planning for all the cities and districts in that politically and geographically important area of the P.R. of China.

This fivefold system of strategic planning will frame the future urban development of Beijing and its hinterland. The planners will have to convince the political decision-making milieu to consider and to support such a multi-tier system of strategic planning. And the planners themselves will have to provide the professional expertise for strategic planning at these five levels. Such expertise will require much more research and quite differentiated specialisations – more local, social and communicative when it come to inner-city district level, and more global and economic when it comes to macro-regional territory.
Endnotes

(1) The total population of 1978 is 0.96 billion, and the urban population is 0.17 billion. The total population of 2000 is 1.26 billion, and the urban population is 0.46 billion. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China. Statistical Yearbook of the relevant period.


(6) National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China: Constitution of the P.R. China (1982), Article 13

(7) China’s land system reform 2003, see: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2003-01/20/content_698099.htm


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Notes

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