

## **Spatiotemporal dynamics of urban villages in China**

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Since the introduction of economic and social reforms in the late 1970s, China has experienced a huge influx of people into its cities, coupled with massive urban expansion. As a by-product of these processes, urban villages (*chengzhongcun*) have emerged and evolved rapidly to satisfy the increasing demand for low-cost housing and a variety of social and economic activities. In many cities, the spatial growth of urban villages represents a very large share of total urban growth and has significantly shaped the cities' land-use patterns and residential profiles. However, in both planning practice and research the urban village phenomenon has often been viewed as a relatively simple, static and homogeneous stereotype of migrant enclaves. Moreover, as the urban village generally has a negative image encompassing many environmental and social problems, urban policies aim foremost at their demolition and redevelopment. This causes large-scale displacement of residents and, if current programs are maintained, may give rise to a shortage of low-income housing.

In this paper, a theoretical and empirical analysis is carried out in order to understand the growth and change of all 320 urban villages in Shenzhen over the period 1999–2009. The urban villages are examined with respect to their spatial context and their position and role in the wider spatial economy. The spatial evolution process of urban villages is analyzed and described in terms of their physical growth and functional change, revealing that a common perception of urban villages from existing literature as static and uniform migrant enclaves is invalid. Using exploratory spatial data analysis, multivariate models, and spatial regimes models, the spatial evolution of urban villages and the resulting diversity are explained with respect to the local developmental conditions and constraints of individual villages, as well as to the overall urban development process.

This paper finds that the growth of urban villages is organic and highly adaptive.

Their evolution is driven by the planning and development of the formal city and its resulting social and spatial diversity, but is also linked to their location in the urban fabric. Five major issues have been identified. First, the physical and socioeconomic development of urban villages is the natural and logical response of the indigenous village population and the rural migrants in facing rapid economic development and social transition; second, the development process of urban villages follows a general trajectory characterized by three distinct but overlapping phases (expansion, densification and intensification); third, their growth is spatially clustered though the growth centers shift over time, following the general expansion of urban development and the diffusion of employment; fourth, the development of urban villages is driven by the provision of jobs and accessibility to job locations, but it is also confined by physical and institutional constraints such as diminishing land availability and environmental protection plans; and fifth, the land use of urban villages also evolves and the resulting land use diversity in urban villages reflects different local conditions for economic activities and development. These processes are also found to be faster and more advanced in the central city than in the outer districts. The speed with which any specific village moves along the general development path varies according to its location in the city and its distinctive characteristics.

Urban villages in Shenzhen are expected to further evolve in terms of density, intensity and diversity of land use. Meanwhile, the large-scale government-led redevelopment programs will continue. However, the recent practice of redevelopment programs in Shenzhen indicates that there are considerable barriers to be overcome before they can be rolled out at the scale envisaged. Moreover, as the city still lacks a scheme for affordable housing provision, the large-scale redevelopment of urban villages entails both social and economic risks triggered by the displacement of large numbers of migrants. Shenzhen and other Chinese cities that implement such large-scale redevelopment programs may face not only a shortage of low-cost housing, but also a dramatic decrease in the provision of accessible employment and services in the redevelopment areas. These impacts may not be trivial and could conceivably become a barrier to both individual well-being and social stability.