

BEIJING

2016-2035: THE BIG TURN?

As the Chinese Capital, Beijing's urban development is of great significance for the People's Republic of China. Beijing suffers from the so-called "big city disease", i.e. traffic congestion, urban sprawl and massive air pollution. Throughout the New Master Plan, a national strategy demands for the first time that planning be carried out on the scale of the mega-region, moving out non-capital functions to peripheral new centres. Will it work?

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At the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party in 2012, China's General Secretary Xi Jinping presented his new governance concepts, thoughts and strategies for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The *Two Centenary Goals* have been set: (1) to finish building a moderately prosperous society by the centenary of the Communist Party of China in 2021; and (2) to turn China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the centenary of the People's Republic in 2049. These goals have a major impact on all different sectors and in particular on the future urban and rural planning and construction practices of the Chinese Capital, Beijing.

CHINA'S URBAN DEVELOPMENT SITUATION AND MEGACITIES PROPOSITION

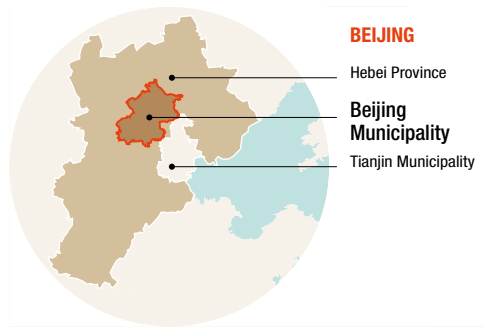
China's rapid urbanization has entered its middle and late stages. As economic growth is slowing down, the development of the most cities is more mature, meaning that the goals have changed - from large-scale expansion to thematic urbanization. In China, the transformation of the urban



Beijing's challenges for 2035: controlling urbanisation and restoring a degraded environment.

growth model has become a major topic and megacities (such as Beijing and Shanghai) have to take the lead in reform and innovation during this period of transition. On the inside, their task is to strive to resolve their own *big city disease*, i.e. traffic congestion, expensive housing, air pollution, urban sprawl and other illnesses that cities are facing. In order to do so, they should seek to explore an optimized growth model for densely populated and economically developed areas; to improve the quality of urban development and competitiveness; and to improve the urban governance system.

In January 2005, the State Council officially approved the Beijing Master Plan (2004-2020). For over 10 years, the capital of China has maintained steady and rapid economic and social development, as Beijing successfully hosted the 2008 Olympic Games, coped with the international financial crisis and held the East-Asia-Pacific Summit (APEC) as well as the *One Belt and One Road* Summit. Today, Beijing has become one of the most dynamic cities with great potential, not only in China but also in the world.



NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR BEIJING

However, Beijing has also accumulated some underlying contradictions and problems, especially the increasingly prominent contradiction between population, resources and environment. By the end of 2015, the city's permanent resident population had reached 21.7 million, while 46% of the plains have become built-up land for urban and rural construction. The city's per capita water resource is far lower than the international standard for absolute water

A state-driven metropolitanisation process

Land is what fuels urban growth in China. Three decades of economic reform have fostered very rapid urbanisation* and the rise of gigantic cities, now slowed by less buoyant economic growth. The liberalisation of urban property markets and the ambivalent status of rural land have put cities in debt: to finance themselves, they borrow, buy and resell land for urbanisation. This speculative system consumes space and destabilises regions both socially and environmentally. Beijing is no exception.

In 2015, to 'rationalise' its territory and compete with the regions of Shanghai and Canton, Beijing set up the *Jing-Jin-Ji* (Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Province) plan. This national interest scheme, which involves reorganising economic and industrial functions on a macro-regional scale and the capping of the number of residents in the municipality of Beijing, forms the basis for the 2016-2035 Master Plan.

The scheme is based on the principle of "less is more"*** (economic use of land and resources; stabilised population) and of a clear separation between capital city functions and ordinary functions. Central Beijing will be home to the political organs of government; Tongzhou in the eastern suburbs, where over a million public-sector employees are being transferred, will host municipal administration; and the Xiong'an New Area in Hebei, 100km south of the city, will accommodate state companies. Since 2016, to reduce the population in the six central districts (the goal being a reduction of 15% by 2035) and meet the requirements of the "political" status of central Beijing, the municipality has been restructured around a controversial project that involves evicting the migrant population that has settled in the capital.

The rapid metropolitanisation process in which the city is engaged and its two-pronged state and municipal governance create paradoxes

RELOCATION OF URBAN FUNCTIONS



that are now part of its DNA. One example is the raft of major social innovations aimed at protecting historic neighbourhoods such as Dazhalan and Shijia Hutong, where projects involving the participation of residents, architects and artists are frustrated by the eviction of migrants and the closure of their shops, which gave Beijing its vitality. Such paradoxes reflect the conflict of urban policies and state measures supporting the reinforcement of Beijing's capital status. ■

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www.sinapolis.net
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*The urbanisation rate rose from 18% in 1980 to 57.8% in 2018.
**Descamps J., Xu S., *Promoting 'Less is More': Beijing New Urban Master Plan*, Modu Magazine, 4 May 2018.

scarcity. Although air quality is improving, the average annual fine particulate matter concentration (PM2.5) in 2016 is too high. The housing supply can hardly keep up with fast-growing demand.

At the same time, Beijing's development has been facing new situations and major opportunities, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei strategy, the new administrative sub-center in Tongzhou and the Hebei Xiong'an new area development. The preparations for the 2022 Winter Olympics and the ambitions of the *One Belt and One Road* construction will also exert a significant impact on the city in the future. Beijing officially launched a new round of drafting a new Master Plan in 2014, enabled through the work of 200 experts and scholars in a comprehensive research programme.

RENEWED NATIONAL IMPORTANCE FOR THE CHINESE CAPITAL

In June 2015, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council approved the *Programme for Coordinated Development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei*¹. This programme intends to make this mega-region a world-class city agglomeration by 2020, comprising the province of Hebei, the municipality of Beijing and the neighboring municipality of Tianjin. As a major national strategy, it aims at the relocation of Beijing's non-capital functions out of the city, including the limitation of the permanent resident population to 23 million, the reduction of the population in the central urban area (Beijing's six central districts) by about 15 percent, and the alleviation of the big city disease issues.

For the first time in history, Beijing is to follow an upper-level programme with requirements to be implemented in the capital's new Master Plan. But along with this national programme, another event has greatly influenced the new Plan: On February 24, 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping inspected Beijing and gave important instructions on further improving Beijing's urban planning and construction. Xi pointed out that Beijing's urban planning should consider the question of "what kind of a capital China needs

and how to build it". This led to a modification of the existing draft of the Master Plan, trying to optimize the planning aspects so that they provide an answer to this question. In September of that same year, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council approved the Beijing Master Plan (2016-2035). Today, the development process of Beijing closely aligns with the national process. Finally, the New 2016 Master Plan (The Plan) will be preliminarily implemented in 2020 and be valid until 2035, but its impact will extend to 2050 as it connects to the *Two Centenary Goals*.

The Plan is centered on the implementation of a new strategic role that has been attributed to Beijing. It is defined as the capital of four clusters: political, cultural, international and innovative. The new development goals align with the ambitions of a better national capital with a broader and long-term vision: to build the capital of a greater China achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and a world-class harmonious and liveable capital.

A NEW SPATIAL STRUCTURE FOR BEIJING: MOVING IN/OUT URBAN FUNCTIONS

Over the past decade, Beijing has relied on land- and population-driven GDP growth, and its development remains relatively extensive. Under the constraints of resources and environmental carrying capacity, the city should adapt a development mode that is more intensive and efficient. The Plan focuses on relocating Beijing's non-capital functions, enhancing capital functions and improving environment in the spatial layout. It proposes a new spatial structure of the city as "*one core, one central urban area, one sub-center, two axes, multiple new towns and one ecological conservation area*". Each area has different goals. Examples:

1. The *Core Area* will experience a profound restructuring of urban functions. The proposal is to move out the regional commodity trading market and large medical institutions. Emptied space should be reused for capital functions, green space, water systems and service facilities for citizens.

MEGALOPOLIS

2. The *Central Urban Area* is to be upgraded following the relocation of non-capital functions and reduction of population density, manufacturing and warehousing land, and to improve the utilization efficiency of industrial land. Vacated space should be reused as a priority for central government and important state affairs, as well as the improvement of innovation and advanced industries, and cultural and service functions.

3. The *Tongzhou Sub-Center*, currently under construction, is set to be the new center for the relocation of municipal functions. It is located in the east, 20 km from the central districts within the boundaries of the municipality.

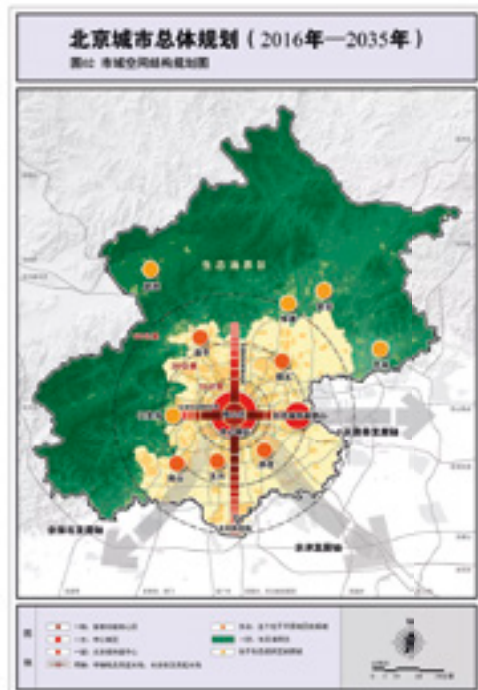
While past master plans of Beijing have already attached great importance to the relationship between city and region, the 2016 Master Plan finally extends a focus on coordination for the whole *Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei* region. Beijing counts as the *One Core* within the region, engaging in closer cooperation with Tianjin port-city and Hebei province.

In order to manage the relocation of Beijing's non-capital economic functions, a new town is proposed in the south, outside of the boundaries of Beijing in Hebei Province: The *Xiong'an New Area*.

PLANNING RESTRICTIONS, LAND USE, HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPE DESIGN

The most prominent problems in Beijing are the pressure on resources –especially water resources, clean air, and continuous nibbling of ecological land. Thus, the new Master Plan draws *three red lines*: the city scale (maximum population), the ecological control boundary and the urban growth boundary.

Population ceilings are set according to the maximum capacity of water resources. The maximum resident population of Beijing (23 million) shall remain at this level for a long time after 2020. Since the founding of People's Republic of China, previous master plans for Beijing emphasized controlling scale, but the reality is that growth and sprawl have become the normal state. The excess of power boundaries creates a



BEIJING MASTER PLAN 2017-2035, BICP

The new master plan focuses on the protection of the mountainous and natural areas in the north and the reinforcement of the two central historical axes that extend into the landscape.

space for speculation and rent-seeking on fragmented plots. The new Plan reduces the urban and rural construction land.

Currently, Beijing has too much production and employment space with insufficient living space. In comparison with other metropolitan areas, such as Paris and Tokyo, the current residential land/industrial land ratio in Beijing is fairly low. Whereas Tokyo and Paris have a ratio of about 1:3-1:4, Beijing is at 1:1.3. The Plan aims to reduce the production space, moderately raise the proportion of the land for residential, and improve the ratio to above 1:1.5 in 2020, and 1:2 in 2035.

Along with these ambitions, the Plan proposes to greatly improve ecological scale and quality, to develop an urban green space system, to increase the forest coverage rate, and to improve the per capita park and green land area in the built-up areas; 95% of the built-up areas should be within 500 meters coverage of park and green land. The Plan promotes the coordinated development of water and the city, the improvement of the jobs-housing balance, and the coordination of the development of underground and aboveground spaces.



PAUL LECROART/L'INSTITUT PARIS REGION

The protection of Beijing's last traditional Hu Tong areas is a new feature of the new Master Plan.

It further extends the connotation of historic and cultural protection. In addition to the recent focus on the old city, by the renewal and protection of the traditional *Hu Tong* area, the Plan suggests the comprehensive protection of Beijing's natural and cultural setting, defined as the *three hills & five gardens* region, as well as the *Great Wall cultural belt* and other regional features. For the first time the Plan uses a separate section to discuss urban design and cityscape. It envisions a landscape control system that covers guidelines for building height, city skyline, bird-view corridor, city rooftops, city color, etc.

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION AND PLANNING OBJECTIVES

Beijing's new Master Plan sees urban development as an organic whole. It follows the coordinated requirement of political, economic, cultural, social and ecological development. The effective alleviation of the *big city disease* and the construction of a modern megacity governance system are fundamental for the realization of Beijing's planning blueprint at a high level. The Plan responds to the people's concerns, enabled through special research on land sprawl, traffic jams, housing price surges, air pollution, municipal infrastructure and public safety problems, and by putting forward systematic solutions.

Since the approval of the former 2004 Master Plan, the Beijing urban and rural planning department has set up multiple planning and coordination platforms. However, the implementation of the 2004 Plan remains problematic. The 2016 Plan proposes a multiple-in-one implementation and control system, carrying out evaluation mechanisms and setting up a supervision and accountability system to deal with violations of plans and poor implementation.

The CPC Central Committee and the State Council approved the Beijing Master Plan (2016-2035) considering that it is "of great significance to promote comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of the capital." While the 2016 Plan is highly appraised, we should not forget what the famous Chinese planner and professor Wu Liangyong said of the 2004 Plan: "The completion of a new master plan of Beijing is also the beginning of new problems." In the future, Beijing will continue to explore methods for the implementation of the Plan and other urban planning and construction management, march towards the vision of a world-class harmonious and liveable capital, and achieve the *China dream* as well as the *two centenary goals*. ■

1. China's Jing-Jin-Ji regional economic strategy: 2016 progress update, JLL, *The Economist*, 2016