Shenzhen’s transformation within a generation from a rural fishing village to a thriving metropolis, home to 10 million people, and almost as many enterprises, illustrates how the pressure of rapid urbanization can be accommodated to create a livable, efficient and productive city.

For centuries, Shenzhen was an unremarkable fishing village clinging to the coast of China, on the edge of the Pearl River Delta. Its fortunes changed with the advent of the Reform and Opening up program initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 over the course of which the Transformation District (FTZ) was established in Shenzhen as a test-bed for reforms, ring-fenced from the rest of the country.

In 1979, Shenzhen was certainly no disadvantage, over 2000km to the north of the seat of power in Beijing, the distance from Shenzhen to the seat of power is 177km, including linkages to Hong Kong, with 5 additional lines under construction. The first metro line opened in 2004 and in 10 years the system has extended to cover the majority of the city. A container port. The first metro line opened in 2004 and in 10 years the system has extended to cover the majority of the city. A container port. The first metro line opened in 2004 and in 10 years the system has extended to cover the majority of the city.

1. October 1949, PLA led by Communist Party of China established

The economic reforms tested in Shenzhen quickly spread throughout the country. Issues remain, but such as the hukou or registration system, which denies the migrant population the right of permanent residence and access to services within the city, and the serious air pollution which affects many of China’s cities are starting to get serious attention, although it will be many years before the problems are eradicated.

In fact, the rapid growth encouraged land sales and the proceeds from new businesses, provided the revenues which gradually allowed urban planning to gain the upper hand. Broad streets were built, building regulations were enforced, and health and safety concerns addressed to avoid the building collapses and disastrous fires that had plagued the city’s initial growth spurt.

In the early years, Shenzhen displayed all the characteristics of a boom town with its substandard housing blocks and lack of social and transportation infrastructure. However, by restricting migration to the city to a group of employers responsible for providing accommodation for their workers, Shenzhen gradually avoided the urban squatter and informal housing that plagues many fast-growing cities in emerging markets.

In the late 1980s, Shenzhen began to diversify the growth of the financial and business services sector to complement the dominant manufacturing sector. An airport was developed as well as the world’s third busiest deep water container port. The first metro line opened in 2004 and in 10 years the system has extended to cover the majority of the city, including linkages to Hong Kong, with 5 additional lines under construction.

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Shenzhen, People’s Republic of China

COORDINATES
22°33'N 114°06'E

AREA
159 sq mi

POPULATION
8,538,275

DENSITY
22,000 sq mi

GDP total
$178 billion

GDP per capita
$17,096

2004
The first metro line opened in Shenzhen, now there are 5 additional lines under construction

2. Shenzen by night

3. Picture of the western side of the CBD of Shenzhen, China, looking southwest. The Shenzhen river and rice fields can be seen in the background.

With the strong entrepreneurial spirit of its population, and backed by a welter of domestic and foreign capital, the FTZ flourished

Shenzhen managed to avoid the urban squalor and informal housing that plagues many fast growing cities in emerging markets

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