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Beijing Unfinished Metropolis: Backdoors entry points to detect the multi-scalar perspective of the upcoming Chinese urban spaces

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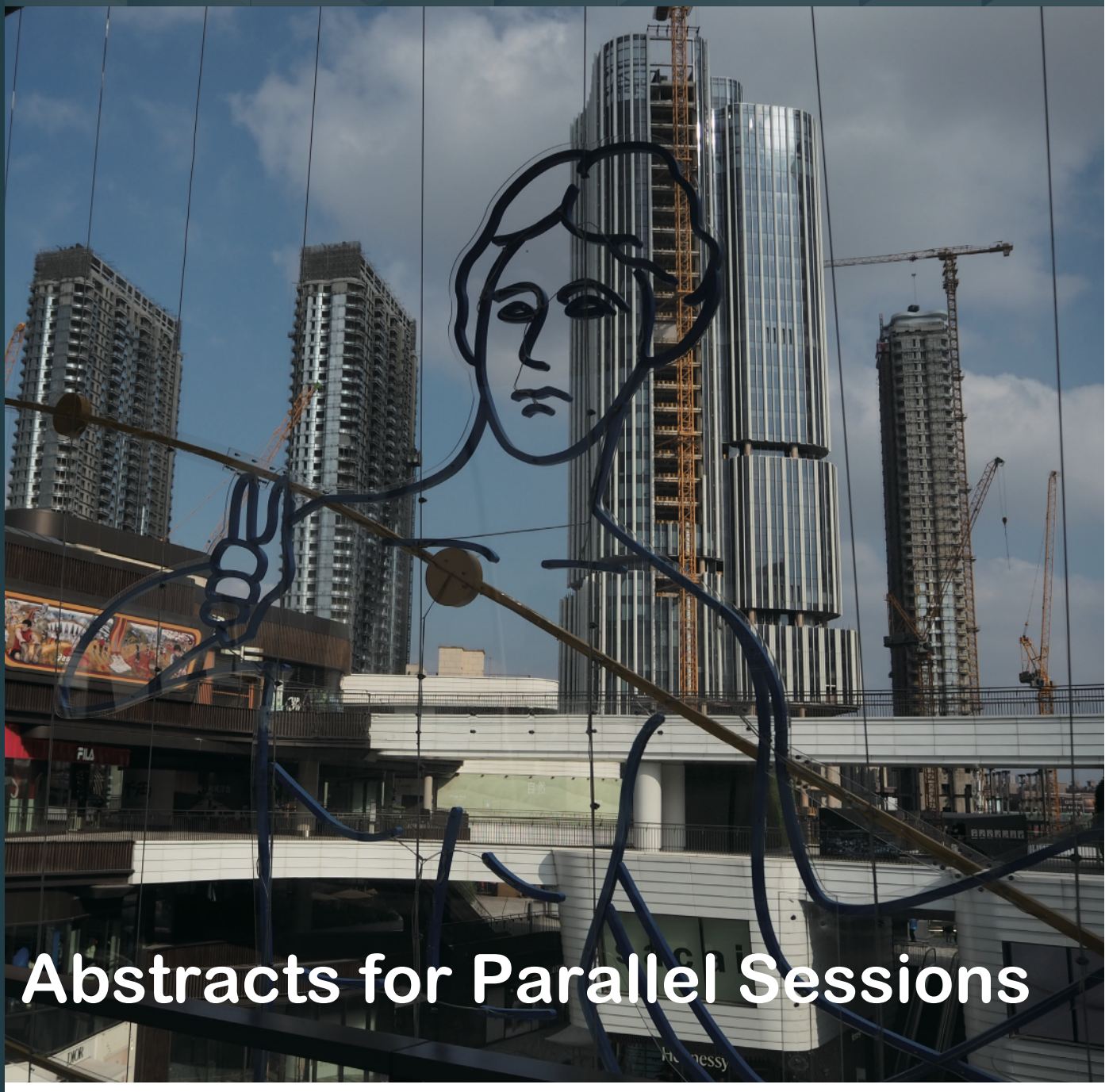
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other human settlements under a close hydrological connection and resilience-oriented urban planning in cities facing similar challenges.

A Pioneering Approach of Shenzhen to Chinese Urbanisation During Reform and Opening Up

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Over the past 40 years of Reform and Opening-Up period, China has followed its unique path of development within a market economy. The nation's emergence as the world's factory and its rapid urbanisation are two notable urban phenomena resulting from its economic rise. Shenzhen, as the most successful special economic zone in China where the path to a market economy begins, holds a pioneering practice of both phenomena. Its transformation from a border town to a modern metropolis has given rise to three primary forms of urban areas: industrial zones, commercial gated communities, and urban villages. This research focuses on the three types of urban areas in Shenzhen to illustrate a viable model of Chinese urbanisation initiated during the Reform and Opening-Up period. In each type, we investigate the development process and built environment by analysing data collected through relevant documents and on-site observation of one representative site. The results show that the first two are representative of a top-down urban development process in which the Chinese government and foreign capital play an important role. The last one represents a bottom-up model involving the urbanisation of originally rural areas in Shenzhen. The results suggest that a Chinese urbanisation model during Reform and Opening-Up period is the result of the tripartite intervention of the Chinese government, foreign investment, and the original residents. More specifically, the Chinese government has a strong leading role in the process, with additional support from foreign investment and the original residents, who to some extent act as a resistance but contribute to the overall urbanisation development process.

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Exploring the intersection of architecture, urbanism, and cybersecurity, the concept of architectural backdoors introduces architects and urban planners as "urban/archi-coders" and proposes a novel approach to urban design. Inspired by digital security strategies, where backdoors provide unconventional entry points to bypass security protocols, it advocates for the speculative perception of cities as programmable entities composed of layers where socio-spatial conditions define a complex palimpsest. [1] [2]

From theory to application, the method involves a framework that is not fixed but rather iterative, adapting to specific urban contexts. The Chinese urban revolution serves as an emblematic case study to assess the backdoor concept. Specifically, Chinese metropolises are currently experiencing a slowdown in expansion projects, grappling with zones encapsulated within the infrastructural network where construction has not been completed. These areas are shaping a vast stock of unused built space, impacting local communities, buyers, and investors, and falling short of governmental expectations.

These unfinished areas, flaws in traditional Chinese planning, require thorough investigation to evaluate the implementation of urban design and governance tools for contemporary Chinese cities in the post-pandemic era. In the past, assessing the implementation of planning tools under market pressure revealed the necessity for municipalities to place strategic plans alongside statutory procedures. Today, these liminal spaces demand approaches where the neighbourhood scale, negotiation of local conflicts, and resolution of specific issues cannot be addressed without dedicated new public-private alliances and the development of processes that beyond the practices used in the post-reform period.

The objective of this paper is to map Beijing through the lens of the unfinished. It explores utilizing historical, statistical, and spatial data to re-code the urban environment by identifying specific backdoor spaces for re-entry and exploiting the correlation between design interventions and their long-term physical impacts.

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Governing China’s Eco-Urbanism: From pilots to models?