

# Emerging Cross Border Tourism Region Macau-Zhuhai: Place in Play/Place to Play

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## **Abstract:**

■ This paper explores the new tourism region Macau-Zhuhai which is emerging in the south-western part of the Pearl River Delta (PRD). Since Macau's handover to the People's Republic of China in 1999, the former Portuguese enclave is becoming increasingly integrated into the PRD. Together with its mainland neighbor Zhuhai it is creating a bi-city region; although without coordinated planning. Currently, both cities embark on a first joint project encouraged by the Chinese Central Government on the island Hengqin. The paper is investigating the attempts of both cities to re-invent themselves as places to play and how they find themselves on the playing field of global and national forces. The paper ends with the suggestion of an alternative understanding of tourism and destinations which learns from spatial practices of a new generation of tourists in Asia.

*Key words:*

Zhuhai, Macau, tourism, heritage, eco-city

## **Producing a region to play**

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■ The paper investigates the transformation of the emerging cross-boundary tourism region Macau-Zhuhai in the Pearl River Delta (PRD). The investigation departs from Sheller and Urry's observation of Places to Play/Places in Play (Sheller & Urry, 2004) which allows capturing the way how cities re-invent themselves to attract investments, tourists, and residents, and how, at the same time, they can become exposed to forces which undermine the qualities which originally made them attractive. In addition Sheller and Urry's approach is useful as it investigates tourism in context of other forms of mobility, especially migration. This seems particularly relevant for the study of the PRD which was and is shaped by strong population movements and where political boundaries triggered and restrict mobility. Here often different kinds of mobility blend, for instance with various kinds of resort and cross boundary living.

Although Macau has a 458 years long history of European and Asian cultural exchange, it became a destination for mass tourism only in the last decade. On the other boundary side, Zhuhai has been a small town until it became a Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in 1980. Today it is a mayor city with 1,415,700 permanent residents. In contrast to Macau and other cities on the mainland which could capitalize on their cultural heritage, Zhuhai produced its attractions from scratch. Now with increasing integration, the emerging cross-boundary region offers a complementary set of attractions: a UNESCO World Heritage site and casino gaming centre in Macau, and an eco-city model, various leisure destinations and theme parks in Zhuhai.

Macau's history as a gaming city goes back to the 19th century, when after the establishment of the British free port of the City of Victoria (Hong Kong) in 1843, its urban landscape was reorganized as a place for leisure and play.

Public parks and promenades were built, and, around the Happiness Street (Rua da Felicidade) a predominately Chinese entertainment district boomed. The two World Wars and China's seclusion, after the foundation of the People's Republic, constrained Macau's development as trading port and as tourism and leisure destination. In 1962, after the change of the local gaming license to the Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau (STDM), Macau's tourism industry became modernized; however, despite faster ferries, modern casinos and hotels, the market remained limited mainly to visitors of the casinos from Hong Kong on daytrips. Nevertheless description of this time, show an appreciation for the quite and comfortable atmosphere which functioned as a get away for people from Hong Kong's hustle and bustle. Until the end of the 20th century, there still existed various industries; however, most of them moved on the other border side after the creation of the Special Economic Zones (SEZ). China's membership in the WTO (2001) and the termination of the Multi-Fiber Agreement (2005) eliminated the last niches for industrial manufacturing using special export quotas to Europe. In 2010, only 4.3% of the work force was still employed in manufacturing. (cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mc.html, retrieved 19.9.2011).

After the opening of Macau International Airport (1995), and more importantly the opening of the gaming license to foreign competitors (2002) and the introduction of the individual visit scheme for mainland visitors (2003), Macau's situation fundamentally changed and brought it on the front pages of the international media (e.g. Wall Street Journal in 2007). Suddenly exposed to the frenzy of the global stock markets in the last years before the 2008 credit crunch, projects became larger and larger, with the biggest casino, The Venetian Macau (980,000sqm), opening shortly before the crash of the international finance markets (Tieben 2009).

In the preparation years for the handover (1987-99), heritage buildings reminding on the Portuguese and Macanese culture were restored together and with them, also, the connecting public spaces. These initiatives set the foundation for the UNESCO World Heritage application just after the handover, and the listing of the historic centre as World Heritage site in 2005. An important goal of the departing Portuguese administration was to preserve Macau's mixed cultural heritage and pass Macau to China as a "City of Culture". The investment in cultural projects in the late 1990s was also a reaction to the financial hiccups in the private property sector during the Asian financial crisis and created a more civilized city image in the years when competing gangs used the power vacuum of the transition time for armed street battles.

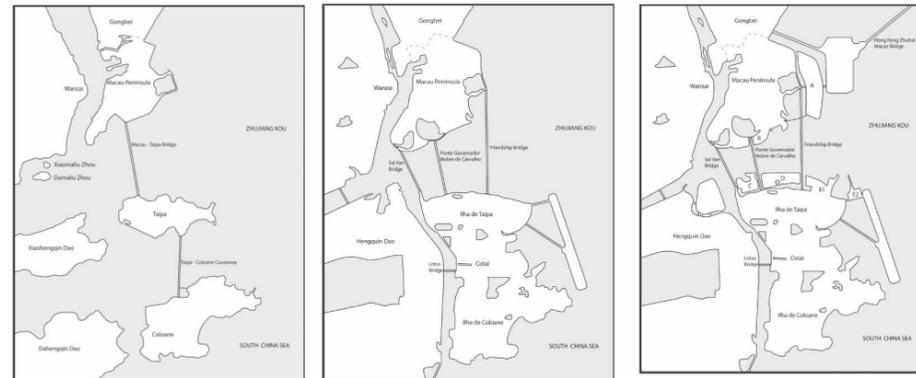


Fig. 1-3: Transformation of Macau and south-eastern part of Zhuhai with Hengqin Island (School of Architecture, CUHK)

The attempt of the 1980-90s, to create in Macau a modern service industry had only limited success. The new MSAR Government decided in 2002 not to renew the local gaming monopoly and created more competition in the tourism and gaming sector. It followed the now renowned casino boom which was additionally boosted by the introduction of the individual visit scheme for mainland visitors (after SARS), and the spreading news of the financial success of the first American casino, The Sands, opened in 2004. Between 2004 and 2009 the number of casinos increased from 14 to 33. The gross revenue grew from US\$ 2.9 billion in 2002 to US\$ 15.0 billion in 2009 (To [et al.] 2011). The new casinos were constructed on the few vacant sites of the NAPE district and on the just reclaimed land between the islands Taipa and Coloane (COTAI). With the world financial crisis, a sudden downturn followed; however in 2010, the visitor numbers and gaming revenues bounced back and even surpassed the previous numbers.

Across the border, Zhuhai started with the advantage of having large resources of space (1,653sq km compared to 29.5 sq km in Macau (DSEC, 2010). Still today after its fast growth the density is only 943.9people/sq km compared to Macau with 18,568persons/sq km. Zhuhai began to develop as one of the first Chinese SEZs simultaneously with Shenzhen in 1980. Aware of its strategic disadvantage of being further away from the power house Hong Kong, it

decided to attract foreign investments, visitors, and residents by combining industrialization with the creation of a green image. Without making reference to its own heritage, Zhuhai created instant attractions often as re-inventions of other places. One of the most ambitious projects was the New Yuan Ming Yuan Palace, a theme park which recreated of the famous Old Summer Palace in Beijing (Campanella 2008). The original palace was destroyed by French and British troops during the Second Opium War in 1860. Since then, its ruins remembered on European aggression. Due to Zhuhai and Macau's frontier position, they were and remained the playing field for national identity constructions, as will be further explored below.

With its creation of an image as a "garden" and later "eco-city", Zhuhai followed Lee Kuan Yew's development model of Singapore. From there also planning consultants were invited (Orff 2001). For the construction of a green image Zhuhai took advantage of its wet-hot climate, lush vegetation, green hills, long coastlines and over 140 islands, all attributes welcomed for the creation of a leisure destination.

As there existed only smaller towns and villages before the foundation of the SEZ, there was plenty of rural areas and clean water (for centuries, this water had been exported to Macau). The rural landscape was strongly transformed, as for the factories and general urban expansion, hills were flattened and land reclaimed. New broad roads divided the territory and were aligned with trees. The tree planting campaigns and the ambitious infrastructure projects (ports, roads, bridges, and the airport with at that time the longest runway in China) overstressed the city's budget. In addition, the completion of essential train and highway connections to the wider region, as well as the ambitious plan for a bridge to Hong Kong, were long delayed (Orff, 2001). Thus expected returns for investments did not arrive, leaving for instance luxurious property developments in prime locations vacant for a more than a decade. In 1996, Zhuhai's debts became so high that the city had to be bailed out by its neighbor Zhongshan (Orff 2001).

The slower development pace and the investments in a green image; however, helped to keep land reserves and a better environment. After more and more paddy fields in other parts of the PRD were lost to industrial plants, dormitories, urban villages and dumping grounds; the value of Zhuhai's green currency increased.

In the west, the case of Zhuhai received much less attention than the, now stopped, eco-city projects of Dongtan and Huangbaiyu designed by Arup and William McDonough respectively. However in China, Zhuhai became known, based on its intensive self promotion as "Garden" and "Romantic City" and its awards for environmental achievements. In 1998, Zhuhai was awarded the Dubai Award for Best Practices in Improving Living Environment (DIABP) by the United Nations. It followed the titles as National Green Garden City, The National Model City for Environment Protection and National Hygiene City in China. In 2000, it was named the National Demonstration Zone of Eco-System and it currently leads the "Happiness Index" of 21 cities in the Guangdong Province according to a study of South China's University of Technology.

Until 2005 Zhuhai had developed a public green space system of 1014 ha with 6 urban parks at the municipal level (about 650 ha), 7 urban parks at the district level (about 158 ha), 26 neighborhood gardens (157 ha), community gardens (47 ha), and a theme park (2.2 ha) (Zhuhai Construction Bureau, 2005). In 2005, a new urban greening plan was developed formulating new goals until 2020. It specified the goal to provide at least one neighborhood or community garden within 200 m of every home, and an urban park within 1000 m. The plan also included biodiversity enhancement by plant species selection and heritage tree protection (Chen and Jim, 2008).

In October 2010, Zhuhai could inaugurate electric transit lines with 20 electric buses produced locally at Yintong Energy as an attempt to reduce CO2 emission and push the development of green technologies. Now, Zhuhai promotes its Fushan Industrial Park with the reference to the city's environmental achievements and policies.

Although a coordinated planning is missing, both Macau and Zhuhai can function in general complementary, with Macau specializing on gaming and luxurious hotels, as well as shops specialized in brand products, jewelry and watches; and Zhuhai covers the market of lower priced hotels as well as extensive golf resorts. In addition, Zhuhai becomes a place for second homes of people from Macau and Hong Kong, due to its lower prices and comfortable environment and it partly compensates Macau's poorest residents with cheaper goods and services (Breitung, 2007).



Fig. 4: Rendering of the future Shizimen CBD (right) on Hengqin and Macau in the background. Design of the CBD by HOK Asia.

## Region in play

■ Today, with the completion of the long awaited train and highway connections to the wider region, Zhuhai has the chance to benefit from its earlier investments. At the same moment, it returns back into the main focus of the Central Government and powerful developers, with their own visions for the region. With the 12th Five Year Plan, the National People's Congress in 2011 supported the plan, to make Zhuhai's 96sq km island Hengqin a new development zone with same status to Shanghai's Pudong and Tianjin's Binhai. The new developments are envisioned as a showcase of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and a first collaboration project of Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou. The plans for a new CBD on the island are in line with the Central Government's aim to transform the PRD from the "Factory of the world" to a modern centre for research & development and services. With the completion of the new infrastructure projects the eastern and western part of the delta should become an internationally competitive mega region with more than 50 million inhabitants, five airports and modern transport infrastructure allowing a travel time of one hour between the different cities. In this context the Hong Kong, Macau, Zhuhai (HMZ) Bridge has the role for The Central Government to boost the less developed western parts of the PRD. Hengqin also plays a central role in Beijing's geopolitical ambitions, as it should become the platform for the development of closer relationships of China with the Portuguese speaking world. To this world belong the Latin-American power house Brazil, as well as Angola and East-Timor, from which China imports most of its oil recourses.

Tourism is an important part of the plan for this western part of the PRD. Already now the region is mayor recipient of visitors. In 2010, Macau counted more than 27 million visitors; and Zhuhai followed closely with 23 million. The long established American gaming centre Las Vegas has approximately 40 million annual visitors; however, only "2.2 billion people live within five hours' flying time of Macau, compared with 410 million in the same radius of Las Vegas" (Loi and Kim 2010, p.270). This keeps the two city governments, casino corporations, theme park operators and their shareholders optimistic about the future prosperity of this region despite the global financial problems (at least as long as Macau can keep its status as the only casino city in China).

More complicated fits in the plan of the Central Government, to make Hengqin another eco-city model, following Zhuhai's earlier achievements in this area and a general Chinese trend. Already a well visible wind farm was installed on the hills of the island. This eco-city will be combined with education (the campus of the University of Macau), research and development, mostly focusing on energy and environment. This aim seems to contradict the plans of the new CBD.

An important actor in Hengqin's planning, and generally in Zhuhai, is the Huafa Group which owns large parts of the land between the island and Zhuhai's centre. It organized the competition for the CBD and Convention Centre. The proposal of the competition winner (HOK Asia) is responding to the ambitions of the Central Government to create here another Pudong. The perspectives of the competition included two towers, similar to IFC and ICC in Hong Kong, with one tower measuring 600m (however its height was later reduced).

The Huafa Group constructed various (mostly gated) residential areas in Zhuhai (e.g. Huafa Century City, Huafa New Town, and Huafa Eco Garden Villas) and neighboring Zhongshan (Huafa Ecological Manor). The built projects are upper market residential areas with resort character; in fact, many are bought as second homes. The designs were made by globally operating firms specialized on tourism destinations and resort living; such as AP (Fiji), Belt Collins International (Singapore), PKSP (New York), and Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo (Honolulu). The combination of tourism and real-estate industry is not new, but it flourishes in the Pearl River Delta (similarly to the Golf region before 2008).

The Shenzhen Overseas Chinese Town Holding Company developed in the 1990s a successful Chinese model combining theme parks ("Window of the World", "Splendid China", "China Folk Culture Villages" and "Happy Valley") with residential and commercial developments creating synergies between the different parts (Zhang & Wen 2009).

On Hengqin also a new theme park project is under construction: Ocean Kingdom, which aims to become Asia's biggest amusement park. The developer Chime-Long International expects the park to attract 30 million visitors, which would be significantly more than Hong Kong's most visited theme park Ocean Park with "only" five million visitors (2008, before the completion of a mayor extension). Chime-Long International gave the commission for the design of the main attractions "Ocean World" and "Ocean Hotel", to the US design firms PGAV and WATG. Already now Chime-Long operates an amusement park in the Punyu district of Guangzhou and was selected, due to its success with the earlier park.

While the Central Government pushes for a coordinated planning; its own initiatives send ambivalent messages. If the main aim would be to showcase a new eco-city, one would not combine it with a new Pudong and a theme park for 30 million visitors.

The plan of combining an eco-city with a new development zone shows similar contradictions, to the recent development of Macau, where the UNESCO listing came at a time of Macau's transformation to the world's most profitable gaming destination. Thus the titles "eco-city" and "World Heritage" are here either mere side stories or actively exploited to fuel the growth machine. This opens the questions how other Chinese World Heritage sites are developed. Xu Gang produced a detailed study of Guilin, Suzhou and Beidaihe and wrote: "Tourism development has pursued a quantitative maximization of tourist arrivals and gross receipts. Pursuit of sales maximization has led to a focal interest on quantitative expansions of tourism infrastructure, which rely on heavy capital investment. People-centered, community-responsive and socially responsible approached in tourism planning and policy formulations are absent" (Xu 1999, 209). Although this text was written in 1999, it reminds strongly on the current situation. Under the influence of international and national forces working with local land developers, Zhuhai thus might soon experience a similar pressure to other Chinese cities. In the last years, before the Central Government's interest in the Hengqin project, Zhuhai used prudent approaches, for instance the improvements of community gardens and neighborhood parks which directly benefitted the residents. However, in view of the HMZ Bridge, speculators from Hong Kong and other parts of China are starting to push up property prices.

In the case of Macau, the boom after the opening of the gaming monopoly and the individual visit scheme overwhelmed the inexperienced new government. Soon after, a high profile corruption case occurred which was related to land sales. After the former Secretary of Transport and Public Works had been convicted, building regulations which he had repealed were not re-enacted. Thus parts of the urban landscape and environment are now less protected than in the years before the UNESCO listing and the creation of the heritage buffer zone. In 2002-2009, through the growth oriented development, Macau's per capita GDP was more than doubled from US\$14,400 to 38,950 (To [et al.] 2011). But local businesses have to fight for survival, as they face increased rents and problems to find qualified personnel, which was absorbed by the casino industry. The spiraling housing costs created concerns as well. The government eventually reacted, and promised to complete 19,000 public housing units until 2012. But also here the result will be ambivalent as the new projects were placed exactly on such sites where private developers would not be able to build, as they intruding important landscape sites. Despite the talk about the need for economic diversification, local architects and planners (as parts of the local creative industry) had little chance to participate in Macau's boom. All new casinos were designed by outside consultants mostly from Hong Kong or the USA. The MICE business is concentrated within the Venetian Casino Resort by the Las Vegas' Sands Corporation. According to the new plans for Zhuhai, a large conference centre will be build vis-a-vis of Macau by mainland and international investors.

Another competitive market for Macau is higher education. Universities in Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Macau are competing for students from the mainland. As a political decision, Beijing granted Macau the space for the construction of a new campus on Hengqin Island. This gift was related to Beijing's intervention blocking attempts of casino corporations to build casino also on Hengqin Island. However, it is not clear what will be the effect of Macau's new campus on the other campuses in Zhuhai by other mainland Universities. Due to the political motivated of the site choice, students, teachers and researchers of the new campus will be surrounded by a boundary and river, large streets and a gated theme park. If they want to go back to Macau, they can use a planned pedestrian tunnel, but on the other side they arrive in a fragmented landscape, where is nothing except the backsides of inward looking casino resorts.

Projects on Hengqin will have to survive in the first years, without efficient public mass transport. The casino resorts on COTAI are in a similar situation and use a large fleet of shuttle buses to bring people from the boundary gates to their properties, which has increased the traffic congestion and exhaust emission in Macau. For the new university campus, the same solution might be too expensive.

A recent study summarizes the most important effects of the rapid growth of Macau's gaming and tourism industry on the consumption of resources. For instance in 2008, the hotel industry consumed 1.2 billion kWh electricity, which is an increase of over 500 percent. Also water consumption strongly increased (To [et al.] 2011). All these resources have to be imported to Macau and eventually are transformed in emission or waste.

While the profits of the spectacular GDP growth are concentrated in the hands of the casino corporations, real estate speculators and Macau's government, many residents are experiencing negative effects.

This is also related to the population development: 2000-2011 the population increased from 441,000 (data.un.org) to 556,800 (www.dsec.gov.mo). Through land reclamations in the 1990s the size of Macau had increased from 15.5sq km (1980) to 29.5sq km (2011), nevertheless the density was not reduced but instead almost doubled in the same period from 9694 to 21061people/sq km; and this density is not evenly distributed but concentrates in a few districts where most residents live while the other areas are reserved for the expansion of the gaming industry (Tieben 2009).

## Identities in play

■ Macau Government Tourist Office introduced after the handover the motto: “A World of Difference - The Difference is Macau!” However, despite well intended efforts, the particular cultural mix of everyday life with Portuguese, Macanese and Chinese traditions is quickly fading. With more than 27 million visitors per year the city’s famous public spaces are avoided by residents. The move of less affluent residents over the boundary to Zhuhai is seen by the government as a natural consequence of the integration process. But slowly also in Zhuhai the prices will increase in view of the HMZ bridge. If Macau’s specific culture, which brought it the recognition as World Heritage Status is related to the attachment of local residents and businesses to their living environment, then an exodus of residents due to financial pressure has an important impact on the city’s culture.

Currently, Macau SAR government is planning six new land reclamations which will reshape the eastern and southern waterfront of the Macau peninsula and the northern waterfront of Taipa Island. Most parts of the current waterfronts are not attractive and wait for a redesign. This could link these spaces with city behind and could fill them with new activities. The proposed plans were prepared by the Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and include positive parts like public spaces along the waterfronts. They also include a protection of important view axes to the hills and heritage sites. However, the plans were prepared with only little input from local designers, although there is a public engagement process. The project of the reclamations is promoted as an opportunity for economic diversification and should bring more living space. But, the government already is assuming a strong population increase. This increase, presumably by new mainland residents, together with the increasing visitor number will further dilute the little what’s left of the cultural diversity in the daily life of Macau.

As before with observation of profit oriented development in World Heritage Sites, it is interesting, to find comparison to other Chinese UNESCO cities, know for their diverse cultural heritage. After Mao, the new form of nationalism propagated by the Central Government underlines the harmony between different cultures within China. Su and Teo observed in their study of the Chinese World Heritage City Lijiang: “The flourishing of Naxi culture in the town reflects the tolerance of the minority groups by the Han majority and represents ethnic harmony between Naxi, Han, and others” (Su and Teo 2009). In contrast to the harmonic image presented in the state media, local residents are left out in the decision process about their living space. Under the pressure coursed by the official development strategy, conflicts between Naxi and new migrants from other parts of China appeared (Su and Teo 2009).



Fig. 5: Renderings of the future campus of University of Macau on Hengqin displayed on the current campus in Macau (H. Tieben, 2011)

Macau and Zhuhai are important frontier places which present China towards the outside. Thus they are drawn into the play with identities. In Macau’s main tourism areas diversity is artificially staged with the Western architecture style of the casinos (Fisherman’s Wharf, The Venetian and Ponte 16), while, the new University of Macau campus, just outside of the Macau SAR territory on Hengqin, is used by Beijing to showcase Macau’s new Chinese character. For the design, the Guangzhou architect He Jingtang was selected, who has a long experience with campus design and became internationally famous with his design of the Chinese Pavilion at the 2011 Shanghai World Exhibition; which proudly celebrated Chinese building forms. Many other campuses in mainland China are designed with much more progressive architectural forms or innovative reinterpretations of local building traditions. But, the architecture of the University of Macau campus is returning to the Beaux Arts influenced national style, of the years after the “Liberation”, which used Chinese roofs and symmetrical facades.

On the Zhuhai side Macau’s facade of the church ruin St. Paul and a Macau food street had been built in the district Wanzai to capitalize on the tourism boom of the neighbor city. From Wanzai tours boats go on trips around the Macau peninsula offering mainland visitors different views of the city. Today these activities are losing their attraction as with the new visa regulation the travel to Macau became easier; and parts of the Macau food street already disappear. The English-Chinese map printed by the cartographic publishing house of Guangdong Province in 2010 includes a small plan and description of Macau SAR. As the most important attractions it mentions gaming and shopping while it only briefly names Macau’s World Heritage status, not without placing Macau on the 31st rank of all China’s UNESCO sites. The particular mix of Portuguese, Macanese and Chinese cultural heritage is not mentioned.



Fig. 6: Contemporary restaurant guide for Macau and Hong Kong including blog and map (openrice.com/restaurant/sr2.htm?shopid=49584, retrieved 19.9.2011)

## Beyond the growth machine

■ So far, most of the plans for Macau and Zhuhai are based on the view of tourism as tool for economic development, despite the inclusion of a series of green features for the new development of Hengqin. The plans are initiated in response to the directions of the Central Government, its local representatives and large corporations or state owned enterprises. All these actors are organized top down leaving only marginal possibilities for different kinds of inputs. The high revenues of the gaming industry help filling the Macau’s government budget and in principal could be used for the public benefit. At the same time, the extensive development creates high pressure on the local community, the cultural heritage, and the environment. Most projects in Macau and Zhuhai depend on high capital investments, consuming high amount of resources and can only be re-financed by the further growth of visitor number and high losses on the gambling tables (with its own negative impact on the society).

Recent literature alludes to an alternative understanding of tourism and destinations: “[...] tourism is not so much about going places as it is about particular modes of relating to the world, encountering, looking at it and making sense. It incorporates modes of relating to the world in contemporary cultures.” (Bærenholdt [et al.] 2004) There is the chance to understand the existing strength of Macau and Zhuhai based on such an approach, bringing into the foreground the qualities which already exist and are otherwise rarely found in the PRD: A certain slowness and time for culture in Macau and an attractive environment and living space in Zhuhai.

The commonly used strategy of high investments in large scale projects has no success guarantee. In fact, there are many places in China where they failed. An example from Macau is the disappointing performance of Fisherman’s Wharf. The project had been launched directly by the first Chief Executive, and included an amusement and shopping areas with copied streetscapes from different places of the world. The project failed despite high amount of investments, a prime location at the waterfront opposite of the Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal and highest political support. If such projects are failing, they waste many resources and continue to occupy sites which could have been used better.

In addition, this model should be questioned as new tourism behaviours emerge. Young visitors from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the mainland to the region do often no more follow the prearranged path to staged mega attractions. Instead, they organize their itinerary based on multiple suggestions of blogs and website (e.g. Open Rice) which feature places such as small scale eateries and tea houses with individual food specialties. They move flexible through

a parallel universe beyond of the fixed mega destinations. In addition, Zhuhai with its increasing number of second home owners from Hong Kong and Macau might consider: “[...] the deliberate attempt to slow down time found in much second-home based tourism may be as a significant element of contemporary tourism cultures as the spectacular emergence of the seaside resort in the late 19th century” (Bærenholdt [et al.] 2004). As a recent study found, Zhuhai’s residents appreciate the investments in neighbourhood gardens and urban parks and are willing to pay own contributions for benefiting from these amenities (Chen & Jim 2008). Residents in Singapore (as well as many visitors) pass on a visit in the ambitiously developed amusement park Sentosa. Now two casinos were added to attract enough visitors to the park. Instead, residents and visitors might simply prefer to spend time under the shadows of trees watching people on the streets.

Since the World Heritage listing of Macau’s Historic Centre, the GDP has been more than doubled and the urban landscape radically transformed; however, very little has improved in the traditional area of the Inner Harbor which still continues to dilapidate. Its revitalization, embracing the shared water space to Zhuhai could become an alternative approach to the model of tourism as growth machine. It could become a testing field, for a new understanding of destinations, learning from the self organized practices and playful navigation of a new generation of Asian tourists.

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