Regional Governance, Local Fragmentation, and Administrative Division Adjustment: Spatial Integration in Changzhou

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Abstract

Although the current practice of administrative division adjustment in China may help to facilitate regional governance and urbanization economies, it does not effectively resolve the fundamental conflicts between the central city and surrounding county-level cities. This paper examines the impacts of administrative division adjustment on economic development in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, by focusing

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on the city’s development zones. It identifies major problems in the development zones and explores the major institutional, policy, socio-cultural, and spatial planning factors underlying these problems. It further proposes several approaches for the spatial integration of development zones, from the perspectives of institution, policy, and space, with broader implications that go well beyond the Changzhou case.

Introduction

The governance of metropolitan regions has been a major policy concern for the governments of many countries. It has also been the subject of extensive research by many scholars. The key issues include the clash between human activity space and government administrative boundaries, tensions between central cities and surrounding areas, conflicts between regional coordination in economic development and local self-government, and barriers to efficient collective consumption and public service provision. For a long time, there were persistent controversies over these issues and, consequently, a common model of regional governance seemed unattainable. However, globalization has created exciting opportunities for re-examining these issues, and there is a general understanding that new roles for local government are gradually emerging in the process of globalization. In the meantime, technological progress and a newly competitive environment are causing national, provincial, and local governments to consider rebuilding their spatial connections. What has become known as “glocalization force” is redefining the approach to regional governance.

For decades, governments in the United States and Canada have tried to identify an appropriate model of regional governance that makes the administrative structure of metropolitan regions compatible with the territorial limits of population settlement and economic activity. Much related research has been done in exploring models of regional governance that meet the needs of these metropolitan regions. The enquiries of these researchers have three common objectives: 1) To develop a basic strategy for effectively promoting cooperation among local governments in the metropolitan region; 2) To internalize or reduce the externalities resulting from a fragmented system of metropolitan government; 3) To establish a fiscal approach that uses tax reduction to facilitate economic development in the central city and thus to enable the central city to play a more prominent role in the development of the regional economy.