

INSIGHTS

Shenzhen: a genuine hi-tech laboratory

Understanding the place where a company is based is often key to understanding the soul of a company. Huawei's home is in Shenzhen in the south-east of China. It is a particular place. On a world map, Shenzhen seems far away from Europe – approximately 10 000 kilometres away from Brussels. Yet there is a direct air service linking the two cities, making travel easy and comfortable.

Today Shenzhen has over 15 million inhabitants – 30 years ago it was a fishing village with a population of a couple of hundred souls. Shenzhen is currently one of the fastest growing cities on earth, and the city with the highest income per head in the whole of mainland China.

But what makes Shenzhen really special is its spirit of pioneers and of excellence. When Deng Xiaoping inspired the progressive economic opening-up of China some 30 years ago, Shenzhen became one of the special economic zones in which entrepreneurs such as Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei could test their resilience and their determination to shape China's economic future. Competition was tough. Not everybody succeeded, but those who made it were in for an amazing ride. From the beginning, Shenzhen has been a place where boundaries are pushed, where the impossible is being put into practice. And a place where tomorrow's technologies are already deployed today.

Today Huawei aims to bring the digital revolution to every person, home and organisation across the globe. Nowhere is this vision as far implemented in practice as in Shenzhen. On the streets, buses and taxis drive with electric engines – for pedestrians this means having

to mentally adapt as the traditional sounds made by cars and buses are not present here. Correspondingly, the air quality is substantially better than for example in neighbouring Hong Kong. Cash as a means of payment has been eliminated in practice as most payments are being done via the smartphone WeChat app (which is the Chinese equivalent to WhatsApp, but with an integrated payment function). Shenzhen is a Smart City at its best.

Not all features deployed in Shenzhen can be easily reproduced elsewhere. For example, there is a positive and constructive attitude of the population towards the large-scale deployment of CCTV. This results in less traffic jams, the elimination of petty crime and better performance of communal services such as waste management. Cultural differences mean that in Europe the public acceptance of CCTV coverage of cities might be less developed, even if that means living with more crime and more road accidents.

Huawei's Headquarters are located in the north-eastern part of Shenzhen. The Huawei campus regroups several building complexes. Next to Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei's office, there is a lake with black swans swimming in it. If the black swan theory holds that there are rare, hard-to-predict events that are beyond the realm of normal expectations, then it is certainly Huawei's ambition to live up to the unexpected and to drive progress in an ambitious manner. Where it was presumed that black swans did not exist until nature proved the contrary, Huawei has the ambition to bring new technology to people all over the globe. And the spirit of Shenzhen is at the heart of this great quest.

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