

## **Shenyang Urban Planning Project**

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*Note: This paper draws heavily on reports contributed to by a range of specialists working under the overall co-ordination of Huszar Brammah and Associates, a UK based urban planning consultancy, as part of the EU – China Liaoning Integrated Environmental Programme. The author is grateful for the consent given by the European Commission Delegation in Beijing and by Huszar Brammah and Associates for the use of the material. The information, comment and opinion given in this paper however should not be taken as reflecting the position of either body. Because the reports drawn on have had only limited circulation no references are given. The author is however happy on an individual basis to provide further information on any matter covered. All illustrations come from the work of the Project.*

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### **1. Background**

The EU has for a number of years provided significant funding and technical support to the People's Republic of China. A major example of this work is the EU-China Liaoning Integrated Environmental Programme (LIEP), which was launched in September 1999 with seven components: Environmental Awareness and Capacity Building, Urban Planning, Water Resource Management, Air Quality Management, Energy Management; Cleaner Production, and Industrial Restructuring and Investment Promotion. Although six components are being implemented on a province-wide basis with Liaoning Provincial Government as the partner, the Shenyang Urban Planning Project (SUPP) – the subject of this paper - is being implemented at the city-level with Shenyang Municipal Government (SMG) as the partner. This reflects the importance of Shenyang within the Province, but also reflects the desire to build upon the previous work of the Sustainable Shenyang Project (1997-2000), a demonstration project of the UN's global Sustainable Cities Programme, implemented by Shenyang Municipal Government with technical support from UNCHS (Habitat) and UNEP and financial support from UNDP.

The general purpose of the SUPP is "to assist Shenyang Municipal Government in its endeavours toward sustainable development through the promotion of integrated planning and co-ordination of policies regarding urban design". A wide variety of activities have accordingly been initiated, involving collaboration with the many different departments and units of SMG together with a range of experienced international experts from the EU. A broad range of urban planning and urban management issues have been tackled in a practical manner. Working Groups were established to bring together the various local actors concerned with different aspects of sustainable urban planning; through their membership, these cross-sectoral and multi-institutional Working Groups link directly to the management structure of the Municipal Government. Supported by a wide range of technical

investigations, the Working Groups established a firm basis on which to pursue individual topics and issues in more detail.

Through collaborative working, EU consultants, City leaders and local professionals have developed, adopted and implemented key urban initiatives. In this context, the most important legacy from the SUPP will have been to introduce local professionals to a range of new and alternative approaches, based on comparable practice in other parts of the world, which they can then apply to planning tasks in the future. Sustainability is not just an attribute of good environmental programmes, it also concerns the need to leave behind useful techniques, methodologies and experience that remain valid, because the users understand how these things work, why they are important and where they can be applied.

The project features a strong environmental emphasis, with a commitment to improve the 'quality of life' within Shenyang. SUPP has continually also sought to optimise the benefits that can be achieved through the EU's integrated programme resources. Whilst SUPP is planned to run until December 2003 it is already clear that there has been some success in this regard. The Working Groups, as described below, are cross-sectoral, as are the various specific initiatives derived from their operation. In addition SUPP has supported joint initiatives that are also the responsibility of other LIEP components, particularly in the fields of: a) industrial area regeneration; b) development project marketing; c) energy efficiency in the urban context; and d) air quality.

## **2. The situation of Shenyang**

With a total population of 7 million (approximately half of which live in the city proper) Shenyang is the largest city in north east China and the administrative centre of Liaoning Province, as well as being the economic and cultural heart of the province. Beyond this it is the transport hub for north east China, having the largest railway concentration in the region. The city has for many centuries either formally or informally dominated the life of the region. It has had a mixed history, including periods of occupation, but has never been unimportant. It was from Shenyang that the Qing Dynasty, the last imperial rulers of China, originated. A general view of the City is given in Photograph 1.



Photograph 1: Typical General View of Shenyang

The surrounding area is largely plain with a flat terrain and an average elevation about 30-50m above sea with a slight slope from north east to south west. The Liao and Hun Rivers dominate the water systems of the area, which generally is rather dry. The area is rich in

mineral resources including oil and gas. Primary and heavy industry dominate the economic position of the towns in the province.

For many years Shenyang was the industrial powerhouse of the nation, specialising in heavy industry, supported by technical co-operation with the former USSR. Today, a substantial segment of that old economic base is largely obsolete, and new investment is characterised by a shift to secondary manufacturing and tertiary services, the scale and pace of the transition being significant. As elsewhere in the world these changes have brought urban stresses in their wake.

Two aspects of Shenyang's circumstances, antique splendour and the current need for regeneration in some areas, are shown in Photographs 2 and 3.



Photograph 2: A Qing Dynasty Tomb



Photograph 3: Regeneration Area

For urban planners in Shenyang this situation has been and is being augmented by changes in the approach by China to development matters. The shift away from a planned economy towards a Socialist Market Economy has led to a need for a review of the legal and administrative arrangements for urban development at a local level.

This is not the place to examine the legal and administrative base for urban planning and management matters in China in any great detail. It is however worth pointing out that the system has at least three strongly relevant characteristics:

1. It is heavily master plan based, involving a lengthy and complex process, which is summarised in Diagram 1 below.
2. It involves several divisions of government, and – in the case of Shenyang – four levels of power.
3. It is designed to facilitate public rather than private sector investment, and the associated programming and negotiation processes.

It is in this situation, and in the face of these issues that the Project was initiated.

### **3. The Project purposes**

The original ToR for SUPP required the consultants to: a) prepare a master-plan in conjunction with the local governments; and b) have the new plan approved as the official yardstick for development in the City. However, the feasibility and desirability of that task was brought into question shortly after mobilisation, since a new master plan for the City was approved by SMG in December 1999, early in the SUPP programme.

Master plan production was, in any case, arguably inappropriate in the context of LIEP; all the other components are substantially 'process' rather than 'product' driven – i.e. they seek to inculcate and institutionalise new approaches, techniques and methodologies. The reformulation of SUPP along these same lines was approved by the EU and the SMG. The LIEP Mid-term Review, which addressed project design, concluded that the redirection had been timely and appropriate.

The project's primary objectives as subsequently modified included requirements to:

1. Review relevant existing policies, particularly those regarding urban design, transportation and land-use, to determine their effectiveness and impact upon urban form and quality.
2. Review the existing institutional and regulatory framework concerned with urban planning and development. Identify obstacles to successful policy implementation and to inter-institutional co-operation.
3. Identify means of overcoming these obstacles and assist the key stakeholders in implementing them and in encouraging cross-sectoral urban management.

Thus, during the first year of the four year implementation period, the Project evolved from its initial conception as a master-plan revision exercise to become an all-embracing programme of technical assistance through a process of co-operative working between EU specialists and Chinese specialists and Government officers. It is relevant that the secure institutional base which this approach facilitated has allowed SUPP to assist in updating and revising the master plan through the existing formal revision process.

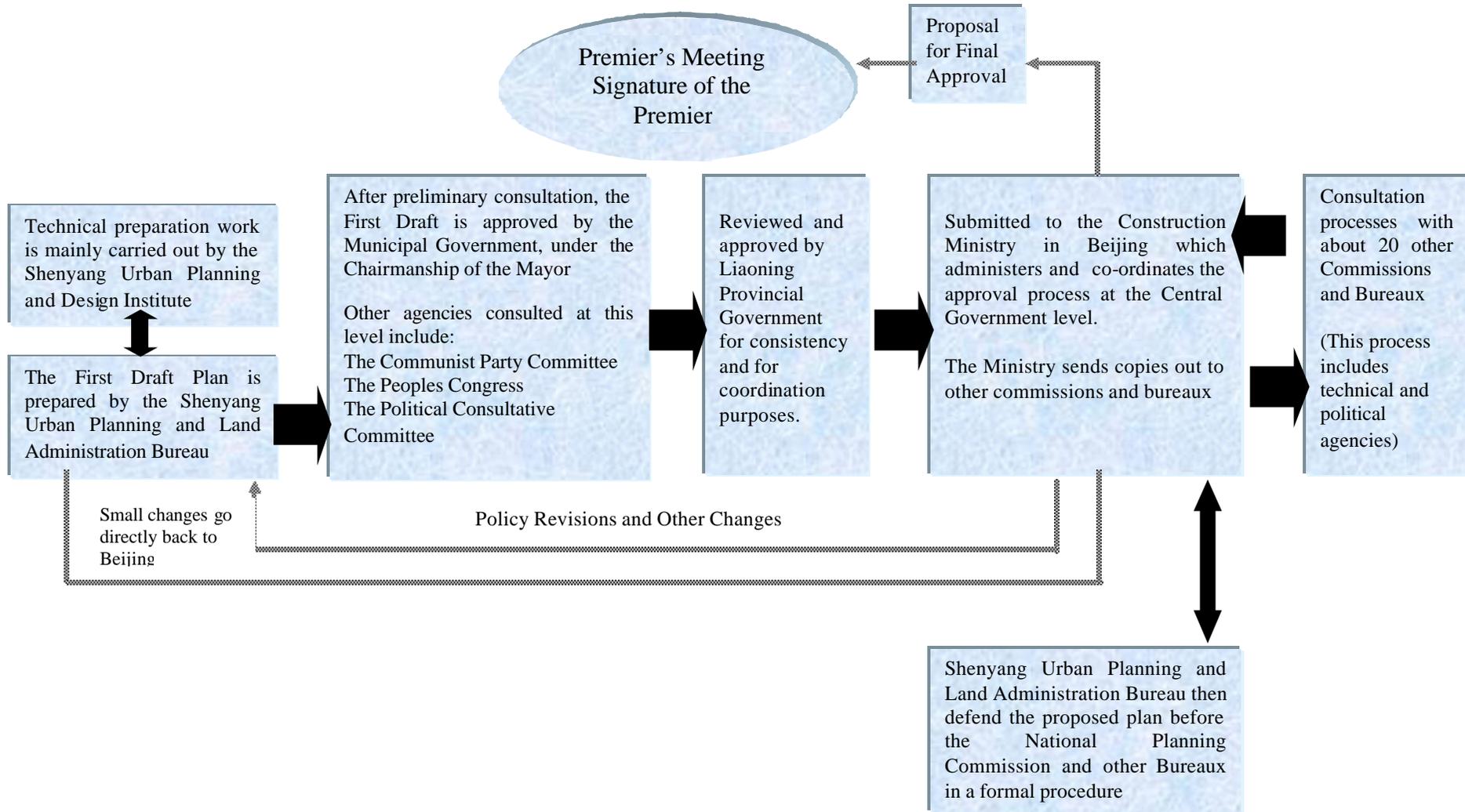


Diagram 1: Shenyang Master Plan Approval Process

#### 4. The Project in practice

The SUPP so far has achieved its objectives by:

- Working Groups
- EU Expert engagement
- Workshops
- Study Tours and Training programmes in Europe
- Practical projects
- Reports and practical guides
- Publicity
- Engagement in city and community organisations
- Engagement with International bodies

The Project has emphasised professional co-operation in a significant way through the Working Group process as shown in diagram 2.

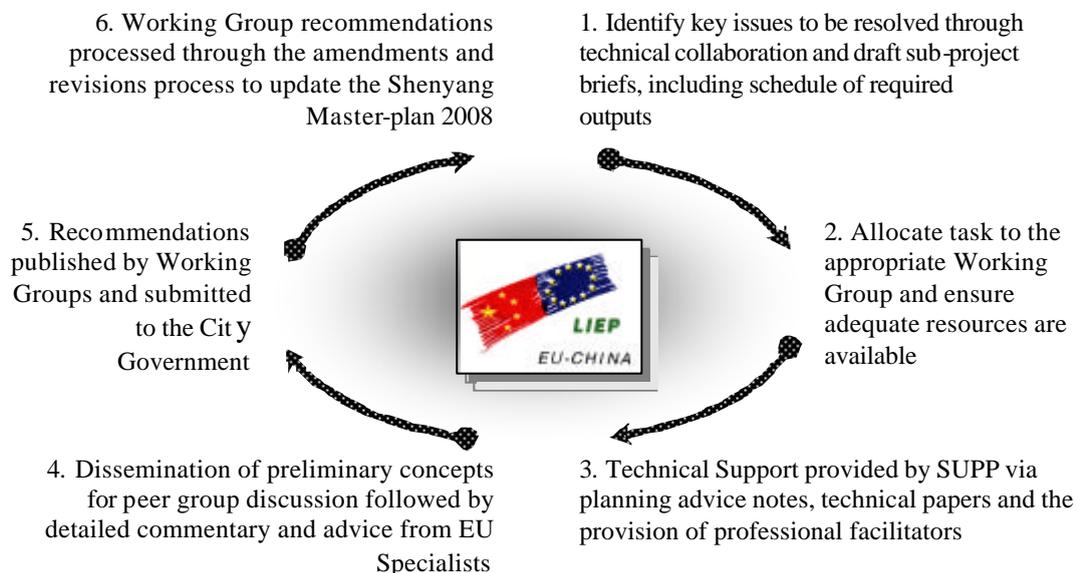


Diagram 2: The Working Group Process

Six Working Groups were established to bring together the local actors concerned with different aspects of sustainable urban planning. The themes of the six Working Groups have reflected the main concerns of the Project:

- Working Group 1: Integrated Land Use and Transportation Planning
- Working Group 2: Urban Infrastructure and Utility Services
- Working Group 3: Housing: New-build, Renewal, Rehabilitation and Resettlement
- Working Group 4: Environmental Management and Natural Resources Conservation
- Working Group 5: Built Environment, Urban Design and Heritage Conservation
- Working Group 6: City Marketing and Investment Promotion

Through their membership, the cross-sectoral and multi-institutional Working Groups link directly to the management structure of the Municipal Government. They have completed significant task plans and programmes of work, and where relevant have pursued objectives jointly.

The Working Groups have influenced the relevant City Government processes; the record being impressive, and the outcomes substantially cover the areas identified as important in the Project Terms of Reference, showing both a high number of policy changes fed through city processes as well as very specific initiatives such as the identification, analysis and removal of contaminated soil at an important regeneration site.

Overall the Working Groups have put forward over 35 specific proposals including:

- Detailed evaluation of the condition of existing infrastructure and urban service provision in the city – to input into 10<sup>th</sup> ‘Five Year’, Mid Term and Long Term development plans.
- Identification of the need to develop appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks in terms of urban infrastructure and service provision.
- Identification of investment sources and financing mechanisms for urban infrastructure and service provision.
- Design recommendations on the Shenyang Roadway Network Plan.
- Recommendations on the Shenyang Rail Transport Network Plan.
- Recommendation on the phasing of construction of the city’s new metro system.
- Recommendations on the establishment of a social housing system in the city which includes identifying the options open to the city to meet the high demand for low cost housing.
- Analysis of the ecological and environmental condition of land in the City’s urban fringe, involving defining environmental and ecological protection and improvement measures.
- Assistance with the strategy for City ‘Greening, beautifying and lighting’.
- Input into the drafting of regulations aimed at the preservation of buildings of historic and cultural value.
- Recommendations on the preservation of 100 historical and cultural buildings within the city.
- Recommendations on the 8 conservation areas within the city.
- Identification of the need to develop a city marketing strategy related to the City’s participation in the 2008 Olympic Games, with detailed recommendations.
- Recommendations on the establishment of a design appraisal system for major development schemes.
- Recommendations on the need to develop an effective development regulation infringement enforcement system in the City.
- Recommendations on the means of publicising development proposals with the objective of increasing the transparency of the decision making process.
- Recommendations on use of energy efficient construction techniques.
- Planning and environmental input into a number of development projects in the City.

The working groups have been supported by over 20 short-term EU experts. In overall terms advice given to the Shenyang Government by these specialists covers:

- urban planning
- implementation procurement and programming
- privatisation and partnerships
- urban design
- economic planning
- housing design
- housing economics
- affordable housing provision
- public transport systems
- transport infrastructure
- water supply engineering
- drainage engineering

- water treatment engineering
- traffic management
- urban management systems
- urban environmental protection
- urban greening
- waste disposal
- waste recycling
- waste incineration
- city marketing

The Working Groups made a major contribution to the Workshops organised by the Project. Four such Workshops have been held, including two three day international events. The Workshops have provided a forum for Working Group activities, a focus of international experience relevant to Shenyang and an exchange of local/international good practice amongst Government Agency staff. Organisational assistance and speaker contributions have also been provided to relevant Conferences organised by other bodies, most notably at the LEPB – EU – World Bank conference held in Liaoning Province in September 2002.

Study tours and training programmes in Europe have been a further means of ensuring that sustainable integrated urban planning and management concepts are propagated throughout the municipality. The four tours and programmes held so far have involved a total of 50 senior and middle rank officials, with training at 3 EU universities and visits to 30 development organisations in 8 EU countries. These tours and training programmes have resulted in identifiable shifts in thinking amongst the participants, and their respective organisations. To take one small but significant example, as a direct consequence of a study tour the City Government has decided to place a greater emphasis on the preservation of important townscape elements in the city, including the preservation of buildings and other representative built-forms, in order to maximise potential economic advantage.

A further visit within the current programme is planned for very senior Shenyang officials, concentrating on regeneration and further Shenyang/Europe links.

Direct engagement in practical projects is vital to achieving the objectives of the project. This is being realised by side-by-side work with local agencies on specific urban initiatives of relevance to the city. Five such strands of work have been developed:

- Regenerating Tiexi Industrial District economically, socially and environmentally
- The planning of city expansion areas, including the Shenyang Hunan High Technology New Urban Area, and the northern university expansion area
- The Urban Upgrading and Cultural Heritage Conservation Package for the Qing Dynasty Palace and Tombs
- Detailed urban design and management, for example through traffic management designs
- The planning of the Hun River Corridor

In all cases City Government action has followed Project engagement, and in at least one case further external funding is likely. Detailed advice on the conservation of the culturally and historically important Imperial Palace and Tombs is hoped to result in World Heritage listing for the buildings. Urban design advice on the area surrounding the Palace is being implemented with the city's own resources. Practical engagement in the Tiexi Industrial Area involves detailed advice on regeneration initiatives (physical, economic, social, organisational and environmental), and it is possible to identify the influence of the Project in recent organisational changes, and specific project designs. Other initiatives have included direct engagement with urban greening, river corridor management and environmental

rehabilitation, new area planning, and specific traffic management initiatives. These projects are all at various stages of realisation.

Links with international organisations on behalf of the City have also been pursued, including initiatives designed to secure further collaboration with external agencies. There are active links with the World Bank and various European embassies, governmental agencies, trade agencies and universities. Several initiatives are in hand encouraging engagement in the city.

Numerous reports and practical guides have been circulated and used as working tools. All the above activities have been extensively documented. The reports referred to include over thirty multi-sectoral Specialist Reports, four International Study Tour Reports, two major International Workshop Reports and records of frequent participation of SUPP experts in other international and domestic workshops.

Senior project personnel have made strong efforts to engage with a wide range of city organisations, concentrating on those that have a role in the urban management process. There are active links with several of the city's universities, professional associations, environmental bodies, business groups and district level agencies, as well as with entrepreneurs in the private sector. The advice of the project team is frequently sought by one arm or another of the City Government, on matters ranging from detailed management and design issues to matters of overall city structure strategic policy. Senior Project staff have served on a number of formal evaluation panels. The city has recognised the work of the project team in personal awards to two of its senior staff.

## 5. A broader context

The planning system in China is now obliged to respond to the demands of increasingly open and dynamic market economies. The challenge is to facilitate the transition from the present system of planning by design and direction, to a more responsive approach, which is based on urban management to further economic growth, improve urban efficiency and promote sustainability. These issues are of wider relevance. The Project has identified a number of themes for the City which could have a similar relevance in a broader context:

- Sustainable development cuts across both natural and built environments and will require integrated planning through collaboration between the agencies involved.
- City government can support sustainable urban development most effectively through a flexible and responsive urban management approach, rather than relying solely on a design-based control system.
- The future mobilisation of adequate development resources to fund urban development and infrastructure will depend on the increasingly close cooperation between the public sector and the private sector and tap into the financial resources of private enterprise - to supplement, and eventually supersede state funds.
- In order to realise the value of the existing urban assets, conserve energy and preserve the countryside it will be important to recycle land and property in the city – this means dealing with degraded land and land contamination at the municipal scale to prepare such sites for urban, agricultural or other uses.
- Rationalise subsidy so that consumers pay the real cost for urban infrastructure and services, and are able to exercise choice among competing providers; using these principles, the quality of services will improve.
- With the commercialisation of urban infrastructure, there is a need to maintain basic-needs infrastructure at affordable levels for low-income households as a safety-net.

- The development of the city should seek lively, healthy, safe and friendly environments to achieve habitable' streets and spaces which also meet local socio-economic needs efficiently.
- Shenyang should pursue an energy efficient transportation system, with an emphasis on public transportation, including an MRT and integration of inter-modal options and interchanges.
- Successful city marketing requires a complete package of incentives, supported by high quality built environment and urban services; particularly as Shenyang faces stiff competition from southern cities in China with more favourable climates and fewer obstacles.
- Develop programmes to rehabilitate, upgrade and maintain the City's stock of walk-up apartments to safeguard existing investment and maintain an adequate stock of affordable housing.

## 6. Towards a theoretical framework

Entirely suitably SUPP is dynamic in nature and design. In the four years of its existence to date the changing focus of SUPP reflects its intentions. In the rapidly changing context of present day China to have remained within the framework that guided the first year, or within the framework that empowered the next two years, would have been inadequate.

It is also interesting that this history of changing purpose mirrors in sharply concentrated form the history of urban planning practice in Europe over the last sixty years.

In its initial formulation, SUPP was required to produce a City Master Plan for Shenyang. Such plans were the means whereby the renewal of European cities following the Second World War was initiated. Master plans are well suited to definite statements of pre-ordained urban form, to be achieved within a given timescale, hence their continued relevance to site development planning. They also require a certainty of investment, and a programmed control of that investment. Again the relevance to situations where there are a limited number of investors, with unified and mutually dependant purposes, that are only affected by outside forces to a limited extent, is apparent. In China under the planned economy these requirements matched perfectly the mechanisms of the overall urban development process. It was hence no surprise that the SUPP team discovered very early in the Project's life that little guidance was needed in terms of such a system – indeed the Chinese institutions could probably have provided a fuller description of such a system than their European counterparts.

Early in post war European history however it became apparent that the ideal conditions for city master plan exercises did not exist. There are many agents in a mixed or market economy, all with different priorities and parameters. Certainty of programming and pre-descriptions of the detail of urban form is impossible. The city master planning process rapidly showed its weaknesses in Europe, with consequent changes of practical approach.

The establishment of the SUPP team coincided with the early impacts in urban development terms in Shenyang of the monumental shift in China towards a Socialist Market system, and the necessary rapid shift away from the inappropriate aspects of city master planning.

Fortunately SUPP Chinese counterparts were quick to realise the benefits of exploring the techniques that had replaced city master planning in Europe. For the second and third years of its existence this determined the purpose and effect of the work of SUPP. The challenges of urban management were explored in detail, with its concentration on dynamic engagement in a multi-actor world, and the continuing need for governmental agencies to ensure the

constant re-examination of priorities, and the means of implementation within acceptable parameters. The hardest lessons, those of institutional reform and governmental capacity building, were not avoided.

The lessons were necessarily taken at a rapid pace, as it was important for the full strategic role of SUPP to be realised. A further stage of European understanding – beyond the macro level implications of the urban management approach – was available for practical exploration, and SUPP would have failed in its intentions if this had not been realised. Consequently the last year of SUPP is being spent exploring, with real time, real life working tools the means of implementation currently in use in Europe. Hard edged commercially engaged partnership working, the precise on-the-ground meaning of sustainability (in all its economic, social and environmental aspects), and the detail of integrated working are all being explored in a number of specific projects that do not flinch from the most challenging of urban regeneration situations.

The validity of the changes to European planning over the last sixty years has been put to its most severe test in the regeneration of areas of decreasing competitive advantage. It is in such areas that the relevance of the planning process to the lives of ordinary citizens in a mixed or market economy is most challenged. To arrive at this point four years after the initial creation of SUPP – with its instruction to prepare a City Master Plan for Shenyang – is true testimony to the effectiveness of the mutual engagement of China and the EU.

It is through such dynamic integrated models that the purposes of urban planning in terms of economic, social and environmental sustainability in a rapidly changing world can best be realised.