

# Why Urban Region Planning Does Not Work Well as Expected?\*

----A Case Study of Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Urban Region Planning

Xiao Long LUO      Jianfa SHEN

Dept. of Geography and Resource Management  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Email: [luoxiaolong@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:luoxiaolong@cuhk.edu.hk), [jianfa@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:jianfa@cuhk.edu.hk)

Fax: 852-26035006

**Abstract:** Urban region planning is an innovation in Chinese urban and regional planning in recent years. However, such planning often cannot achieve its expected goals. This study attempts to unveil the reasons that cause the failure of such planning, using the case of Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Urban Region Plan Planning (SWC planning). After analyzing the process of formulating and implementing SWC plan, behaviors of governments at various levels, and evaluation of planning implementation, it is found that lack of actors' interaction and information exchange, the difficulties in specifying detailed contents and lack of good planning mechanisms are major factors leading to unsuccessful planning.

**KeyWords:** Urban Region; Urban Region Planning; Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Urban Region Planning; Planning Implementation.

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, the concept of urban region (*Dushi quan*) has received intensive governmental and scholarly attention and urban regions are becoming subjects of many cities' development strategies in China (Gao, 2004; Qian & Xie, 2004; W. Zhang, 2003; etc.). Urban region plans are thus formulated by local governments in order to realize their urban region dreams. Up to now, over fifteen cities have formulated urban region plans in the whole country<sup>1</sup>. As an innovation in Chinese urban and regional planning system, urban region planning aims at coordinating several political entities, i.e., administrative areas, within the same region (Wang, 2003). Due to this coordinative feature, it is different from those traditional urban and regional planning that emphasizes control within the hierarchy system and stimulating development, such as master plans, urban system plans, etc (Ng & Tang, 2004; Yeh & Wu, 1998). Thus, it is conceived as a new urban and regional governance mode by Chinese researchers (Li, 2004; Luo & Zhang, 2005).

As a new instrument and trial by government, urban region planning inevitably encounters various problems in the process of plan making and implementation. These problems can be found in the case of Chengdu Urban Region Plan, in which Deyang city, a member city according to the plan, also devises its own urban region plan in order to improve its status in the economic hierarchy, resulting in overlapping urban regions and mutually-covering urban regions. It should be noted that almost all urban region plans face such problems. In practice, urban clusters (*chengshi zutuan*), which is an interchangeable term with urban region, are often designated in some urban region plans. Thus we have to face many problems: Why many member cities formulate their own urban region plans, although they are members in a given urban region? Why urban region planning does not work well as expected? To clarify these questions, Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Urban Region Planning (SWC planning) is selected to for a case study.

After implementing Jiangsu Province's Urban System Plan in 2001, Jiangsu provincial government attempted to formulate Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou Urban Region Plan for coordinating the development of its three subordinate cities (Suzhou, Wuxi and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sina.com.cn> , 8 July, 2004.

Changzhou). Under this context, the provincial government gave birth to SWC plan in 2002. The plan is the first urban region plan approved by the government and has been strongly supported and highly praised by the Ministry of Construction, becoming not only a model of urban region planning, but also a solution to heavy urban competition. However, like other urban region planning, there are many similar problems in SWC plan's formulation and implementation and it is far from effective after a couple of years' implementation. This study attempts to uncover the reasons underlying the unsuccessful SWC planning from two dimensions of governance theory, namely, interaction of stakeholders (Jessop, 1998; Stoker, 1998) and decision-making process (CGG, 1995). Therefore, our analysis focuses on the process of plan making and implementation, behaviors of governments at various levels and performance assessment of the planning. The lessons drawn from SWC planning can shed light on other urban region planning and help to improve their effectiveness.

The reminder of this paper comprises five sections. The next section outlines the objectives of SWC plan. This is followed by analysis on the process of plan-making, mainly focusing on the interaction among the urban region's member cities. In the fourth section, we examine the planning implementation by assessing the performance of the planning and exploring reasons of the unsuccessful planning implementation. In the fifth section, new challenges facing SWC plan are highlighted. The paper concludes with reasons that lead to the failure of SWC plan.

## **2 Objectives of SWC Plan – The Provincial Government's Original Intentions**

After more than two decades' economic reform, SWC region, a heart area of the delta region, has undergone rapid economic growth (Luo & Zhang, 2005). Although decentralization, marketization and globalization have provided some incentives for local governments to stimulate economic growth, they also lead local governments to fight for FDI, infrastructure development, etc. Industrial structure convergence, urban sprawl, environment pollution, and many issues thus are caused (JSCC & JSURPI, 2002; Luo & Zhang, 2005; Wei & Li, 2002).

In order to alleviate the above serious problems of urban competition, the provincial government began to formulate SWC Plan based on Jiangsu Province's Urban System

Plan adopted for implementation in 2001. The provincial Construction Commission consigned the planning task to Jiangsu Urban and Rural Planning Institution and Urban Planning Institution of Nanjing University, jointly producing the plan. SWC Plan can be viewed as a blueprint of cooperation made by the higher government, by which the provincial government attempts to coordinate cities' development and achieve regional integration. In light of SWC Plan, four major objectives of the planning are as follows (JSCC & JSURPI, 2002):

The first objective is to make use of the dominate role of Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou urban region in regional economic development. As a core area with high level of economic development in the YRD delta, SWC region should become an engine of development in the province, stimulating the development of northern and middle regions of Jiangsu. Through this strategy, the province can eventually move up its status in the global and national economic hierarchy.

The second objective is to alleviate serious urban competition and enhance urban and regional competitiveness. The province resorts to the planning to coordinate the development of various cities, avoid undesirable development, and stimulate city cooperation. In order to taking advantage of SWC region's location, infrastructure, tourism and education, a common ground for sharing resources should be provided. In addition, cooperation and coordination in industry development are urgent for improving the urban and regional competitiveness.

The third objective is to improve the relationship between SWC region and Shanghai. It is an undeniable fact that the development of SWC region benefits a large degree from its proximity to Shanghai, an emerging global city of China (Shi & Hamnett, 2002). However, in recent years, there is a tendency that many production factors in SWC region, such as capital, human resources and technology, have been attracted by Shanghai inversely, and this tendency is likely to become stronger and stronger. It is obvious that reconstructing the relationship between Shanghai and SWC region is urgent for SWC region's further development, in which cooperation and competition are intertwined relationships. As stated in the plan, "Only combining the strengths of three cities, the region can realize its goal – relying on Shanghai, serving for Shanghai, remaining

independent, and achieving a win-win situation” (For the detailed analysis of Shanghai and its neighbors’ competition, see (Fan, 2004)) .

The fourth objective is to enhance regional competitiveness in response to challenges of economic globalization and WTO accession.

It is clear that the planning is the provincial government’s instrument to guide regional development and enhance regional competitiveness under the circumstance of intensifying urban competition. Let’s pay our attention to the planning formulation.

### **3 The Plan-making – The Lack of Interactions among Coordinated Cities and Keen Fights for Local Interests**

This planning takes three cities into consideration as a whole. It is a comprehensive planning and covers industry, infrastructure development, spatial planning, environment protection, etc. However, this planning is more a higher level government’s intention than a blueprint of cooperation and coordination, because it is formulated and operated in a top-down manner. During the plan-making process, planning institutes only functioned as bridges among coordinated cities and the provincial government, and planners who were subordinate to the bureaucratic machine also could not play their roles in development control, as observed by Yeh and Wu (Yeh & Wu, 1998). On the contrary, there is little information exchange and interaction among cities and the provincial government, which to a certain degree prevents cities from reaching consensus and building up mutual trust. In fact, this coordinative plan making and operating in a top-down manner triggers many battles for infrastructure development, land use planning, etc., as all city governments have no interest to talk to fellow cities. They are interested only in bargaining with the higher government in the top-down plan-making process. They tend to maximize their own interests and simply ignore the interest of others. Fighting for proposed airports and bridges across the Yangtze River are very interesting cases among these wars. The following will illustrate conflicting interests among cities using the battle for hosting the airport as a case.

The SWC region has been served by Shanghai Hongqiao Airport for many years. But the international flights were moved from Hongqiao airport to Pudong airport in recent years. This change has considerably increased the distance of SWC to the airport

and negatively affected SWC region's international transport of goods and passengers (J. Zhang & Wu, 2004). In order to solve problems caused, the provincial government has decided to construct a new airport for southern Jiangsu that is a key project in the SWC planning. Therefore, fighting for hosting the airport comes to a climax in the plan-making process. Each city has its reasons to compete with others for the proposed airport:

*“Suzhou: Most FDI and foreign investors are concentrated in Suzhou. The move of Hongqiao international airport has had more negative effects on Suzhou's foreign-oriented economy than other fellow cities. The airport thus should be located in Suzhou.*

*Wuxi: Due to situating in the middle of southern Jiangsu, Wuxi has the advantage of location and thus the newly-built airport will provide better services for Suzhou and Changzhou. Moreover, Jiangyin Yangtze River Bridge in Wuxi will also extend the service scope of the new airport to middle, even to northern Jiangsu.*

*Changzhou: Currently, Changzhou has an airport with the highest grade in SWC region. In order to avoid infrastructure duplication, the existing airport should be expanded to become the new airport. In addition, Changzhou is the central city in south part of Jiangsu (da sunan, the area on the south of Yangtze River in Jiangsu province), having the advantage of location.”<sup>2</sup>*

The battle on airport has forced the provincial government to end up at a compromised solution. In the SWC plan formulated, three existing airports still remain in each city and the new airport – Southern Jiangsu Airport (*Sunan jichang*) – is proposed and located in Wuxi<sup>3</sup>. However, Changzhou and Suzhou still put forward their airport proposals subsequently indicate that they do not agree with the plan at the very beginning. This event supports the argument that lobbying by local governments can often change

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<sup>2</sup> These reasons were raised by vice mayors from corresponding cities in the final discussion conference in March 2002. The author attended this conference.

<sup>3</sup> China Interview 09060401.

the decision of governments at upper levels<sup>4</sup> (Walder, 1995). Perhaps, Suzhou and Wuxi also believe in this decision-making process. It should be pointed out that almost infrastructure projects proposed in the planning are subject to city war. Thus the consignor of the planning, the provincial government, have to confess that the provincial government can not force three cities to fully implement the plan and the aim of planning is just to provide a blueprint for cooperation, guiding cities toward integration<sup>5</sup>. In short, a coordinative plan should pay more attention to the process of the planning, especially trust building and reaching a consensus among cities. Cooperation directions will then become clear.

Although the plan has been highly praised by the Ministry of Construction for its innovation in coordination, whether the planning has achieved its original aims or is realizing these goals step by step under the context of insufficient information exchange and interactions among cities, and serious conflicts of interest? Next section evaluates the implementation of SWC plan.

## **4 The Unsuccessful Implementation of Plan and Reasons**

### **4.1 The Unsuccessful Implementation of Plan**

In order to evaluate the performance of the plan implementation after its approval, we interviewed the planning consignor (Construction Commission of Jiangsu Province), executors (three cities' Urban Planning Bureaux), and planners (Urban and Rural Planning Institute of Jiangsu Province and Urban Planning Institute of Nanjing University) respectively. The evaluation of planning implementation pinpoints the contents of plan, focusing mainly on five categories: industry planning, spatial planning, environment protection, tourism planning, and infrastructure (Table 1). Because the first four items just focus on macro and general strategies and do not involve concrete projects or contents, they will only be assessed generally. On the other hand, there are many key projects in the item of infrastructure development that enable us to trace each project's implementation.

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<sup>4</sup> According to the regulation of Chinese aviation, the newly-proposed airport must be approved and issued by State Council, National Civil Aviation Administration, and provincial governments. Due to some reasons, Suzhou temporarily gave up its dream of airport later on.

<sup>5</sup> China Interview 10060401.

According to table 1, it is clear that the implementation of industry planning, spatial planning, environment protection, and tourism planning is unsuccessful. The failure of these items largely attributes to the lack of operational suggestions and solutions at the macro-level<sup>6</sup>. Regarding the items of infrastructure, the planning also does not work well as expected. There are 11 projects that are at the statuses of changing/debating, suspended, difficult to operate, cancelled, accounting for 65 percent of the total of 17 key projects investigated. The following outlines the condition of these projects.

a. Highway and railway projects. Changing the course of national highway No. 312 and upgrading Hu-Ning railway are unfeasible projects in the plan. So they are difficult to realize. Thus upgrading national highway No. 312 and speeding up trains are adopted as alternatives. The course of River-side railway is still being disputed while the preparation for the planning of Nantong-Shanghai railway has begun. The failure of most project allocations suggests that projects in a coordinative planning are not easily implemented. Thus these proposed projects should be sufficiently considered before being listed in the plan.

b. Rail transits. According to the plan, the provincial government has formulated the plan of SWC rail transit. Wuxi is also preparing its rail transit planning (Jiangyin-Wuxi-Yixing Rail Transit Plan). However, it is impossible to “translate” these proposed projects into concrete actions in the near future. The other two rail transit projects listed in table 1 are just mentioned in the plan, and local governments have no intention to put these projects into practice yet.

c. Bridges. Suzhou-Nantong Yangtze River Bridge and Changzhou-Taizhou Yangtze River Bridge are the projects decided by the province’s transportation planning, and also key projects of the province. These two projects thus have made satisfactory progress in planning and will be implemented.

d. Airports. Table 1 shows the plan’s inability to coordinate airports development clearly. As stated in the plan (JSCC & JSURPI, 2002),

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<sup>6</sup> China Interview 10060401 and China Interview 14060401.



**Table 1 Implementation Assessment of SWC Plan**

Proposed projects		Implemented /Implementing	Partly implemented	Planning /preparing	Changing /debating	Suspended	Difficult to operate	Cancelled
Industry planning							√	
Spatial planning							√	
Environment protection							√	
Tourism planning							√	
Infrastructures	Changing the course of national highway No.312				√			
	Upgrading Hu-Ning railway				√			
	River-side railway				√			
	Nantong-Shanghai railway			√				
	SXC rail transit			√				
	Changshu-Wujiang rail transit					√		
	Jiangyin-Wuxi-Yixing rail transit			√				
	Changzhou-Wujin rail transit					√		
	Suzhou-Nantong Yangtze River Bridge			√				
	Changzhou-Taizhou Yangtze River Bridge			√				
	Changzhou Benniu Airport as the key airport (4D*)							√
	Upgrading Suzhou Guangfu Airport (4C*)					√		
	Upgrading Wuxi Shoufang Airport (4C*)					√		
	Southern Jiangsu Airport					√		
	Wuxi logistic center							√
Regional natural gas supply		√						
Regional water supply		√						

Source: The author's interviews. The interviewees are urban planners and local officials who directly involve in these projects investigated.

*“ (the province) gives the highest priority to the development of Changzhou Benniu Airport (4D-level, provincial level airport); then to improve Wuxi Shoufang Airport and Suzhou Guangfu Airport (4C-level, local level airport). ..... In order to meet the needs of local economic development and transport in the future, (the province) can construct a new airport in Wuxi”.*

Although one original aim of the planning is to coordinate airport development in the region and the province places emphasis on the development of Changzhou airport, the currently highest level airport. But it can be seen from the above statement that the province is in a dilemma due to keen fighting for airport mentioned above. This also supports other scholar's argument that the governments at higher levels no longer tightly control their subordinate authorities with the growing power of local governments in the context of the triple processes (Wei, 2001). The conflict between collective interests (the province and SWC region's interests) and individual interests (each city's interests) can not be easily solved by the provincial government, as the provincial government is difficult to force any cities to give up their own interests by imperatives (closing their existing airports). After the failure of coordination, surprisingly, a proposal for a new airport, Sunan Airport, was put forward by the provincial government. But the development of airport also did not follow the trajectory set up by the plan subsequently. In August 2003, Wuxi Shoufang Airport was enlarged and the number of flights was also increased, becoming the most influential airport in the region. Thus, “giving the highest priority to the development of Changzhou Benniu Airport” perhaps has become an impracticable plan forever.

e. Logistic center. In the plan, the province proposed to establish a logistic center in southern Jiangsu, Wuxi Logistic Center. Because it is just a function division rather than a concrete project, it is difficult to operate for the local government. In addition, the need of such a logistic center is decided by market, local economic development, and the desire of local government, rather than hierarchical allocation. Thus the higher level government has little influence upon the development of logistic center.

f. Regional natural gas supply and regional water supply. The provincial government has formulated thematic plans for these on the basis of SWC Plan. According to

interviews in Jiangsu, each prefecture city can well implement regional natural gas and water supply plan within its own jurisdiction. However, because of the following two reasons, these projects have to face various handicaps at the region scale. First, there is no trust among the cities. “Some cities worry that natural gas and water supplied to the outsides will be used “free” by other cities as they may not follow the regulations”<sup>7</sup>. This further validates previous finding that there is a lack of trust among cities due to little information exchange and interactions among cities. Second, each city tends to protect its own interests. “Constructing own waterworks and gasworks means that local governments can make big profits with a small capital”<sup>8</sup>. Thus governments of cities are not willing to give up these projects, leading to infrastructure duplication (Luo & Zhang, 2005). However, because conflicts within one jurisdiction can be solved easier than those involving a couple of jurisdictions, some prefecture cities have successfully completed projects of regional natural gas and water supply in their own jurisdictions<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, in some cities limitations of technique and engineering have also affected the plan implementation<sup>10</sup>.

In view of the above evaluation of planning implementation, it is clear that the plan performance is far from successful. This is largely due to the difficulties in specifying detailed contents of planning, which will be analyzed in the next section in details with other reasons of the unsuccessful plan implementation.

#### **4.2 The Reasons of Unsuccessful Plan Implementation**

In order to investigate the reasons underlying the ineffective planning implementation, additional information is obtained from the planning consignor (one provincial official), planning institutions (two chief planners in the two institutes), and planning executors (eight local officials in local planning bureaux and heads of local planning institutes) via semi-structural interviews. They were asked to indicate the reasons for the unsuccessful plan implementation. It should be mentioned that all interviewees are key figures involving in the planning. Thus, the results generated from

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<sup>7</sup> China Interview 14060401.

<sup>8</sup> China Interview 15060401.

<sup>9</sup> China Interview 15060401 and China Interview 12060401.

<sup>10</sup> China Interview 14060401, China Interview 15060401 and China Interview 12060401.

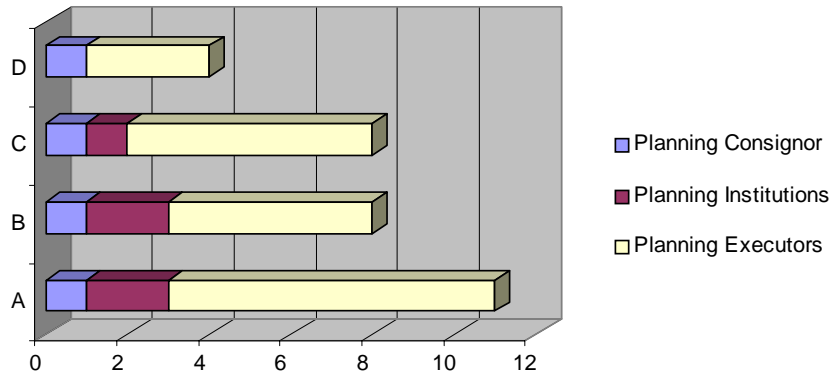
these interviews are persuasive. In Figure 1, the reasons of unsuccessful planning implementation with high frequencies are listed. These reasons can be summarized into the following three aspects.

Firstly, interest conflicts are the main cause of the planning failure. There are heavy competitions among the coordinated cities, such as fighting for investment and infrastructure development. In addition, as a polycentric urban region, competition in the region is fiercer than other urban regions in China (For a detailed analysis of polycentric urban region, see (Kloosterman & Lambregts, 2001)). Most importantly, since the plan concerns many interests of cities, such as industry development, functional division, and infrastructure, cities are difficult to achieve consensus for cooperation. On the other hand, conflicts between the province government and its subordinate cities also contribute to the unsuccessful planning (Of course, sometimes they have common interests). As shown in the planning, it is obvious that the province government tries to coordinate subordinate cities' development by means of its policy-making power in an attempt to enhance the region's competitiveness. However, this also means that collective interest maximization may be at the cost of some individuals' interests, thus inevitably spurs conflicts among governments at different administrative levels.

Secondly, there are no coordinating mechanisms. Although the provincial government has formulated the plan for coordinating cities' development, measures regarding the plan's implementation and administration have not been taken yet. Moreover, coordinating mechanisms are still not established among cities. Therefore, the lack of coordinating mechanisms leads to the failure of planning.

Thirdly, as discussed in the previous section and our interviews, city governments can not 'translate' the plan into concrete actions because of its unfeasibility. Let alone coordination and cooperation. Consider the plan content. Whether the plan can be successfully implemented depends on the contents of the plan. Generally speaking, the plan consists of fields at micro and macro levels that need to be coordinated. We should avoid general and unfeasible contents that are difficult to implement for local governments. Meanwhile, the contents also should not be too detailed, which otherwise may reduce the flexibility of the plan. Furthermore, the analysis in the previous section suggests that it is difficult to coordinate competitive projects in the planning process.

Instead, cities are inclined to form partnerships in those fields with common interests, such as transportation development. Therefore, how to enhance city cooperation and coordinate in competitive fields is the crux of the coordinative planning.



- Reasons: A – Urban competition  
 B – Lack of coordinative mechanisms  
 C – Difficult to operate  
 D – Interest conflicts among governments at various levels

**Figure 1 Reasons of unsuccessful planning implementation based on interviews**

In addition, power distribution and conflicts among government departments are also one of important factors underlying the unsuccessful planning implementation. As a comprehensive plan, Transport Commission, Environment Protection Commission, and other relevant provincial departments of course are stakeholders in the planning. Therefore, whether the planning can be successfully implemented depends on not only the degree of their cooperation, but also their attitudes towards the planning.

To sum up, urban competition, lack of necessary coordinating mechanisms, the inoperable planning (planning contents), interest conflicts among governments at various levels, and interest conflicts among government departments are major causes underlying the ineffective planning. The newly-proposed provincial development strategy and new urban regions defined by individual cities, which will be discussed below, will further provide evidences for these conflicts and the plan's volatility.

## **5 New Challenges Facing the Plan**

### **5.1 The Shift of Provincial Development Strategy and the New Plan**

The plan of SWC Plan was formulated under an urban region-oriented development strategy adopted by Jiangsu province government. The urban region-oriented development strategy places emphasis on developing three urban regions – Nanjing urban region, Xuzhou urban region, and SWC urban region (Wang, 2003). This thought directs the formulation and implementation of SWC Plan. As stated in the planning, one objective of SWC Plan is to make use of the dominate role of SWC urban region in the regional economic development to stimulate development of middle Jiangsu and northern Jiangsu (JSCC & JSURPI, 2002).

However, the new party secretary of Jiangsu, Mr. Yuanchao Li, proposed a new regional development strategy of Jiangsu province focusing on the River-side region development recently. This has changed the strategic basis for the SWC Plan. The new strategy emphasizes the construction of industrial zones along the Yangtze River, aiming to accelerate economic development of southern Jiangsu and middle Jiangsu, and eventually stimulating the development of northern Jiangsu. In tandem with the development thought of the new provincial secretary, the province has begun to prepare the Plan for Jiangsu's Yangtze River-side Region Development. While this new plan would not overturn the urban spatial pattern outlined by SWC Plan, it would designate new urban clusters ( *chengshi zutuan*). Although a new term, urban cluster, is adopted in the planning, it actually has the same meaning as the urban region. In the new plan, the River-side region has been reorganized as consisting of many urban clusters, such as Changzhou-Taizhou urban cluster, Jiangyin-Zhangjiagang-Jingjiang-Rugao urban cluster, Nantong-Changshu urban cluster. These new urban clusters overlap with Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou urban region. Although the Plan of the river-side region development and SWC Plan with different aims and emphases refer to different classifications of urban regions, the Plan of the river-side region development does not clearly abandon the urban region in SWC Plan – Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou urban region. Therefore, a new problem has emerged. That is which plan should be followed when the two plans have conflict implications in practice, especially on infrastructure and port development.

Like other studies on local leaders' role in Chinese urban development (Wei & Li, 2002; Zhu, 1999), the above case indicates that the shift of provincial development strategy and the new plan also suggest that the change of local leader and the shift of leadership's will exert significant influences on the fate of policies issued. Currently, there is no coherent institutional arrangement for dealing with the relation with a province's development strategy and a regional planning and how and when a regional planning should be adjusted to fit with new development strategy. On the other hand, new provincial development strategy should not be changed too frequently and the legal power of regional planning should be reserved to endure its effectiveness. Clearly, regional planning is still at experimental stage in China and there is a long way to get it institutionalized in the administrative and planning framework. The following case of new urban regions defined by the coordinated cities further show that regional planning is an ad hoc matter.

## **5.2 New Urban Regions Defined by the Coordinated Cities**

While SWC Plan is challenged by the new provincial development strategy, cities in SWC Plan also define their own urban regions that are different from SWC urban region. Although Suzhou, Wuxi, and Changzhou are conceived as member cities of SWC urban region in SWC Plan, these cities do not seem to accept this arrangement. As some scholars interviewed in this research argued that SWC region is a polycentric urban region without a leading city. Therefore, integrating these three cities is an impossible task and SWC urban region should be replaced by other classifications<sup>11</sup>. Cities incorporated in the SWC urban region indeed have their own definitions on urban region based on their jurisdictions' interests. In the Development Forum of the Yangtze River Delta (Lake Tai) (*Changsanjiao (Taihu) fazhan luntan*) sponsored by Suzhou government, Suzhou put forward a new definition of urban region – Urban Region around Lake Tai. This new urban region consists of two sub-urban-regions with a total of five cities under administration of Zhejiang and Jiangsu province, namely, Suzhou-Wuxi-Changzhou urban region and Suzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou urban region. By this defining, it is clear that

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<sup>11</sup> China Interview 10060402.

Suzhou makes itself the center and the head of urban regions in southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang.

Like Suzhou city, Wuxi defied the plan and defined its own urban region in order to extend its development space, as Wuxi also deemed it impossible to achieve aims of the plan due to heavy interest conflicts among three cities. Thus it is necessary for Wuxi to devise a new plan regarding urban region. A new plan – *Wuxi Development Strategic Plan* has been formulated. This new plan broke down SWC urban region devised by SWC Plan, replacing it with Wuxi-Changzhou-Taizhou urban region and Suzhou-Shanghai-Nantong urban region. In this urban region classification, Wuxi excluded Suzhou and proclaimed itself as the leading city of Wuxi-Changzhou-Taizhou urban region. Although it is difficult to compare these classifications and decide which one is more realistic, reclassification of urban regions indicates that cities have no recognition on arranged identities (as member cities of SWC urban region) and have intention to expand their own developmental space at least. Therefore, SWC Plan has a rather blue future.

In short, there are two challenges facing the plan: reclassifying urban region for a new plan due to new strategies and reclassifying urban region based on the interests of individual cities. Urban regions under old and new plans usually overlap each other. It is essential sometimes to reclassify urban regions, because there are different aims in old and new plans due to the shift of development strategy or thematic planning. However, how to effectively implement these two plans with overlapping urban regions? When there are conflicts among different urban regions in the stage of implementation, how to balance them? It is such problems that we have to face and seek appropriate measures.

Reclassifying urban regions based on the interests of individual cities is another and more complicated situation, as it is largely due to the low degree of common identity sharing (as members of an urban region), power struggles among governments at different levels, etc. This results in many issues in our planning system: how to define, plan, issue, manage, and supervise an urban region planning? Who has rights to adjust and amend the plan, if the plan is ineffective or need to be changed in response to the changing socio-economic environment? All these questions suggest that urban region planning, as an innovation in Chinese urban and regional planning system, is facing



various challenges. The planning may encounter failures if various problems mentioned previously can not be solved.

## **6 Conclusions: The Reasons of the Unsuccessful Planning**

SWC Plan, as well as other urban region plans, is a new initiative in Chinese urban and regional planning system, and its significances lie in coordinating development and promoting city cooperation. However, it does not work well as expected in practice. After tracing the process of plan making and implementing and evaluating SWC Plan performances, we argue that it is the following three reasons that lead to the failure of the planning.

Firstly, SWC Plan is a governance initiative without “governance”. SWC Plan is initiated by the government at provincial level, aiming to coordinate urban and regional development and promote city cooperation. This coordinative plan has designed by the higher level government, which differs much from those traditional plans with emphasis on stimulating development. In this sense, urban region planning is a new initiative of urban and regional governance (Li, 2004; Luo & Zhang, 2005). However, the core elements of governance, stakeholders’ interactions and consensus building (CGG, 1995; Jessop, 1998; Stoker, 1998), do not embody in the plan-making and implementation process. Thereby the plan is a governance initiative without “governance”. It should be pointed out that urban region planning should put more emphasis on the process of building trust and understanding, instead of simply making a plan. Regarding the role of higher level government, the government at the upper level should pay more attention to mobilizing cities to be coordinated and creating a favorable atmosphere for cities’ interactions, although it acts as a coordinator in the planning. Only after mobilization and trust building, the plan could have a consolidated foundation and can be successfully implemented.

Secondly, the difficulty in specifying detailed contents is a major reason for the failure of the planning. As urban region planning is an initiative in Chinese urban and regional planning system, the contents of the urban region planning can not follow those in traditional plans, such as master plans and urban system plans. They must be constantly improved and amended in practice. More importantly, the planning consignor

and planners are difficult to grasp on which contents and directions cities can cooperate effectively. In SWC Plan, the contents and directions of coordination and cooperation set up by the higher government are either too general and unfeasible and are difficult to implement for local governments, or too detailed, which reduce the flexibility of planning. Therefore, the plan is poorly implemented.

Thirdly, SWC Plan lacks essential mechanisms of plan making and implementation. Regarding SWC Plan, after tracing the plan-making process, evaluating implementation, and analyzing the rising of new urban regions, it can be seen that there is no essential mechanisms to formulate, issue, implement, manage and supervise the plan. As a result, the implementation of SWC plan is unsuccessful. Thus, it is urgent to establish necessary mechanisms in order to improve the effectiveness of the plan. These mechanisms should include not only standardization of urban region planning (for example, definition and classification of urban regions), planning approval, as well as procedures to deal with uncertainty and unpredictable problems, but also a proper institution for cities' collaboration. It should be noted that more flexibility is needed in these mechanisms due to variable stakeholders and interests.

It is these three reasons that lead to the failure of the planning. These lessons drawn from SWC Plan can shed light on other urban region plans or coordinative plans, such as Beijing-Tianjing-Hebei Urban Region Plan and Coordinative Plan for The Pearl River Delta Region's Urban Development. To achieve a successful and more effective urban region planning, we must cope with the above shortcomings.

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