

Review paper

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTEGRATING CONCEPTS IN SPATIAL PLANNING: INSIGHTS FROM BULGARIA

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Abstract

Based on the theoretical and practical spatial planning experience this paper aims to draw the attention of the professional spatial planning community and legislative authorities to the importance of legal regulation of an integrating strategic, program and planning document - a concept to ensure the integrated development and implementation of strategic and planning documents at municipal level. The research is built on the spatial planning practice in Bulgaria, but it uses a holistic approach and lays on well-established principles in the field. Thus the basic elaborated statements could be applicable to spatial planning in general because they outline a possible algorithm for integrated decisions which contribute to the balanced and harmonious planning, management and functional-spatial development of the territories. Some of the main findings of the study are the notions formed about the links and interactions between the different types of legally regulated strategic, planning and programming documents; the place and role of the necessary integrating concept for functional and spatial development and the possible structure and content of such kind of document.

Keywords: *functional-spatial planning and development, integrating concepts, structural models*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main instrument of spatial development of territories is spatial planning. In spatial planning practice in Bulgaria, it is often observed that the mandatory regulated strategic, program and planning documents are developed in isolation and without a unified vision for the functional and spatial development of the municipal territory, on the basis of which the policies of the local government in the spatial planning sphere can be determined. One of the reasons for the identified problem is the lack of a legal and regulatory framework to ensure the interrelation and hierarchical subordination between the goals, priorities and policies set out in the strategic planning and programming documents, reflected in the operational planning developments and implemented through specific projects – investment, social, management, financial, etc. This is the main argument that justifies the need for an integrating document to link spatial planning processes [1].

Based on the analyses held on, researches and practical experience [1, 2, 3], some key problems in spatial planning practices in Bulgaria are identified that are relevant to the explored topic as:

- Incoherence of spatial planning developments – strategic and planning documents – due to the lack of a connecting conceptual basis that would regulate integrated priorities and provisions.
- Lack of understanding of the interrelationships between spatial planning and the protection of the natural and anthropogenic environment and of the possibilities for the harmonious reconciliation and functioning of these systems.
- Incoherence and lack of integration between the specialized researches on the individual functional-spatial and socio-economic strands and spatial planning – isolated projects (investment, social, financial, protection, management, etc.) and independent functional-spatial plans are developed without taking into account the cultural-historical, socio-economic and functional-spatial regional and territorial connectivity and interactions between processes.

The **research aim** of the study is to propose an algorithm for elaboration of an integrating concept for functional and spatial development of a municipality (ICFSDM).

From the aim thus formulated the following **research questions** follow:

- What is the potential of the newly proposed ICFSDM for legal regulation and where does it fit into the existing structure of the planning system?
- What could be the structure and content of the ICFSDM to make it a workable strategic, programmatic and planning document?

In the development of the study, the proven in theory and practice **analyze-synthesize methods** are used, which in this case include:

- **analysis of:** the legal and regulatory basis in spatial planning; the links between the different types of strategic and planning documents; the theory and practice of spatial planning in Bulgaria for the creation of spatial planning developments;
- **synthesis of:** principles, approaches, potentials and mechanisms, taking into account the need for integration of spatial planning processes and developments; structural models to illustrate the proposed ideas; guidelines and proposals for optimizing spatial planning practices.

2. INTERLINKING OF SPATIAL PLANNING DEVELOPMENTS

In order to better understand ideas, put forward, it is necessary to briefly present the structure of the spatial planning system in Bulgaria and to clarify the interconnections between the main processes and documents in the field [4, 5].

The author's notion of the connections between the different types of legally regulated strategic, planning and programming documents and the place and role of the necessary, but unregulated, integrating concept for functional and spatial development of a municipality (ICFSDM) is schematically shown in *Figure 1*.

The functional purpose of the general spatial plan of a municipality – so called **Master plan of a municipality (MPM)** – is to serve as a management tool of the local government in the sphere of spatial planning policy targeted at creating of spatial and functional-management conditions for development and complex planning of different types of territories, taking into account the existing natural and anthropogenic elements and specific socio-economic conditions.

MPM details the guidelines for territorial development of the municipalities, set out in the **Integrated territorial development strategy (ITDS)** of the relevant planning region.

MPM provides the planning basis for the implementation of the goals for socio-economic and functional-spatial development of the municipality.

The provisions of MPM are mandatory for the subsequent detailed spatial planning. **Detailed urban plans (DUP)** have direct investment application and are a necessary planning basis for issuing visas for research and design and for the elaboration, proceeding and implementation of specific investment projects.

Protection plans (PP) and **Management plans (MP)** should be developed and implemented in conjunction with the provisions of the **Plans for integrated development of the municipalities (PIDM)** and the spatial development plans for the territorial scope to which they apply. Such plans are developed for certain types of territories as such for:

- protection of cultural heritage;
- environmental protection;
- nature protection;
- preservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna;
- water protection;
- protection of cultural and natural landscapes;
- sanitary and hygienic protection;
- protection against disasters and accidents;
- etc.

In terms of spatial planning and strategic programming, PP/MP include, depending on the specificities of the particular territory, protection regimes, long-term and short-term programs for conservation, protection and management activities and for implementation of the plan.

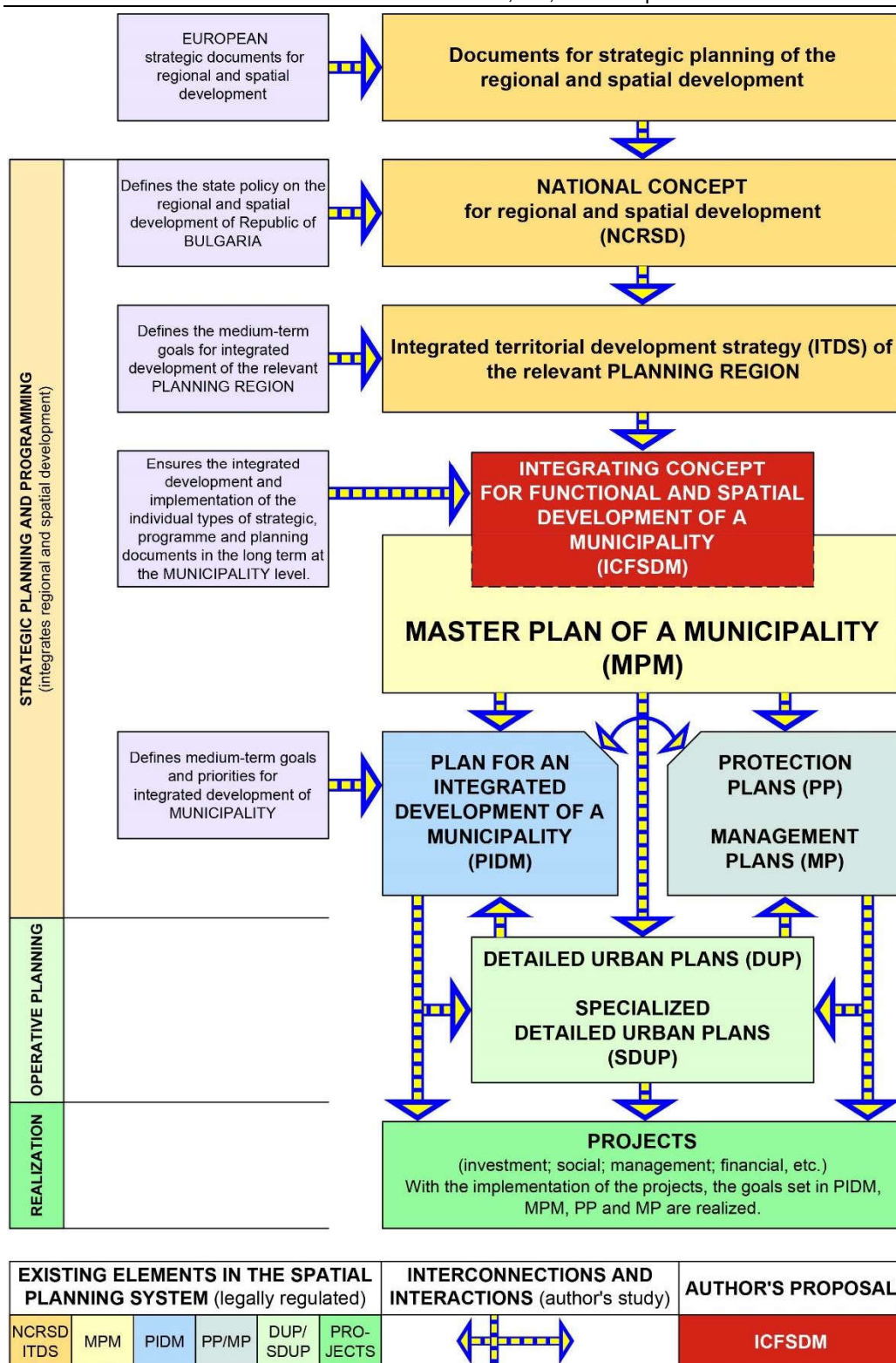


Figure 1. Linkage between strategic and planning documents, source: author's scheme based on [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]

The functional purpose of PIDM is:

- to define priorities, means and stages for achieving the goals, set out in ITDS and for implementation of the development solutions envisaged in MPM;
- to ensure an integrated approach and a comprehensive effect of the implementation of the main planning and strategic documents related to the management and functional-spatial development of the municipality and to the protection and evolution of the territories and society.

PIDM is developed in hierarchical subordination with the goals and priorities contained in the higher level strategic planning documents for regional and spatial development, without repeating them, but by specifying them according to the specificity of the municipality. Such strategic documents of a higher hierarchical level are:

- **National concept for regional and spatial development (NCRSD);**
- **Integrated territorial development strategy (ITDS)** of the relevant planning region.

PIDM defines medium-term goals and priorities for sustainable development of the municipality and connections with other municipalities in accordance with the ITDS of the planning region at level NUTS 2 and with the MPM.

PIDM provides spatial, temporal and factual coordination and integration of different policies and planning resources to achieve the defined goals for lasting improvement of the economic, demographic, social, spatial-functional, infrastructural and environmental conditions of the municipal territory.

In this way, at the normative level, the MPM, the PIDM and the PP/MP are the main link between the Regional Development Act (RDA), the Spatial Development Act (SDA) and the special laws such as the Cultural Heritage Act (CHA), the Act on Waters (AW), the Protected Areas Act (PAA), the Biological Diversity Act (BDA), etc.

From the brief analysis presented, the conclusion naturally follows that there is **a need for legal regulation of an integrating strategic, program and planning document - a concept to ensure the integrated development and implementation of strategic and planning documents at the municipal level.**

It is appropriate to call it an **Integrating concept for functional and spatial development of a municipality (ICFSDM).**

The **author's proposal** is to regulate legally the ICFSDM as a mandatory element into the existing planning system in Bulgaria in interconnections shown in *Figure 1* and with structure and content shown in *Figure 2*.

3. INTEGRATING CONCEPT FOR FUNCTIONAL AND SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT OF A MUNICIPALITY (ICFSDM)

One possibility is to regulate the ICFSDM as a stand-alone document in the RDA and the SDA, ensuring its integrating character and the mandatory hierarchical subordination of subsequent spatial planning projects. It is more appropriate for the concept to be a mandatory part of the MPMs, given their long-term nature and their focus on the functional-spatial and socio-economic development of the territories, and this should be enshrined in the legal and regulatory framework for spatial planning. This would make it easier for the municipalities in terms of the number of programming documents they have to produce. Another argument for the inclusion of the ICFSDM as a mandatory part of the general spatial plans is the already regulated subordination of the planning documents and the place and importance of the

MPMs in this hierarchy, as well as the monitoring and control system through environmental assessments, conformity assessments and impact assessments of the plan in the process of its elaboration and subsequent implementation.

Figure 2 presents a structural model outlining the guidelines for the development of the proposed for legal and regulatory regulation integrating concept for functional and spatial development of a municipality (ICFSDM), which will ensure the integrated development and implementation of the different types of strategic, programmatic and planning documents.

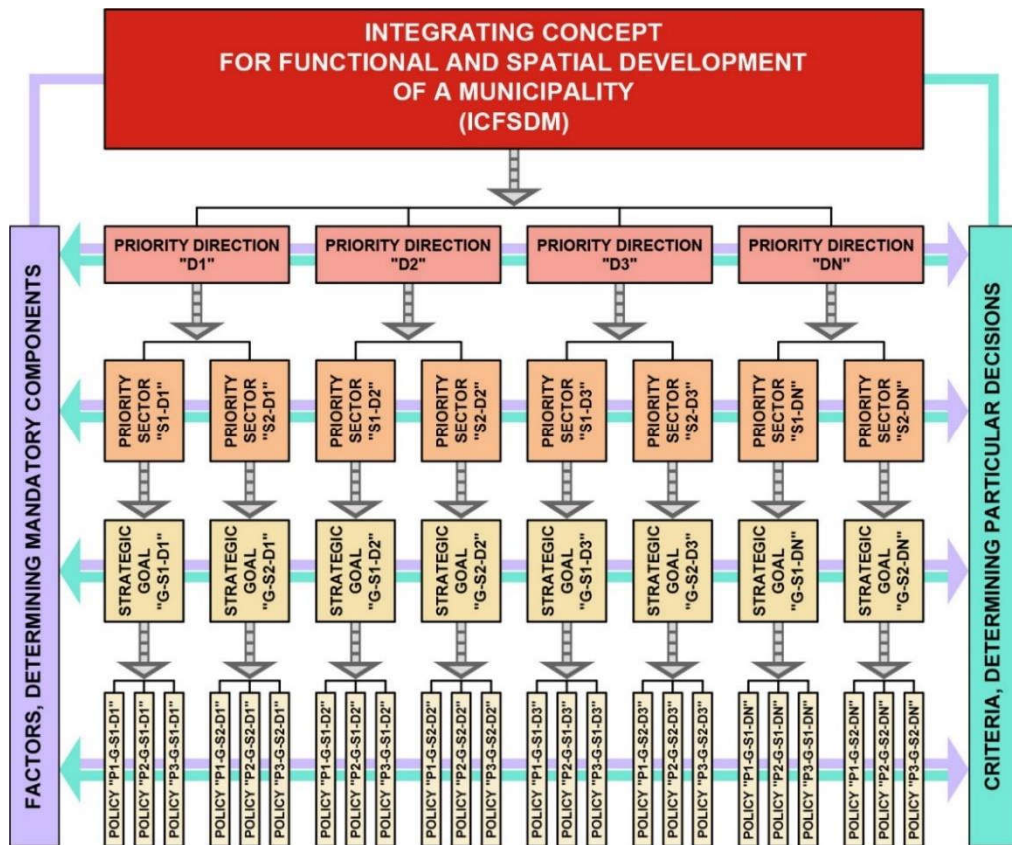


Figure 2. Structural model of ICFSDM, source: author's scheme based on [1, 2, 7, 8]

The structural model of an integrating concept for functional and spatial development of a municipality (ICFSDM) Figure 2 includes defining of:

- **Priority directions** for functional-spatial development of the municipality.
- **Priority sectors** for each of the identified priority directions.
- **Strategic goals** by directions and/or sectors.
- **Policies** to achieve the strategic goals.

As a matter of principle, there are permanent factors defining mandatory components for each level of spatial planning and management of territories and criteria linked to them, requiring specific spatial planning decisions. Such factors and criteria are cultural heritage, ecology, national security, etc.

The spatial-functional expression of each of the priority directions so defined by ICFSDM has its specificity and interaction with the other directions, which forms the functional-spatial characteristic of the respective municipality. The MPM concepts also define the priority

sectors for each of the priority directions, the strategic goals by direction and/or sector and the policies to achieve the strategic goals. MPM establishes the spatial planning conditions for the implementation of the policies defined by ICFSDM. PIDM specifies the particular actions, timeframes and means for realization of the policies determined by ICFSDM and spatially assured by MPM.

Figure 3 demonstrates the possibility of practical application of the theoretical considerations presented. The example shows the graphic part of the concept of the Master plan of Yakimovo – one of the small municipalities in Bulgaria - where the principles and algorithm for developing the proposed for legal regulation ICFSDM are laid down.

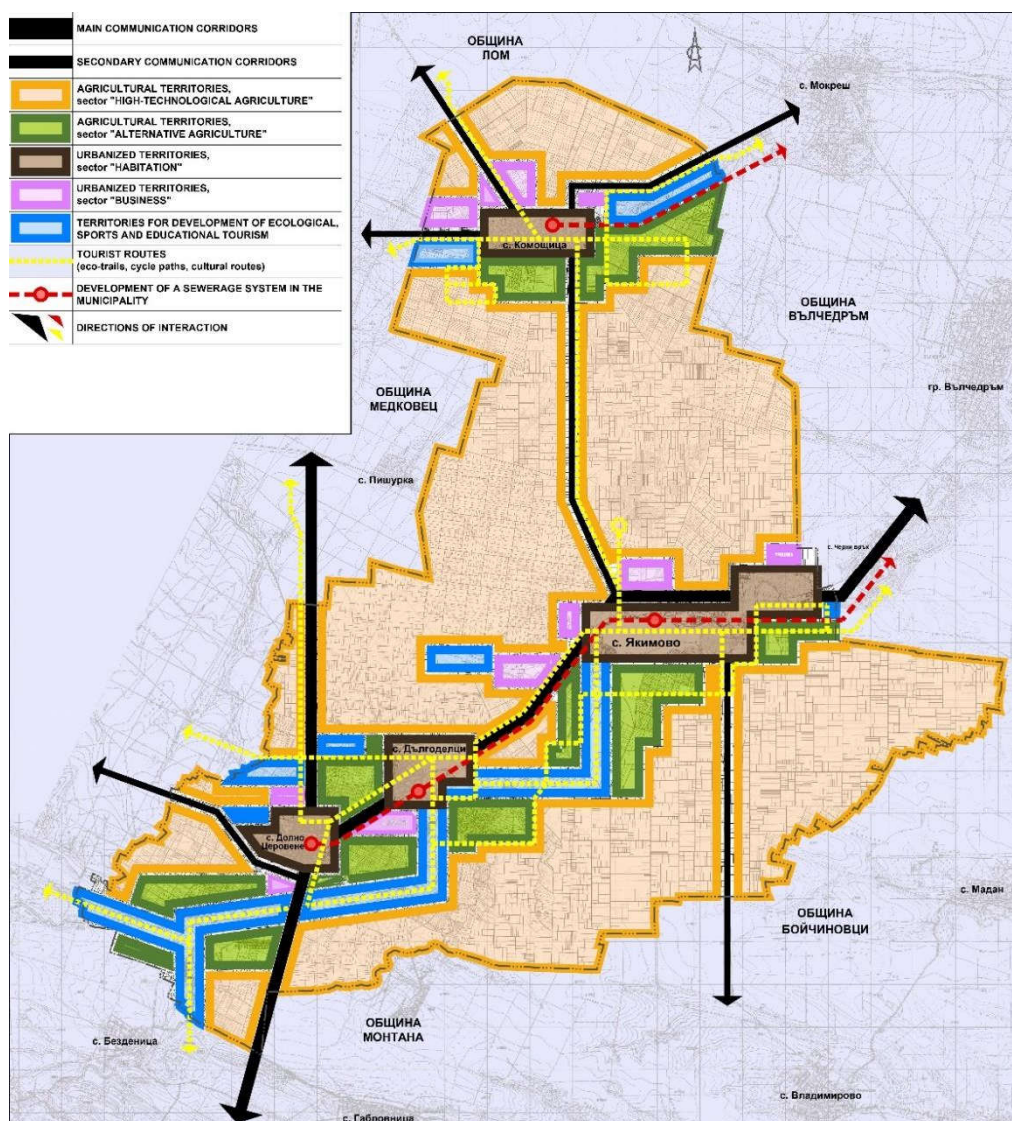


Figure 3. Concept of the MPM of Yakimovo for a functional-spatial development of the municipality, source: MPM Yakimovo [8] and personal archive

Although it is not regulated as a mandatory element, a concept has been developed to the MPM that corresponds to the presented structural model, filling it with specific content depending on the specifics of the municipality. The concept for the functional and spatial

development of the municipality of Yakimovo forms five priority directions: agriculture, urban areas, tourism, transport and technical infrastructure, ecology, cultural and historical heritage. The set priority sectors, strategic goals and policies for each priority direction can be seen in detail in the MPM documentation [8]. In line with the concept, the MPM itself has been developed.

4. CONCLUSION

Using the holistic approach this paper provides clear answers to the defined research questions by:

- defining some gaps in spatial planning theory and practice and in legislative framework in the sphere of spatial development in Bulgaria;
- exploring the potential of the integrating concepts and proving the need to incorporate them into spatial planning;
- proposing a new document, called "Integrating concept for functional and spatial development of the municipality"(ICFSDM), which to be legally regulated and to be included in the existing spatial planning system in Bulgaria;
- presenting author's notion of interconnections between the individual strategic and spatial planning documents and exploring the appropriate place of ICFSDM into the existing structure of the planning system in Bulgaria;
- outlining the structure and content of the ICFSDM, giving the main guidelines for its elaboration;
- demonstrating an example of practical application of the theoretical ideas.

The presented ideas are derived from the spatial planning practice, they are formulated as theoretical propositions and the aim is after their legal and normative regulation to be applied as structural models back in practice. The study proposes an algorithm to develop ICFSDM, thus the goal of the study is achieved.

The author hopes that the ideas presented will contribute to a better understanding of the interrelationships in spatial planning processes and to the establishment of an effective working algorithm in the development and implementation of spatial planning documents.

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