

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA BY 2020

Borislav Yankov BORISOV

Faculty of Architecture, University of Structural Engineering & Architecture (VSU) "Lyuben
Karavelov", Sofia, Bulgaria
archbb@abv.bg

Abstract

This paper examines the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the National Spatial Development Concept (NSDC) of the Republic of Bulgaria by 2020. Attention is drawn to the expected results of its application. The main methodological guidelines and principles for spatial planning are studied. The coordinating role of NSDC in relation to other types of territorial planning is an object of particular analysis. After the accession of Bulgaria in the EU, the principles and provisions of European documents, practices and prospects for spatial planning are taken into account.

Keywords: National Spatial Development Concept, urban development, sustainable development, spatial planning, regional policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

This methodology explains the approach and technology for the preparation of the National Spatial Development Concept (NSDC) and defines general methodological spatial tasks[1], as well as conceptual formulations related to NSDC itself.

The obligations of Bulgaria as a new full member of the EU impose new practice concerning the application of the basic principles of the European policies about spatial development, the requirements of the programme for research in the field of the territorial planning "ESPON", environmental protection within NATURA 2000, the Europe 2020 Strategy and others that motivate NSDC as part of the general planning of the European space.

2. MISSION, VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF NSDC. EXPECTED RESULTS OF ITS APPLICATION

As a strategic document, NSDC is made in a way any strategy is created, taking into account its specific features as a spatial concept for development.

- Mission. Methodologically, the mission of the NSDC is the spatial coordination of the processes occurring in the national territory through the formation of a space development basis and a regulator for carrying out not only at a regional, but also individual socio-economic sectoral planning at a national level in the context of the pan-European spatial development, with the aim of achieving a comprehensive, integrated plan. On the other hand, the Mission of NSDC is to create a national framework for the implementation of the spatial planning of the lower territorial levels (regional, provincial, municipal), by formulating the general guidelines and principles for the conduct of the State policy for spatial planning.
- The Vision of NSDC from methodological point of view should outline the strategic expectations and priorities for future spatial development, and in this respect it can be seen as a predictive model for spatial development within the national territory and in the context of the European space.
- The main objective defining the functions and role of the NSDC in accordance with the national planning policy, whose goal is defined in Art. 1 of the Spatial Planning Act for the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria as a national treasure, is to guarantee "... sustainable development and favourable conditions for living, work and recreation of the population". The specific methodological objectives and tasks of the NSDC that determine what type of a document it is and how it works in the system of the strategic planning, are as follows:
 - Integration of spatial planning with regional and sectoral planning through territorial coordination of sectoral policies, strategies, plans and programmes which are directly or indirectly related to the spatial development;
 - Reducing imbalances in use, including overbuilding of the territory, without rejecting the regional policy principle for concentration;
 - Creating optimal conditions for sustainability and planning in the spatial development /regulation of the random urbanization with planned balanced and stimulated territories for development and areas of impact/;

- Creating a territorial basis for stimulating the polycentric development of the town network and improving the performance of the connections between the central and peripheral areas, between the town and country;
- Formulating specific guidelines and principles for the implementation of the spatial planning policy for a certain period of time;
- Creating a toolkit for real and efficient coordination between the different hierarchical levels of the spatial planning.
- In this methodological context the following results shall be achieved through NSDC:
 - Long-term sustainable spatial development in the planning period until 2020;
 - Optimal conditions for the implementation of the priorities of the national socio-economic development through effective and sparing use of the recreational and culture-historical resources of the territory;
 - Realization and protection of the public interest in spatial planning;
 - The spatial structuring of different types of territories depending on their future basic use, as well as determining the permissible and prohibited activities and the conditions for their use, development and protection through the modes and scenarios of spatial development;
 - Spatial development of the urban areas as a national network of settlements, including agglomeration cores and habitats, cities from different hierarchical levels, their interrelations, axes of urbanization, etc. /including the development of social infrastructure of national importance and improving conditions for the accessibility of its elements/;
 - Reconstruction and development of territories with impaired spatial parameters and creating prospects for their future use;
 - Suitable structural prerequisites and conditions for the pre-emptive development of the systems of the national technical infrastructure and its linking with the European corridors and the network of settlements;
 - Conservation of the immovable cultural heritage, development of its spatial potential and creation of spatial conditions for its effective socialization;
 - Protection of the environment by balancing the optimum territorial structure and sustainable spatial development;

3. BASIC METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES FOR SPATIAL PLANNING

The NSDC outlines specific spatial approaches for the implementation of structural policies by applying the following basic methodological guidelines and principles for the conduct of the national spatial planning:

- Unified/integrated/ approach of planning. The NSDC applies the approach of strategic planning with unified information provision, system analysis demonstrating problems and opportunities, forecasting, creating a vision – a spatial model, goal-setting and use of indicators for monitoring and evaluation. In this regard, spatial planning is an essential part of the integrated planning – interconnected and coordinated with the economic, social and ecological planning.
- Publicity, transparency and civil society participation. The participation of citizens in the whole process of planning, consideration, acceptance, approval and implementation of the NSDC from methodological point of view is a condition for the sustainability of the planning and must be ensured at every stage and phase of this process. Publicity and transparency shall be ensured by a reliable information system and open procedure.
- Priority protected public interests. NSDC plays an important role in balancing the public and the individual interests, so as to implement the priorities of the national spatial policy. The protection of the public interest and public property[1] should be regulated for such important, nationally significant components of the territorial structure as the natural ecological, socio-cultural and communication technical systems of spatial development, so that the State could effectively regulate the development processes and phenomena, which are the subject of NSDC;
- Scientific approach – in all activities and levels of spatial planning. In the process of developing the NSDC a number of complex problems are solved such as: formation of spatial solutions, forecasting processes, comparing and evaluating options. Using the results from previous experience and adapting good practices follow the logic of continuity and the scientifically grounded consensual approach;
- Continuity of the planning process. As a toolkit the NSDC deals with the content, the management and the monitoring of the two types of objects — physical substances (territories, settlements, infrastructure, people) and processes (urbanization, deurbanization, change in the status of the territories, spatial impacts and interventions, migrations, market environment,

degradation, development, growth, etc.). The complex interactions between them are marked both by dynamic changes, requiring continuous monitoring and corresponding updating of the information base, and periodic adjustments in the planning documents. The continuity of the planning process is a precondition for its sustainability over time and for its effectiveness.

4. COORDINATION ROLE OF NSDC

The methodology[1] requires NSDC to be developed so that it fulfills the role of a spatially coordinating instrument on regional and sector/institutional/spatially relevant strategies. For these purposes the document complies with the planning at a national level, carried out by all interested parties, not as a single act, but as a continuous procedure of complicity from the outset of its production, thus realizing the inter-institutional approach and imposing its role as a coordinating instrument /horizontal coordination effect/. Also, the NSDC will perform coordinating function in terms of its hierarchical territorial consistency on above-national territorial level /in the territory of the EU, South-East Europe, Cross-Border areas/, and the territories of the regions, counties and municipalities within the national space /vertical coordination effect/.

The coordination role of the NSDC reflects the role of the interdisciplinary composition of the drafting team, such as complex project coordinator, so as to meet the requirements for participation of sector departments and their competent bodies, professional circles, the academic community, business and civil society representatives, associations, NGOs, citizens.

The coordination role of NSDC must be achieved and evaluated by the application of a number of spatial indicators, criteria and indicators for the connection, estimation and consistency with the other documents for regional and sector development.

5. CONSIDERATION OF THE PRINCIPLES AND PROVISIONS OF THE EUROPEAN DOCUMENTS, PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR SPATIAL PLANNING

In the development of the NSDC it is also necessary to take into account the practice of the individual European countries in spatial planning at a national level, which is applicable in the Bulgarian conditions. From a methodological point of view, it is necessary to explore, generalize, and adapt into the specific conditions in our country the practice of the European countries showing the uniform treatment of the issues of town planning with the issues of regional development /in Germany – Raumordnungsgezet, in France – Amenagement de territoire, in Hungary – general law on regional planning and spatial planning, etc./

The absence of pan - European directives on spatial planning is compensated by the presence of common European principles and approaches, synthesized in many EU documents:

- ESDP – European Spatial Development Perspective adopted by CEMAT in Potsdam, 1999);
- GPSSDEC – Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent, adopted by SEMAT in Hannover, 2000);
- ESPON – European Spatial Planning Observation Network ;
- The new European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth Europe 2020, adopted in 2010;
- Gothenburg strategy on sustainable development;
- 4th and 5th Cohesion Report of the EU;
- Documents and agreements, fixing the development of large infrastructure projects and networks within the European space, such as the European transport corridors, gas and product pipelines, "the green belt", cultural corridors, etc.;
- Community Strategic Guidelines 2007-2013;
- Territorial Agenda of the European Union;
- Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, 2007;
- TOLEDO INFORMAL MINISTERIAL MEETING ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT DECLARATION on matters of integrated urban regeneration and development, 2010;
- European Convention on Landscape.

The documents "recommend the Member States to take account of the European dimension of spatial development in the coordination of policies, plans and national spatial development reports". The NSDC therefore shall make a step forward in the spatial integration and in "Europeanisation of national, regional and urban planning" in Bulgaria.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) recommends spatial development policy to be based on three main principles:

- Polycentric urban development and balanced system of cities and deepening of the partnership between urban and rural areas, between the town and the countryside.

- Application of integrated circuits for communications that can help the polycentric development in the territory of the EU and create opportunities for equal access to infrastructure and knowledge.
- Development and protection of nature and cultural heritage[1], which means the preservation and development of regional identity and maintenance of the natural and cultural diversity of the regions and cities of the EU in the era of globalization.

In the European documents cited above basic requirements for sustainable spatial planning and spatial development of the European continent are launched, such as:

- Promoting territorial cohesion through the balanced socio-economic development and improving competitiveness;
- Promoting development impulses generated by urban functions and improving the links between cities and villages;
- Creating more balanced conditions for transport access /incl. information and knowledge/;
- Reduction of offences on environment and conservation of natural resources and the natural heritage;
- Valorization of the cultural heritage as a factor for development;
- Development of energy resources in order to maintain the security and protection of the natural environment;
- Development of a quality and sustainable tourism;
- Preventive limit of the consequences of natural disasters;
- Study on development trends due to climate change;
- Development of the specific potential of the Bulgarian landscape.

In the context of the pan-European practice the NSDC should specify for Bulgaria that "spatial planning is the policy of cooperation and participation" and that "the wide range of structural and territorial measures within the framework of the policy of spatial planning creates the need for interdisciplinary integration and cooperation between the relevant political and administrative bodies. Their function is

expressed in providing a framework for transnational, interregional, and long-distance solutions, in overcoming the contradictions and increasing the synergetic effects".

From a methodological point of view, the NSDC highlights the importance of horizontal cooperation with sector policies, which have strong impacts on the territory /for example transport policy, agricultural policy, the policy on environmental protection/; and on the other hand, it focuses on vertical cooperation between different administrative levels, which must be organized in such a way that the regional/local authorities adapt their spatial planning to the measures taken at a higher level, and the national level adapts its own decisions to the plans and projects proposed by the regional/local level/pan-European methodological principle of reciprocity/.

The elaboration of NSDC must answer the question: which of the guiding principles and approaches of the European documents will be interpreted in the Bulgarian national spatial planning system and how the use of these documents as initial prerequisites in the field of spatial development will ensure the effective entry of national space in the spatial organization of the European continent.

6. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE NSDC AND THE DOCUMENTS FOR THE STRATEGIC PLANNING OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The development of NSDC clarifies its correlations with all documents for the strategic planning of the regional development and with sector strategies, plans and programmes at different territorial levels of planning.

7. CORRELATION BETWEEN THE NSDC AND THE NSRF

As a strategic document, NSDC synchronizes its spatial objectives and priorities with those of the NSRF. The objectives of the NSRF, which are spatially significant and have a direct relation to NSDC, are as follows:

- Main objective: "Achieving sustainable and balanced development of the regions in the Republic of Bulgaria" /incl. the tools and resources of NSDC/.
- Strategic objective 1: Achieving accelerated development of the Bulgarian regions and getting closer to the average levels of development of the regions in the EU. /In NSDC – by defining territories and modes of active spatial impact/;

- Strategic objective 2: Reducing inter-regional and intra-regional differences. /In NSDC – by stimulating and developing the internal territorial potential of regions and cities, on the basis of rational management of spatial resources/;
- Strategic objective 3: Development of territorial cooperation, neighbourhood and partnership to achieve the European territorial cohesion. /In NSDC – by reducing the spatial disparities/;
- The first priority in the NSRF: "Enhancing regional competitiveness and integrated urban development" has a direct relation to NSDC, and should be further developed with the methods of spatial planning. The following specific objectives are outlined within this priority, with a direct relationship to spatial and urban planning:
 - Specific objective 3: "The integrated urban development and the strengthening of the correlation between the city and the region" in the NSDC must develop into an effective spatial model for the functioning of the various urban centres as regards the development of their surrounding territories, taking into account the potential of settlements which are located in close proximity to major cities, by linking them in a hierarchical spatial network.
 - Specific objective 4: "Creating an attractive urban environment, restoration and renovation of urban areas[2], promoting clean urban public transport" in the NSDC should be realized by combining spatially significant activities which are directly related to the sustainable development of cities and regions – rehabilitation of old industrial areas, improvement of the urban environment in residential neighbourhoods, urbanization, increasing access to public services and education, introduction of environmentally sound technologies and systems for public transport, etc. In this respect, the country's and regional commitments to decrease the negative consequences of the global climate changes can also be supported by the NSDC.
- The second priority in the NSRF: "Development and modernization of the infrastructure to create conditions for growth and employment" is directly related to the issues of spatial planning and the identifying of infrastructural elements with national and supranational /European/ importance on our territory. It should receive comprehensive argumentation and specific territorial expression in the NSDC through the following specific objectives, with a direct relation to spatial and urban planning:
 - Specific objective 1: "Development and modernization of the elements of the regional and local transport infrastructure" in the NSDC shall focus on the national road and railway network, with

the purpose of improving the transport access at the regional level to the main transport corridors, as well as the access of economic activities to peripheral and backward areas.

- Specific objective 2: "The building and improvement of the ecological infrastructure" in the NSDC will direct the spatial planning towards the improvement of water supply and sewerage systems, waste management, the prevention of natural risks and the development of renewable energy sources in specific areas of the country.
- The third priority in the NSRF: "Improving the attractiveness and quality of life in the areas for the planning and development of sustainable tourism" also has a serious territorial dimension and requires specific treatment in the NSDC, in view of the negative effects on the environment of the recent tourist construction.
- Reasonably, specific objective 2, which has a direct relation to spatial planning, is based on this priority – "Achieving the sustainable development of tourism in the areas, preservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage." In this regard, the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage in the NSDC should be planned through the reinvention of its potential, as a stimulus for sustainable integrated regional and local development.
- The fourth priority in the NSRF: "The development of the cooperation for European territorial cohesion, deepening of the partnership and neighbourhood policies to achieve development", with its specific objective 1 – "Development of cross-border cooperation", has a direct relation to the spatial planning of border areas. The emphasis on "Europe without borders" is essential in the NSDC to overcome the structural problems of border and peripheral areas and put them in the focus of the European cohesion policy, through the improvement of the infrastructural links, development of joint spatial significant economic, social and cultural activities, management of risks, etc.

8. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THE NSDC AND OPRD

OPRD is oriented towards practical implementation of Priority 4 of the The national strategic reference framework – "Support for balanced territorial development" and has the following specific goals with a direct relation to the tasks of NSDC:

- Building a sustainable and dynamic urban centres connected with their less-urbanized peripheral territories;

- Mobilization of regional and local technical and institutional capacity and resources for the implementation of policies for regional development.

The strategy of the OPRD is to increase the attractiveness of the regions and municipalities and to reduce differences between them through five priority axes of particular importance for the NSDC, as follows:

- Sustainable and integrated urban development;
- Regional and local accessibility;
- Sustainable development of tourism;
- Local development and cooperation;
- Technical assistance.

This will be achieved through the improvement of industrial, residential, social, ecological and cultural environment of the city /central/ areas[2] and accessibility of the rural /peripheral/ areas by road, rail, information, engineering and other networks.

The following specific spatial planning features of OPRD play an important role and should be reflected in the NSDC:

- Urban centres and metropolitan areas as agents of development and a means of overcoming the intra-regional disparities;
- Investments targeting the urban centres and their adjacent areas to be balanced on a territorial principle;
- Realization of spatial codified approach to achieving integrated local and regional development in spatial terms;

From these characteristics of the OPRD the additional similarities with the NSDC become clear as well as the opportunities for refinement and development of its priorities through NSDC, namely:

- NSDC should specify the scope of the urban areas and urban cores should by clarifying the role of the towns – centres, and the benefit of their development for the adjacent territories.
- NSDC, as urban policy for small town - centres in rural /peripheral/ regions and for the construction of the polycentric model of urban development, will promote the improvement of interconnections between urban and rural areas, as specified in Community Strategic

Guidelines and the material from the Commission entitled "Cohesion policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions".

- The tourist spatial potential and the spatial treatment of tourism as a tool not only for regional and local development, but also as a serious urban factor, which reflects in the modern development of the national network of settlements.

9. CORRELATIONS OF NSDC TO OTHER OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND SECTORAL STRATEGIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

The measures of the Operational programme "Competitiveness" should be territorially localized in the NSDC. The task of NSDC is also to give feedback to the programme by pointing out the appropriate territorial basis for the realisation of interventions that can be taken into account in the selection criteria for the projects, in particular to assist the development of national research and development and the construction of appropriate business infrastructure, to promote business network, development of regional clusters and more spatial meaningful activities.

With the construction of the national transport infrastructure and the entry in the trans-European network, the Operational Programme "Transport" also has a direct impact on spatial development and spatial planning of the country. NSDC takes into account this impact and assesses the spatial impacts of particular operations and projects envisaged for the purposes of spatial planning, including road, rail, water and air transport, etc. Through NSDC, a better integration of the national transport network with that of the EU and neighbouring countries in South-East Europe and a better system of accessibility to all the territories is achieved.

The Operational programme "Environment" in the NSDC has a significant impact on the territorial coordination of measures for the protection and improvement of water resources, improvement and development of environmental infrastructure and waste management and soil protection, conservation and restoration of biodiversity and nature protection and environmentally sustainable spatial development. The indicative list of the major projects of the OP "Environment" by priority axis allows the assessment of the expected territorial impacts, reported in the NSDC. Conversely, as a result of the development of the NSDC, other additional measures and activities, relating to environmental protection, should be featured, specifying their territorial projections, aimed at better land management and implementation of previously made international commitments such as the Kyoto Protocol, the

Conventions for the Protection of Biodiversity, Combating Desertification and Climate change, and many others.

The National Strategic Plan for Rural Development, the Rural Development Programme and the National Programme for Fisheries and Aquaculture are also among the major national papers, which have a direct impact on the development of the NSDC in terms of sustainable rural development, through the spatial interpretation of the issues for agriculture, forestry, the food-processing sector, improving the quality of life, promoting employment opportunities, the preservation of the territorial resources and environmental protection in rural areas.

The sectoral strategies, prognoses, development plans and programmes, including education, health, social welfare, etc., are coordinated territorially in the NSDC, revealing the internal and external factors, conditions and prerequisites, measures and specific actions that balance or unbalance spatial development, organization and spatial planning, and have a positive or negative influence on the development of the public-serving and socio-economic systems. The object of special attention are the cross-cutting links in order to suggest a suitable integrated spatial approach to supplement the sectoral policies taking into consideration their territorial objectives, priorities and requirements. The integrative and coordinating role of the NSDC should be emphasized with respect to all spatially measurable sectoral projections and addressing them to the territorial structures.

The NSDC is directed primarily towards planning solutions and proposals for the positioning and development of sectoral projects, networks and facilities with a predominant importance for the development of the national territory and implementation of rapid economic and social growth; sustainable, balanced and polycentric development; priority in the multifunctional use of certain target, territorially limited and non-renewable resources, active and effective entry in the European space.

10. NSDC AND THE REGIONAL AND INTRA-REGIONAL INEQUALITIES

The reduction of inequalities between regions and within regions, which is enshrined as a goal in NSRF, should be further elaborated appropriately in the NSDC with the specific approaches of spatial planning. The spatial disproportion "Sofia and the Bulgaria desert" is a disturbing trend of the first decade of the 21st century, which must be overcome by the means of the NSDC, through various approaches of spatial balance of regional and urban development, such as stimulating the urban centres of the capital as balance factor and compensation of imbalances through government regulation of city planning.

In order to reduce the difference between NUTS2 regions, we should rely on other major cities in the country. Besides the three cities mentioned in ESPON with national/international functions Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas, the NSDC, together with the NSRF and the OPRD, should contribute to the expansion of this network by including cities such as Ruse, Stara Zagora, Pleven and others for a more balanced distribution over the national territory of cities with national functions and importance. In the future, through appropriate spatial policy and territorial promotion, Vidin, Montana and Vratsa may stand out as centres of the lagging north-west region and the town of Blagoevgrad - as a specific centre in the Southwest Bulgaria, competing with Thessaloniki and Skopje.

In the peripheral area spatial stimulation of available medium towns is necessary, using the NSDC toolbox through its accelerated development to compensate the lack of big cities and to have a beneficial impact on the disadvantaged rural territory. The NSDC should pay particular attention to such towns.

The proximity of the towns to the villages is another factor that should be used because it creates opportunities to improve the "town-village" relationship and the transformation of towns into supporting centres in the network of settlements, serving rural areas and in line with the Pan-European policy for sustainable development and planning of the European continent, which pays particular attention to small towns in the countryside and to strengthening the links of the rural areas with urban centres. The interactions between towns and villages are of strategic importance for regional policies and spatial development of the European continent and must comply with the NSDC of the Republic of Bulgaria.

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