

PhD thesis

DESIGNING A STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH FOR INTEGRATED AREA DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

by

Inge de Kort

Summary

Increasingly, it has become evident that spatial problems can no longer be resolved in isolation, but should be solved in conjunction with other development-related issues. As a consequence, interest in integrated area development is growing, and a more integrated planning approach is emerging. Compared to spatial projects of the past decade, the current integrated area development projects are broader, more integrated and more collaborative. However, the therefore required integrated, and more implementation-led and development-led, approach is still in its infancy. Although recent planning literature pays much of attention to planning approaches that consider the interaction process between the various stakeholders as a way strategically dealing with complex spatial problems, a strategic planning approach for integrated area development projects, and in particular those in a public-sector-dominated setting, is lacking. By developing a process design for strategic plan development in integrated area development projects, the contribution of this thesis is twofold: 1) it contributes to the development of a more strategic and integrated planning approach; and 2) it offers practitioners in integrated area development an outline of an appropriate strategic planning approach.

In this design-based research, a conceptual 'Integrated Area Development & Management' (IADM) approach has been developed based on extensive explorative research and insights from strategic plan development for integrated area development projects. This IADM approach was designed by adopting the reflective cycle (Andriessen, 2004; Van Aken, 2004), also called the intervention cycle, and thus involved carrying out the four steps: 'diagnosing the actual problem', 'designing a method', 'planning and implementing interventions' and 'reflecting on the results'. The design knowledge was based on eight interviews with academic and professional experts, a framework of analysis based on a literature study, two in-depth case studies including longitudinal observations, 21 stakeholder interviews and document analyses, and interventions in a third case study.

To diagnose the actual problem, first, an initial problem exploration was carried out based on previous research, planning literature and reports, and eight pilot interviews with academic and professional experts. To ease the readability, this initial problem exploration has already been outlined above.

Then, by conducting a literature study in spatial planning theories, insights were provided into the current understanding of strategic plan development. It was concluded that spatial developments are nowadays shaped through the collaboration and interaction of several stakeholders who are mutually dependent. The focus in spatial planning literature is particularly on planning approaches that adopt a stakeholder perspective and focus on the interaction process between the stakeholders. Based on an analysis of three planning approaches -communicative planning, interactive planning and strategic planning- it was argued that all three could be used to reflect on the process of strategic plan development for integrated area development projects, but that strategic planning was the most appropriate, in particular because of the attention given to power positions, interactions, contextual factors and implementation. For these reasons, it was argued that strategic planning theory should be used in this thesis. Strategic planning amounts to a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it (Bryson, 2004).

Subsequently, two analysis frameworks were developed. The first analysis framework was developed to describe plan development in general, and includes the three basic characteristics, namely 'stakeholders', 'interaction process' and 'context'. As a fourth element, perceived performance was included in order to be able to evaluate the plan development and deduce design knowledge from the case analyses. A second analysis framework was developed to describe to what extent the plan development is strategic. For this purpose, the ten elements of the strategic planning process model of

Bryson (2004) were used since this model is specified for the public sector. The elements are 'initial agreement', 'mandates', 'mission', 'external and internal environments', 'strategic issues', 'strategy formulation', 'strategy and plan review and adoption', 'vision of success', 'implementation' and 'strategy and planning process reassessment'.

Finally, by carrying out two in-depth case studies, insights were gained into how the plan development process of an integrated area development project evolves in practice, how the stakeholders perceive its performance and to what extent the plan development is strategic. For this purpose, two projects -Ijsselsprong in Zutphen en Ijsseldelta Zuid in Kampen- were analysed intensively over one year each. The integrated area development projects showed substantial similarities in the process of plan development and in conducting strategic activities. In both cases, a network of interdependent stakeholders were involved which, by definition, meant that collaborative efforts by multiple stakeholders were needed. These stakeholders had various interrelated goals in a specific geographic area and could only realise their own goals and interests through collaboration and joint inputs of resources. The stakeholders were willing to accomplish such extensive collaborative efforts because they believed that cooperation was the only way to solve their spatial issues and felt a sense of urgency in solving these issues. However, the complexity of the integrated area development projects, and the many interrelationships within each project, made it hard to grasp the general implications of each project. This led to a long initial stage of exploring the collaborative advantage and determining what the joint project could lead to before stakeholders were willing to formally agree to a strategic planning effort and show commitment to the project. To structure and facilitate discussions about the complex issues and the various interpretations of these issues by several stakeholders, and to guide the strategic project decisions through the political decision-making process, strong leadership by a project leader and political representatives was vital. Further, the plan development process was in each case dominated by legal procedures and other externally imposed mandates. Moreover, given the dynamic nature of plan development, with political decision-making and many external factors influencing it, plan development occurred in a highly iterative manner. Overall, the major elements of the plan development in the analysed cases correspond in essence to the strategic elements proposed by Bryson (2004). However, the findings do indicate a clear need to reorganise the strategic elements, to add some extra activities and to adjust the strategic planning process model for a collaborative and public-sector-dominated setting. The eight identified key aspects in designing a strategic plan development approach are:

- Collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders;
- Sense of urgency;
- Commitment;
- Long initial stage;
- Strong leadership;
- The many external factors that influence plan development;
- Strongly iterative plan development; and
- The many externally-imposed mandates that need to be satisfied.

The second step of the reflective cycle is to design a method. Based on the extensive explorative research component, a conceptual Integrated Area Development & Management (IADM) approach has been developed. This IADM approach is an interactive and action-oriented strategy for the collaborative plan development of integrated area development projects. The IADM approach is split into two components. The first component covers twelve IADM process steps that outline an appropriate strategic planning process for a joint integrated area development project, see Figure SE.1. The basis of these IADM process steps is the strategic planning process model of Bryson (2004). The major redesigns to Bryson's strategic planning process steps leading to the IADM process steps (component 1) include:

- Adding a strategic step to carry out a network analysis (IADM step 2);
- Transforming the activities into joint activities (IADM steps 1 - 12);
- Modifying the 'initial agreement' step into a looser 'initiative' step (IADM step 1);
- Specifying the strategic element 'external environment analysis' (IADM step 5);
- Rescheduling the strategic activities in a more iterative form (IADM steps 2 - 7); and
- Specifying the strategic element 'mandates' (IADM step 3).

The second component adds the IADM guidelines. This component is an addition to the strategic planning process model. The guidelines cover three factors that are important throughout the entire planning process, not just in a single step. These factors are dynamic, and therefore need continuous nursing and maintenance. As such, they are not included in the

IADM process steps but form an additional component to the IADM approach. These dynamic factors, that stakeholders should take into account and stimulate, cover a sense of urgency, commitment and strong leadership.

Finally, to complete the reflective cycle, interventions were implemented and, based on those interventions, the results were reflected upon. Since it was impossible to test the IADM approach in a laboratory or practical experiment, a quasi-experiment was executed in the form of a third case study. As such, a workshop was organised in the Avenue2 project in 's Hertogenbosch to analyse whether the conceptual IADM approach was user-friendly in practice. Based on these interventions, there were no indications of failure in the IADM approach and it was therefore argued that the conceptual IADM approach could be used in practice.

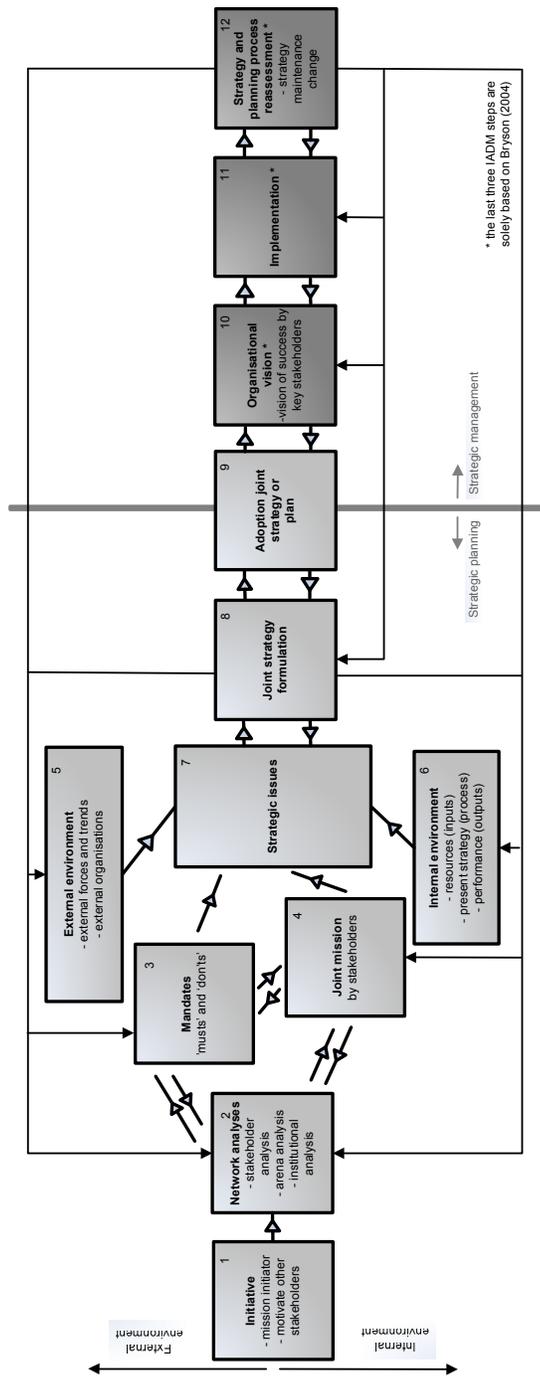


Figure SE.1: the IADM process steps