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Study of the Core Components of Spatial Development Plan Documents to Enhance the Spatial Planning Approach in Syria

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Abstract:

Achieving spatial development has become a primary goal for nations to ensure human comfort and well-being. Spatial planning offers a comprehensive view of the economy, environment, and society. This effort is directed towards preparing spatial development plans across all levels (national, regional, and local) to meet desired goals effectively. Thus, the preparation and formulation of spatial development plans must ensure clarity, precision, and feasibility for accurate and effective implementation by stakeholders.

This research examines spatial development plans and their preparation mechanisms in various countries. It identifies the components and elements found in plan documents and studies the interrelation and impact of these components on the clarity and decision-making processes of the plans. It proposes a general framework for the core components to be included in spatial development plans, including those in Syria, across different planning levels. Ultimately, the study offers findings and recommendations for preparing and drafting spatial development plan documents.

Key Words: Spatial Development, Spatial Development Plan, Components Of The Spatial Development Plan, Spatial Development Plan Document.

دراسة المكونات الأساسية لوثائق خطط التنمية المكانية في سبيل تعزيز نهج التخطيط المكاني في سورية

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الملخص:

أصبح تحقيق التنمية المكانية اليوم الهدف الذي تعمل نحوه الدول، لتحقيق راحة ورفاهية الإنسان، باعتبارها تقدم نظرة شمولية للاقتصاد والبيئة والمجتمع، وتُبذل الجهود لوضع خطط التنمية المكانية على جميع المستويات (الوطنية – الإقليمية – المحلية) لتحقيق الأهداف إنتاج خطة واضحة، ومفهومة بدقة، قابلة للتنفيذ من قبل المعنيين، بشكل صحيح وفعال.

وفي ضوء ما سبق؛ يدرس البحث خطط التنمية المكانية وآلية إعدادها في مجموعة من الدول، ويستخلص المكونات والعناصر التي تضمنتها وثائق الخطط، كما ويدرس علاقة وتأثير مكونات الخطة مع بعضها، ودور كل منها بوضوح الخطة واتخاذ القرارات التنموية، ويتوصل إلى إطار عام للمكونات الأساسية التي يمكن أن تتضمنها خطط التنمية المكانية، ومن ضمنها خطط التنمية المكانية في سورية، بما تشمله من مستويات تخطيطية معتمدة، وفي النهاية خلص البحث إلى مجموعة من النتائج والتوصيات لإعداد وصياغة وثائق خطط التنمية المكانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية المكانية، خطة التنمية المكانية، مكونات خطة التنمية المكانية، وثيقة الخطة.

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Introduction

Spatial development has become essential to optimize the resources of our environment, create better opportunities to meet population needs, and improve living standards. Since the emergence and evolution of the spatial development concept, nations have worked to develop spatial development plans at national, regional, and local levels to achieve desired developmental goals, giving special attention to the success of this process.

The success of spatial development plan preparation depends on several factors, most notably the clarity of planning phases and the inputs and outputs of each phase. These plans outline orientations and procedures that determine action paths in various economic and social fields, contributing to spatial development over a specific period. Clear components of these plans are the best guarantee for achieving sustainable work, ensuring stakeholder comprehension, and facilitating the proper implementation of spatial development initiatives.

1- Research Problem

The study focuses on the issue of unclear and undefined core components that should be included in the spatial development plan document. This affects the understanding and feasibility of the plan across different planning levels.

Spatial development plans are often prepared based on diverse experiences and methodologies, with varying formats depending on previous or similar experiences. This raises the question: What are the core components that any spatial development plan, regardless of its level, must include to ensure the clarity, realism, coherence, and logical interconnection necessary for stakeholders to understand and implement them? Additionally, how do these components relate to one another, influencing the preparation, formulation, and subsequent decisions based on the plan document?

2- Importance and Objectives of the Research

The importance of this research lies in its examination of the components of spatial development plans and their essential elements that ensure plan clarity. This clarity is crucial for plan implementation and success. The study also evaluates various spatial development plan models to analyze how different countries enhance their spatial planning outcomes. The objectives of this research are:

- Analyzing the components and elements of spatial development plans, highlighting their importance and interrelations, and their impact on the plan.
- Developing a set of fundamental reference components that spatial development plan documents must include at different spatial levels, ensuring coherence and efficiency.

3- Research Methodology and Materials

To achieve its goals, this research adopted the following approaches:

1. Literature Review: Reviewing theoretical studies on spatial development plans, their preparation stages, and components.
2. Case Studies: Examining a set of spatial development plans from various Arab and global countries to understand the components included in their documentation.
3. Analytical Framework: Developing an analytical framework outlining the fundamental components of spatial development plan documents.
4. Application to Syria: Analyzing local spatial planning literature and comparing it with the developed analytical framework.

The research adopted the following methodologies:

- Descriptive methodology: To study the theoretical literature and the content of spatial development plans from a selection of Arab and international countries.
- Comparative analytical methodology: To compare the contents of spatial development plans, aiming to identify their core components, impacts, and interrelations.
- Descriptive analytical methodology (applied section): To study the components of plans from selected spatial planning experiences in Syria and apply the derived analytical framework to these components.

4- Literature References:

4.1. The Book: Planning (Fundamentals and General Principles), Dr. Othman Mohammed Ghoneim (2008):

Ghoneim (2008) defined a development plan as a framework that includes details about the desired change, its scope, and all other specifications. He summarized the content of any development or improvement plan into the following elements:

- **Problems or Issues:** These are identified as the problems to be addressed, forming the foundation and starting point for formulating the goals, objectives, and purposes of the plan.
- **Objectives**: These are derived and formulated based on the problems faced by the community. They can be classified into two types: General objectives or goals: broad and comprehensive in nature and specific, measurable objectives: always expressed in quantitative terms.
- **Development Policies:** These are the guidelines and general rules that define and regulate the future course of action. They serve as directives that clarify the general strategy for achieving the objectives. These policies must be interconnected and consistent across various levels.
- **Implementation Procedures**: These refer to the execution steps and mechanisms that are detailed appropriately and aligned with the defined policies. They must be clear, specific, and free of contradictions or overlaps.
- **Budgets:** These represent the quantitative depiction of plans and are classified into three main types: Physical budgets: Covering goods and services. Human resource budgets: Quantitative estimates of human resources and their usage. Financial budgets: Comprising operational and investment budgets for medium and long terms.
- **Programs and Projects:** These are tools and means to achieve the objectives, policies, procedures, and budgets. They translate these elements into tangible reality. Programs and projects are selected based on their ability to achieve objectives within the available financial and technical capabilities.

4.2. Strategic Development Planning Guide for Cities and Towns in Palestine (Ministry of Local Government; Ministry of Planning, 2013):

The guide establishes the foundations for preparing, implementing, managing, monitoring, and updating strategic development plans at the local level. It divides the planning process into phases, with each plan containing the following components:

- **Assessment of the Current Situation:** Evaluating the current state of developmental fields, identifying problems, opportunities, and untapped potentials. Priority developmental issues are determined, focusing on the most urgent and significant factors influencing development. These priorities serve as guiding lines for the planning process and the formulation of developmental goals.
- **Vision and Developmental Goals:** A developmental vision represents a picture of the future and acts as a compass for strategic development planning and its outcomes. Developmental goals form the foundation for the execution plan. Measurement indicators

(quantitative and qualitative) are established to track goal achievement. These indicators facilitate decision-making regarding the most appropriate interventions to achieve the goals and are used for monitoring and evaluating the plan during its implementation.

- **Identification and Description of Projects:** Developmental projects are proposed and described, followed by a review to ensure alignment with the required developmental goals and priorities. The proposed projects are finalized, their components detailed, and their spatial and financial linkages defined.
- **Execution and Monitoring Plan:** The spatial description of developmental projects ensures they address local needs geographically. Proposed projects are categorized based on available resources and funding capabilities. Projects are scheduled within an integrated timeline, and the expected cost of each project and the responsible implementing entity are identified. A monitoring and evaluation matrix is developed, including a table linking developmental fields with goals, measurement indicators, their sources, measurement methods, and the responsible party for tracking and evaluation.

4.3. National Spatial Development Framework in Poland – 2030 (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2012):

This document presents a vision for the country's spatial development over the next twenty years. It outlines the objectives and directions of national spatial development policy and explains the principles and mechanisms for coordinating and implementing general development policies with significant regional impact. The framework includes the following components:

- **Conditions and Obligations:** These influenced work policy and the planning approach, such as integration with the European Union, sustainable development goals, and incorporating the maritime area into national spatial development considerations, which were absent in previous documents. Additionally, several laws regulating spatial planning in Poland were outlined.
- **Diagnosis:** Prepared as part of a previous document for this plan, it provided an overview of Poland's spatial development and an analysis of variables that formed the basis for evaluating the current situation. This was considered an integral part of the plan document.
- **Development Vision and Strategic Objective for Spatial Development Policy with Six Operational Goals:** Each goal included an initial diagnosis outlining the main spatial challenges, a description of problems, and proposed solutions to be addressed in the implementation plan.
- **Development Directions and Investment Priorities:** Identification of possible areas of activity spatially and sectorally. Guiding maps were produced to reflect Poland's spatial development perspective for 2030, highlighting promising areas for development, protection, and restriction.
- **Operational Plan**: It detailed tasks, timelines, responsible entities for execution, and the actions required to implement the plan.
- **Level and Sources of Funding**: The plan highlighted investment project trends, potential funding sources, and aspects of financial structure and expenditure scale. It emphasized that precise project cost estimations would be addressed in other operational documents due to global economic variability.
- **Measurement and Monitoring Indicators:** These indicators were designed to assess the progress of plan implementation.

The framework identified investment project directions without committing to specific projects for execution. It emphasized that project determination would be based on plans, programs, and other operational documents.

4.4. Spatial Development Plan for Tulkarm Governorate – Palestine – 2031 (Spatial Development Plan for Tulkarm Governorate - 2031, 2020):

This is a strategic spatial development plan for Tulkarm Governorate, focusing on key developmental issues, their solutions, and providing a general framework for action and priority setting. The plan includes:

- **Diagnostic Report on Spatial Characteristics and General Status:** This includes the analysis and evaluation of the four key sectors (infrastructure, governance and good administration, the social sector, and the economic sector). It identifies priority developmental issues that guide the planning process and shape developmental goals.
- **Development Framework:** It encompasses the developmental vision and goals defined after prioritizing key issues. A set of goals is proposed to advance various developmental sectors and assist in making informed decisions regarding project selection to achieve these goals.
- **Development Indicators for Goals:** Indicators are established to measure the achievement of each goal, specifying its current value, source, and measurement tool.
- **Proposed Projects and Their Relation to Regional/National Development Programs:** Projects are selected to meet needs and achieve goals linked to developmental issues and the future vision. These are grounded in available resources and constraints that might affect their spatial and financial descriptions.
- **Execution, Monitoring, and Evaluation Plan:** This includes estimating the cost of each project, scheduling implementation timelines, identifying responsible implementing and funding bodies, and assigning entities to monitor and evaluate progress based on indicators measuring goal achievement.
- **Guiding Spatial Framework:** This defines spatial development directions using a spatial guidance map for the governorate, created based on the outcomes of strategic analyses of developmental fields and diagnostic planning outputs.

Regional-Level Study of Spatial Development Plans in Iraq:

The regional spatial development plan is defined as a dual-document work plan. The first document is a written explanation of main ideas, objectives, policies, and implementation methods. The second document contains maps specifying land uses with a defined scale appropriate to the planned spatial area. These maps translate the first document into practical and spatial reality through phases. The plan addresses economic, social, and urban aspects, proposing future solutions to ensure optimal resource development in coordination with adjacent provinces and administrative units. This aligns with the regional strategy framework prepared under the perspective of the National Development Plan (Ibrahim, Adel Hassan Jassim, & Mustafa Abdul Jalil Ibrahim, 2018, p. 4).

Strategic Plan Preparation Guide:

The scientific guide for preparing a strategic plan outlines its preparation stages and components. In addition to the previously mentioned plan components, it emphasizes the necessity of defining its key references, such as national policies, vision, and other influential references (Qabbani, 2020, p. 3).

Discussion of Reference Studies:

Content from spatial development plan documents was compared to identify commonalities among them, as summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Contents of Spatial Development Plans

Plan Contents	1	2	3	4
Study Level	General	General	National	Local
Problems and Issues	√	√	√	√
Development Vision		√	√	√
Development Goals	√	√	√	√
Development Policies	√		√	
Programs and Projects	√	√		√
Budgets and Funding	√	√	√	√
Execution Plan	√	√	√	√
Monitoring and Evaluation Plan		√	√	√
Development Directions		√	√	√
Development Priorities		√	√	√
Reference Frameworks			√	

Source by author the researcher based on previous studies.

Key Observations:

The findings reveal variation in the components included in spatial development plan documents. Most plans involved analysis of the current situation and the development and guidance framework for spatial development. However, not all plans included project planning, execution, and monitoring within the document itself; these were often treated as subsequent stages.

In some countries, spatial development plans are detailed by allocating lands and sites for proposed projects. However, some argue that this approach is inflexible and difficult to adapt to changes. It does not account for significant uncertainty in spatial development and struggles with amendments in case of unexpected developments. Adopting policies based on criteria that define objectives for specific types or general areas of development is considered a highly effective way to manage potential changes (United Nations, 2008, p. 23).

Determining the components of spatial development plans is influenced by several factors, such as the expertise and experience of the team, laws, references, methodologies, and available resources. Thus, plan contents may be divided into multiple sections based on their nature, purpose, and impact. These may be consolidated into a single document or treated as sequential files and documents, ensuring clarity and integration of elements, especially those interrelated.

5. Theoretical Background:

5.1. Spatial Development Plan:

Spatial development is defined (Al-Azzawi, 2016, p. 185) as every developmental goal that requires planning, guiding efforts, and organizing them to achieve its objectives within a specific timeframe. A well-studied plan ensures the achievement of desired developmental outcomes. Similarly, spatial development, like other development plans, necessitates spatial planning, culminating in a spatial development plan. According to the European Union, a spatial development plan is defined as:

"A set of documents indicating strategic directions for developing a specific geographical area. It outlines policies, priorities, programs, and land-use allocations in line with strategic directions. These plans influence the distribution of human resources and activities across areas of varying scales. Spatial plans can be developed at different planning levels, such as national spatial planning, regional spatial planning, local spatial planning, or even multi-national spatial planning within regions like the European Union." (European Commission, 2024).

Planning, as a procedural activity, aims to create specific changes, while the plan acts as the framework detailing the type, scale, and precise specifications of the desired change (Ghoneim, Planning (Fundamentals and General Principles), 2008, p. 107).

A spatial development plan, therefore, serves as a theoretical tool translating the practical aspects of spatial planning. Its careful construction and formulation influence the clarity of the necessary steps for implementation, ultimately aiding in achieving the goals aligned with the development objectives of the targeted area.

Stages of a Spatial Development Plan:

According to Ghoneim (Planning (Fundamentals and General Principles), 2008, pp. 81–104), the spatial development plan process consists of three main stages:

1-Preparation, Documentation, and Approval of the Plan:

This includes sub-phases such as data collection, analysis, and future forecasting.

Alternatives are identified, and the optimal alternative is chosen.

Programs and projects are planned, and the plan document is drafted and discussed.

The plan is submitted to the official authorities (national, regional, or local level) for approval and endorsement.

2-Plan Execution Phase: This involves studying implementation procedures, securing financing for the plan, and initiating its execution.

3-Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Phase: The implementation of the plan is monitored, and its achievement of objectives is evaluated.

Positive or negative deviations occurring during implementation are identified, and necessary adjustments are made.

5.2. Components of a Spatial Development Plan:

The scientific methodologies for preparing spatial development plans vary, but the content of such plans, across their stages and spatial levels, should address several fundamental questions (Ministry of Local Government; Ministry of Planning, 2013, p. 3):

Where are we now?

Where do we want to go?

How do we get there?

What will help us get there?

Have we achieved what we aimed for?

Based on these questions, the main components of spatial development plans can be identified as follows (Maqsood, 2018, p. 111–112):

Analysis of the Current Situation: Assessing the local community's economic and social realities, identifying problems and needs.

Objectives: Defining the goals to be achieved within the plan's timeframe.

Programs and Projects: Outlining the programs and projects adopted by the plan to achieve its objectives, particularly focusing on investments and their results.

Figure 1: Stages of a Spatial Development Plan
Source: by author based on previous studies.

5.3. Levels of Spatial Development Plans:

Structuring the planning process across interconnected spatial levels is a fundamental step in making optimal decisions for achieving development. This is done by developing appropriate visions, strategies, and spatial plans (Regional Planning Authority; High Institute for Regional Planning, 2020, p. 8).

The relationship between these levels is sequential, starting at the national level by setting the state's general orientations and policies. These are then translated to the regional level, where national orientations are localized, and finally to the local level, which includes the detailed implementation of regional orientations.

Coordination across these levels is essential within an integrated framework. Each spatial level has specific characteristics that reflect the geographic scope of its impact and the degree of detail or comprehensiveness of its input and output data.

As Ghoneim (2008, p. 52) explains, "The methodology and stages for preparing plans remain consistent, whether it's a local city plan or one for an entire state or country. Differences lie in the scope, scale, timeframe, data availability, and number of variables within the plan's scope."

Spatial development plans can be classified into the following levels:

National Level: Covers the entire country.

Regional Level: Focuses on administrative divisions or regions within a single country.

L**ocal Level:** Targets population centers such as cities, towns, or specific parts thereof.

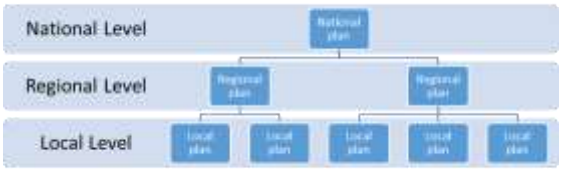

Figure 2: Levels of Spatial Development Plans
Source: by author based on previous studies**.**

5.4. The Role and Impact of Spatial Development Plan Components at Different Levels:

Preparing a spatial development plan is a structured process comprising "interconnected, harmonized components that work together through defined relationships and communication channels to achieve a specific goal by processing inputs and performing operations to produce useful outputs" (Al-Samarrai and Al-Zoghbi, 2004, p. 30).

Spatial development plan components can thus be categorized as inputs interacting based on their roles to generate outputs that meet the planning process objectives, and consequently, the goals of the spatial development plan.

Moreover, the components of spatial development plans across spatial levels intersect and overlap due to the interdependent relationship between levels. For instance, the outputs of a higher-level plan often serve as inputs directing and defining the objectives and orientations of lower-level plans. This requires coherence and alignment among the plans at different levels.

The relationship between inputs and outputs of spatial development plans across levels (national, regional, and local) can be illustrated in the following diagram:

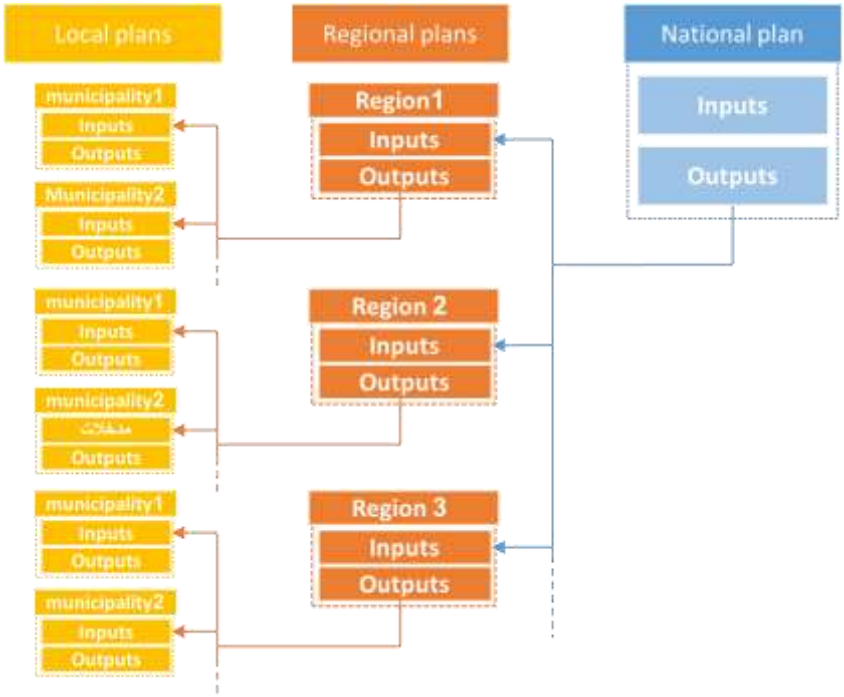

Figure 3: The relationship between inputs and outputs of spatial development plans across levels.
Source: by author based on previous studies**.**

6-Derving the Core and Detailed components of Spatial Development Plans

Based on reference studies that examined the content of spatial development plans in various countries and their operational guides, as well as the theoretical background of this research, common elements with shared frameworks were identified. The core components of spatial development plans, in general, are summarized as follows:

Figure 4: Core Components of Spatial Development Plans

Source: by author

Each core component includes several detailed sub-components, as outlined below:

Table 2: Detailed Components of Spatial Development Plans

Plan Components	Core Framework	Detailed Sub-Components
Analytical Framework	Current Situation Analysis	Available Resources, Key Problems and Issues, Current and Future Needs, Current Situation Indicators
Reference Framework	Guidelines and Reference Documents	Constitution, Laws and Regulations, Political and Economic Directions, International Agreements, Outcomes of Previous Plans
Developmental Framework	Development Vision	General Goals, Detailed Goals, Goal Measurement Indicators, Developmental Strategies, Development Policies
Guidance Framework	Development Directions Development Priorities	
Program and Project Planning	Evaluation and Selection of Projects	
Execution Framework	Execution Planning	Timeline, Execution Priorities, Budgets, Implementation Procedures
Monitoring and Evaluation	Performance Measurement Indicators	

Source: by author based on previous studies**.**

The role of these components was studied to understand how each core framework contributes outputs that influence other components within a spatial development plan. The following findings were derived:

1-Analytical Framework:

- Current Situation Analysis: Identifies spatial characteristics, resources, and current and future needs. It also highlights the problems and developmental issues in the area, ranking them by urgency and importance.
- Current Situation Indicators: Establish measurable indicators to assess the developmental status and identify the scale of issues faced.

2-Reference Framework:

The preparation of spatial development plans is influenced by higher-level reference documents and guiding principles, such as:

- Constitution: Ensures alignment with the rights, duties, and provisions outlined.
- Laws and Regulations: Defines standards and relationships among stakeholders.
-Political and Economic Directions: Sets policies for achieving goals.
-International Agreements: Provides commitments and requirements for specific objectives.
-Outcomes of Higher-Level Plans: Offers directives and ensures consistency.

The impact of these determinants varies based on their level of obligation, and they can be classified into fully binding and relatively binding categories. Certain laws serve as examples of relatively binding determinants that may be developed or modified during the planning process.

Figure (5) illustrates the core and detailed components of the analytical and reference frameworks and their respective impacts.

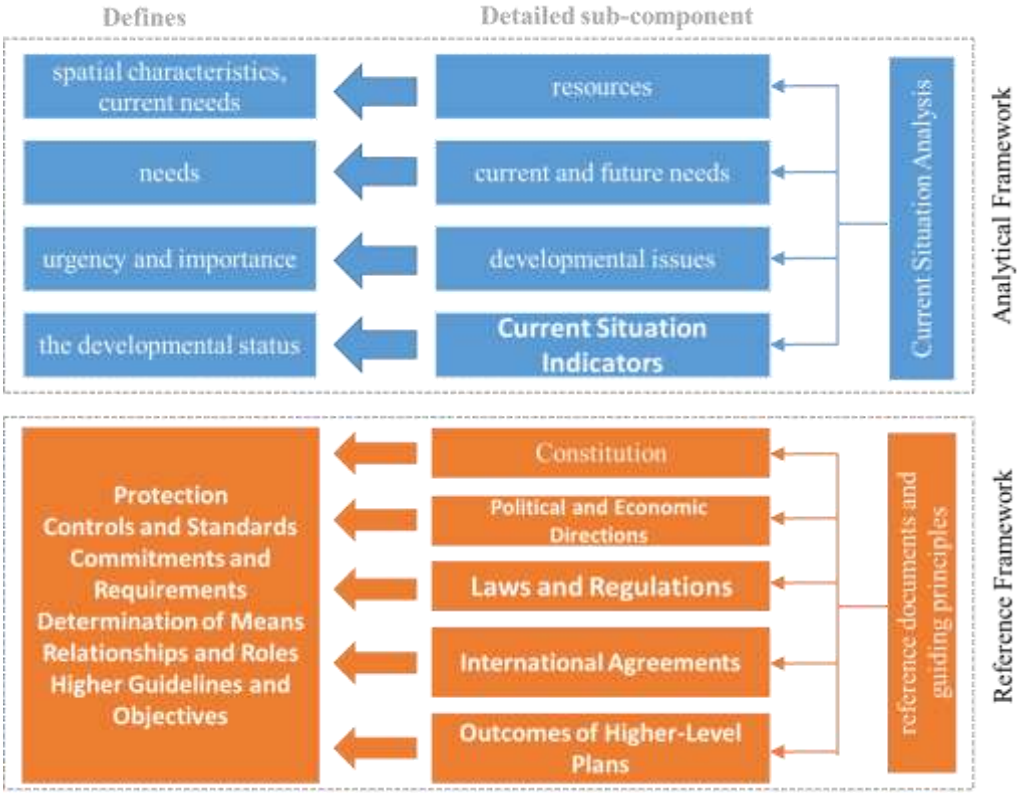

Figure 5: Core and Detailed Components of the Analytical and Reference Frameworks and Their Impact

Source: by author

3-Developmental Framework:

It includes several sub-components aimed at ensuring that the features of development are well-defined, clear, and organized into achievable steps. This involves formulating a spatial vision that provides an image of the area's future, along with general and specific objectives to realize this vision and their measurement indicators. Developmental strategies and policies are then established to guide and regulate the workflow, ensuring the objectives are achieved.

4-Guidance Framework:

The guidance framework serves as an output that summarizes and regulates the process of making developmental decisions related to the area for which the plan was created. It must be clear and specific to ensure that executive entities can understand and adhere to it. It primarily includes:

Developmental Directions: These define the main pathways (sectoral and spatial) for spatial development that should be followed. Their determination is significantly influenced by the unique characteristics and available spatial resources of the area.

Developmental Priorities: These establish the required order of spatial development directions (sectoral and spatial), influenced by the most urgent developmental issues.

This framework produces guidance maps that define future spatial development, including permissible areas, restricted and protected areas, and promising areas for development.

Figure (6) illustrates the core and detailed components of the Developmental and Guidance frameworks and their respective impacts.

Figure 6: Core and Detailed Components of the Developmental and Guidance Frameworks and Their Impact
Source: by author.

5-Program and Project Planning:
This involves identifying existing and proposed programs and projects, classifying and evaluating them to ensure alignment with the specified spatial development directions, and selecting the most suitable ones. This process is primarily based on the plan's guidance framework, which defines spatial and sectoral priorities and directions. It determines the form and nature of activities that the selected projects should address, whether they are new projects or the development of existing ones.

6-Execution Framework:
Develops a timeline for plan implementation based on project priorities and available resources.
Defines procedures and allocates budgets for execution.

7-Monitoring and Evaluation:
This includes identifying measurement indicators to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan, enabling the assessment of how well the plan achieves its objectives during execution. It also provides feedback to the relevant stakeholders, allowing them to decide

whether to continue with the plan or modify it as necessary based on emerging changes and results.

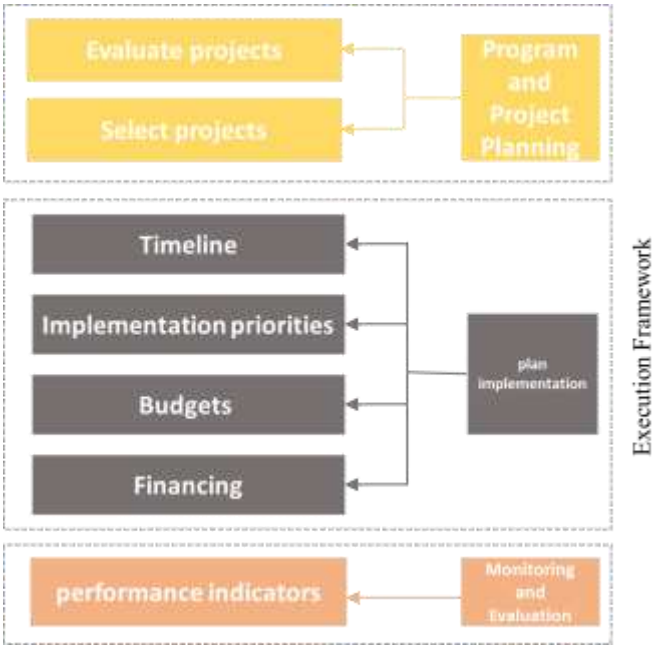

Figure 7: Detailed Components of the Execution Framework
Source: by author.

From the above, we find that the components of a spatial development plan are interconnected through multiple influence relationships. Each component impacts and is impacted by other components. For instance: The analytical and reference frameworks influence the development of the developmental and guidance frameworks by shaping future projections, objectives, their scope, and their feasibility based on available resources and the characteristics of the area.

The developmental and guidance frameworks regulate decision-making processes and implementation procedures, particularly in planning and selecting projects and setting execution priorities, which must follow clear and defined standards.

During the formulation of the plan, these elements and components should collectively present a comprehensive and sequential picture to ensure the plan's content is understood and its objectives are achievable. Studying the influence of plan components allows us to determine the significance of each component in the overall plan structure, thereby identifying the core components that must be included in the plan document.

The figure /8/ illustrates the connections between the core and sub-components, as well as the elements influencing them. These relationships can vary depending on the specific plan.

The figure shows the interrelation and influence of spatial development plan components without presenting a chronological sequence, as the stages may overlap or be completed sequentially depending on the methodology used in preparing the plan.

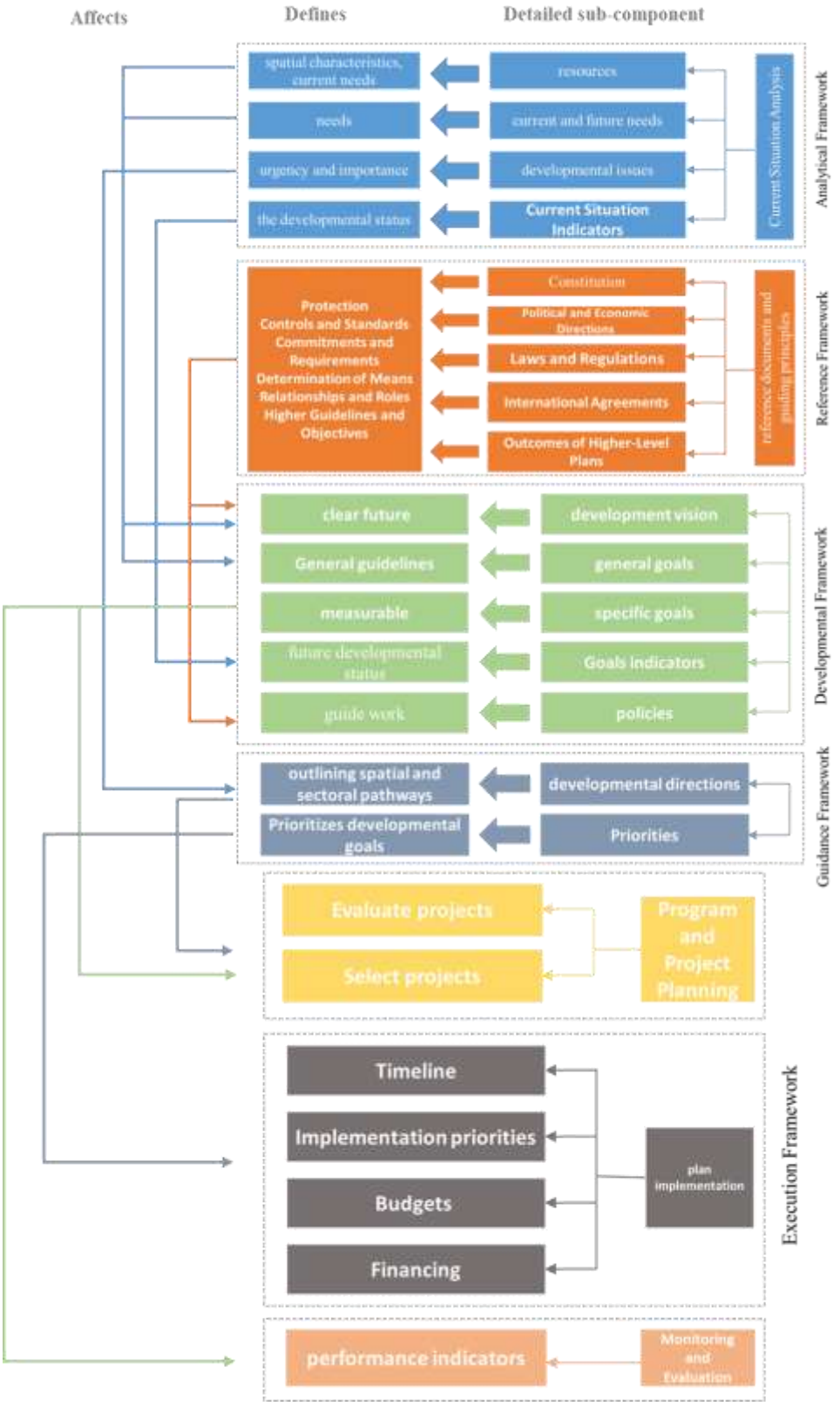

Figure 8: Relationship Between Components and Elements of Spatial Development Plans
Source: by author.

These components and their relationships can be applied to spatial planning levels as follows:

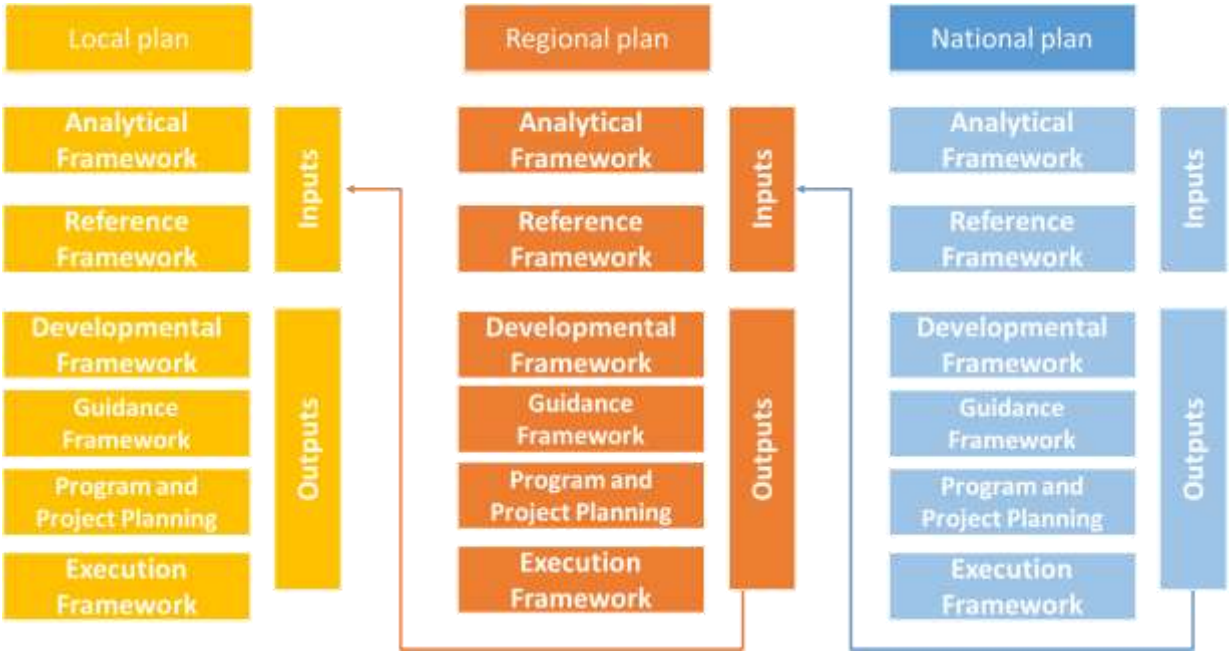

Figure 9: Components of Spatial Development Plans According to Planning Levels
Source: by author.

6. Case Study Analysis

(Components of Spatial Development Plans in Syria)

Spatial planning in Syria operates at three main levels: national, regional, and local. Various entities collaborate to prepare these plans in a coordinated and harmonious manner.

Since the concept of spatial planning was introduced into the planning process in Syria, several spatial studies and plans have been developed, differing in content and components. These plans have relied on the expertise and alignment of the respective planning teams and have been presented in various formats. Following the enactment of the Regional Planning Law in 2010, the **Regional Planning Authority** initiated the organization and standardization of spatial planning studies. A guide for preparing spatial studies was developed, and efforts began on projects like the **National Framework for Regional Planning** and the **Regional Plan for the Coastal Region.**

The study examines the components and elements of spatial plans from Syrian spatial planning experiences, along with the guide for spatial study preparation as a reference document. These are compared with the core and detailed components identified in general spatial development plans**.**

6.1. Guide for Preparing Spatial Studies in Syria (Regional Planning Commission; High Institute for Regional Planning, 2020)

The guide was developed to enhance the spatial planning approach in Syria within the framework of balanced and sustainable development, aligned with Article 10 of Law No. 26 of 2010, the Regional Planning Law.

The guide aims to achieve several objectives, including:

- Organizing and activating spatial planning procedures in Syria at various levels (national, regional, and local).
- Defining relationships between the entities involved in spatial planning to ensure optimal coordination and integration.
- Outlining general and detailed inputs and outputs for regional and structural plans.

The guide's methodology is based on international and national studies and the findings of Syria's National Regional Planning Framework. It adopts specific standards and outputs for each planning level.

Key Sections of the Guide:

- **Spatial Diagnosis:** Analyzing data, identifying distinctive characteristics, regional capabilities, constraints, key issues, and current state indicators.
- **Vision and Development Strategies:** Establishing long-term goals based on factors like developmental challenges, planning frameworks, and global development trends. Goals are divided into four axes (Administrative and governance development -Local economy -Human development -Balanced and environmental development).
- **Development Directions and Scenarios**: Defining the regional planning approach, developing scenarios, and selecting an approved scenario.
- **Study and Reporting Programs for Implementation:** Outlining steps to develop the approved scenario into an actionable regional plan, prioritizing projects, evaluating funding sources, and organizing selected projects over 3–5 years.
- **Tracking, Implementation, and Monitoring:** Initiating the implementation phase to ensure planned projects are executed according to the approved regional plan.

Although the guide provides a methodology for regional and structural planning studies, it does not mandate the inclusion of spatial plan components in official documents or establish specific evaluation and monitoring indicators, which are considered post-implementation activities.

6.2. Regional Spatial Development Plan for the Eastern Region – 2008 (Municipal Administration Modernization Program, MAM, 2008)

Prepared under the European Union's Municipal Administration Modernization (MAM) program, this plan focused on the Eastern Region (Raqqa, Hassakeh, Deir Ezzor). The plan consisted of two volumes:

Volume 1 - Written Overview:

- **Context and Methodology**: Included a review of reference plans and frameworks influencing the plan (e.g., the 10th Five-Year Plan, Syria's regional planning objectives, MAM's key planning goals).
- **General Description:** Highlighted historical, geographical, social, and economic aspects, positioning the region in a broader national context.
- **Strategic Development Framework**: Built on the 10th Five-Year Plan, incorporating 17 regional development strategies, identifying drivers of development, and establishing a vision for the future.
- **SWOT Analysis:** Provided data collection and analysis, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- **Key Issues and Challenges:** Ranked 10 main challenges within three categories: natural conditions, socio-economic conditions, and regional characteristics.
- **Development Strategies and Regional Plan:** Completed the strategic framework with proposed strategies, measures, and a regional plan envisioning 2025.

- **Follow-Up Actions**: Outlined necessary actions (who, what, and when) after plan approval.
- **Priority Projects and Activities:** Listed projects classified into four categories, organized into matrices with project descriptions, locations, and proposed next steps.

Volume 2 - Atlas: Provided detailed data summaries and thematic maps.

6.3. Regional Plan for Rural Damascus (General Company for Engineering Studies, 2012)

The regional planning study for Rural Damascus was conducted in three stages: (data collection – diagnostic analysis, expected capabilities, and scenarios – balanced regional strategies).

The first stage documents included a description of the current situation data collected, while the second stage documents contained the results of the analysis and diagnosis of the current situation, identification of problems, opportunities, trends, and the development of developmental scenarios. The final report of the study included the following:

- **Key Issues and Analytical Points:** A summarized focus on some key issues that open opportunities for regional work (spatial land analysis – regional segmentation – opportunities and challenges – proposed trends – projections and forecasts).
- **Development Policies** for the Approved Scenario and its Developmental Indicators**.**
- **Developmental Strategies:** Included identifying balanced regional development goals and their dimensions (economic – social – environmental – strategic), and work strategies in thematic areas (development poles and centers – major industrial activities – technical logistics activities – tourism strategies – economic activities and employment opportunities – urban development – regional environmental strategies – education, health, culture, sports, and recreation – agricultural strategies – resource protection and disaster management – renewable energy – vital and strategic projects).
- **Regional Development Directions:** Included spatial and sectoral directions for the form and type of proposed development for parts of the region, aligning with its capabilities and characteristics, along with spatial distribution maps and land-use and protection plans, culminating in the proposed regional guidance plan.
- **Priority Spatial Interventions:** Identified priority areas for work and included developmental projects within the proposed regional guidance plan through several operational frameworks.
- **Development Projects:** Proposed and spatially positioned vital projects based on developmental indicators, paving the way for subsequent structural studies.
- **Execution and Timelines:** Proposed a set of plans and measures for Rural Damascus in full coordination with Damascus, arranged by priority, without addressing funding sources.

6.4. Regional Plan for the Coastal Region (General Company for Engineering Studies; Regional Planning Commission, 2022)

The coastal region study was conducted in three stages: (data collection – diagnostic and sectoral analysis – development of the planning alternative).

The adopted regional plan document included the following:

- **Approved Spatial Development Scenario** in the study.
- **Main and Sub Goals:** Nine main goals were identified to achieve the developmental vision.
- **Development Policies** for the Approved Scenario.

- **Developmental Strategies:** Included identifying work foundations and strategies in thematic areas outlined in the plan (social – agricultural and rural – tourism and cultural – urban, infrastructure, and services – economic – environmental – natural resources).
- **Regional Development Directions:** Included spatial and sectoral directions for the form and type of proposed development for each part of the region, aligning with its capabilities and characteristics, along with guidance maps specifying opportunities, protection zones, and permissible areas.
- **Priority Spatial Interventions:** Identified priority areas for intervention and supported them with developmental projects during the project planning process.
  - **Development Projects:** Proposed projects by sector and assessed their alignment with the plan's goals and sustainable development objectives, evaluated their strategic environmental impact, and selected appropriate projects for spatial distribution in the region to achieve the plan's objectives.
  - **Implementation of the Balanced Development Plan:** Included the timeline, priority execution plans, and strategies for implementation and funding sources.
  - **Regional Development Indicators:** Derived from analyzing the current situation and future projections, these indicators measured performance in achieving progress during the implementation of the regional development plan.

The first two stages of the study involved analysis and diagnostics of the spatial situation and defining the plan's reference frameworks. These were not included in the plan document but were considered separate previous documents. They resulted in identifying priority issues, strengths, weaknesses, the regional development vision, goals, and the development and selection of scenarios.

The **regional plan** was considered the output of the third stage (Development of the Planning Alternative) and served as the document discussed and approved. However, this approach may affect the understanding of the integrated and sequential elements of the plan. A new document could be prepared, including a summary of the analytical and reference frameworks that formed the basis of the plan, in addition to its current contents.

By comparing the content of spatial plans as mentioned in the planning studies guide and the spatial planning studies outlined above with the analytical framework derived for the components of spatial development plans in **Table 2** and **Figure 8**, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Table 3: Comparison of Spatial Development Plan Components in Syria

Plan Components	Guide	Eastern Region	Rural Damascus	Coastal Region
Analytical Framework	√	√	Separate Document	Separate Document
Reference Framework	√	√	-	Separate Document
Development Framework	√	√	√	√
Guidance Framework	√	√	√	√
Project Planning	√		√	√
Execution Planning	√	-	Partially	√
Monitoring and Evaluation	-	-	-	√

The comparison highlights differences in the inclusion and format of plan components across Syrian spatial development plans. Some components, such as monitoring and evaluation, are often excluded or treated as separate stages, while other elements are incorporated into

supplementary documents rather than the primary plan. These findings suggest a need for clearer guidelines and integration across planning levels to ensure consistent, comprehensive spatial planning in Syria.

Findings:

The research studied the theoretical foundations for preparing spatial development plan documents, analyzed international models to understand how countries improve their spatial planning outcomes, and evaluated various spatial studies and plans in Syria. The key findings are as follows:

- Analysis of experiences revealed no standardized template for spatial plan components. The research proposed an integrated framework to understand, organize, and execute plans effectively.
- This framework enhances the organization, quality, and presentation of plans, significantly influencing their effectiveness and proper implementation.
- Each plan is influenced by the political and economic context of the country and the specificities of the region it is designed for. Despite variations in methodologies, most plans share a core set of essential elements that ensure clarity.
- The preparation of a comprehensive spatial plan depends on the resources and conditions available to planning teams. Under less favorable conditions, a simplified plan focusing on priorities and major challenges can act as a general framework for guiding development and urgent decision-making until more detailed plans can be created.
- The analytical, reference, developmental, and guidance frameworks are identified as the essential components of a spatial development plan. They provide a structured understanding of the developmental context and regulate the plan's implementation by executing entities.
- Planning documents often generate separate execution documents. This separation offers flexibility for plan updates when needed. It is essential to ensure that plans include adaptable components while maintaining strict guidelines for revising execution documents.
- The level of spatial planning affects the degree of detail required in the plan document. Spatial development plans must balance flexibility with sufficient detail to provide clear and actionable insights.
- The drafting phase of spatial development plans is crucial. Plans must be written and reviewed as clear, comprehensive documents by the planning team before submission to responsible authorities for approval, adoption, and execution.

Recommendations:

The research offers the following recommendations to enhance spatial planning practices in Syria:

- **Update the Spatial Planning Guide**: Revise the guide used by the Regional Planning Authority to specify the components that spatial plan documents should include. This will help direct and organize the preparation of spatial development plans as inputs and outputs for each planning level. It will also ensure alignment with other planning levels, clarify roles and responsibilities, and build a more integrated spatial planning approach.
- **Develop a Guideline for Plan Drafting and Terminology:** Create a guideline detailing specifications and principles for drafting spatial plan components clearly and effectively. Include precise definitions of planning terms (e.g., strategy, policy, mechanism) to ensure a shared understanding among all stakeholders and improve coordination to achieve plan objectives.

- **Adopt a Simplified Planning Approach:** In cases where conditions do not allow for comprehensive plans, adopt a simplified framework that includes essential rules for managing spatial development and making sound decisions.

Syria has made initial progress in enabling a spatial planning environment and has tested spatial studies and their approval. However, it is crucial to develop instructional and directive guides to promote spatial planning as a systematic approach. This ensures spatial plans are prepared and presented clearly to the authorities responsible for implementation and monitoring.

By applying these recommendations, Syria can establish a functional and adaptable framework for spatial development plans, paving the way for improved clarity, coordination, and execution in its spatial planning endeavors.

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