

Final Assignment Document

“Survey on the nationally accessible data sources relevant to the implementation of the Rio Conventions and preparation of information dataset and a guidebook text”

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1. Introduction

The GEF-funded Rio Conventions Project (full title: *Integrating Global Environmental Issues into Bulgaria's Regional Development Process*) aims at promoting a proactive integration of global environmental issues into the very process of regional and local development, as well as spatial planning, both of which are managed by Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW). This would be achieved by developing the capacity of MRDPW and Ministry of Environment and Water (MOEW) to integrate global environmental objectives into the regional and local development policies and practices, as well as into spatial planning documents.

One of the most important and problematic task, related to the aim, pointed above, is the information basis of the regional development and related issues such as data sources, level of detail of the data and system of the indicators, needed in the processes of analysis and monitoring of the regional development, its management and planning.

The prepared dataset aims to offer an overview of the basic sources of data and information, which could be used in the regional planning processes as well as to shortlist some of the major variables and indicators, needed in the analysis and monitoring of the regional development of the different administrative territorial units.

2. Methodology

The methodology which the assignment utilized “rests” upon a few basic principles, whose observance was from crucial importance for achievement of effective results. Those principles were:

- Regional planning is a complex system, which could be regarded as function of the resources (natural, economic and social) and their management and effective use in spatial context. That means that the data types, needed in the analysis and planning of the processes are different in their nature and genesis and that they presume the use of a balanced system of natural, social and economic datasets and indicators;
- The stakeholders in the regional planning system are different, therefore we have many different potential data deliverers;
- The approach and the methodology of the work was built upon a balance between “desktop” survey, qualitative methods (interviews, questionnaires) and analytical methods with respect to the nature of the data and its genesis

- The regional planning is a spatial based process, therefore in the survey was given priority to the data with spatial aspect;
- The achieved results should be understood not only by the high level professionals, but also by the experts with not so specialized background, which has been involved in the processes of regional planning in Bulgaria;

Based on the above principles, the following primary *Tasks* were completed:

- A detailed review of the plans for regional development at planning regions level and selective review of plans and strategies for lower level was conducted in order to be identified the types of data which are used, their complexity, nature, genesis and level of detail;
- A list of all institutions, which could be potential data deliverers was prepared and was organized in searchable dataset format;
- “Desktop” survey was conducted, aiming to identify the institutions and datasets which can be accessed through internet or published materials;
- The institutions which are the main data deliverers were visited and there was conducted a detailed survey using qualitative survey techniques;
- The gathered information was processed, analyzed and classified;
- Based on the above, a spreadsheet was developed (both in English and Bulgarian), which contains all necessary aspects of the different datasets. The spreadsheet is accompanied by explanations/legend, in order to facilitate its usage;
- An appropriate text for a project brochure (in Bulgarian) was prepared.

One of the most important tasks of the assignment was the definition of an appropriate selection criteria for the potential data deliverers. The used selection criteria relate to the scientific and policy requirements that variables and indicators should fulfil for the purposes of regional planning purposes. A list of the used criteria are listed below:

- **Validity** – Does the variable/indicator logically measure the ‘item of interest’?
- **Value and relevance** – Is the variable/indicator relevant and valuable to the community of regional planners, its activities and the outcomes?
- **Predictive** – Is the variable/indicator likely to give an early warning about a dangerous or irreversible problem?
- **Goal driven** – Is the variable/indicator likely to really measure progress to achieving the goal?
- **Sustainable** – Does the item of interest being measured have a long-term dimension, and is it prepared for stable territorial units?
- **Trend** – Is the indicator able to show trends over space and time?

- **Scope** – Does the variable/indicator deal with an issue relevant to the whole community (of regional planners) or only to a small part?
- **Understandable** – Is the meaning of the indicator readily apparent to regional planners?
- **Reliability** – Can the variable/indicator be measured reliably?
- **Accessible** – Is information about the variable/indicator readily available?
- **Timely** – Can the variable/indicator provide timely feedback to decision-makers?
- **Responsive** – Can changes in the item of interest be readily detected in the measurements?
- **Compatible** – Does the variable/indicator align in a clear way with the rest of variables/indicators in the set?

According to the criteria, listed above, only the governmental institutions could be regarded as official data deliverers. For information purposes in the datasheet were included also selected NGOs and Academic institutions.

Special attention was paid to the ***Basic Indicators*** (therefore, they are in a separate worksheet) for regional planning purposes (analysis and monitoring). They are used to simplify, quantify, communicate and create order within complex data. They provide information in such a way that both policy-makers and the public can understand and relate to it. They help us to monitor progress and trends in the time and space. Similarly, indicators can help us to compare results in different areas or countries and examine potential links between changing conditions, human behaviour and policy choices. Indicators can be either descriptive or normative; they may indicate quantitative or qualitative information and they may (or may not) be applicable to varying temporal and spatial dimensions. Probably the most essential criterion for an indicator is that it should enlighten its user and provide a sense of the issue being examined. An indicator can be a simple data point or variable, or can be a simplified value derived using a complex mathematical algorithm.

3. Structure of the dataset

The dataset is organized as group of related worksheets, developed in MS Excel format. The different fields are structured in order to meet the requirements of the relational database format, which makes easy the transformation of the dataset into more complex database format such as MS Access or Oracle (if it is needed).

In the first worksheet, entitled “Main”, all of the used abbreviations and terms are explained, which is making the dataset more accessible even for the people, who are not very familiar with this specific terminology. From this worksheet through hyperlinks are accessible the other five worksheets: Sources, Geography, Environment, Social-economic and Basic Indicators.

The worksheet **Sources** contains all necessary information regarding the selected basic data sources such as name of the institution/organization, type of the data, form of the dataset, contact details etc. The worksheet is containing 53 institutions, which are identified and selected as data sources for regional and spatial planning. They are divided into three major groups: Governmental (GOV), Non-governmental organizations (NGO) and Academic (ACD). The list of selected institutions is a result from the conducted survey, interviews and analysis of the existing strategic planning documents from all administrative levels (National Strategy for Regional Development, District Strategies for Regional Development, Regional and Municipal Plans for Regional Development).

The other four worksheets contain data (pre-selected and arranged by the consultant)- variables and indicators - which could be used directly in regional planning documents for quantitative overviews of the relative regional advantages of the different territorial units in Bulgaria, as well as to give a means to monitor regional development and inter-regional and inter- municipal cooperation in the country.

For each of the selected variables and indicators it is clearly indicated for which part of the regional planning it is applicable (with the sign “X” in the last two columns), namely: Analysis of the status of regional development or for the Monitoring of the processes, related to the regional planning and policy.

4. Conclusions

Bulgaria is just in the beginning of a long-term effort to develop a comprehensive set of data and indicators for integration of global environmental issues into the process of regional and local development. It is obvious that the country need a lot of work and efforts in order to improve the information basis, regarding not only the environmental issues, but the whole regional statistical system. Bulgaria still needs good information resources and indicators, necessary for the regional and spatial planning. This lack of information is one of the reasons that, very often, strategic documents look more like “wish lists”, rather than good tools for management of regional development and policy-making. Therefore, the development process of a good system for regional statistics and data provision must involve more stakeholders from wider backgrounds.

Of course, the selected variables and indicators are only indicative and the list is not pretending to be exhaustive. In order to develop a more reliable system of variables and indicators for regional planning purposes it is needed much larger and deeper research.

To summarize, the developed dataset with basic data sources, variables and indicators definitely will help the people, involved in the lower levels of regional, local and spatial planning systems, to gain an orientation in the complex and not very well structured system for data access and dissemination of information in Bulgaria. In addition, it could be used as a guiding and reference tool in preparation of comparable and balanced strategic planning documents.