

Spatial and Sectoral Planning in Saudi Arabia:

Joint and Divide points

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Abstract:

This paper examines the sectoral and spatial planning system in Saudi Arabia in light of its two main national plans. The Five-Year Development Plans coordinate to the national system of planning in various development sectors which includes health, education, social, infrastructure, and other supporting sectors of the nation's development. On the other side the National Spatial Strategy arranges the national framework of the spatial development. This comprises the layout of cities, towns, and villages along with their pattern of connections. The paper concludes with points of commonality and distractions, which would illustrate for planners as to where to best match their plans within this heterogeneity.

Key words: Spatial planning, development planning, regional planning, urban structure, governance.

Introduction:

National planning systems differ significantly from country to country. Many factors usually affect the approach that each nation follows. In addition to the political and ideological affiliation that guides the general country's system, there are different approaches which lead nation's development. Some developed countries as the USA has a well delegated system for development. Within its federal system, the US urban areas have their own identity and plan independently for their future with a high degree of autonomy. These urban areas consist of local units that are cities, which have their own government and representation system from their local communities. They also consist of regional units which comprise adjacent cities forming one structural unit with a governing body that varies significantly in its authoritative power from a state to another.

The European countries follow a different approach that conforms with the general trend toward the delegation of the national authority to units that are closer to the local communities. The European Commission has established its unique regional development initiative with Regional Development Agencies as a vehicle for local development. The European regional unit is different than the American structure because it usually includes a larger countryside area along with the main cities included to the region. England, for example, has nine RDAs where some of them include more than one major city and majority of the activities are contributed by small communities in the countryside.

In contrast, developing countries follow a general model which is usually recommended by the United Nation's experts. This model usually follows the nation's holistic approach of sectoral development. The well-known Five-Year Development Plans (FYDP) is the framework that is followed by developing countries on the basis of the United Nation Development Programme recommendations. This framework helps developing countries that lack the capacity to formulate its own development structure. It has been of great benefit for many countries to utilise their resources and organize their development structure. It has also been a mean to generate appropriate funds from the world community which are allocated for development programmes.

However, the case for Saudi Arabia is unique in various aspects. It is a relatively newly established country with vast abandoned land and unknown valued resources. The establishment of the country in 1932 has come with the initial efforts to explore its resources and build its institutional structure as a unified nation for the first time on its area of 2.25 million square kilometres. These conditions require immense efforts in many aspects to build a system to manage the country and to explore its resources. Soon after its establishment the oil was discovered and the resources started to come in increasing amounts. Simultaneously, the governance system has been established gradually. As it is the case with the developing countries, Saudi Arabia started seeking assistance from expert institutions in the industrial countries to build a planning system in 1958. After several experimentations of planning models, a ministry for planning was established in 1975 (Al-Kahtani, 2003).

The first official planning document in Saudi Arabia was published in 1970 which is the first FYDP. These plans have been published successfully until now. Meanwhile, development in Saudi Arabia is faster than other developing countries. The abundant oil resource has opened the opportunity for the Kingdom to spend generously on the various development sectors. Consequently, education and health development rates are high which places Saudi Arabia in the list of advanced countries while other developing countries are still struggling in these fields. The Saudi government has recognized its first official document that deals with the urban layout of the nation as a whole, which is called the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), in 2000. Therefore, the country now has two valid national frameworks for the spectrum of development. The sectors field of development planning is well established and periodically produced through the FYDP, which is the focal job for the Ministry of Economy and Planning. While the spatial field of development planning is represented by the NSS, which is prepared by the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs (MOMRA).

Sectoral development planning:

The FYDP in Saudi Arabia represents the main national system of planning for various development sectors. These sectors include health, education, social, infrastructure, and other supporting sectors of the nation's development. In the early phase, the FYDP concentrated to generate development resources into a small number of urban centres, beginning with three primary cities. The approach of the FYDPs was altered with the elapse of time and along with the realization of some of their development goals. They have begun directing their policies towards the spread of development throughout the country. This has not been merely a logical progression following development methods. Rather, it was needed to solve problems that began to

appear due to imbalance in the process of the regional development which has been increasing gradually and accelerating recently because of certain internal and external circumstances.

Important Regional development issues were raised in the third phase of Development Plans (1980-1985) and led by two government bodies in parallel; the Ministry of Economy and Planning (MEP), as a developmental planning agency and MOMRA as a physical planning agency. The policies which have been adopted for regional development in the FYDPs were general in the beginning, but not backed by any statutory mechanism. Therefore, they were unable to demonstrate any real effect because the central executing agencies had other necessary priorities which consumed their allocated resources.

In the latest FYDPs, some degree of integration has begun to appear between the national planning agency and the executive agency which is responsible for urban affairs, MOMRA. This integration has been particularly successful in concentrating development work in dispersed rural areas in the form of village clusters. Additionally, a new progress in the country's statute, which is represented in the approval of the Law of Regions, has helped as legal machinery to implement developmental programmes and policies for local and regional areas as it has been aimed in the Development Plans.

Even though the government made the diversification of the national economic base as a strategic goal for all the Development Plans about 35 years ago but this goal has not been met yet. Furthermore, the planning methodology has been affected by this fact. The FYDPs include strategies and policies based on approaches and methodologies that sometimes conflict each other, for example as these are in the fourth FYDP. In spite of the transformation that MEP has made in planning approaches, processes, and technical tools the main methodology of these plans remains in planning for the principal developmental sectors broken down into their different elements such as natural resources, productive sectors, service sectors and human resources.

Concurrently, FYDPs have laid out goals and policies to develop regions without reference to any practical or statutory instruments for the development sectors mentioned above. The key issue that the last published FYDP raised concerning development of the regions and urban centres was "Migration and Regional Inequality", which is an obvious effect of regional disparities. It does not mention regional inability to achieve a minimal standard of self-operation and self-financing and even their effective contribution to national economic development. Subsequently, the FYDPs strayed away from supportive policies to attain the various goals that the original plans contained, such as changing the structure of the country's economic base and diversifying its sources, decreasing the dependency on oil production and exportation as a main source of national income, developing human resources in addition to the major aim of realizing regional social and economical integration.

It can be argued that the current approach to produce development plans and policies for each development sector and programmes for each agency is a factor that directly contributes to the individual working style of the government agencies. Hence, we can say it is the absence of spatial integration. Due to these reasons MOMRA has begun a comprehensive development study that goes beyond the concept of growth centres which FYDPs adopted repeatedly in an abstract form. The more comprehensive and detailed information made available about the socio-economic characteristics of the whole population and about the development resources in the entire country. This has helped to establish development proposals that are more inclusive of the regional range.

Spatial development planning:

The National Spatial Strategy represents the main national framework of the spatial development planning. This infers the layout of cities, towns, and villages along with their pattern of connections. It was intended to deal with the persistent problem of regional disparities that was highlighted in the Development Plans. In addition to this, it was driven by the responsibilities of MOMRA as a central spatial planning agency. MOMRA has been working since early 1980s with the support of a consultant team from the Development Programme in the United Nations to reduce regional disparities with regard to development prospects. They have prepared the NSS which has been approved by the Council of Ministers on 28/8/2000.

NSS is a long-term policy guideline aimed at providing regional perspective in the development process to solve apparent regional disparities. This major aim makes it a tool that facilitates implementing the general strategic goals of the FYDPs. It states the broad guidelines for the country's spatial development and provides a spatial dimension for policies relevant to various sectors of development. The balance that has been brought by the NSS appears in its framework for the local and regional development strategies in a manner that

assures compatibility between national planning, which is sector-oriented, and local planning, which is physically oriented.

The NSS defines the guidelines, policies and optimal approaches necessary to achieve a spatially balanced development. More specifically the strategy defines the spatial development guidelines and policies that are consistent with the national development goals of economic efficiency and social equity. While economic efficiency is achieved through expanding opportunities for economic growth and diversification, social equity is achieved through the gradual spread of development from growing to lagging areas. Identified growth centres are expected to act as vehicles for the spatial transmission of such development.

The strategy has adopted the notion of development corridors as an essential instrument to manage long term spatial development, in order to promote integration between different areas of the national territory. It has also identified the most desirable and balanced hierarchy for urban settlements with the components of national, regional and local growth centres. Furthermore, the strategy emphasizes the importance to provide sustainable support for small and medium cities, which might become growth centres, capable to accommodate future population growth, and reduce their dependence on large cities.

The strategy realizes that inter-regional disparity in development is cumulative and a product of long term factors and correction of these imbalances can only be achieved in the long term. The length of time is necessary to realize the objectives of the strategy which will depend greatly on the level of resources allocated periodically for development projects that are necessary for rectifying regional imbalances and producing efficient coordination among execution agencies. The strategy has been intended to be implemented within the framework of the Five-Year National Development Plans. During each plan a set of growth centres will be selected for intensified development effort. As a long term strategy, periodical updates are expected in order to reflect any changes in priorities.

Regulatory and structural framework of development in Saudi Arabia

Governance is the major determinant of spatial structure. It represents the legal and administrative framework in which development procedures operate. The procedures for development are those expected to come from policies and plans for the regions and localities. Management of spatial and sectoral development planning at the national level may be described in three types (Arriyadh Development Authority 2005):

- (1) The first type is the spatial administrative framework which arranges for local and regional governance with the Ministry of Interior (MOI).
- (2) The second type is national development planning which is represented by five-yearly cross-sector national plans with the MEP.
- (3) The last type is concerned with spatial planning, which is carried out by or under the supervision of MOMRA for local and regional planning units in the country.

The governance in Saudi Arabia is organized through the Law of Regions (1992). Spatial development plans, on the other hand are tackled centrally by MOMRA through its NSS, with participation from regional municipalities via individual regional development strategies. Other agencies have recently initiated or are planning to develop regional strategies for their sector such as the authorities of investment and tourism. Plans and strategies of MOMRA, like all other government agencies, should be instructed by the national FYDP which are prepared by MEP.

The regions in Saudi Arabia are administratively managed by governors with municipalities headed by mayors. The administration of regions is organized by the Law of Regions, which vests the central reference for regional administration with the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Municipal organization however is totally separate at the level of central government represented by MOMRA. MOMRA has recently amended the structure of its regional and local agencies to work within the administrative and geographical organizations that have been set out by MOI for the regions. Accordingly each region has a governor who represents the MOI locally, and a mayor, who represents MOMRA and works under the supervision of the governor.

Every ministry or government agency that provides services to the regions is required by the Law of Regions to have a branch in each region. The head official at that branch is then required to report directly to the parent central agency and at the same time to operate in close coordination with the governor of the region. The projects and budget for each service agency (e.g. health, education, water, etc.) are discussed in the regional

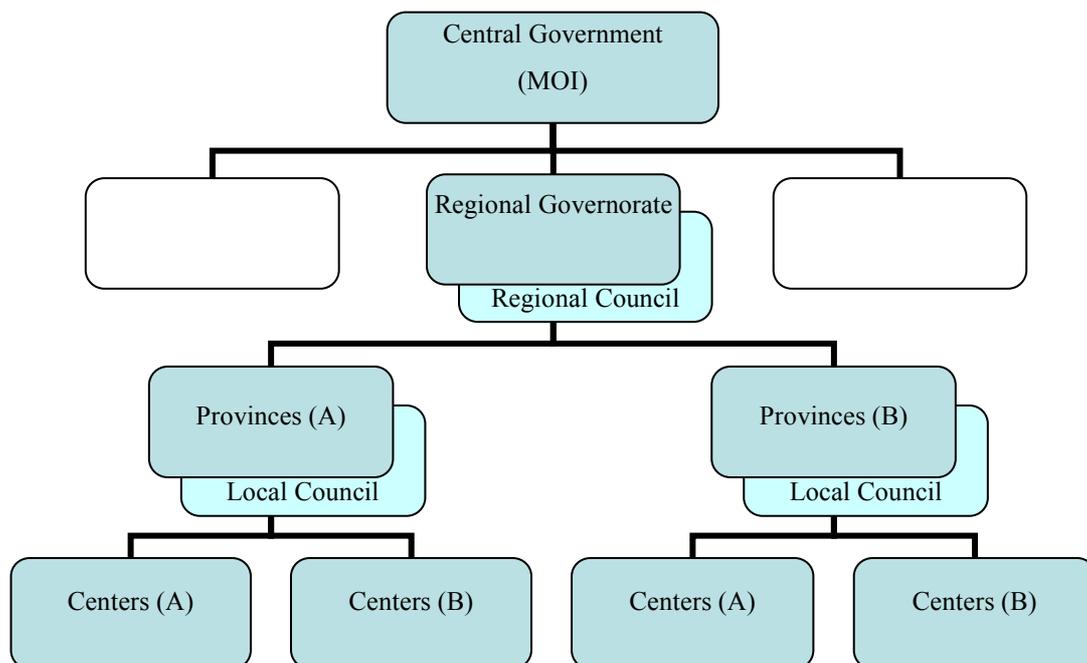
council, which may be considered as an advisory body to the governor. The regional council is expected to discuss all issues which are conducive to improve service standards in the region and is entitled in particular to:

- Determine the needs of the region and propose their inclusion in the State development plan.
- Determine what projects are useful and arrange them in order of priority and propose their adoption as part of the annual State budget.
- Study the region's urban and rural organizational layouts, and follow up their implementation after being adopted.
- Follow up the implementation and co-ordination of those parts of the development and budget plans related to the region¹.

The Law of Regions has created a three-tier system for local administration: regions, provinces (A & B), and centres (A & B). There is a governor at the head of every region, each of which has a regional council appointed by the government. Each region is made up of class A and class B provinces. Each province has a local council that is also appointed by the government. Class A and class B centres² come at the lowest administrative level (Figure 1). The actual spatial division of this structure is left to MOI to determine in consideration to the population, geography, security, environment and means of transportation. MOI has used this system to establish 13 regions and 103 provinces, with definite geographical boundaries (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

The municipal administration system is also structured in three tiers: mayoralty (regional municipality), municipality, and village cluster. Each region has a mayoralty, which is a regional municipality that is considered a reference for all local municipalities. Local municipalities are classified as belonging to one of four groups, based on the responsibilities they hold. Each municipality has a semi-elected municipal council, half of its members being chosen by a general election, while the others are appointed by the government. There are also village clusters that come in three classes as a subordinate level of local municipal administration (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 1: Structure of local administration



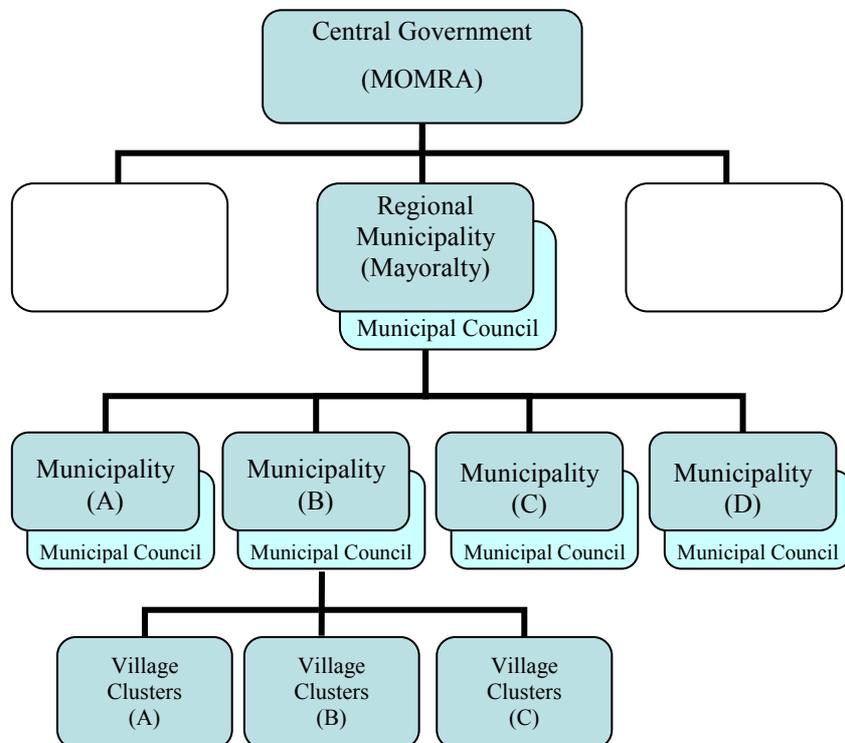
¹ Law of Regions, Article 23.

² Law of Regions, Article 3.

Figure 2: Map of regions of Saudi Arabia



Figure 3: Structure of local municipal administration



Conceptual framework of spatial and sectoral development in Saudi Arabia

It is important to review the literature about the regional development in Saudi Arabia to perceive a fair understanding of the past and existing practices that are related to developmental work. The critical review of a practice should be based on the given or available instruments throughout the course of its existence. Some new regulations or changes in practice might make any criticism void. This is the case for regional development in Saudi Arabia as an underdeveloped, newly established, and fast growing country³. It can be deduced from the analysis of the structure and instruments of local and regional development in the previous section, that there have been three distinguishable phases in the country's experiences regarding regional development:

- (1) The first phase was the period before 1970. From the country's official establishment in 1932, there were several attempts from the Government to establish a national planning system. Consultations were sought from international organisations in order to structure a proper system of planning that could work for the country's distinct conditions. As it was the first attempt, there were different obstructions faced in the effort to organise long-term strategies and policies for economic development (Al-Kahtani, 2003).
- (2) The second phase was between 1970 and 1992. This phase began with the remarkable production of the first national development plan of its five-yearly series. The national plans concentrated on programmes for building basic utilities and infrastructure in the country with the focus being in limited major urban settlements. These development efforts were supported by the economic boom which started in the 1970's as a result of the high revenue from oil sales (Alkhedheiri, 1998).
- (3) The third phase was from 1992 until the present. The beginning of this phase was marked with the launching of the law of regions. It is considered one of the most important political decisions that has had direct affiliation with the regional planning concept (Mubarak, 2003). This law has structured the administrative and geographic framework of regions and their development in the country.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, after three decades of structuring developmental planning practice via the FYDPs, the NSS came to indulge itself under the implementation plans for the FYDP's regional development goals. The combination of these two planning documents is problematic for some reasons that require thought:

- (1) The FYDP itself contains some contradictions when considering the spatial approach to development. Directing the short-term spatial priorities for the various sectors is missing; at the same time, the long-term policies for regional development are not provided with a schedule or phased programme.
- (2) The NSS's plans and policies require a degree of authority equal to that of the FYDP. Inevitably this would create difficulties in referencing the planning process for national development.
- (3) The Regions Law is a potential statutory reference underlying regional development, although it is underutilized by both FYDP and NSS. The interaction of FYDP with the Regions Law is limited to administrative organization and statistical classifications. The NSS plan, on the other hand, is mainly based on the idea of Development Corridors; this is established on natural and urban characteristics and does not make any reference to the spatial classification of the Regions Law.

³ Specially growing in terms of urbanisation and modernization.

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