



STATEMENT
by Prof. Dr. Milanka Slavova

Subject: Dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor", field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.7. Administration and Management

Author of the dissertation: Bojidar Georgiev Babadjanov

Dissertation topic: "Development of functional strategies in public sector organizations (on the example of Burgas Municipality)"

Reason for submitting the opinion: Order No 224/05.11.2024 of the Rector of MBBU - Botevgrad for participation in the scientific jury.

1. Information about the PhD student

Bozhidar Babadzhanov is a PhD student in the independent form of study at the International Business School, according to the Order No. 263/13.12.2023 of the Rector of the International Business School. The PhD student's research interests are in the field of public sector management and, in particular, the development of functional strategies at the municipal level.

2. General characteristics of the submitted dissertation

The thesis submitted for review is 227 pages long, of which the abstract is 198 pages. It is structured in an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, a list of contributions and a list of publications. The text includes 18 figures and 10 tables. There are two appendices of 15 pages in the thesis. The literature used includes 70 sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English. Monographs, articles, laws and regulations and other documents of national and international institutions have been studied.

The topic of the dissertation is adequate to the need of regional public policies development. The analysis of the experience of a local administration can serve to reveal best practices and problems in the development and implementation of functional strategies at the municipal level. The problem area is difficult to explore because of the intertwining of multiple legal regulations and changes in them, established practices, and the deeper development of

strategic planning theory in business than in public administration. The thesis therefore contains an interesting attempt to compare and contrast strategic planning processes in local structures from those in business.

In the introduction the PhD student has clearly defined subject, object, aims, thesis, research objectives and limitations. The thesis of the dissertation is related to proving the necessity for public authorities to be aware of the role of strategic documents in promoting the development of a local community and to implement targeted activities for the improvement of processes through the use of legal prerequisites and good practices. The subject of the study is the functional strategies of one of the largest and most developed municipalities in Bulgaria, which creates objective prerequisites for the search for workable solutions and problems. The introduction also clearly defines the limitations of the study. They are logical and related to its scope and time horizon.

3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied results

The exposition has a logical structure. The issues addressed in the three chapters follow and lead from the general to the particular and again to generalizations about the development of functional strategies.

In chapter one the PhD student has reviewed different theoretical approaches to the study of strategic planning in business and in regional management. He has presented arguments that support the possibility of considering the municipality as a strategic business unit. The doctoral student has also made a successful attempt to present the subordination between different types of planning documents and their content. He has presented the development of the planning process in Bulgaria since the time of the centralized planned economy and the changes in planning documents at different stages of Bulgaria's development, including after EU accession.

From the comparisons of experiences in the presentation it is clear that the lack of sufficient opportunities in the country for more decentralised management at municipality level also creates problems in the development and implementation of different strategies.

The PhD student has presented the specific features of municipal strategic planning, which distinguishes it from business planning. He also pointed out the principles on which municipal planning should be developed. By analogy to the types of business strategies, the PhD student has made a good attempt to classify public strategies according to the areas of public activity to which they relate and the objectives they set themselves - for example, the application of global trends or consideration of specific local conditions. On the basis of the classification of strategies, he has looked for the place of functional strategies, which are defined as strategies for the development of the main activities of the municipality. He has also made a distinction with functional strategies in business organisation in terms of the driving forces - respectively public interest in the case of functional strategies at local level and profit in the case of companies.

The thesis sets out the current classification of functional areas and their budget provision in line with changes in legislation in 2020. The author has critically reviewed the methodology for the development of strategic documents in the country setting out a particular policy and has presented the most important issues based on primary research done by others.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the problems most commonly encountered in the development of strategies in general and functional strategies in particular. The lack of reliable methodologies for developing strategic plans and their use is highlighted as one of the main problems of planning.

In chapter two, the PhD student has reviewed research done by other firms on the powers of the mayor and the related functions he performs. It is clear from the review that opportunities for the development and implementation of functional strategies are largely determined by legal requirements, but at the same time opportunities exist for municipal initiatives to develop them. This chapter also provides a comprehensive overview of the work of the different administrative units responsible for certain activities. As a result of the analysis, improvements have been identified in the determination of risks in different functional areas and actions to address them or their consequences.

The planning documents by functional area are presented. A good attempt has been made to analyse the content of these documents for each functional area, to identify the functions for which no planning documents have been developed and to analyse the need to develop such documents. The PhD student has found that for some functions the lack of a planning document does not create significant problems, while for others, such as Human Resource Management, its existence would create clearer guidelines for finding, hiring, training staff, etc. In other cases, the tasks of the administration are defined unambiguously by regulations at central level, making the development of strategies pointless.

Based on the analysis of the strategies of the municipality of Burgas in different functional areas and publicly disclosed on the website, the PhD student has drawn conclusions about their quality and has tried to distinguish strategies from programmes. He has also pointed out many negative consequences due to the absence or mixing of different types of planning documents.

I consider that the doctoral student's achievement is the reference model he has developed, based on literature sources and his own analysis of existing municipal documentation, for the development of functional strategies. In this model, he has described the need for sequential stages of the process and the tasks to be performed, as well as the necessary actors and their interaction. The programmes, projects and work plans that are related to the realisation of the set objectives and activities are commented as part of the reference model in its final part. At the end of chapter two, the PhD student has summarized the conclusions from the analysis of the specific documents and the opportunities that the developed model will create for the development of co-subordinate and logically linked planning documents.

In the third chapter, the PhD student presented an empirical study on the employees' attitude towards the developed reference model and their willingness to implement it. He has justified the use of the survey, the types of questions that were developed, the stages that the survey had to go through. The aim is to identify inconsistencies and to make recommendations for improving the work of developing functional strategy documents. The number of surveys allows the formulation of key issues.

The analysis of the responses confirms the attitude towards the development of strategy documents for functional areas, the lack of methodology or the lack of knowledge of it by municipal officials, the negative impact of the lack of strategies on the development of the municipality and the attitude of citizens towards public policies. Interesting questions assess municipal officials' understanding of the competencies needed to develop strategies and other planning documents. They can be used to organize training in the municipality of Burgas.

Based on the analysis, conclusions are drawn about the need to pay more attention to risk assessment in the development of various planning documents, to involve employees, to use common methodological guidelines, to apply more monitoring methods and to develop operational plans for the implementation of strategies. The PhD student has made a good attempt to illustrate the divergence of practice with the reference model he developed. At the end of the chapter good practices of different Bulgarian municipalities for functional planning in specific areas of municipal activity are presented.

In the conclusions to the third chapter, the PhD student has summarized the problems of functional planning and has formulated recommendations for the improvement of strategic planning in the municipality of Burgas. He has also argued the need to revise the already developed functional strategies on the basis of a common methodology and best practices.

The scientific style and language meet the requirements for the development of a dissertation. The dissertation is graphically very well laid out and presents the research and conclusions. References used are properly cited as required.

4. Evaluation of scientific and applied contributions

I accept the contributions formulated by the PhD student. The contributions in the dissertation can be summarized in two areas:

- ✓ Compliment of existing theory and methodology, which enhances their validity. This aspect of the contributions is related to the generalization of different approaches to the study of strategic planning and its application to the public

sector, taking into account its specificities.

- ✓ The second area relates to the application of existing theory or methodology to explain and analyse specific problems. In this case, these problems are related to the development of a reference model for the development of functional strategies and a survey of the opinion of a large number of employees on the feasibility of its application.

5. Critical comments, recommendations and questions

1. Clearer argumentation of the research methods used in the thesis.
2. In particular, the integration of functional strategies and the choice of priorities in the presence of limited resources could be commented on.
3. Chapter three could more clearly identify the extent to which the practices described conform or deviate from the reference model developed by the PhD student.

Notwithstanding these remarks, I consider the dissertation to be complete.

6. Abstract and publications

The abstract faithfully reflects the object, subject, thesis, aim and objectives of the study, as well as the problems analyzed in the individual chapters of the study.

The doctoral candidate has indicated 10 independent publications on the dissertation, including one study, two articles and seven scientific reports. They faithfully represent individual parts of the developed dissertation.

Conclusion

The dissertation on "Developing functional strategies in public sector organizations (the example of the municipality of Burgas)" is a very good attempt to study the problems of planning functional strategies on the example of the municipality of Burgas. It complies with the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, as

well as the Regulations for the Conduct of Competitions for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the International Business School. This gives me grounds to propose to the distinguished members of the scientific jury to award Bozhidar Georgiev. Babadzhanov the educational and scientific degree doctor.

17.12.2024 г.
гр. София