
ARTICLE

‘Regions Out—Sub-regions In’—Can Sub-regional Planning Break the Mould? The View from England

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Abstract

A number of fundamental concerns have been raised over the recent abolition of regional economic and planning institutions processes and associated plans and strategies in England. In particular, questions have arisen over the strength and democratic accountability of the new arrangements emerging at a sub-regional scale—namely local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) that as yet have neither legal powers nor any formal planning role. Consequently, this article critically assesses the role, provenance and value of the abolished regional institutions together with the parallel criticisms. It also examines the potential for LEPs as their replacement and to develop into democratically accountable, locally self-determined strategic planning bodies.

1. Introduction

The abolition of regional institutions and policy instruments, including strategic planning, in England by the Coalition Government in 2011 has been greeted with critical concern (Bentley *et al.*, 2010; Jones, 2010; Shaw & Greenhalgh, 2010; Pugalís, 2011). Indeed, considerable unease has been expressed that such edifices of regionalism, which have structured English spatial, economic and social policy since the 1930s (Marshall & Glasson, 2007), have been dismantled so quickly. The primary purpose of this paper is therefore to review the implications of such changes for the delivery of strategic (regional) planning. In order to do this, the paper initially focuses on the provenance and trajectory of recent restructuring and rescaling processes within an international policy context. This allows us to consider the importance of both path dependency and policy spillovers (Margetts *et al.*, 2012) in forming the outcomes that have emerged. In essence, the paper interrogates the recent policy switch away from regional institutions in England with what has emerged to replace it, namely local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). Despite some resistance and opposition to these emergent sub-regional structures, Government ministers have been clear that these are the intended replacements for regional planning in England (Clark, 2011). The questions for this paper are whether these sub-regional LEPs, that have no formal powers although growing budgetary responsibility can (i) be democratically accountable; (ii) establish

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strategic planning arrangements within these newly defined spaces which for the most part have no institutional antecedents; (iii) harness strategic planning objectives to achieving economic ends and (iv) define and replace the overall strategic planning context for the local level.

This comparison between the past and emergent institutional frameworks is developed through analysis of a variety of policy and governance approaches and which recognize the importance of EU metagovernance and notably the 2014–2020 EU policy programme, theories of multi-level governance (Marks & Hooghe, 2004; Faludi, 2010). Further, the rescaling of planning is exemplified through recent reforms in England but which are also located within broader endogenous growth models (Krugman, 1991; Brenner, 2004) and policy transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). Moreover, we speculate how the effectiveness of the new arrangements may be dependent on characteristics of local governance and local leadership. Through the focus on regional planning in England, the paper subsequently concludes by using this case study area as a lens to highlight the broader implications of sub-state rescaling of institutions and capital investment in infrastructure which is occurring through Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2012). However, we do acknowledge that elsewhere in Europe (for example) ‘middle tiers’ of government (such as regions) frequently possess legal powers set out and ratified in federal and other constitutions and which, therefore, often make it more difficult for incoming governments to simply remove or significantly alter such structures (Pugalys & Townsend, 2012)

2. The Rise and Fall of Regional Planning in England

The role of regional planning in England has been a consistent feature in economic, spatial and redistributive policy since 1934 (Marshall & Glasson, 2007). The governance and delivery of such plans has been supported through central government institutional arrangements such as Economic Planning Councils, regional government offices and formal cooperation arrangements such as the South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN). Such was the importance of the regional planning system to the UK, that when it joined the European Union (EU) in 1973 the introduction of spatially targeted policy for tackling disadvantaged areas was its main policy contribution, and this was subsequently reinforced through EU funding mechanisms and strong Commissioner leadership (Young, 1973; George, 1998).

However, following the emergence of the principle of subsidiarity in the Single European Act 1986 and the Treaty on the European Union 1992 (Haigh, 1992; O’Riordan & Jager, 1996; Morphet, 2013), the UK regional policy was recast. Whilst devolution was developed as an approach to implementing subsidiarity in Scotland and Wales, in England government guidance on regional planning policy emerged in 1990 (Marshall & Glasson, 2007) and Government Offices for the Regions were established by the then Conservative Government in 1993. These were later accompanied by regional development agencies in 1998 and which together managed EU structural funds. Indirectly elected Regional Assemblies (RA) were also established in 1998 under the successor Labour government and

had a joint lead on planning with central government. These new institutional arrangements were accompanied by the reconfiguration of regional government in the South East of England and new governance arrangements for London, with a directly elected mayor who has responsibility for a development agency.

Nevertheless, the precise nature and form of regional planning in England has varied over time. From 1990, the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) prepared by the central government was issued for each of the standard regions of England, although in 2004 the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act abolished RPGs and replaced them with Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) which were prepared and 'owned' within each region by RAs. RSS were tested and 'legitimated' through public examination processes which maintained a strong central government guiding hand within the process. Within their region, RSS formed part of every local authority's Local Plan (LP) and created a 'lock in' between regions and localities through which Government could exert pressure particularly on the allocation of housing land for development (Morphet, 2011).

When introduced, RSS were viewed as offering a number of central and local benefits, including their potential for promoting national economic prosperity and comprehensive, strategic planning across each English region. Potentially providing a framework to facilitate private investment through public sector planning (Sandford, 2006), RSS could integrate infrastructure, housing, urban expansion, economic development and environmental protection through the involvement of a wide range of interest groups (Goodchild & Hickman, 2006). They had a role in constructing the evidence base (House of Commons DCLG Committee Report, 2011) upon which frequently controversial strategic proposals for housing were based but served to remove local politicians from taking responsibility for these decisions.

However, criticisms of the RSS system emerged over time including the length and complexity of the preparation of the RSS (Counsell & Haughton, 2007) and the undemocratic nature of the RAs that prepared the RSS (Dabinett, 2009). From a scaling perspective, RAs were also seen as being too large and remote and not attuned to 'real' economic geographies (Allen & Cochrane, 2010), as well as being difficult for local groups/organizations to influence (Haughton *et al.*, 2010). RAs were also considered to be non-transparent bodies (Marshall & Glasson, 2007; John *et al.*, 2008, 135) under the practical control of central government through the role of Government Offices for the Regions and central government *de facto* processes for RSS approval.

Approaches to regional planning were also criticized for being 'top down' (Haughton *et al.*, 2010), being overly concerned with delivering against government's national housing targets (Morphet, 2010) and not necessarily taking a balanced and inclusive approach (Marshall & Glasson, 2007). RSS were also quickly captured by the Treasury to promote a house building agenda (Barker, 2004, 2006) rather than as a means of promoting economic growth (Krueger & Gibbs, 2010). In addition, locally derived evidence demonstrated the need for more housing than allocated in the RSS (Morphet, 2010; Shelter, 2011).

Consequently, there were increasing calls for the reform of regional strategic planning in England. What is important to note here is that the reforms that have been recently instigated parallel those being taken forward in other EU member states

(Amdam, 2004; Booth, 2009; Herrschel, 2009; Sehested, 2009). Indeed, the characteristics that have emerged have been twofold. First, there has been an increasing separation between economic and strategic planning institutions and processes, although this separation is stronger in some states than others. Second, economic spaces have emerged, typically adopting an ‘edge to edge’ approach and comprising of groups of existing administrative areas. Pugalís and Townsend (2012) has pointed out that these emergent spaces are of approximately two million people. This is typically the average population of the EU region but smaller than that of an average English region (around five million). These new economic groupings are not administrative areas, but rather new spaces that rely on multi-stakeholder involvement from all sectors that have strong links to their respective localities. Such spaces also have emerging responsibilities for investment in social and physical infrastructure. However, it is pertinent to note that the development of new strategic planning spaces has not been developed in parallel, despite the need to locate investment within such a plan. This is an important point and one that we will return to later in this paper.

This privileging of substate economic spaces over existing (and larger) regions in England had also commenced well before the election of the Coalition Government in 2010. Whilst the referendum on the establishment of directly elected RA in 2004 was progressing, preparations were already being made for other integrated approaches within, between and across different scales of governance (DTLR, 2002). Functional Economic Areas (FEAs), based on cities/journey to work areas, were seen as an increasingly central engine for delivering the Government’s economic agenda (DCLG, 2011b; Morton, 2011). Policy for HM Treasury and Cabinet Office FEAs in England emerged through the Treasury’s focus on endogenous growth (2004a; 2004b) and continued through the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration in 2007. Here, attempts to address concerns at the lack of integration in governance structures—both horizontally and vertically—led to the creation of Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs). These operated through contractual relationships between central and local areas (HMT, 2007) and were initially focussed primarily on the largest cities, although they were subsequently developed within other parts of England. Nevertheless, they were criticized for their lack of influence, and indeed from a planning perspective their engagement was marginal at best.

Prior to the general election in 2010, the Labour government abolished RSS and replaced them with integrated regional strategies (RS) through the 2009 Local Economy, Construction and Economic Development Act. This attracted little attention at the time and was accompanied by other proposals to strengthen the regional tier, at the expense of the RDAs, including the establishment of local authority Leaders’ Boards and a revamping of Government Offices, possibly into offices of Regional Ministers (Hope & Leslie, 2009). However, there was a widespread lack of knowledge about these changes—including within Central Government. Indeed, following the general election in 2010, the newly elected Coalition Government faced legal challenges with the announced abolition of regional plans in that they declared the abolition of RSS rather than RS.

When taking the first steps to removing the RS in 2010, the Coalition Government stated that they were seeking to address ‘the gap between planning

issues determined by local policies and concerns, and those subject to nationally-determined policy aspirations, such as housing' (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee 2011, 3) in three ways. Firstly, a 'larger than local' strategic planning obligation was established through a 'duty to co-operate' on planning issues. This was placed on neighbouring local authorities and other defined public sector partners through the Localism Act 2011. Ministers have stated that this duty replaces regional planning (Clark, 2011) and creates a *de jure* sub-regional planning power (Tennant & Beaumont, 2011).

The second was through the creation of self-determining LEPs in 2010 to replace MAAs and to extend their coverage to the whole of England. These have similar characteristics to other forms of governance as those emerging in other parts of the EU and involved inviting local authorities to create new 'soft' sub-regional institutions. These were to be 'bottom up' in their formation and related to FEAs. However, in practice 'the complexity and multiplicity of functional economic geographies was curtailed through journey to work simplification... and worse still, political horse trading (often over-rode) what shaky evidence existed on functional economic market areas (Pugalys & Townsend, 2012, 243), but there were some notable exceptions, for example, across the South Yorkshire/East Midlands and East Midlands/Eastern regional boundaries.

Although such LEP areas were seen to be 'voluntary' in their formation, those not joining originally have been encouraged to join up subsequently. Also, despite the fact that local authorities can be part of more than one LEP, this may be heavily compromised by recent ties between LEP funding allocations and LEP consortia required by the Department for Transport (DfT, 2012).

Third, the coalition government introduced 'city deals' for the eight largest cities in England, a policy approach also rolled out in Scotland and emerging in Northern Ireland and Wales. These city deals are focussed on infrastructure and public services. However, there has been no government policy explanation about the evolution and role of city deals has emerged nor about their obvious relationship to LEPs.

Thus, over the last 10 years, English regions that had been privileged in planning and quasi-democratic institutional arrangements have been dismantled. However, critics of the abolition have raised concerns about the new arrangements that have now emerged, including the fuzziness of LEP boundaries, their lack of formal powers and the extent to which they are democratic, given their soft institutional frameworks (Haughton *et al.*, 2010). They have also expressed doubts at their likely success in meeting the economic, investment and planning roles that they have been assigned (Liddle, 2011). Even those who have taken a 'wait and see' or opportunistic view of the likely success of LEPs have identified key tests that they will need to meet to be judged successful including tests of democracy and investment leadership (Johnson & Schmuecker, 2010; Pemberton & Morphet, 2010; Harrison, 2011).

Furthermore, LEPs also have to operate within a new institutional framework created by enhanced powers provided to local authorities through the general power of competence (Localism Act, 2011). This extends the localism agenda and effectively brings a more privileged status to the local scale rather than the former hierarchical relationship between regions and localities. Much of the national

debate on the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was concerned with the likely inability of local authorities to deliver successful planning outcomes without ‘top down’ strategic direction, which was provided by RSS and which has not yet been provided by LEPs. This suggests an emergent assumption that localism will not work without reference to the context of hierarchical scales of governance.

LEPs do not have any formal powers, but the Coalition government’s White Paper on local growth (HM Treasury and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011) and the Localism Act 2011 both highlight their potential involvement in aspects of planning across sub-regions. Activities proposed for LEPs include leading the production of plans that identify and align strategic economic priorities and guide infrastructure delivery and producing evidence/technical assessments to inform decision making, including strategic planning (HM Government, 2010). LEPs have also been provided with funding that will support formal infrastructure delivery programmes and projects (DCLG, 2011). These will require associated accountability and governance arrangements once the LEPs take on the role of managing this finance, including sub-regional transport budgets from 2014 (DfT, 2012).

As these sub-regional arrangements are introduced, crucial questions are now being posed over the extent of democratic accountability, efficiency and delivery of strategic planning they will secure. In essence, will they be able to respond to the problems associated with previous attempts at regional strategy making, such as a lack of integration between related spheres of activity, implementation resources and central government control (Baker & Wong, 2012)? Such issues will be discussed further in the following sections of the paper.

3. Seeking the Provenance of These Rescaling Tendencies: The Role of the EU

Having explored the rise and fall of regional planning in England, this section of the paper focuses on the provenance of the rescaling processes that we have highlighted and, in particular, the influence of the EU in such processes. Whilst many recent studies (for example see Pugalis & Townsend, 2012) have highlighted how sub-state rescaling is a nuanced, complicated and politically charged process, there is notably less reference to the EU. It can be noted that similar approaches to territorial rescaling have also been evident in the EU and have arisen as a consequence of continuing efforts by key economic and political actors to secure political unity and legitimacy across functional and territorial divides (see Barca, 2009; CEC, 2009; Committee of the Regions, 2009; Jessop, 2009). Such trends have been developing firstly through formal means and as part of a wider EU project. For example, the Lisbon Treaty (CEC, 2009) confirmed changes away from targeted approaches to spatial economic and social support that have been evolving over the last 15 years to a broader focus on territorial cohesion.

Thus following a long gestation period, the territory now joins economic and social cohesion as a triple lens through which all EU policies and action are promoted and evaluated (Mirwaldt *et al.*, 2009). In addition, there is an emphasis on seeking horizontal and vertical integration across sectors and territories. Key

elements of ‘successful’ territorial cohesion that are emerging include strong democratic leadership for places and integrated multi-level governance for policy derivation and delivery (OECD, 2006; Barca, 2009). It is evident that more emphasis is being placed on *all* spaces and places rather than those that have been identified as lagging regions. There has also been the recognition that the wider impacts of EU policy and investment—including sectoral policies—have territorial implications that have not generally been recognized or factored into decision making. This ‘edge to edge’ approach across the EU’s territory is now creating new spaces for policy, which has been reflected in an emphasis on ‘mega regions’ (for example, the Baltic Sea and the Danube), FEAs and cities. Such emphases are now also reflected in the EU’s Europe 2020 Report on the objectives and frameworks for the EU economy (CEC, 2010b) and its spatial expression, *Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020* (CEC, 2011) and has now been incorporated into the UK policy (HM Government, 2010).

As part of the rescaling of the governance of territory, a second less formal and non-binding approach has been used to promote spatial planning across the EU. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) emphasizes policy integration, promotes cross border working through European regions and applies sustainability through poly-centricity (Duhr *et al.*, 2010; Faludi, 2010). The recent informal European Ministerial adoption of a *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020* (CEC, 2011) identifies the application of a poly-centricity principle and spatial planning as key mechanisms of delivery for the new integrated, sustainable territorial cohesion policy, and suggests that further activity will be developed in this area in due course. This softer approach also reinforces the move towards newer governance spaces formed by FEAs that are not confined to traditional political or administrative boundaries.

Whilst there was a pause before ratifying the Lisbon Treaty, some EU member states developed anticipatory policies on territorial cohesion and the inter-scalar integration of policy, planning and governance (Evers *et al.*, 2009). In the UK, which frequently adopts a ‘receiver’ stance on EU policy (Bulmer & Burch, 2009), this anticipation was reflected through the move towards sub-regional working from 2003 discussed earlier. Thus, pertinent questions arise over the extent to which LEPs are a partial response to the evolving agenda of territorial cohesion and how far the EU’s approach includes new forms of meso-level planning to align with new economic spaces.

Although it is early in the implementation of LEPs, we can offer a number of informed speculations on the relationship of LEPs to both EU policies and strategic planning in England. There are based on a small number of interviews conducted with LEP coordinators ($n = 8$) across England during the spring and summer of 2012, discussions with senior civil servants in Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Treasury and analysis of existing policy documentation produced by DCLG, the Heseltine Review (2012), policy think-tanks, local authorities and LEPs themselves. These suggest that LEPs appear to meet some of the new economic governance objectives, for example the local determination of growth objectives and initiatives. However, on the other hand, there is an argument that LEPs are too small and inward looking to create new European territorial groupings, and that regions will have to re-emerge in due

course. LEPs are currently loose structures (Haughton *et al.*, 2010), although they are being nudged into more formal governance arrangements as they respond to central government bids for Regional Growth Funds and Enterprise Zones across England. This still does not automatically lead to the generation of a strategic planning function for LEPs, although any business case or bid for future investment funding will need to demonstrate that a project is achievable within the planning framework. Further, Heseltine's review on growth has proposed that LEP boundaries should be reviewed to create greater alignment with FEAs and that these areas should have a strategic planning function (Heseltine, 2012).

Multi-scalar alignment between local and sub-regional plans will be a critical success factor. In the UK, the Government has sought to reinforce this approach both through creating a policy precedence for national infrastructure planning projects in local plans and secondly by expanding the categories of infrastructure types that are included in this grouping (Pickles, 2012). However, this 'top down' approach to vertical integration is legal rather than consensual or contractual, and has also been accompanied by the potential removal of planning powers at the local level if local authorities do not complete their plans, an intervention described as 'muscular localism' by the Secretary of State (Pickles, 2012). This infers that the focus on local plan making as the key building block of sub-state plans has been reinforced. In this case, based on our interviews, discussions and policy analysis, we can again speculate that the pooling of planning powers at the LEP level may become more difficult if it relies solely on the 'duty to cooperate' as it could become procedural rather than providing a strategic planning framework for economic space. Moreover, there is evidence in practice that the 'duty to cooperate' has involved discussions around single issues (PAS, 2012), rather than as a replacement for the strategic planning framework component of the local plan.

Overall, it appears that the achievement of integration lies both with the local authority and its public sector partners, and also through the joint action of local authorities comprising each LEP. However, it is difficult to identify from our analysis how investment programmes can be developed and delivered in the absence of a pan-LEP strategic planning framework. Further, the provision of major transport and infrastructure funding to LEPs is to be associated with LEP consortia which may cover territories similar to former regions but not replicating their boundaries (DfT, 2012). Thus before 2014, new regional scale structures under democratic control, and led by planning and territorial agendas could create a new regionalism in England.

4. Can LEPs Create a New Sub-state Planning Mould?

Such processes of state rescaling across the EU and the implications for planning raise interesting questions over the extent to which the new system in England can provide a democratically accountable and strategically efficient framework for plan making and delivery. From a strategic efficiency perspective, the government has stated that it is committed to cross-boundary planning and we have noted the role of the 'duty to co-operate' in this. Those subject to the duty must have regard to the activities of the LEPs when preparing their local plans, although this duty itself does not apply to LEP activities. A number of think-tanks have also started to

make the case for LEPs to have spatial planning powers (Larkin, 2010, Bolton, 2011; Morton, 2011) and a role in housing (Smith Institute, 2012). Hence, we can speculate whether LEPs will be able to function without any spatial planning frameworks for investment, and the extent to which they are the most appropriate means of delivering effective strategic planning outcomes such as infrastructure delivery

Whilst LEPs may provide a mechanism for horizontal integration across FEAs, there is also a need to consider the territorial anchorage that will be required to support vertical integration between governance scales. This is a key consideration in the EU's sub-state policies (Barca, 2009; Duhr *et al.*, 2010). In England, the democratic tiers of government are national, local and parish. Thus we also need to consider how the vertical alignment of policies and programmes—including spatial planning—between the different democratic tiers may be developed. Although LEPs may be viewed as a new 'soft' mode of governance (Haughton *et al.*, 2010) or as a post-political technology for managing 'nudged' compliance through new forms of 'soft' power (Swyngedouw, 2010), they could be positioned to facilitate sub-regional strategic planning around national objectives.

The capture of the RSS by the housing agenda also provides a context to consider this strategic planning aporia, given recent OECD criticisms of housing delivery in the UK (Andre, 2011). If LEPs assume some responsibility for strategic planning and/or housing, then will they be diverted towards these areas and within a highly politicized agenda or will a more balanced approach prevail in line with their current focus on economic and transport roles? Furthermore, there may also be a growing temptation by central government to use LEPs as a means to deliver housing targets. If this is the case, then the dominance of the housing agenda could lead to LEPs being as stalemated as the RSS, and will detrimentally impact on their economic functionality, despite housing now being defined as an 'economic' good. Under the former 'top down' system, local (reluctant) acceptance of housing development targets could be blamed on central government influence through the RSS. This may become more difficult for local politicians to substantiate when housing needs are solely determined by local evidence. It will also become a pertinent point when it is found that local housing requirements are likely to be higher than those agreed through previous RSS processes (Shelter, 2011).

Finally, given all of this, the evidence base upon which LEPs will make informed decisions on strategy, implementation and delivery will be critical. It will shape the ways in which they may (or may not) be able to facilitate the integration of infrastructure, economic development, housing, transport and environmental protection on a sub-regional basis. The democratic accountability of LEP governance arrangements will also be under close scrutiny by proponents and critics of the previous regional system. These key challenges faced by LEPs mean that the extent to which they are able to become democratic, effective and efficient planning bodies needs to be considered. Each of these challenges is examined briefly below, and again is speculative in nature but strongly informed by the research conducted on LEP implementation during 2012.

Can LEPs Demonstrate Democratic Accountability for Planning or Will They be Used to Deliver a Centrally Orchestrated Agenda?

The governance of LEPs is through a management board that is chaired by the local mayor (where applicable) or a private sector business leader. LEPs have no direct or indirect election. In each LEP, any democratic accountability will therefore rest on the agreement of constituent local authorities to legally pool their powers, particularly in relation to their planning and transport. However, this creates a problem for some LEPs and particularly those that have been created from old county areas (Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). Here, planning powers rest with the district or lower tier councils that are represented as a single group on the LEP, despite being individual members. Consequently, they will not be involved in all of the decision-making processes of the LEP. Hitherto, the transport powers in these two-tier areas have been located with the County or upper tier councils who are the drivers of the LEPs, although this will change in 2014 when transport funding is given to the LEPs rather than local authorities (DfT, 2012). Such discontinuities between planning and transport planning policies are longstanding. Unless joint committee arrangements are adopted—which pool local authority powers for planning and transport—questions will remain in relation to the democratic accountability of any LEP decisions over planning outcomes. There is also some evidence that the Government wants to see quicker progress on this democratic underpinning. The announcement of an allocation of funding to each LEP from the Growing Places Fund (DCLG, 2011) sets out a requirement for each to appoint a local authority accounting officer, creating both the start of democratic oversight and the potential route for further funds to be channelled through LEPs once these arrangements are established.

Critics are already making strong claims that LEPs are a tool to recentralize power (Bentley *et al.*, 2010) or at best will simply be delivery arms of the central state. There is some evidence of the tension within government around the degree of influence which should be applied. Some Government departments including the Treasury and BIS favour more centralized and directed approaches, whereas other departments such as DCLG and the Department for Transport strongly support the use of ‘nudge’ techniques for more locally determined approaches. Although the ‘nudge’ approach appeared to prevail for the first year, the appointment of a shared Cities minister between DCLG and BIS from July 2011 suggested a shift in implementation strategy and tactics by the centralists. This has been compounded by the transfer of the Cities Minister to the Treasury in a Cabinet reshuffle in 2012. Indeed, in the short term, LEPs will (only) be allowed to ‘make representations on national planning policy’ (HM Treasury, 2010, 13) and indeed there is some evidence that inward investment support activities are being centralized together with other functions of the RDAs—until their funding concludes as part of the EU budget cycle in 2013. However, the EU required existing programme management arrangements to be maintained until the end of this budget period in 2013. After 2014, these are likely to be led by LEPs and local authorities (HM Government, 2011).

On the other hand, LEPs have been identified as taking responsibility for the management of other funding streams such as those available for transport. *The Local Resource Review* (DCLG, 2011a) localizes residential and business property rates, and encourages a proportion of business rates to be pooled in LEPs (Pickles, 2011). Overall, about 20 funding streams can be identified which have been

associated with LEPs, including planning mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy and Tax Increment Finance. LEP democratic and accountability structures will need to be resolved for funding applications to the UK Government and the EU and associated territorial impact assessment. There will be a need for transparency about which individuals, groups and territories are most/least likely to benefit from new initiatives, as well as their respective involvement in such processes.

Can LEPs Deliver Strategic Planning Through Horizontal Governance Arrangements and Are They Suitable Vehicles for Strategic Planning Given their Economic Focus?

The experience of local authorities working together on planning issues has been longstanding through informal arrangements, and latterly some have made these working arrangements more formal. The ‘duty to cooperate’ places responsibilities on all public sector partners in delivering the stated objectives set out in the local development plan and associated documents. In working in cross-boundary areas, there is a suggestion by the Government that this could be though a specific ‘local’ plan for the area of the LEP (Tennant & Beaumont, 2011). Once adopted, the plan would become part of the local plan and be used to promote and control development. In order to undertake this joint plan, all the democratically elected local authorities would have to pool their powers. This could be facilitated through the use of specific powers in the 1972 Local Government act s101 that enables the establishment of a joint committee or the 2009 Local Economy Act that enables the creation of a Combined Authority.

Nevertheless, this may not result in strategic planning as, although this joint committee could be constructed (and embedded) as an institutional layer within the LEP, it is not clear how the local authority layer could provide the leadership to the LEP as a whole, as this remains a business-led partnership. Thus strategic planning may become embedded within the LEP structures, but not necessarily driving their activities.

Critics could also argue that joint committees may not be decisive or be willing to take difficult decisions (Pemberton & Winstanley, 2010). Questions also remain over which interests are privileged over others. However, they do create a legal basis for democratic planning decisions. In this sense, they are far more accountable than the preceding models including RAs or RDAs. These joint committees could also encapsulate a wider local pooling of powers between local authorities. Although Bentley *et al.* (2010) have called into question the democratic accountability and the degrees of freedom in choosing priority projects, as we have shown above, the reality—at least in terms of planning—is likely to be more nuanced than this. Although LEPs have not overtly been created as sub-regional planning bodies, there are ways that they could evolve to perform such a role in locally accountable ways through joint committees or combined authorities. In so doing, they would secure a democratic mandate for their intra and inter LEP planning activities.

The economic focus of LEPs and their leadership by the business sector has been echoed within recent guidance to local planning authorities, which states the

primacy of economic matters over others (DCLG, 2011b). The role of LEPs in identifying key economic priorities is likely to include infrastructure requirements of all types, depending on local assessments of ‘missing links’ and ‘bottlenecks’ (CEC, 2010a; HM Treasury, 2010). Such gaps in infrastructure will also require a greater emphasis on ‘demand management’ that LEPs could undertake, especially if they are able to marry such activity with the wider variety of funding regimes. Moreover, as their governance structures mature, some public assets could pass to LEPs for development purposes and they could—in turn—perform an important role as promoters and commissioners for sub-regional investment projects and programmes.

So, although it has been argued that ‘enterprise’ is an advocacy function (House of Commons DCLG Report, 2011), the longer term role of LEPs may be of a more interventionist nature. Consequently, there is a need to consider whether LEPs will be any more efficient than the RDAs in strategically linking local democratic structures with the activities of other provider agencies through the planning process. The ability of LEPs to work in an integrated and transparent way will significantly depend on their governance and management.

Some LEPs are already beginning to consider their performance management frameworks (Institute of Directors, 2011), and are setting out their expected outcomes against the initial bid proposals that they submitted to the central government. Indeed, in contrast to the establishment of ‘single purpose vehicles’ focused on specific issues/areas, the model that appears to be emerging for LEPs involves an alternative approach focused on the co-ordination of existing organizations, both horizontally and vertically.

Within this context, however, it can be argued that LEPs will need to have a wider than economic remit in order to perform an effective strategic planning role. From a ‘strategic efficiency’ perspective, the ‘fuzziness’ of LEP activities—both thematically and territorially—is an issue. Their ability to secure territorial coherence in partner activity and work with other LEPs on cross-boundary infrastructure planning issues may be problematic. In response, Bolton (2011) has suggested that LEPs should prepare joint strategic spatial plans for their area. He also recommends that LEPs should have additional powers to aid co-operation over housing and planning decisions and—if desired—the ability to develop a binding housing strategy and spatial plan.

Infrastructure delivery plans remain the responsibility of individual local authorities rather than LEPs (Morphet, 2011; Morphet *et al.*, 2011). So a critical question that arises is the way in which LEPs will engage with, influence and deliver such plans. In the past, there have been poor and sometimes competitive relationships between economic regeneration and planning. The establishment of individual LEP infrastructure funds could support the development of an integrated programme. The type of national infrastructure investment that may be most effectively governed at a sub-regional scale has not yet been defined. As this emerges, LEPs will need to make informed decisions on their involvement in such activities, and the ramifications that may emerge if they fail to work together to engage authoritatively and accountably with this process. A specific issue—as we have already highlighted—will be the anchorage of projects to place and the multi-scale plan alignment that will be required.

Given these speculations, the extent to which LEPs will be more strategically efficient in planning than their predecessors appears to rest on some key issues. Firstly, can LEPs provide local leadership and undertake strategic planning that provides a degree of (legal) certainty that is conducive to new opportunities for sustainable economic growth, but which is focused around place and securing territorial cohesiveness? Secondly, can resistance to hijacking by single issues such as housing or major transport infrastructure be achieved as well as balancing issues of democratic accountability with the need to ‘get business done’? Thirdly, can LEPs steer through the policy and delivery skirmishes that are likely to arise in the current climate of public expenditure cuts, and act as an effective conduit between the national and local state? Within this context, the implementation of the Localism Act 2011 could be crucial in supporting the transition of LEPs from slippery, unformed organizations with no specific legal powers to strong, unified local autonomous bodies which could fulfil objectives for subsidiarity and stronger sub-regional and local economies.

5. Conclusions

Whilst many uncertainties still exist on the outcomes of the restructuring and rescaling of the tools for planning in England, there are key shifts now taking place and particularly in relation to accountability and strategic efficiency issues as we move from an emphasis on regions to sub-regions and localities. In considering accountability, an initial assessment could conclude that this continues to be undermined through the emerging LEP arrangements. However, there is a need to adopt a more longitudinal and wide-ranging analysis. In so doing, what then becomes apparent are the significant opportunities for LEPs to link the new emphasis on localism and local housing delivery; national concerns with economic prosperity and strategic infrastructure planning; and EU concerns with subsidiarity, sustainability and territorial cohesion. This approach sits within a democratic construct that—Government could argue—has been created by the LEP rather than being imposed top-down. Further, as LEPs appear to be centrally located for the delivery of EU policy delivery during the next phase of funding under new ‘partnership contracts’ 2014–2020 (CEC, 2011), this is likely to be an area of policy development and expansion.

However, such activities are unlikely to be straightforward. LEPs will need to work together whilst simultaneously grappling with vertical and horizontal political pressures. There are existing policy and governance tools that LEPs can draw upon. In terms of strategic efficiency, a key activity for LEPs will be to ‘marry up’ their concerns with securing economic growth on the one hand, with wider—yet related—concerns over housing provision, local infrastructure, environmental sustainability and social and territorial cohesion on the other. This will require LEPs to look both vertically and horizontally across their activities. Failure to do so risks individual LEPs becoming marginalized from national/EU funding opportunities and local priorities (Crowley, 2011). If new forms of strategic leadership and management evolve, these could assist in developing a planning agenda that brings together a place-based approach that is equally informed by a cross-boundary perspective.

Given the fluidity of LEP boundaries and the opportunity to reflect FEAs, there are also opportunities for LEPs to take forward some of the perceived benefits that were originally defined for RSS, including interrelationships between cities and their hinterlands. LEPs could be appropriately placed to provide guidance through the production of evidence/technical assessments to accommodate urban expansion in a sustainable and cohesive manner.

From a broader perspective, this paper highlights the ongoing effects of the changing structures and scales of governance in England. As we have illustrated, these in turn can lead to shifts in emphasis in the ‘objects of governance’ that are pursued at both a national and local level, and the types of activities that are both ‘designed in’ and ‘designed out’ by new sub-state structures such as LEPs (also see Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). The implications for *sub-regional* and *local* planning processes are that some networks, territories and spatial scales of intervention are promoted over others. This highlights the importance of politics—and how this is practiced in, through and against institutions that are defined in territorial terms (Goodwin, 2011). From the perspective of LEPs, their exact activity—planning or otherwise—will be dependent on the range of local political and social forces engaged in their governance, as well as the outcomes of local struggle and/or resistance. It may also rely initially on devolved central government infrastructure funding, as well as the extent to which planners can think strategically and spatially, regardless of the actual powers of LEPs (Baker & Wong, 2012). In turn, this will shape the extent to which democratic accountability and strategic efficiency can be achieved, or whether trade-offs are required as LEPs position themselves in a role as a democratic, sub-regional, planning force.

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