

Disentangling three decades of strategic spatial planning in England through participation, project promotion and policy integration*

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Abstract

Strategic spatial planning (SSP) has been a key planning practice supporting spatial transformation globally. However, designing and implementing strategic spatial plans is a complex task. The process involves prioritizing planning intentions, establishing funding mechanisms and structuring governance settings, which take shape within power configurations. It is within this complexity that a participatory and integrative planning approach assume increasingly importance when addressing, strategically, societal challenges such as spatial injustice. Furthermore, a consolidated planning practice – that is the experiences in dealing with SSP are thought to influence how strategic plans are prepared and executed. Bearing in mind the influential role of preceding experiences in SSP processes as well as of participation, project promotion and policy integration, this paper synthesises the results of a literature review reflecting three decades of SSP (1990-2020) in England. England has a well-defined history of engagements with SSP. The purpose is to discuss lessons learned from looking back thirty years and debate suggestions for how to design future SSP that account for public and private interests and align cross-sectoral policies. To overcome democratic accountability constraints and steering resource management effectively, this review pleas for more cooperative central–local relationships in shaping future SSP processes in England and beyond.

Keywords: planning; strategy; participation; policies; subsidiarity; governance.

Introduction

Strategic spatial planning (SSP) is a participatory, transformative and iterative, socio-spatial process through which a coherent spatial development strategy is co-produced (Hersperger et al., 2019). SSP is thought to overcome some of the rigidity of regulatory spatial planning (Kunzmann, 2013) such as statutory land use planning (Albrechts and Balducci, 2013). SSP involves relevant place-based actors and the specific activities of citizens and policy makers. SSP is a collaborative exercise ‘through which knowledge and value, rules and procedures are actively mobilized and transformed to produce new knowledge and value’ (Healey, 2003, p. 21). In this vein, SSP is directed towards securing coherence in policy delivery, bringing together sectoral policies for the development and use of land with other policy domains such as transportation planning, housing, agriculture and overall land management, which influence the nature of places and how they function (Albrechts, 2017). In this review paper, SSP is understood as a path to comprehensive planning, capable of tackling previous regulatory land-use planning approaches, by improving wider participation with stakeholders, including economic agents and the public, in order to define long-term strategic visions and strategic projects supporting implementation. SSP enhances integration across spatial plans and sectoral policies (Lingua, 2018). Strategic spatial plans are often implemented through projects coordinated by public actors to achieve policy objectives and thus shape spatial development strategies (Pagliarin, Hersperger and Rihoux, 2020). We define projects, as strategic development projects. These are typically large-scale urban and regional development enterprises, employed as fast-track plan-implementation approaches to ensure that spatial transformation happens on the ground in strategic and policy domains (Hersperger et al., 2019).

The effectiveness of strategic spatial plans is, therefore, influenced by how well they integrate in different policy spheres and how various stakeholders share visions towards such policies and co-produce strategic urban development projects supporting their implementation (Vigar, 2009). Furthermore, consolidated planning practice, understood as the experience and expertise of actors in dealing with SSP, also influences strategic plan-making and plan-implementation and is especially valuable for the process of consensus-building (cf. Palka et al. 2020).

It is important to stress also that SSP is path-dependent and demands an analysis within the specificities of a planning system of a selected territory (Nadin et al., 2020). This is what Albrechts (2017) refers to ‘situated practice’ of SSP or strategies that must be adapted to circumstances of a time and place. For example, SSP has taken different forms in the four nations of the United Kingdom (UK), in what has been defined a ‘differential experimentation’ (Morphet, 2011) or the ‘performative model’ (Berisha et al., 2020). In this paper, we specifically focus on SSP in England in the last three decades (1990-2020). Similar to various European countries, England has a well-defined history of engagements with SSP. However, the influence of European spatial planning in the English planning practice, has been the subject of strong domestic debates mainly because of increasing Euroscepticism that has resulted in drastic changes of the planning system (Lingua, 2018). Nonetheless, Tomaney et al. (2019), identify considerable changes in spatial planning in England since 2015 as the result of lessons of earlier planning practices both at home (e.g. absence of solid connections to other policy sectors) and abroad (e.g. the Irish strategic approach of connecting land use planning to public investments). We synthesise the results of a literature review by focusing on stakeholder participation, project promotion and policy integration, which constitute the analytical backbone of this paper. We contend here that along with consolidated planning practices, participation, project promotion and policy integration are at the epicentre of any SSP process. This is extensively justified in the spatial planning literature. For instance, Ziafati Bafarasat (2015) argues that these are the three defining features that distinguish between SSP as a proactive placemaking force and other spatial planning instruments. Tomaney et al. (2019) stress that public participation and cross-sectoral policy integration are key to effective SSP processes. In addition, Nadin et al. (2020) stress that the three central issues of participation, policy integration and adaption are increasingly important when dealing with grand societal challenges such as climate change, sustainability transition and spatial injustice. This is in line with a widespread definition of spatial planning as an expression of ‘a shift beyond a traditional idea of land-use planning to describe many aspects of planning practices that provide proactive possibilities for the management of change, involving policy-making, policy integration, community participation, agency stakeholding and development management’ (Tewdwr-Jones, 2004, p. 593). Furthermore, as Haughton (2012) noted, the time is ripe for an independent assessment of SSP, if only to ensure that similar mistakes, if they were made, do not occur again in the future.

The next section details how we have selected and reviewed the literature. We then provide an overview of SSP in England, followed by an analysis of the key findings. Based on previous SSP efforts in England, we aim to inform current efforts towards a revival of SSP in the country, which the UK2070 Commission might be indicative of (UK2070, 2020). The final report of the UK2070 Commission, published in February 2020, states that ‘The long-standing gap in strategic planning capacity in England therefore is now starting to be filled, but needs to be extended across all of England, for all metropolitan and city regions’ (p. 83).

Literature selection and review

We follow the systematic literature review method. We searched for published records in both academic and grey literature published in English. We used *Google Scholar* to conduct the search. July 1st, 2020 was the date of the literature search. We have restricted the search to the timespan 1990–2020. We covered the following types of literature: case studies, reviews, normative discussions and theoretical contributions, with a combination of search strings, which were tested before the final search: *search one* (“strategic spatial planning” AND “England”) =2,705 results; *search two* (“strategic regional planning” AND “England”) =253 results, and *search three* (“strategic spatial planning” AND “England” AND “participation” OR “project promotion” OR “policy integration”) =1,840 results. Through abstract reading, we selected the most relevant publications by judgmental sampling from a total of 4798 retrieved publications. This resulted in a non-probability sample of 82 publications. We then decided to carry a probability sample with confidence level of 95% arriving at the sample size of 116. Through systematic random sampling, we sampled elements from each search resulting in 198 records (i.e. 82+116). Further reading of these publications in terms of relevance to the overall aim of this study resulted in a content analysis of 90 records. We did not observe repeated publications in our systematic random sampling. If we had observed, we would have sampled extra elements.

Discussion

Our review of SSP in England resulted from the assessment of 35% of case studies, 15% of review papers, and 5% of normative discussions and a majority of theoretical contributions (45%). In a synthetic manner, results show how political changes of discourse and practice impact spatial transformation at the local level and across sectoral policies. Findings evidence a

positive evaluation from regional spatial strategies in comparison to informal alternatives. In terms of stakeholder participation, between 1990 and early 2000, debates were unanimous about the decisive role of the central government in SSP, including during the first generation of Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) (1990-1998). The contributions of SSP in England to investment decisions through projects are seldom explored in academic debates, contrary to a strong tradition of planning through projects in other European countries (e.g. Hersperger et al., 2019). In terms of policy integration, the key argument emerging from this review is of a gradual move beyond land-use issues and the linkage to sectoral policies such as housing, especially in the cases of West Midlands and the North West (e.g. Counsell and Haughton, 2002; Baker, 1998). An instrumental finding for planning in England and elsewhere, is that strategic planning practices rooted in governance systems streamline SSP process effectively and comprehensively.

Strategic spatial planning in England between 1990 and 2020

In England, SSP has been oriented towards securing sustainable development through more inclusive, integrative and delivery-oriented policies for the spatial organization, in particular at the regional scale (Morphet, 2011 in a practice oriented publication; Haughton et al., 2010 on the practices and discourses of spatial planning in England). Tomaney et al. (2019) argue that this reflects a preliminary influence of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) of 1999 in the English planning system. The ESDP seeks to widen the horizon of urban and regional planners beyond purely sectoral policy measures, to focus on the overall territorial situation and consider comprehensive development opportunities. SSP effectively started with the influential Patrick Abercrombie's Greater London Plan 1944 (Abercrombie, 1945); a Plan supplying the opportunity for a constructive, preservative and regenerative planning, which would serve as a 'lung' for the people of London (Gold and Gold, 2008). Although, with a light emphasis on economic planning (Gordon and Champion, 2020), Abercrombie's plan was exemplary in its neat logic, designing a Green Belt to physically 'contain' the urban core, and providing for a system of planned population movement to relieve the overcrowding inner areas of the city (Hall, 1988). Also in a practice-oriented and pleasingly provocative publication, Allmendinger (2011) captures well the role of participation, project promotion and policy integration in SSP in England. He argued that planning is about integrating policies such as

housing with environmental protection while involving stakeholders in decision-making. However, few other countries might match England in its highly experimental and politically changing attitude towards SSP (Gallent et al., 2013). The 1980s backlash against regional strategies and Metropolitan Structure Plans, within the Premiership of Margaret Thatcher, is an example. This backlash, which comprised housing developments and enterprise growth, was in part counteracted by a 1990 Conservative Administration request to the regional planning conferences of local governments (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006). These conferences of local government were thought to provide advice for a RPG. Consequently, ten Integrated Regional Offices were set up in 1994, one for each region in the country. These Government's Regional Offices (GOs), were established to have a wider role than the consideration of spatial planning, such as linking sectoral policies, and providing a regional input to policy formulation as well as improved territorial coordination across English regions (Pearce, Mawson and Ayres, 2008). The GOs worked also as a response to the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU subsidiarity principles in England. They created a quasi-democratically accountable regional tier for EU projects through the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) that ensued them (Mawson and Spencer, 1997). GOs and RDAs always held these decision-making powers, which were never devolved to Regional Assemblies (RAs) (Lynch, 1999).

Since its 1997 election, Labour's long-term objective was to develop RPG into a comprehensive spatial strategy with a statutory status (Swain et al., 2013a). The *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* (HM Government, 2004), therefore, replaced RPGs and County Structure Plans with Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). Publically shared opinions on the RPGs, prepared in the period 1998-2004, were focused on the continued domination of the role of central government and GOs in making changes to, and finalisation of, regional strategies. These strategies, which incorporated a Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), were intended to provide a long-term spatial framework with sub-regional detail (ODPM, 2004). Similarly to its predecessor, the RSS was required to be delivery-oriented, but *Planning Policy Statement 11: Regional Spatial Strategies* also stipulated that 'RSS cannot itself identify specific sites for inward investment' (ODPM, 2004, p. 40). In a referendum in November 2004, the people of the North East determinedly rejected the proposal to create a directly elected Regional Assembly. This result effectively put an end to proposals for RA elsewhere as plans for referenda in other

regions were consequently abandoned (Shaw and Robinson, 2007). In 2005, a Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) process was introduced with indicative budget allocations within which each region provided coordinated advice on how funding across transport, housing and economic policies should be better spent to help meet regional priorities (Martin, 2013). In 2008, with the financial crisis and subsequent global recession the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act* (HM Government, 2009) replaced the RA with the Leaders Board, and the RSS and RES with a Regional Strategy (RS).

Regional Strategies were intended to incorporate economic policies into statutory spatial planning and were to be prepared by the business-led RDAs in association with the Leaders Board (Ziafati Bafarasat and Baker, 2016). These reforms were, however, aborted. Specifically, on 6 July 2010, the Communities and Local Government Secretary of the incumbent Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government, Eric Pickles commented that they were a national disaster that robbed local people of their democratic voice, alienating them and entrenching opposition against new development (MHCLG, 2010). The new Government, therefore, abolished RAs and RDAs along with their strategies (Haughton and Hincks, 2013). The decision-making capacity of GOs and RDAs was substantially reduced before 2010 general elections. However, they paved a way to a so-called bottom-up alternative which by large has remained intact under subsequent Conservative Administrations (Lingua, 2018). At the core of this alternative, there is a statutory ‘Duty to Cooperate’, placed by the *Localism Act*, on public bodies (HM Government, 2011). Although Duty to Cooperate existed before the development of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF), it was with the NPPF that gained emphasis. This ‘Duty to Cooperate’ in England mirrors the power in Scotland but in a much reduced version (Lingua, 2018). It means that local planning authorities were required to demonstrate that they have fulfilled this duty in the form of a joint planning committee, a memorandum of understanding or a joint strategy when their new Local Plans are submitted for independent examination (DCLG, 2012). In the revised NPPF, however, this was changed, asking for one or more statements of common ground, documenting the cross-fertilization of place-based policies and progress towards more participatory models to address societal issues (MHCLG, 2019). Another initiative at the core of Coalition Government’s attempt for reshaping a sub-national leadership on development, was the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs

involve the participation of business leaders and local government representatives for the steering of housing, transport and economic growth policies (HM Government, 2010). In the following section we give an account of stakeholder participation in SSP processes.

Stakeholder participation

For the period post-2000, Baker et al. (2010) suggested that the New Labour's approach to stakeholder involvement was based on two principles: (i) more efficient service delivery through its tailoring to the needs of target communities; and (ii) reducing the gap between decision makers and those affected by policies, or fostering stronger local democracy. This means that, the participatory planning was intended to go beyond the formal institutions as stakeholders (ODPM, 2004; DETR, 2000). Haughton et al. (2010) interpret this emphasis on stakeholder involvement as the pursuit of legitimacy and credibility, especially for the strategic planning procedures, which were undertaken by quasi-democratic bodies. The critiques of stakeholder participation have therefore been mindful of the breadth and depth of regional policy deliberations, the latter in terms of genuine consensus building. Glasson (2002) highlighted the establishment of formal 'concordats', which can be translated here as agreements, between RAs, GOs and RDAs, while Marshall (2003) suggested that these official regional powers could veto proposals and stakeholder inputs which they considered to be against their agendas.

Cowell and Owens (2006) argue that by abolishing Structure Plans, the 2004 planning reforms removed the planning layer that had become a basic forum for the deliberation of social priorities amongst elected officials and other partners. This undermined stakeholder participation in SSP processes. They believed that County Structure Plans provided for inclusive and transparent consensus building on the directly elected platform of county councils whereas, at the regional level, economic interests as represented by the well-resourced and state-steered RDAs take a prominent position. Baker et al. (2010) suggested that issues around democratic accountability and the invisibility of the regional planning body (i.e. RAs), in the lives of citizens inhibited the capacity of RSS for engaging grassroots – a capacity that also suffered from poorly executed consultation exercises and inadequate *peer-to-peer* communication. Ziafati Bafarasat and Baker (2016), reinforced this argumentation as they contended that most plan agreements made on the RSS platform lacked fundamental stakeholder participation. Tewdwr-Jones (2012) noted a

similar deficit of participation. In a publication aimed at understanding spatial planning and territorial governance in the UK, Tewdwr-Jones (2012) identified governance structures being defined by the central government, which altogether lead to consensus building difficulties as local and regional partners became subsequently protective of their own positions and interests. Swain et al. (2013b) focus on the involvement of economic and environmental representatives in the RSS process while reiterating genuine attempts at wider public engagement and acknowledging that the latter had limitations at a strategic level. Such attempts, and their scalar barriers, are highlighted by Ziafati Bafarasat and Baker (2016), and community participation is also considered an area of achievement, mainly in the South East RSS process (Riddell, 2013).

Drawing on a range of case studies of strategic planning in the UK, Haughton et al. (2010) argued that the wider consultation procedures were designed to serve market-state objectives. Rather than considering spatial planning as oriented towards politicising the process of decision making and publicising fundamental debates around resource allocation, in this context it is regarded as collaborative engineering (Haughton et al., 2010). Allmendinger and Haughton (2012) argued that these collaborative engineering processes paved the way for the radical ‘rollback’ of planning reforms. In the same line of reasoning, Hager (2012) suggested that the establishment of collaborative regional planning institutions inadvertently revived market and state crises of power, accountability and democratic legitimacy. Although some planning agreements did support SSP processes, primarily at the regional level, some argue that tensions could surface again at the implementation phase (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009). Whereas Riddell (2013) argued that the outcome of housing negotiations in the South East RSS was an agreement of all partners, Allmendinger and Haughton (2012), questioned the existence of such inclusionary deliberations, and their alleged outcome of agreement; they mentioned judicial review challenges to the South East RSS by Guilford Borough Council and South Oxfordshire District Council in 2009 as an evidence. Haughton and Allmendinger (2011) claimed that failures in inclusive stakeholder involvement contributed to a legitimacy crisis for SSP at the regional level.

In a context of divisive austerity, Boddy and Hickman (2013) argued that the Duty to Cooperate and the emerging city-regional partnerships, including LEPs, could not realize consensual policy

making. Ziafati Bafarasat and Baker (2016) reasoned that any such agreements would still require the involvement of broader interests. Some are concerned about the democratic accountability of LEPs in their lack of formal planning roles and uncoupling of formal democratic processes (Allmendinger et al., 2016; Morphet and Pemberton, 2013). Bentley et al. (2010) stressed that rather than being a step towards localism, the establishment of target-controlled LEPs should be considered ‘re-centralisation in disguise’ – a view which Clarke and Cochrane (2013) echo under the ‘anti-political’ term. Doyle (2013) suggested that although local government and business interests dominated the LEPs, they have a sound capacity to involve stakeholders such as universities as well as social enterprises. LEPs date back to the Government’s 2010 White Paper ‘Local Growth: Realising Every Place’s Potential’. This was very much a centrally driven agenda, with the concurrent abolition of the RDAs (Pike et al., 2015). The LEPs can bid for funds from a centrally organized regional growth fund and other centrally organized funds such as the Growing Places Fund. In 2016, the government announced a review of the LEPs, led by Mary Ney, including their roles and responsibilities (Jones and Copus, 2021). McGuinness and Mawson (2017) believed that a gradual rise of such representative engagement will provide the context for some form of spatial planning to resume. The analysis of Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2017) about devolution of more responsibilities to Combined Authorities, from spatial policies on land and planning to sectorial policies on health and social care, might imply that they could be the future strategic planning bodies, but as Sandford (2017) debated, they have the same indirect democratic status as the former RAs, albeit with the absence of voluntary interests. Ziafati Bafarasat (2018) reiterated this structural deficit of Combined Authorities for strategic planning, and Grole et al. (2020) discussed it under what they term limited ‘input legitimization’.

Project promotion

Project promotion in the first generation of RPGs (1990-1998), which Alden (2006) describes as a ‘restricted activity’ under John Major, is nearly absent. Wray (2011) qualifies this in the case of strategic employment sites for the North West by suggesting that similarly to the government, the regional association of local planning authorities would not accept the challenge and was reluctant to set specific regional priorities for resource allocation. However, Roberts (1996) notes a move in some regions, such as the North West, towards ‘robustness’ in the documents prepared

in this period. This move, he suggested, was a result of both improvements in the procedures of preparing regional advice and the growing tendency of the government for more rigorous regional guidance through-projects. He stated that ‘Alongside the growth of confidence in the ability of RPG to provide a coherent and comprehensive basis for future development plans and investment, there has been a noticeable trend towards enhancing the life expectancy and robustness of RPG’ (Roberts, 1996, p. 107).

Complaining about a trend towards leaving issues unresolved, specifically in relation to transportation policies, and the inability to constitute a ‘real spatial strategy’, Marshall (2003), remained less satisfied with robustness of RPGs even in their second generation (1998-2004). Ziafati Bafarasat and Baker (2016) in a practice-oriented study focused on the North West of England, whereas the first RPG was a conformist exercise, the second involved a turn towards assertiveness with a tendency to discuss possible locations for major strategic development projects. Benneworth and Vigar (2007), noted an inclination in the North East to lowest common denominators in transport priorities, housing developments and establishment of strategic employment sites in the 2002 published RPG. Haughton and Counsell (2004) observed a similar ambiguous proposal in the East Anglia draft RPG (1998) for a new housing settlement in Greater Cambridge. No specific site was identified for this proposal in the RPG and detailed debates were deferred to the Cambridge and Peterborough Structure Plan, which, however controversially, managed to take forward the initiative. Headicar (2002) suggested that despite the incorporation of RTS in the second generation of RPG, there were a range of single purpose and sectoral focused agencies, such as the Highways Agency and RDAs. These agencies steered transport-based projects but were not under an obligation to follow the approach of the regional planning agency. Therefore, Glasson (2002) warned that the RDAs could become the *de facto* strategic regional planning entity. Haughton and Counsell (2004), in a paper aiming at investigating sustainable development in the process of regional plan making in England between 1990 and 2000, further observed a common trend in the drafting of RPGs i.e. promotion of projects intended to attract investment. For example in the North East, Yorkshire and Humber, and the North West, such investment aspirations of RESs, involved the location of greenfields. Wray (2011), however, argued that besides the requirement placed on RPGs to avoid identifying these greenfield sites, the strategic leadership of the North West Development Agency, which

was less evident in RPG procedures, was behind its pioneering role in site identification for investment purposes through the promotion of strategic development projects.

Cowell and Owens (2006) stressed that the post-2004 system widened the gap between strategic direction and the implementation of policies at the local level, whereas Batey (2013), draws on the Liverpool Core Strategy to argue that there was not enough focus on policy instruments at the local level. Dimitriou and Thompson (2007) argued that the RSS was a proactive instrument for the management of change, for example, through a clear hierarchy of plans, transport section and harnessing the delivery power of others. Thompson and Dimitriou (2007) observed evidence of such delivery, for example, in terms of urban regeneration projects in Manchester, Newcastle and Leeds. Benneworth and Vigar (2007), however, complained about the implementation dependence on Regional Development Agencies which have their own agendas. Martin (2013) stressed also that the implementation plan of the South East RSS involved a costly inventory that the agencies responsible for delivery of new infrastructure deemed to be necessary to support transport schemes, flood defence measures, higher education facilities, green infrastructure among other domains. Whilst Wray (2011) considers RES as resource planning and RSS as regulatory planning with the former as the major promoter of investments through projects, other scholars point out their unification could have addressed development functions of spatial planning more effectively with an implementation plan based on the RDAs own resources and their links to Whitehall (i.e. the site for key central-government administrative offices such as the Treasury and 10 Downing Street) (Baker and Wong, 2013). Others reflected on new growth, for example a new development west of Stevenage (town in Hertfordshire, England, 45 kilometres north of London), aborted by regional spatial planning as undesired investment (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010). Conversely, drawing on the experience of three local planning authorities, two of which imported housing growth models from neighbouring areas and the other was an exporter of such models, Hamiduddin and Gallent (2012) stressed that RSS revocation, left detrimental impacts on large scale housing development, particularly where future expansion is reliant on cross-local authorities' cooperation. Ziafati Bafarasat (2018) noted that in the latter, some localities like Cheshire West and Chester, considered greenbelt projects as land management measures in support of housing development. These concerns are also reflected in the accounts of Gallent et al. (2013) about the dilemmas of housing delivery under a growing

parochialism and the consequent move away from RSS housing targets. Pugalis et al. (2016) questioned the extent to which such projects addressed an apparent strategic void. Morphet (2017) argued that the Combined Authorities, some of which have directly elected mayors, would be able to change this ‘strategic void status’ as ‘Mayors have responsibilities for local development through the creation of Mayoral Development Corporations, and through setting priorities for transport investment and the location and type of housing’ (p. 102). The elected mayors will have the direct power to raise resources to design strategic projects supporting policy integration. In spite of this, the Government continues to favour a central role of LEPs in design and delivery of industrial development projects and supportive policies (Ziafati Bafarasat, 2018). Furthermore, Marlow (2019) draws on the lessons of the Greater Cambridgeshire Greater Peterborough LEP, which has now become Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, to exemplify the tensions between democratic accountability and strategic leadership. Marlow (2019) argues that the Government’s ‘Strengthened LEPs’ Review (HM Government, 2018) – partly stimulated by the Greater Cambridgeshire Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership experience – sought to reconcile some of these tensions. The Review sets out the Government’s plan to support LEPs to develop an evidence-based Local Industrial Strategy that sets out a long-term economic vision for their area based on local consultation (HM Government, 2018). The extent to which such economic strategies and linked projects will emerge from collectively defined spatial planning strategies remain, however, unclear (Grove et al., 2020). In support of project making streamlining the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy, several EU Member States have been implementing the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI). This tool has encouraged innovation through the integration of various policies within sustainable urban development projects. In the UK, ITI is a part of the Sustainable Urban Development agenda 2014-20, and has been implemented in London, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (Miller and Van der Zwet, 2018). In the following section we discuss the results of our literature assessment regarding the domain of policy integration in SSP.

Policy integration

In terms of policy integration, Baker (1998) underlined that ‘the guidance for the North West hints at a widening of the current scope of RPG to embrace regional economic development issues.’ (p. 166). Consequently, for the second generation of RPGs (1998-2004), Counsell and

Haughton (2002) stressed that the draft RPG for the North West adopted a more integrated approach to spatial policies that closely impacted sustainable development targets. This is in line with Aitchison (2002) assessment about the East Midlands Integrated Regional Strategy, which incorporated RES and RPG and considered new policy domains such as the lifelong-learning agenda. Counsell et al. (2007) were concerned about the integration of RES and RPG / RSS policies and coordinated policy integration across spatial scales in Yorkshire and Humber and suggested that the lead regional institutions were not willing to move towards the East Midlands model of an Integrated Regional Strategy. Martin (2013), however, observed a positive shift towards a better regional level integration of policies within the domains of transportation, housing and land management. Thompson and Dimitriou (2007) suggested that the shift towards policy integration in SSP gains in effectiveness if led by the central government. However, economic and spatial planning agencies in Whitehall failed to collaborate. In addition, Ayres and Pearce (2005) mentioned conflicting views on the contributions of the Regional Coordination Unit to inter-departmental cooperation on a regional basis. Thompson and Dimitriou (2007), stressed further that for integrated national policy making and the determination of priorities between regions: 'The time is well overdue for calls for a national spatial strategy for England...to be heeded' (p. 348) (cf. Wong, 2002). Haughton et al. (2010) stressed that the existence of different government initiatives to which various stakeholders in each strategy responded created considerable 'noise' in the system. Whereas Cowell and Owens (2006) considered the government's *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM, 2003) as part of such a sectoral 'noise' for housing developments, Pritchard (2013) argues that was the closest the Labour government ever came to a national spatial strategy. Nadin (2007) reiterated the commitment to cross-departmental policy integration as being evident in the Comprehensive Spending Review i.e. a governmental process carried out by UK's Treasury to set firm expenditure limits and, through public service agreements, define the key improvements that the public can expect from these resources.

Drawing on sustainability assessment exercises for the new RSS, in the case of the South East RSS, for example, which covered health impact assessment and a wide number of other themes, Glasson (2007) concluded that institutional innovations and the production of statutory RSSs in England can provide for the pursuit of a more holistic approach towards cross-departmental

policy integration. This argument echoes Roberts's findings (2007) about two barriers to the fulfilment of policy integration: (i) the absence of a requirement for regional organisations to produce an overarching strategy, and (ii) an ambiguity over which strategy, if any, is the superior document. Haughton et al. (2010) illustrated the latter argument in the case of the Yorkshire and Humber RSS: 'despite RSS becoming a statutory instrument, it was not clear how important it was...particularly in relation to the role of the Northern Way, city-region initiatives, the Regional Economic Strategy' (p. 174-175). Whilst Williams and Baker (2007) observed similar barriers to the inter-sectoral, inter-territorial and vertical integration of policies in the North West, they also highlight the potentially divisive nature of the RSS policy context. These, include, for example, the removal of Structure Plans, which could: i) reinforce fears of spatial injustice, mainly in rural areas, and ii) securing cooperation from the private sector, which could be turned against the public sector agencies involved in the housing market renewal projects. Martin (2013), however, underlined that: (i) the growing importance and status of RSS, and (ii) emphasis on promoting functional area strategies and partnerships in the process of RSS, along with the roles of RTS, the Examination in Public and Regional Funding Allocation, contributed to a better policy integration across Yorkshire and Humber. Baden and Swain (2013) highlighted the role of GOs in place-based policy integration and knowledge transfer throughout the RSS process. Pritchard (2013) emphasized the soft planning spaces, firmly based on experience of planning reform in the UK under the New Labour governments, which were created amid the RSS process and had positive implications for the integration of housing and employment policies. Conversely, as decoupled from regional spatial strategies, new spaces of planning are considered as sectoral driven (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2015). Ziafati Bafarasat (2018) pointed out the informal status of the LEPs confines the possibility of brokering any real agreements in policy integration. Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones (2017) also highlighted issues with LEP boundaries that have at least as much to do with political 'fixes' as economic analysis, and their lack of long-term vision and dynamism, and faltering growth and uncertain economic conditions which undermine the capacity of LEPs for policy integration. These challenges involving the integration of policies with non-economic sectors and other city-regions, are identified by some as basic deficits of the LEPs, although others observe that the Duty to Cooperate often fails to yield integration within city-regions in such strategic fields as housing (McGuinness and Mawson, 2017). Morphet and Pemberton (2013) argue that LEPs provide a

flexible potential for the vertical integration of policies, from the local to the EU level. In this context, it is important to underline the great relation between EU programmes such as the EU Cohesion Policy or LEADER for a Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) initiative. CLLDs support delivering sub-regional interventions under the European structural and investment funds (ESIF) in the 2014-2020 period, as well as in earlier EU multiannual financial frameworks (2006-13) (Miller, 2014).

While acknowledging issues around the coordinative capacity of the LEPs in the light of their weak representative profile, their lack of formal planning powers, a less enforceable Duty to Cooperate and an inter-LEP void, Pugalis and Townsend (2013), pointed out that ‘LEPs... may provide sub-regional fora in which many aspects of the future spatial organization of development can be considered in a more integrated and strategic manner. LEPs may therefore be of value to the design of future SSP processes, just as the reverse is the case; it is necessary at all stages of LEP business that planning is part of their activities, for instance in viewing the transport needs of business’ (p. 115). Morphet and Pemberton (2013) suggested that LEPs could perform an important role as promoters of projects in the domains of sub-regional infrastructure development. Pike et al. (2015) argued that this will depend on their complex multi-scalar setting, while Pugalis and Townsend (2013) suggest that this raises the dilemma of democratic accountability within plan-implementation through projects.

Conclusion

We critically discussed stakeholder participation, the promotion of localized and sector-specific projects and policy integration in thirty years of English experimentation with SSP, specifically the Regional Planning Guidance, first (1990-1998) and second generations (1998-2004), the Regional Spatial Strategies and their bottom-up replacements in the period post-2010. Our purpose was to discuss lessons learned from looking back and debate suggestions for how to design future SSP in England and beyond. With this in mind, there are some lessons to draw from our review that could streamline future SSP endeavours. *First*, statutory obligations and coherent national frameworks contribute to stakeholder participation and policy integration more than they confine innovative methods in these fields. These innovations require a deepening of relationships between actors whose conflictual interests discourage sound spatial negotiations in

an optional context. However, democratic status of these actors and transparency of their decision-makings are equally important. Although these would require more devolved powers to local level governance structures, such actors would not then represent different organizations. Another key finding is that – where strategic projects are not incorporated into spatial strategies, their identification by the strategic planning entity hinders consensus building around investment priorities. This is because stakeholders will replicate negotiation tactics which they have successfully applied during the strategy making process. Evidence shows that regionalizing a share of departmental expenditures on the basis of the resultant list of project priorities could address the often lack of a delivery vehicle in SSP i.e. could facilitate plan-implementation. All these require the establishment of a permanent institution, which would be in charge of making and implementing spatial strategies. The running finance and process management of such an institution demands an effective central government engagement in strategic planning which has often received positive evaluations in this capacity. *Secondly*, the localism approach to SSP processes pursued in England is premised on a resourceful and coherent local government context of a Duty to Cooperate that refuses to live up to the expectations. Such a ‘duty’, which is less likely to result in serious interest exchanges between local entities, does not involve the strategic spatial vision and institutional platform to engage the public on one hand, and a range of sectoral departments on the other hand. Findings show that informal city-regional partnerships do not provide these type of assets in the absence of which cross-local projects may be promoted in a hasty pursuit of economic growth. Moves towards the establishment of mayoral Combined Authorities with SSP powers to help overcome these limitations still involve the issue of scales at which social and environmental objectives are best integrated. Conversely, these authorities will find it difficult to exercise SSP which would put under scrutiny their blurred pivotal policy-making roles.

Our findings complement those of the UK2070 (2020), which could be perceived as a renewal and reinforcement of SSP in the UK. The Commission underlines that new institutional structures and processes are needed to promote effective and efficient use of resources in meeting local priorities, and enable innovative collaborative action. The Commission also calls for further devolution, which would require a changed relationship between local and central government and joined up policy-making, particularly involving housing and transport policy

and policies intended to mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Therefore, this review pleads for future SSP processes that take shape under a more balanced central–local relationships. This unstrained, more cooperative and local-focused relationship would primarily reconcile democratic accountability constraints of three decades of SSP in England and support effective and sustainable use of resources by prioritizing local-based needs. Given calls for responsible devolution by the UK2070, our findings aid in suggesting that these could be achieved through: (i) *subsidiarity*, which makes sure that SSP undertakes only those tasks that cannot be performed at the local level, and (ii) *statehood*, which empowers SSP to drive the whole-of-government agenda, and facilitates the delivery of projects. Subsidiarity gains relevance as one of the operating principles of UK’s Government in a scenario of regional planning post-Brexit as the UK no longer abides by the Treaty of Rome, Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and the Lisbon Treaty (cf. Morphet, 2017). We stress the importance of allowing spatial discretion in any future institutional and procedural reforms, which would enable the transformation of complex local dynamics into action-oriented strategies valuing local assets and potentials. Altogether, these would contribute to effective SSP in England and the UK.

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