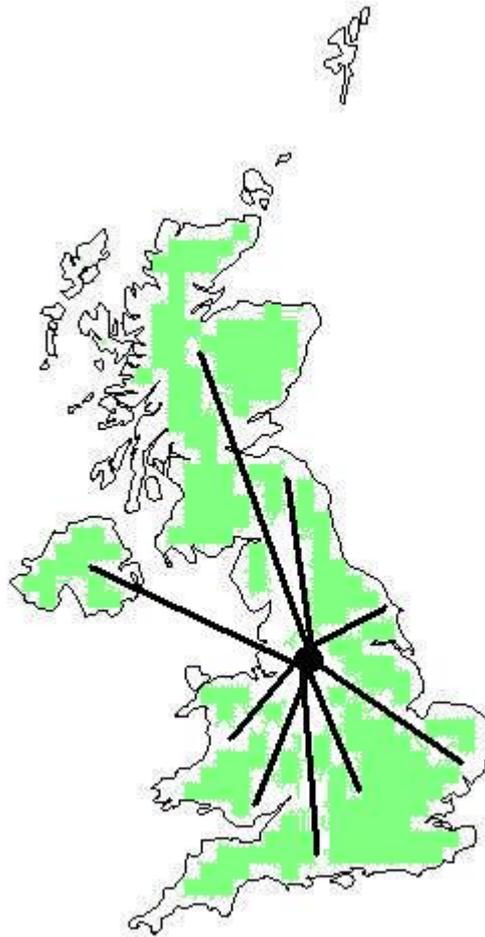


Comparative Urban Futures: Spatial Networks for Sustainable Urban Development



COMPARATIVE URBAN FUTURES: SPATIAL NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Mistra Urban Futures is a unique international center for promoting sustainable urban futures, with its headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden. We believe that the coproduction of knowledge is a winning concept for achieving sustainable urban futures and creating FAIR, GREEN, and DENSE cities. It is funded by the Mistra Foundation for Strategic Development, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and seven consortium members.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks go to the 17 interviewees from the five case study cities (Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester and Newcastle) listed in Appendix One for their time and help in contributing to this report. Their input including feedback was invaluable. Others helped from the case study cities: Paul Taylor (Bristol) and Hamish Wilson for facilitating arrangements with their cities; Richard Baker who provided detailed feedback with Kit England from Newcastle; Dave Clarke from Bristol; and Professor Paul Fleming from Leicester and De Montfort University for his very helpful comments and recommended additional sources of information. Thanks to Jen Rickard at Core Cities for help with contacts in the case study cities. Last but by no means least, thanks go to Dr Beth Perry and Dr Mike Hodson for their unstinting and invaluable advice and support during undertaking this research project.

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Foreword

Mistra Urban Futures (M-UF) is an international centre for sustainable urban futures, based in Gothenburg, Sweden. Mistra Urban Futures was established in 2010 with a vision to increase capacities in order to transform current, unsustainable urban development pathways to more sustainable urban futures in the global South and North.

M-UF believes that co-production is the way to achieve sustainable urban futures and that this process should focus specifically on the creation of Fair, Green and Dense cities. The co-production of Fair, Green and Dense cities is a complex challenge that requires interaction between a variety of bodies. M-UF has established Local Interaction Platforms (LIP) in five cities – Cape Town, Gothenburg, Greater Manchester, Kisumu, and Shanghai - and an Urban Futures Arena (UF-Arena), which supports collaboration and learning across and within each LIP.

The Greater Manchester Local Interaction Platform (GMLIP) is hosted by the Centre for Sustainable Urban and Regional Futures (SURF) at the University of Salford in Greater Manchester. The platform runs until 2015. Our overall aim is to improve the relationship between research and practice in creating a sustainable Greater Manchester, and, thereby, to enable a more systematic, integrated and inclusive urban transition.

We have been working with a broad range of bodies across Greater Manchester on a range of research, practice and capacity-building activities to address two central questions:

- What is happening to the sustainable cities agenda in the context of the economic, political, social and ecological crises of the 21st Century?
- In this context, how can the knowledge and skills of different stakeholders and communities be brought together to support a more sustainable urban transition in Greater Manchester?

In 2012 we embarked on a large project entitled ‘Mapping the Urban Knowledge Arena’. This project sought to develop a baseline assessment of developments, issues and initiatives in the city-region through a range of pilot activities. We mapped the existing knowledge base in sustainable urban development, explored gaps, identified novel practices, assessed the extent of joined-up thinking, engaged with different groups and sought to locate the Greater Manchester experience in its contemporary UK context.

A series of pilot activities were designed to cut across policy, academic, business, community and cultural groups through different modes of knowledge production and the deployment of innovative modes and tools, including community researchers, focus groups and seminars, generating action-research projects, an exhibition, working with artists, co-reflection and visual methods such as film and photography.

This Working Paper is one of a series of supporting reports that have been produced as part of the Mapping the Urban Knowledge Arena project. It reflects substantial work done already but should be read as part of an ongoing process of research and practice activities. We have also produced an Annual Report that brings together insights from across all of the pilot activities. Drawing on the insights from the pilot activities, a Programme of Work for 2013-2015 has now been developed which takes forward the key themes and issues into research and practice activities.

We hope you enjoy reading this report – if you would like a copy of the Annual Report or other Working Papers, please contact the GMLIP by emailing a.wharton@salford.ac.uk.



Beth Perry, Director GMLIP



Mike Hodson, Deputy Director, GMLIP

Executive Summary

In brief:

- There are distinctive patterns (or waves) in the way that cities have pursued sustainable urban development (SUD) through spatial networks in a UK (English) context from 1990 until today.
- Post 2010, under the Coalition government's form of localism, an increasingly complex and diversified picture is evolving in the approaches taken by cities towards SUD.
- It is clear that cities have an important role to play in the promotion of SUD and in the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
- However, the capacities of cities to promote SUD are established crucially on long-term investment in the 'place qualities' of embedded knowledge, strong institutions, effective leadership and trusting network relationships. These may only be built up and sustained over time. The processes involved need to be much better understood, not just locally but also in central government.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This paper explores how cities have pursued sustainable urban development (SUD) through spatial networks in a UK (English) context.

Two questions were considered. The first primary question is: what is the role of spatial networks in SUD? This is considered in a broad context of change in local governance in England, which was driven by a broad range of political, economic, social as well as environmental factors. The second secondary one is: in what ways do these networks contribute to policy transfer and learning? Both these questions are explored in the context of the period since around 1990, which was when the issue of global warming gained significant international traction through the Rio Summit of June 1992. From then on, network activity from the global to the local expanded, to which local authorities and their partners made a vital contribution.

This research contributes to a three year project which maps what the challenges cities are facing, what the solutions are and how policies can be more effective through the inclusion of local and other forms of knowledge.

The overall project has four key aims which represent the distinctive approach of Mistra Urban Futures: bringing together the 'what' of knowledge with the 'how' of formulating and implementing urban policies for sustainable futures. The aim of the overall project is to produce a framework for understanding how the challenges of SUD are shaped in different contexts and what steps cities can take to enhance the effectiveness of policy-making and implementation.

WHAT WAS DONE

The background research to this project was conducted over two stages during the summer to winter of 2012. Stage one, a review of literature, was undertaken on the impact of networks and policy transfer on approaches towards SUD from the early 1990s until today. Stage two was a series of 17 interviews conducted with local authority officers and Local Enterprise Staff and partners in five English cities between September to November 2012: Birmingham; Bristol; Leeds; Leicester and Newcastle (see list in Appendix One). The aim of these interviews was to inform understanding of the context, purpose and role of networks at different spatial levels (city, city-region (or sub-region) and neighbourhoods) in promoting SUD.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- There are distinctive patterns (or waves) over the time period 1990 until today

The research has shown that the path that these networks has followed is not linear. It is possible to identify distinctive patterns (or waves) within three time periods since 1990 (1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2010 and 2010 onwards) covering networks within a national/sub-national context and internationally (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2012) (see Figure 1).

With a risk of over-simplification, 1990 to 2000 can be identified as a period of experimentation in emergent networks and partnerships in an era of *municipal voluntarism* (*Ibid*). A number of leading cities, including our case study cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle responded early on to the challenge of climate change and became at their own initiative frontrunners in the UK, participating internationally and locally from the beginning of this period onwards. Leeds was a front-runner in this period in a different way; through excusing leadership in creating a strategic partnership for the city in the form of the *Leeds Initiative*.

2000 to 2010 coincided with the mature years of the Labour government. This was a period when more bottom-up diverse approaches towards spatial networks that had evolved in the 1990s had increasingly to conform within a top-down 'community leadership' framework constrained by local agreements, targets, indicators and performance regimes. There were positive things about this period, including the national indicators for climate change (Cooper and Pearce, 2011) and the Climate Change Act 2008. However, what might have appeared to have been a benign decade of economic stability and relative resource availability (certainly compared with today), might now on reflection seem like an era of relative missed opportunity.

What has emerged post-2010, is both more diverse and more complex. The Coalition government has claimed a localism agenda. Much of the top-down performance and inspection infrastructure developed by Labour has gone. This has created new freedoms and opportunities for local authorities, including in relation to pursuing SUD. However, this is balanced by increasing austerity in local government budgets through reduced government grants and freezes in Council Tax.

Varied patterns are emerging in the way that different cities are responding in shaping their networks for SUD. Standardised top-down models imposed by the Centre (e.g. LSPs) are being replaced by more distinctive approaches designed locally appropriate to the different ‘place-based’ characteristics of the city (and its sub-region/city-region). These are driven by an increasingly complex range of motivations and drivers.

- Advancement of networks for SUD in cities

Important issues can be identified.

First, within the case studies, the city is becoming the primary context for pursuing networks for SUD, whilst the sub-region (city-region) is becoming the main setting to progress the competitiveness of the local (and green) economy. This pattern has been reinforced by the abolition of (formal) regional spatial planning and the creation of private sector led LEPs around an economic growth agenda. An exception is Leeds, where the development of city-regional working is the most advanced of the case study cities (followed by the West of England LEP and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP).

Second, whilst the international dimension to networks for sustainable development is less pronounced than it was in the 1990s or even 2000s, it still remains important. Of the case study cities Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle are still particularly active internationally in networks (e.g. Euro Cities, ICLEI, Energy Cities, the European Covenant of Mayors and European Green Capital) and see participating in these as important to innovation in SUD locally.

Third, the role of networks in SUD has changed. In the early days (1990s) the focus was on developing relationships and trust within networks and identifying strategy, for example, through the LA21 process. Since 2000, not only have partnership networks become more mainstreamed, but the focus has also shifted increasingly from identifying strategy to delivery. The emphasis on delivery has become even more pronounced since 2010. This is reinforced by the impact of austerity on local authority budgets and incentives, such as through the Energy Act 2011, to reach delivery agreements with Utility Companies as well as increasing involvement by the private sector. This in turn is promoting a stronger emphasis on innovation, as local authorities are increasingly forced to seek new resource and network solutions to problems. However, this is not an easy transition to make since it requires harnessing new skills sets for local government officers, particularly in working in projects with the private sector.

- Policy implications

First, relates to the role of central government. It is clear that the kind of ‘conditional’ model of localism pursued by Labour (Hildreth, 2011) had limitations for creating a context conducive to progress in city responses to climate change. The top-down target and performance regimes offered some benefits. These included a focus on climate change indicators and targets, improving the quality expertise on and quality of data recorded, encouraging local authorities to work in collaboration on climate change issues with the private and voluntary sectors and raising awareness of the need to put in place local measures to address climate change (Cooper and Pearce, 2011). However, the downside is the tendency to incentivise uniformity and discourage local innovation.

On the other hand, the experience so far of the Coalition government indicates that the absence of a clear national policy framework towards climate change and energy security makes it harder for cities to be settled about the directions that they should take. Nevertheless, the case study cities welcomed the growing engagement by government departments like DECC and DEFRA in dialogue with local authorities. A case was made in interviews that this should be strengthened further with greater dialogue and consideration of staff secondments across local and central government and even the private sector as a relatively low cost means of building cross-organisational competency, skills and understanding.

Second, there are limitations to the Coalition government's form of localism. A positive outcome is that the removal of Labour's performance framework and introducing new incentives has enabled innovation by the case study cities covered in this research. On the other hand this is likely to be impacted by growing austerity in local authority budgets, where the incentive to find new solutions and manage budgets effectively is pushed to the point where cutting out important activities becomes the only option.

Third, there may also be a wider problem here; that the Centre with its focus on short-term delivery within the space of a single government administration, fails to grasp the significance of the embedded nature of knowledge and expertise within the context of 'place'. Building effective local networks for SUD takes time and requires maintaining momentum over the long-term. The role of the Centre in both challenging and incentivising creative change and innovation at the local level can be constructive. However, the chopping and changing of institutional frameworks may have counter-productive elements. The cities (city-regions) that are best placed at the present time are those that have been able to absorb the best bits of new institutional changes (e.g. the engagement of private sector leaders who have not worked with the public sector before, through the creation of LEPs) and integrate them within their own long-term ambitions and structures. They are places that have consistently built upon robust networks across geographies and sectors and can rely on trust in relationships to resolve challenging issues. The cities (city-regions) least best positioned are those that constantly find themselves starting almost all over again in response to a new central initiative, as they find it difficult to hold together effective network relationships across places within their area. The result is that institutional capacity between places is widening to a potential gulf. There will be a few places (particularly larger cities like Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol) that are very well placed to pursue a SUD agenda. There will be many others beyond the case study cities that will find it much more difficult.

However, the extent of austerity is putting progress at a local level at risk. It is also likely that the contribution that local 'places' can contribute to sustainable development is only partially understood in Whitehall. What may be missing is an appropriate understanding that progress locally is not just about policy initiatives. Local momentum in SUD is established critically on investment in the 'place' qualities of embedded knowledge, strong institutions, effective leadership and trusting network relationships; all of which may only be built up over time. Finally, this study has demonstrated that cities have an important role to play in pursuing SUD through spatial networks:

“Perhaps one of the most surprising responses to climate change over the past two decades has been the growing involvement of municipal governments and other urban

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the findings of a research project with the aim to better understand how cities have pursued sustainable urban development (SUD) in a UK (English) context through spatial networks. It forms a contribution to a wider study to network the Greater Manchester Local Interaction Platform (GMLIP) within the context of its region, hinterland and other UK cities.¹ As such it should be related to other papers in this series, which also address background issues, including matters of definition of concepts used within this and other papers in the series.²

Two questions were addressed that are central to understanding a narrative about how sub-national actors and interests have become engaged in the development of a policy narrative and its realisation in the quest for sustainable development in urban environments. The first was: what is the role of spatial networks in SUD? This question is the primary focus of the report. The background is that from around 1990 onwards key trends converged to enable a growing role for spatial networks in SUD in the governance of cities as an expanding range of actors below the level of the nation state: local governments, private sector and voluntary organisations, became increasingly active in promoting SUD. In doing so, they were not just content to act within their immediate spatial domain, but also connected in external networks with other organisations with which they had shared interests. Given this context, the aim was to identify trends in the evolution of spatial networks up to the present day, as cities continually explore ways to secure sustainable development. These changes are considered within a broad context in which drivers of change encompassed political, economic and social changes as well as environmental.

The second and secondary question was: in what ways do these networks contribute to policy transfer and learning? Policy transfer has been defined as:

“..a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place.”

(Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996)

To address this Prince (2012) suggests that there are a number of different approaches towards understanding policy transfer. One is concerned with what particular processes of policy transfer can tell us about the political-economic-social context in which the transfers are occurring. (Approach A)? A second approach focuses on the way particular places are

¹ SURF is the only UK and European partner in an unprecedented 12 year comparative urban research programme funded by the Swedish environmental Foundation, MISTRA. The Greater Manchester LIP has been formed as part of this programme to address: 1. What is happening to the SUD agenda in the context of the economic and ecological crises of the 21st Century? And 2. How can the knowledge and skills of different stakeholders be brought together to support sustainable urban transitions? The overall ambition of the Greater Manchester LIP is to create an urban knowledge area to better share knowledge, skills and expertise to develop fair, green and dense urban futures.

² Also see OECD (2012) and Baker (2012) for an analysis of key terms and definitions relating to the “urban” context

constituted within dynamic relational geographies (e.g. McCann, 2011; McCann and Ward, 2010) (Approach 2). A third approach focuses more intently on the transferring policies themselves (Prince, 2012) (Approach 3).

This paper therefore provides an analysis of the development of networks over the period since the early 1990s until today; to consider what reflections might be made on what has occurred in SUD through network activity and what difference it has made to policy, learning and practice.

The background research to this project was conducted over two stages during the summer to winter of 2012. Stage one was a review of literature undertaken on the impact of networks and policy transfer on approaches towards SUD from the early 1990s until today. This was subsequently updated to take into account very recent papers and additional material recommended by interviewees. Stage two was a series of 17 interviews conducted with local authority officers and Local Enterprise Partnership staff and partners in five English cities between September to November 2012: Birmingham; Bristol; Leeds; Leicester and Newcastle (see list in Appendix One). The purpose of these interviews was to inform understanding of the context, purpose and role of networks at different spatial levels (city, city-region (or sub-region) and neighbourhoods) in promoting SUD. They also touched on the wider regional context. The draft paper was circulated to interview contributors for comment. Feedback received has been taken into account in revisions to this paper.

The report is organised into five chapters. Chapter 2 explains the context to the evolution of spatial networks during the period covered by this report. It shows that a series of factors facilitated both the growth and shifting role of networks over this time that provide a platform for today. Key trends during the three sub-periods addressed by this paper (1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2010 and 2010 to today) are identified. In each case, what happened and what might have been learned is considered. Chapter 3 provides an analysis of the case study interviews. It explores: why cities engage in SUD and what networks have been engaged in at different spatial levels. Chapter 4 continues this analysis by identifying other key factors in the maintenance of effective networks. Chapter 5 sets out the papers conclusions and policy recommendations, including issues for further reflection. Of particular priority, is the imperative for a wider understanding of the critical importance of investing in the 'place' qualities of embedded knowledge, strong institutions, effective leadership and trusting network relationships to making progress in SUD; all of which may only be built through continuous progression over time.

Chapter 2: HISTORICAL CONTEXT: REASONS FOR GROWTH IN SPATIAL NETWORKS 1990 UNTIL TODAY

Whilst the focus of this report is on the evolution of networks for SUD, the context is set by the broad sweep of change in local governance that has taken place from 1990 to the present day, driven by political, economic, social and environmental factors. This chapter reflects upon why spatial networks formed and grew in significance during this period and why they are important today, particularly in a UK (English) context. It then goes on to examine important trends over three identified periods – 1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2010 and 2010 onwards – for which there is precedence in the literature (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013).

WHY SPATIAL NETWORKS GREW IN IMPORTANCE

Several reasons can be identified to explain the growth of spatial networks for SUD.

First, was recognition that sustainable development (and within it climate changes) was a serious and complex ‘global problem’, for which any effective response was beyond the reach of the individual nation states. Global interest in SUD can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s. In an urban context, its profile had risen through the environmental impact of rapid industrialisation and rapidly expanding cities in the global south (Whitehead, 2012) and more broadly due to the early 1970s oil crises.

By 1990, the issue of global warming was gaining international traction. It was in the lead up to and activities beyond the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 (Rio Summit), which provided a particularly significant milestone in establishing the global profile around the issue. Implementation of the agreement required collective action coordinated through international institutions and agreements either globally (UN) or regionally (EU). Whilst there had been activity around this issue prior to 1990 (UNHABITAT had earlier begun to focus concerns through the Vancouver Declaration in 1976), it was about this time that pressure built up sufficiently to develop an internationally mediated agreement to tackle climate change. The Rio conference and Agenda 21 agreement marked a significant milestone in an evolving process of environmental policy being mediated through international institutions, which carry on today. This international background of climate change negotiations began relatively optimistically with the Agenda 21 agreement at Rio and has since passed through a ‘roller coast ride’ of climate change conferences and inconclusive agreements involving the contribution from an increasingly diverse set of actors from outside the formal negotiation process, including cities (Bulkeley et al, 2012). The assertion of different regional and national interests and the global economic crises post-2008 has not made making progress easy.

Second, in the context of globalisation, there was increasing recognition that nation states could not make an effective response within their own territories without the active engagement of sub-national and local actors, including local governments. Around 1990, there was a distinct conceptual shift from government to governance. The professional certainties that had marked post-war government had evaporated and had been replaced by a growing understanding that many of the problems faced by governments were, like climate change, highly complex for which there were no straight forward solutions ('wicked issues').

As a result, nation states were caught between the developing role of international institutions in establishing a framework for international and regional action and a growing assertiveness by sub-national actors. Some have described this process as the 'hollowing-out' of the state, as central government becomes increasingly squeezed between both international and local actors (Peet, 2007). Arguably the powers of the nation state were being rescaled 'upwards', 'downward' and 'outwards' to supra-national institutions, local administrations and non-state actors (Prince, 2011). This trend was reflected in the formation and growth of networks for SUD (Rydin, 2010). Local governments, for example, became globally active from around 1990, by forming their own international climate change networks to respond to the crises.

These networks can be traced at different levels, up to the global and down to the very local. This paper is particularly concerned with exploring the role that UK (English) cities have played within such networks to promote sustainable development. In doing so it acknowledges that networks have operated at different spatial levels:

- Global e.g. ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability
- Regional (e.g. EU) e.g. Energy Cities, European Covenant of Mayors
- National e.g. Core Cities Group, Local Government Association (LGA)
- Sub-regional e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)
- Local e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships
- Community e.g. Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network

Third, in the UK at least, 'community governance' emerged as a partnership network of public, private and community actors in promoting a 'common vision' for sustainable well-being of their areas. It could be seen as a 3rd Way initiative (Giddens, 1994), or a perception that it was possible to reach local consensus on a vision and ways of working that looked beyond divisions on difficult issues like sustainable development and unite disparate groups and views (Raco and Flint, 2012). This approach began experimentally in the early to mid-1990s, coinciding with the Major led Conservative Government. Cities like Leeds (the *Leeds Initiative*) and Manchester, acting independently of central government led the way in seeking new ways to secure the performance of the local economy, through involving new actors, particularly from the private sector. Eventually such approaches became mainstreamed by New Labour through the Local Government Act 2000, which imposed a more uniform top-down framework on what up to that stage had emerged largely as bottom-up diversified approaches in different places. Some of Labour's underlying framework remains in place today, including the legal requirement on local authorities to lead the preparation of sustainable community strategies to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area.

However, as will be shown, aspects of New Labour's community leadership model are breaking down under the Coalition Government post-2010. This is changing the nature of local and sub-regional networks for SUD.

It is therefore recognised that the story of networks in SUD is not linear over time. Changes occurred during the period under examination which altered the direction and nature of network activity in SUD. First, governments changed, bringing changes in policy: indeed, a Conservative government was in place at the beginning of the period and a Conservative Liberal Coalition at the end, with Labour in power for 13 years in the middle. The UK is a highly centralised state (particularly England), with a history and culture of 'conditional' local-self-governance (Hildreth, 2011). It is therefore not surprising to identify a trend in England where local governments act generally less independently from central government (including in their approach to networks), than local governments in many Western European countries would do, where a more 'representative' local-self-governance system is more dominant (Ibid). However, there have been subtle shifts in the central-local relationship over time, reflected today in the rhetoric of 'localism'.

In addition, the period is marked by significant economic change. The 1990s began in a recession, which lasted to around 1994. It was followed by an almost unprecedented period of apparent rather than real sustained economic growth and stability. This came to a dramatic end in the post-2008 credit crunch and depression. It was arguably easier to prioritise sustainable development in what appeared to be the calm waters of a growing economy, when it was seen to be part of a win-win with economic growth and social justice, than in the storm of an economic crisis, more drawn out than the 1930s Great Depression (Flint and Raco, 2012).

To highlight the impact of these trends in the role of spatial networks and lessons for policy transfer, the period since 1990 is divided roughly into three: 1990 to 2000; 2000 to 2010 and 2010 to today (see Table 1). The following sections explore these three periods and what they mean for the role of spatial networks in SUD, particularly in the context of English cities, for today.

The analysis begins around 1990, because it was then that all three factors identified above began to come together. By 1990 public and policy pressure was growing for a response to the challenge of climate change. Local governments had begun to see a wider role for themselves, both individually and collectively leading to a marked increase in networking activity both locally and internationally. A small number were even represented at the Rio Summit, including Leicester, in recognition of their pioneering work. 1990 to 2000 might be characterised as a period of relative experimentation, both globally and in a UK context. Bulkeley and Betsill (2013) describe this period as one of *municipal voluntarism*, characterised by individual local authorities recognising the potential significance of climate change and offering some kind of response, primarily around mitigation measures. It coincided with a growth in network activity, particularly by local governments, and a temporary relatively 'hands-off' approach towards local government from central government in the UK (as central government immersed itself in other crises). It coincided with the emergence of a new generation of local government leaders in cities like Leeds, Manchester and Leicester, who were actively building outwardly facing networks to facilitate development and secure investment for their cities. If there was an urban renaissance in England's cities, arguably the foundations were laid during this

period, reinforced by the advent of availability of lottery funds for large physical projects. It also marked a break from the more directly interventionist approach of the former GLC and Metropolitan Councils, who were more confident in the ability of the Council to operate more independently of networks as the agent of change.

Table 1 – Three periods for sustainable development networks

Period	Characterised by	International and UK
1990 to 2000	Emergent networks and partnerships	Internationally, this period coincided with the Rio Summit. In the UK it was marked by the Major (Conservative) Government and the early days of the New Labour Government from 1996
2000 to 2010	Mainstreaming multi-level governance and networks	This period coincides with the mature years of the New Labour Government, and the mainstreaming of community (or network) and multi-level governance.
2010 onwards	From partnership to service delivery, uniformity to increasing diversity, complexity and austerity	This covers the period so far of the Conservative Liberal Coalition Government

1990 TO 2000 – EMERGENCE OF SPATIAL NETWORKS IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In 1990, three international networks were formed specifically to focus on sustainable development and driven by local governments (Bulkeley, 2010): ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability; The Climate Alliance and Energy Cities (formerly *energié-citiés*) (see Table Two). A further network, Fedarene (European Federation of Agencies and Regions for Energy and Environment) was also formed in 1990 with a focus on regions and energy.³

There was some participation by UK towns and cities, particularly in Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and Energy Cities, reflecting the growing public and policy profile of sustainable development (and climate change). However, compared with local governments in many other countries, UK local authority membership in these international networks was limited. Of our case study cities, Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle were all members of ICLEI. Leicester and Newcastle were also active in Energy Cities. It is therefore not surprising that these cities were amongst a limited number of UK outriders in developing good practice in SUD at this time.

³ For further information see: http://www.fedarene.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=148&Itemid=96&lang=en#

Table 2 – Wave one of international networks for sustainable development with a local government focus

Network/formed	Purpose	Members (UK)
ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability 1990	To provide technical consulting, training and information services to build capacity, share knowledge and support local government in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level	Over 1,220 local government members from 70 countries <i>(Birmingham⁴, Bristol, Craigavon, Glasgow, Greater London Authority, Knowsley, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Woking and Royal HaskoningDHV (associate)⁵)</i>
Energy Cities 1990	To assist its members to: enhance their role and skills in the field of sustainable energy; influence European Union urban, energy and environmental protection policies and promote exchanges of knowledge and experience and joint projects	<i>(Aberdeen, Leicester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Milton Keynes, London Borough of Sutton)</i>
Climate Alliance 1990	To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, support indigenous rainforest peoples and conserve the tropical rainforests and their biological diversity. In 2006 the Climate Alliance's General Assembly adopted a specific CO ² target for members to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions continuously, aiming for a reduction of 10 per cent every five years	1,661 members (1,372 full members and rest associate) amongst cities and municipalities. <i>(None)</i>

⁴ Case study cities are shaded

⁵ Leicester has also been an active member of ICLEI. It was only recently that the city's membership lapsed, a decision that is remains under review

As an example, Leicester had started to be proactive, particularly in the field of energy management, as early as the 1970s. It was one of the first local authorities in England to appoint Energy Conservation Officers and establish an Energy Advice Centre. In 1990, Leicester was designated Britain's first Environment City by the Royal Society for Nature, in recognition of its progress and commitment. In 1992 Leicester was invited to send a delegation to the UN 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, to contribute to discussions on the role of local communities in tackling global environmental challenges.⁶ The legacy of these early foundations remains in place today in the work of the present Environment Partnership, chaired by Professor Paul Fleming of De Montfort University⁷ and reporting to the Mayor of Leicester. The importance of this long-term embedded experience and knowledge cannot be overstated and is an issue that will be returned to in the final section of the report.

Two other factors were impacting on the role of spatial networks in SUD the UK at this time.

First, in the early 1990s, cities began experiments in strategic governance networks that operated across the city. The *Leeds Initiative* was an early example that was formed around this time. Its early focus was centred on city competitiveness rather than on SUD. However, the *Leeds Initiative* was an early and important illustration of a shift in how local authorities began to seek to work in partnership with private, community sector and other public sectors actors within the city. This shift was underlined later by the LGA's '*New Commitment to Regeneration*' in 1998. This together with encouragement from the New Labour Government, elected in 1997, promoted experimentation amongst local authorities in models of community leadership (Blair, 1998), involving network governance.

Second, the Rio international agreement included a specific chapter for local governments, referred to as Local Agenda 21 (LA21). This offered a context and created momentum for new types of network working between local governments and a wider set of local stakeholders. Chapter 28 was the shortest chapter of Agenda 21, a fact that may impact on its relative success (Lafferty, 2001). It provided a relatively simple appeal to local authorities to engage in a dialogue for sustainable development with members of their communities. It is because "*so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities*", that the participation of local authorities was viewed as "*a determining factor*" in fulfilling the purposes of the Action Plan. As the level of governance closest to the people, local authorities "*play a vital role in educating, mobilizing, and responding to the public, to promote sustainable development*" (United Nations 1993, Agenda 21, paragraph 28.1). The expectation set in Chapter 28, was that by 1996 most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved consensus on a LA21 for their community.

There exists an inconclusive debate as to how successful LA21 was in practice. Some saw the involvement of local authorities through LA21 as a 'superficial veneer' (Selman, 1998). Church and Young (2001) argue that only around 60-81 LA21 strategies could be

⁶ A short history of Leicester's progress can be found at: <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/ep/the-environment/environmental-policies-action/environment-city/>

⁷ Director of Sustainable Development and Director, Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development, De Montfort University and also a former officer at the City Council, being appointed Energy Manager in 1988

said to have met the envisaged requirement of being adequately resourced strategies to tackle a range of economic, social and environmental issues. Evans and Percy (reported in Church and Young, 2001) concluded that ‘very few’ local authorities pushed LA21 “*at the level envisaged by the authors of the LA21 document*”. Nevertheless, Church and Young (2001) argue that LA21 did have wider impacts, for example in promoting environmental awareness amongst the public and in helping to promote campaigns that begun outside LA21 such as ‘Don’t Choke Britain’. Arguably LA21 changed the perceptions of many professionals (e.g. planners and economic development professionals) towards engaging with methods of participation and drawing green ideas into their work. It also brought many businesses into engaging with local authorities for the first time (Church and Young 2001).

Few of the interviewees had either been around at the time or involved in LA21. Nevertheless, important points were made by those that were, which reflect the debate around the issues identified above. First, LA21 appears to have galvanised political support for sustainable development which arose from the Rio Summit and focussed it into a wider engagement with Civil Society, as reflected in this typical observation:

“If you go back to Rio in 1992, when LA21 started off, there was quite a lot of political support at the time (early to mid-1990s) within the Council to involve wider civil society in this agenda. To this end a Sustainability Team was established to get certain types of projects going. One was to set up a Sustainability Forum, which brought together the diverse parts of civil society, ranging across tenants groups, residents associations, environmental groups and the business community to start to shape what might be a new sustainability agenda for the City under the banner of LA21”

(Case study interview)

Second, LA21 was probably stronger on process than on outcomes. It enabled the active engagement of civil society in local governance a way that had not normally occurred before and remains a significant legacy today. At the same time the outcome might be seen in terms of producing a LA21 Action Plan, which in turn might mix up the strategic with the routine:

“LA21 had an Action Plan that included a strategic issue next to a routine one. As a result it gave out mixed messages of what it was about. Because it did not differentiate between the more and less strategic, it probably did not have as much impact as it might have done. Nevertheless, it did get quite a lot of people thinking about sustainability issues”.

(Case study interview)

And:

“The strength of LA21 was in the process and not the product. In our city that process was very good and its legacy has gone on through our strategic partnership.”

(Case study interview)

Third, those local authorities that were already building expertise in sustainable development became the front runners for LA21, including Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle. They were involved in sharing their expertise more widely in the UK, for example through the LGA. In addition, as already noted, Bristol, Birmingham, Leicester and Newcastle had all become active in international networks through ICLEI and/or Energy Cities. They were moving ahead of government, which was slow to offer either encouragement or financial support for LA21. Indeed, the observation was made that:

“All the progress made in the 1990s was in the absence of government policy, rather than because of it. Much of the work we did was built on our contacts in Europe and not best practice in the UK.”

(Case Study interview)

LA21 got off to a relatively slow start in the UK outside the front runner cities. However, eventually the newly elected Labour Government engaged enthusiastically with the 1997 ‘Earth Summit +5’. The new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, expressed the wish to see all local authorities have an LA21 by 2000. The Deputy Prime Minister spoke to a conference of local authority chief executives to launch Sustainable Communities for the 21st Century: Why and How to Prepare a Local Agenda 21 Strategy (DETR, 1998). Whilst criticised for its top-down approach, it did encourage a wave of interest in LA21 among the third or so of councils that had up to that point ignored the issue (Church and Young, 2001).

What progress was made by local authorities during this decade with regard to SUD? Allman et al (2000) report on surveys carried out by the then Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) in 2000 and the LGA in 2002. The conclusion reached was that at that stage most local authorities in England and Wales had not made substantial progress. A small number had prepared greenhouse gas emissions inventories, developed strategies and implemented adaptation and greenhouse gas reduction measures. The successful authorities indicated particular characteristics. First, they recognised secondary benefits from tackling climate change e.g. potential employment opportunities. Second, they had strong political leadership and technical support to champion climate change activities. Third, they had capacity to work in networks with public, private and voluntary organisations to raise funding to support projects and implement them (ibid).

Looking at this period in perspective, it was marked by a significant growth in the role of spatial networks in the governance of cities. It was a decade marked by experimentation and the voluntary engagement in such networks initially by a minority of local authorities and their partners (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013). The drivers of this experimentation went beyond, but sometimes included an urban sustainability agenda. The pioneering authorities often took the initiative without the prompting of central government, because they saw this as a strategic opportunity for their city. In doing so, they often established expertise within the city which remains critically important even today. There was also a degree of cross-organisation learning going on through international networks and within the UK, for example through the LGA (Allman et al, 2000). Not for the first time, English cities could be more pro-active in responsive to strategic opportunities and challenges than central government (Whitehall).

2000-2010: MAINSTREAMING MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND NETWORKS

2000 to 2010 was a period that nationally in the UK coincided with the mature years of the Labour government. Two key trends in networks can be identified around this period, one within the UK and the other internationally.

Within the UK, local partnership networks were becoming mainstreamed as a result of proactive government intervention. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new duty on local authorities to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their areas and a statutory requirement to produce community strategies. Local authorities were also given a new ‘well-being’ power.

The formation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) became more widespread, although early experimentation was replaced by a more top-down and structured approach provided from Whitehall (DCLG, 2001), as these partnerships became increasingly tied into narrower agendas linked to Neighbourhood Renewal and funding, and later on, the Working Neighbourhood Fund. The Government increasingly pursued a ‘conditional’ form of localism (Hildreth, 2011), introducing agreements (Local Area Agreements), targets and indicators⁸ and a developing performance regime (from Best Value in 1999 to Comprehensive Area Assessments by 2009). These increasingly impacted on the ways in which networks might be managed. The UK (and particularly England) is by international comparison a centrally governed country. The imposition of such conditionality by the Labour Government was likely to reinforce and incentivise a pattern of behaviour by local government of responding to the lead set by Whitehall. Within this setting, networks for SUD became subsumed within broader networks that were involved in promoting community leadership locally, and especially LSPs. Particular consequences were identified through the research interviews for networks involved in SUD.

First, in some cities, the new community planning processes may have hijacked the earlier work undertaken under LA21. New teams may have been set up to respond to the government’s agenda, sometimes almost beginning all over again:

“It was not a mainstreaming of LA21, but like starting again with the same conversations, but with different people running it.”

(Case study interview)

Second, it meant that whilst a lot more local authorities had LSPs, they increasingly had to adapt the design of their structure, agenda and membership to respond to the government’s agenda. This particularly meant prioritising Neighbourhood Renewal and the

⁸ This included national indicators (NI) for environmental performance. Three of these related to the achievement of carbon reductions and planning to adapt to climate change: NI 185 – CO₂ reduction from local authority operations; NI 186 – Per capita reduction in CO₂ emissions in the local authority area and NI 188 – Planning to adapt to climate change. For further information see: <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/performance-information/performance-data-collections-and-guidance/nis/pages/default.aspx>

allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal monies and government guidance, for example on LSPs.

With government encouragement, there was also a growing trend of local authorities engaging in sub-regional (or city-regional) partnerships (e.g. Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Tees Valley etc.), particularly on economic development issues. This trend was institutionalised through the introduction of Multi Area Agreements (MAAs), city region pilots and the Northern Way's focus on city regions across the North (Baker, 2012).

Internationally, this period was marked by a second wave of municipal networks involving a more geographically diverse range of cities. Bulkeley (2010) argues that these new municipal networks differed from their predecessors in three ways. First, many networks were now nationally organised, partially reflecting the changing organisational structure of municipal networking (Bulkeley 2010). Transnational municipal networks established regional or country based campaigns (e.g. Cities for Climate Protection Program in Australia and Energy Cities network in Poland), while national networks were formed (e.g. US Mayors Climate Projection Agreement, signed by over 800 mayors by 2009). The latter approach was replicated in Europe, through the launch of the European Covenant of Mayors.

Second, there was greater engagement and mobilisation of private actors alongside local government. For example, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group brought together 40 of the world's global cities with private sector participation. Third, a number of grassroots networks emerged that had an explicit urban focus. Here the most notable was the Transition Towns movement which began in 2006. The Transition Network may be emblematic of a broader network of movements rooted in the notion of community engagement and involvement developed from the 'bottom-up' (Whitehead, 2012; Bulkeley et al, 2012). These include the Resilience Alliance, the Slow Food Movement, Local Exchange Tradition Schemes, the Degrowth movement (*décroissance*) and Organoponico, which were seeking to construct local systems of trade, food production and service provision to counter high-energy systems of global production and trade (Whitehead, 2012). Whilst there are similarities between these movements and the more mainstream local authority led networks (e.g. seeing urban in holistic terms and combining a concern for securing environmental protection, social justice and economic productivity), there were important differences. In particular, Transition initiatives differed in their interpretation of the local, their interpretation of economic development and their perception of the future (Whitehead 2012).

Table 3 – Wave two of international networks for sustainable development

Network/formed	Purpose	Members or signatories (UK)
European Covenant of Mayors 2008	A European movement involving European local and regional authorities voluntarily committed to increasing energy efficiency and use of renewable energy	4084 municipal and regional authorities across Europe <i>(Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Bath & North East Somerset, Birmingham, Bisley with Lypiatt Parish Council, Bristol, Cardiff,</i>

	<p>sources on their territories. By their commitment, covenant signatories aim to meet and exceed the European Union 20 per cent CO₂ reduction objective by 2020. Signatories also commit to: preparing a baseline emission inventory, adapt structures to undertake necessary actions, mobilise civil society to contribute to Action Plan, organised Energy Days, contribute to annual EU conference of Mayors</p>	<p><i>Cornwall Council, Darlington, Durham, Edinburgh, Gateshead, Glasgow, Hartlepool, Kirklees, Leicester, Liverpool, Llandoverly, London, Manchester, Middleborough, Milton Keynes, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Nottingham, Peterborough, Redcar and Cleveland, South Tyneside, Stockton-On-Tees, Sunderland, West Lothian Council, York)</i></p>
<p>Transition Network 2006</p>	<p>A broad international community of individuals and groups basing their work on the Transition Model to inspire, encourage, commit, support and train communities as they adopt and adapt the transition model on their journey to build resilience and drastically reduce CO₂ emissions.</p>	<p>By using experienced trainers and facilitators to ‘train the trainers’, transition initiatives have spread around the world (by 2009 including Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, USA , Chile, Japan and Wales <i>(Totnes, Penwith, Ivybridge, Falmouth, Moretonhampstead, Lewes, Stroud, Ashburton, Ottery St Mary, Bristol, Brixton, Forest Row, Mayfield, Glastonbury, Lostwithiel, Forest of Dean, Nottingham, Wroughton, Brighton & Hove, Market Harboough, West Kirby, Whitstable, Marsden & Slaithwaite, Frome, Brampton, Isle of Wight, Seaton, Bath, Exeter, Isle of Man, Canterbury, Wolverton, Leicester, Westcliff-on-Sea, Isles of Scilly, Liverpool South, Norwich, Tring, Crediton, South Petherton, Chichester, Berkhamstead, Coventry, Bungay, Mersea Island, Maidenhead, Ladcock &</i></p>

		<p><i>Grampound, Leek, Horsham, Exmouth, Buxton, Tynedale, Dorchester, New Forest, Stafford, Chester, Cambridge, Hereford, Buxton, Kingston-upon-Thames, Taunton, Langport, Sidmouth, York, Louth, Ely, Sampford Peverell, Tunbridge Wells, Hastings, Newton Abbot, Belsize (London), High Wycombe, Lancaster, Basingbourn, Leamington, Sevenoak, Chesterfield, Sheffield)</i></p>
C40 Climate Group 2005	A network of the world's megacities taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions	58 affiliated cities, accounting for 18% of GDP and 1 in 12 people worldwide (London)

During this period a contrast emerged between the international picture and that in the UK (England). Internationally, spatial networks for SUD remained relatively strong and even diversified beyond local government into new movements, such as the Transition Network. Bulkeley et al sees the period since 2000 as one of *strategic urbanism*. This reflected a more overtly political approach by urban networks outside of the UK, in which climate change became integral to the pursuit of wider urban agendas, for example in the United States and Australia (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013). Cities were positioned as critical sites for addressing the issue of climate change or even opposing national governments. It also coincided with a period when, whilst networks continued to focus on climate mitigation, climate adaptation also increasingly began to feature in the urban agenda (Ibid).

In the UK, sustainable development networks became mainstreamed within an increasingly institutionalised and top-down 'community leadership' framework defined by performance targets, agreements (LAAs and MAAs) and assessments (CPA). For example, Cooper and Pearce (2011) find that 97 per cent of LAAs included at least one climate change target as a priority issue.

Reflecting backwards from today, this period appears to have been one when local authorities were relatively well resourced and operated in a context of relatively benign economic conditions. It would be a reasonable expectation to find that as a consequence substantial progress would have been made in progressing SUD.

However, doubts have been expressed whether all the activity was matched by results. In a review of the research literature, Bulkeley (2010) finds that there was certainly a growing involvement by a wider range of partners in the urban governance of climate change. At the same time there were a developing number of ad-hoc projects being developed. However, Bulkeley (2010) observes that climate change remained relatively

marginalised within local authorities and other organisations, confined to environmental specialists and disjointed from other areas of policy making. Sadly, despite all the initiatives and network activity, Bulkeley (2010) concluded that there was little evidence that the growing mass of urban policies and initiatives had made an impact either in reducing green house gas or alleviating the vulnerability to climate risks:

“For all the promise of the growing involvement of cities in addressing climate change, authors have consistently pointed to a gap between the rhetoric and reality of urban responses.”

(Bulkeley 2010: 231)

And yet in parallel, in a more recent paper Bulkeley et al (2012: 550) conclude that, taking into account international municipal developments:

“The engagement of cities with climate change has developed significantly over the past 20 years: indeed, it is difficult to imagine now a world in which cities are not regarded as having a critical role to play in addressing this ostensibly global problem.”

There was a contrast between what was going on internationally and what was happening in the UK. It was significant that none of the case study interviews in the five cities offered any suggestion that the first ten years of the decade had been a ‘golden age’ of opportunity, at least at the local authority level, that had recently passed by. This is despite all the considerable challenges that now exist of operating in a context of national and deepening local austerity and its impact on local authority budgets (Featherstone et al, 2012; Flint and Raco, 2012). There were nevertheless real steps forward under Labour. In this context the work and investment by the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in SUD is not evaluated in this report. However, positive impacts from the National Indicators for carbon reductions and adapting to climate change (Cooper and Pearce, 2011), the formation of the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and the Climate Change Act 2008 were particularly highlighted in the interviews:

“The Labour government’s heart was in the right place. For example, setting up DECC was a really good move and to get the Climate Change Act through Parliament was absolutely brilliant, because it set the national context. Where there were problems is that they did not seem to understand the role of local authorities properly as key players contributing to all aspects to do with the environment. It also felt that decision making at a national level did not take into account resource security issues, which has been true of all post-war governments.”

(Case study interview)

The role of the cities themselves was also important. In each of these case study cities there are illustrations of how they have led ahead rather than followed behind government policy towards SUD.

It was therefore fascinating to have an opportunity through the interviews to seek observations as to whether the situation was relatively unchanged post-2010, or whether

there was a supplementary or even new story to be told. The next section summarises the policy and organisational changes that have taken place post-2010. This is then followed in Chapters 3 and 4 by an analysis of interviews conducted in the five case study cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester and Newcastle.

2010 ONWARDS: SHIFTING MODELS?

Since the formation of the Coalition Government in May 2010, there have been important policy and organisational changes that have impacted on the role of spatial networks in sustainable development in England.

First, the regional tier of governance and spatial planning has disappeared in any formal sense. RDAs, Regional Assemblies and Government Offices of the Regions (GoR) have all gone. Whilst the regional tier has not been part of story that has been explored in this paper, the regional context was important through regional planning, the activity of regional bodies (RDAs, Regional Assemblies and GoR) and the spending resources available, particularly to RDAs. Whilst RDAs primary remit was economic development, they were all active in and spending on the promotion of sustainable development within their regions. Their absence has led to a loss of financial resources and formal strategic working and planning arrangements across the English administrative regions (apart from London). For example, it was pointed out that One North East had a budget of £1m for research to support the development of the Integrated Regional Strategy for the North East. This resource has largely gone, as the successor bodies, LEPs, operate on a relative 'shoestring' by comparison. The impact of these changes is likely to be most marked outside the larger city regions. What is left at the regional level is a series of ad-hoc informal voluntary arrangements to promote cooperation, for example over planning issues.⁹

Second, in the context of the post-2007 credit crunch and recession, the rhetoric surrounding the public policy agenda is increasingly about 'growth'. Even sustainable development is presented in that light through the national planning framework (DCLG, 2011). The traditional separation between economy and environment that might have been around at the time of LA21 has become less clear cut (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013). 39 LEPs have been created as a replacement for the 9 RDAs, based on locally negotiated perceptions of 'natural economies'. Only one, London, retains the same regional boundaries of the former RDAs. Their remit is to "*provide the vision, knowledge and strategic leadership needed to drive sustainable private sector growth and job creation in their area*"¹⁰ through their private sector and local authority led Boards.

Third, as a result, the trend towards promoting cross-boundary working across 'functional economic areas' or 'natural economies' that began under Labour has evolved further under the Coalition. This is marked in the formation of LEPs across England. However, it is also illustrated in the growing policy interest in cities. There has already been Round One City Deals with the eight English Core Cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield. These deals contain elements that apply at the LEP or city region level, including the expectation that a

⁹ For example, the West Midlands still has a Regional Planning Officers Group that continues to meet quarterly

¹⁰ See BIS website: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/economic-development/leps>

Combined Authority will be formed for the Leeds City Region and North East LEP area. Greater Manchester is the first to have such an arrangement. A second round of City Deals was announced on 30 October 2012, offering possible deals with the next 14 largest cities and their wider areas and the next six with the highest population growth between 2001 and 2010,¹¹ who were invited to put forward proposals to ‘unlock the full growth potential of the area’.¹² Whilst City Deals were much more about securing economic growth than promoting SUD, cities did include elements that related to building low carbon economies (Scott, 2012).

Fourth, the Coalition government has claimed a localism agenda. Much of the top down performance and inspection infrastructure developed by Labour was abolished in the Localism Act 2011. This included LAAs, MAAs, Comprehensive Areas Assessments and the National Indicator Set. As will be shown, these changes have created new freedoms for local authorities to set their own policy priorities, including in relation to SUD. However, these freedoms from Labour’s top down approach must be balanced against the impact of unprecedented austerity in local government budgets through reduced government grant and the freezing of Council Tax increases over several years. This has led to enormous pressure on services. Funding streams which supported network activity through LSPs, such as the Working Neighbourhood Fund, have been abolished.

Fifth, whereas Labour was moving, however imperfectly, towards a national framework towards Climate Change, as epitomised by the Climate Change Act 2008, the Coalition’s position has largely been one of uncertainty and lack of clarity. The Energy Act 2011 offered useful changes to incentivise Utility Companies to reduce carbon emissions, which has opened up new possibilities of collaboration with local authorities. However, the heralded Green Deal has yet to get properly off the ground,¹³ There is also an absence of clear long-term strategy toward energy security and climate change.

Having summarised key changes that have taken place that have impacted on the organisation of networks at the city and at wider spatial levels, the focus now turns to an analysis of the interviews. As a result, Chapter 3 considers the impact of these changes on the role of networks in SUD, largely through the observations of the interviewees in the five cities covered by this project: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester and Newcastle.

¹¹ The Black Country, Bournemouth, Brighton and Hove, Greater Cambridgeshire, Coventry and Warwickshire, Hull and Humber, Ipswich, Leicester and Leicestershire, Milton Keynes, Greater Norwich, Oxford and Central Oxfordshire, Reading, Plymouth, Preston and Lancashire, Southampton and Portsmouth, Southend, Stoke and Staffordshire, Sunderland and the North East, Swindon and Wiltshire, and Tees Valley

¹² See the web site of the Deputy Prime Minister at: <http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/wave-2-city-deals>

¹³ All 38 West Midlands local authorities have signed an agreement with Carillion to be their Green Deal delivery partner, which was the first procurement framework for Green Deal secured at a local level in the country

Chapter 3: ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Seventeen interviews were conducted in the five case study cities: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Leicester and Newcastle (see Appendix 1). This chapter introduces the interviews and the key issues that were addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The remit was to undertake three interviews in each of the five case study cities. However, two additional interviews were offered in Bristol and Newcastle. The majority of interviews (13) were with local government officers. Of these, 11 interviewees had a policy and/or service remit on behalf of the city council. The other two provided executive support to the city-region secretariat or to the LEP. The remaining four interviews were with LEP staff (North East and West of England,) a business member of a LEP Board and Chair of the Green Economy Panel (Leeds) and the Chair of the city's Environment Panel (Leicester). The interviews were conducted between September and November 2012. They followed a semi-structured format. Areas covered by the interviews are set out in Appendix Two. However, each interview was adapted to reflect the remit of the interviewee. For example, the LEP interviews were more narrowly focussed on the evolution of networks in the context of the LEP area, including the development of the City Deal, in the case of Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Newcastle. The interviews with local authority officers largely followed the structure set out in Appendix Two. Overall, the aim was to achieve as full a picture as possible within the constraints of a limited number of interviews. All but two of the interviews were recorded. Wherever possible, room is given within this paper to allow the interviewees to speak for themselves through quotations, which are given anonymously, although sometimes with reference to the case study city involved.

The opportunity was taken to reflect both on earlier history going as far back to the early 1990s of the role of the development of networks in SUD in their area and to explore the present context. The extent to which history could be explored depended on the length of service and/or background experience of the interviewee. A small number of the interviewees, particularly from those inside or with local government experience, could remember back to the 1992 Rio Summit, or even before. These reflections have already been drawn on and in some cases quoted from in the earlier sections of this paper.

The greater majority of interviewees had been involved with networks engaged with SUD only more recently; in one case for less than one year. However, in all cases the interviewees offered a valuable insight into the role of networks in their city and/or LEP area, which collectively enables a picture to be pulled together on what is happening within the five city case studies and make observations about what is being learnt. Nevertheless, caveats are drawn out that the number of interviews was limited and the cities chosen are not necessarily representative overall of English cities. By and large they were larger cities (four are English Core Cities – Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Newcastle) and all five have been pioneers in the development of networks for SUD. If a different group of smaller

cities or towns had been chosen, the outcomes would likely to have been somewhat different.

KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

Overall, the interviews sought to provide an insight into understanding:

1. What motivates the city to engage with networks for SUD?
2. How and why have networks for SUD for the area developed over time?
3. What networks has the city been engaged in at different spatial levels, why and what has been gained?
 - a. Global e.g. ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability
 - b. Regional (e.g. EU) e.g. Energy Cities; European Covenant of Mayors
 - c. National e.g. Core Cities Group, Local Government Association
 - d. Sub-regional e.g. LEP
 - e. Local e.g. Local Strategic Partnerships
 - f. Community e.g. Bristol Neighborhood Planning Network
4. How have the networks impacted on how the city pursues SUD e.g. have they impacted on an understanding of the spatial geography of the city?
5. What has been achieved and learnt, including any formal or informal evaluation of the impacts of networks on SUD?

WHY ENGAGE IN NETWORKS FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT?

Each city is different. The patterns that have emerged in the shaping of networks for SUD vary in the context of place-based characteristics and history of development of each city. Thus a wide range of factors have been at play in influencing the approach taken by each city. Some reflect a degree of commonality; such as the international context for climate change negotiation and mediation and the impact of government policies. Some have been shaped by local circumstances, geography, politics, pressures and priorities. What has changed since 2010 is that the mix of factors has become more, rather than less, complex. This reflects on one hand a less directive policy context set by Whitehall, and on the other, its replacement by the increasing impact of austerity on local government programmes and budgets.

As a consequence, there is a complex range of factors that impact in shaping why cities engage in networks for SUD. Some of these have been explored in the earlier sections, in relation to the history of how we got to where we are today. It might relate to an appreciation of the potential impact of climate change on the city and a desire to offer a policy and practical response to improve the present and future quality of life for the city and its citizens. It might in some ways be a response to government policy; a consequence of statutory requirements, policy guidance and/or financial incentives or penalties. It may also be that the city itself identifies a role for itself, where it believes it has a distinctive and valuable contribution to make in addressing sustainable development that requires it to work through networks outwardly (internationally and nationally) as well as locally (sub-region, city and neighbourhoods). Each of these motivations came out in the interviews.

A common factor amongst all the cities was a connection between motivation, identity and reputation. For example, this may be where the city sees itself as a leading exemplar (often as a 'European city') and uses this to motivate networks across the city to secure progress round a common purpose to bring about a positive process around a common set of objectives. For example, part of Birmingham's motivation for forming a high level Green Commission is to be seen to be leading this agenda, as stated in its press notice: *"The city council's aspiration for Birmingham to become one of the world's leading green cities will be spearheaded by a Green Commission, officially launched today"* (Birmingham Press Notice 18 July 2012). Similarly Leeds City Region has been clear that: *"We want the Leeds City Region to become a world leading, dynamic and sustainable low carbon economy that balances economic growth with a high quality of life for everyone."*¹⁴ Further, another view was: *"We are keen to position the city region as a UK leader in a green economy setting to access UKGI or Green Investment Bank funds, so that we really put Leeds on the map as a low carbon city."* (Case study interview)

Similarly, both Newcastle and Bristol have both submitted European Green Capital bids and have used these to rally support from within the city. Bristol sees *"the green agenda as an important part of what the city is all about and as a key part of its DNA."* (Case study interview) The city has applied three times and is the only UK city to have been shortlisted, becoming runner-up to Stockholm for the 2014 award. On 14 June 2013, it was announced that Bristol has won the international award to become European Green Capital in 2015.¹⁵ It has used the possibility of being recognised as Europe's most environmentally-friendly city as a context to galvanise expert and public support. It has formed a high level steering group chaired by Professor Martin Bigg (Professor of Environmental Technology at University of West of England) with other senior public, private and third sector expert representatives. At the same time it has an open membership scheme to enable individuals or organisations that want to share in the vision of making Bristol 'a low carbon city with a high quality of life for all' to participate.¹⁶ It also manages the Bristol Green Partnership Community Challenge Fund, which makes small awards to innovative environmental projects to help get them going. Bristol is also pioneering work to promote a healthy urban environment. The World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaboration Centre is located at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol. Members of staff at the Centre are also working across the City Council and NHS Bristol impacting on its approach and projects towards areas such as infrastructure and transport to bring about health improvements in the city.

Newcastle applied in 2011 for European Green Capital 2014.¹⁷ Whilst the city was not successful, the partnership that was created to develop the bid has enabled the city to get around the table the appropriate public, private (particularly important) and community partners that they needed to maintain momentum.

Sometimes this connection between identity and motivation is reflected in how the city prioritises sustainable development, as is for example reflected in the case of Leicester:

¹⁴ Quoted on the front page of Leeds City Region Green Economy Agenda 2012-13 booklet

¹⁵ For further information see: <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/press/environment/bristol-announced-european-green-capital-2015>

¹⁶ For further information see the Bristol Green Capital web site at: <http://bristolgreencapital.org/>

¹⁷ For further information see the Newcastle City Council website at: <http://www.thebiggreenpledge.org.uk/european-green-capital>

“We see sustainable development as something that makes us distinctive. Some of the great cities in Europe have been successful because they have focussed on the quality of the environment, which has enabled them to be prosperous cities as well. For example, there are quite a few places in Holland that have done that. It becomes part of their ethos for developing the city and everything flows from that. An example is Groningen, where they have thought just about everything from waste management, traffic management to urban design. You wish that we could just turn a switch on and get there. In practice it takes time and resources.”

(Case study interview)

At one time, cities might have pursued a sustainable agenda, because it was considered the appropriate response to the potentially serious long-term risk of climate change impacting on the city and its residents. This was clearly an important motivating factor with this group of cities, particularly in the early pioneering days prior to and immediately post-Rio. Over time the motivating factors have become more complex.

Increasingly, in the present recession, the creation of economic jobs and growth is a more important part of the mix in a SUD agenda. To some extent this has led to a distinction of roles between the city council (in pursuing a more distinctively green agenda) and the sub-region or city-region (where LEPs are seeking to exploit opportunities for the green economy within an economic growth agenda). Thus for example, Bristol, which has consistently seen itself as a sustainable city, has increasingly become concerned about employment, jobs and growth. A blending between the two can be seen in the approach to the Temple Quarter Enterprise Zone, where the vision is for energy positive and carbon neutral business development in that *“the basis for growth in the city has to be sustainable”*

It is interesting for example to see how the economic case for action on climate change has led to a shift in thinking in the Leeds City Region:

“Things like the mini-Stern report help us when sitting down with Members to demonstrate that investing in these issues involves a straight forward business proposition and that it is not just a good environmentalist idea. There will be jobs and opportunities for the people of Leeds if we can make this happen. Our advice to Members is first to draw out the economic development and regeneration benefits of investment and what it will mean in creating jobs and remaining a competitive city. Then we focus on how it should improve the quality of life in Leeds and make it a more attractive place to live and work. Third or fourth down the list is to stress that we will have also improved our environmental footprint and enhanced our environmental resources.”

(Case study interview)

Incentives and opportunities have always been important. However, in a context of austerity, achieving substantive change is politically attractive both for the city and its residents. For example, in the context of Birmingham energy costs has become a real driver:

“If you add up what it costs to heat and power every house, every building, every business, run the transport system, then the energy bill for Birmingham could be around £2.5 billion a year. If you then consider how much of that energy we provide in the city, it consists of energy from one waste plant, which produces enough to power 30,000 households, out of a total of 450,000 households in the city. Birmingham is currently importing around 97 per cent of its energy needs. If we could generate energy within the city from sources such as biomass, waste, air and ground sources and cut the city’s energy bill to 50 per cent we would be putting back into peoples’ pockets a huge amount of money.”

(Case study interview)

Changing relationships and an evolving statutory context has made it increasingly possible for cities to make progress today in partnership with Utility Companies in a way that until recently was not achievable. For example, Leicester has for many years been a pioneering authority in Combined Heat and Power (CHP). But it is only very recently that it has become possible to develop and open in partnership with Cofely UK the first phase of a District Heating Scheme for the city. Similarly, financial incentives have led to innovation in waste management across all the cities.

In addition, the policy agendas of cities is becoming more diverse. Whereas under Labour, there was a considerable degree of consistency and conformity as cities operated under a top-down policy, inspection and performance framework, this has changed under the Coalition’s form of localism. Much of the top down regulation has gone, enabling cities to be freer in setting their own policy agendas:

“The cumulative impact of loss of funding, a thinned out inspection regime, the sweeping away of centrally controlled performance management in local government has changed things. There is now much greater scope for genuinely local policy, although in a context of reduced resources.”

This in turn is leading to a degree of innovation. The political leadership for Newcastle has, for example, set as their priorities as: 1. getting residents into work in Newcastle; 2. tackling inequalities; 3. decent neighbourhoods and 4. ‘fit for purpose’ (about the management of the authority). Policies and actions to promote sustainable development in the city become, not objectives in their own right, but must be seen to contribute towards the Council’s overall priorities. The pressure to ensure this is reinforced by the impact of reducing resources

“The emphasis would increasingly be on how sustainability can impact on our four priorities for the City and in particular in tackling inequalities. Why is carbon reduction important? Because, in Scotswood for example, because people are living in dire fuel poverty, retrofitting their homes to drive carbon reductions is actually going to help peoples’ income by reducing heating costs.”

(Case study interview)

It can be seen through these examples that there are therefore a wide range of factors which impact on why cities engage in networks for SUD. This analysis is far from being

comprehensive, but gives some indication of some of the factors that are at work. Within this group of cities, identity as leading (European) cities goes hand in hand with the promotion of sustainable development. But beyond this there is a trend towards increasing diversity in motivation, innovation and approach across cities reflecting local 'place-based' characteristics of the city and its surrounding area.

WHAT NETWORKS HAS THE CITY BEEN ENGAGED IN AT DIFFERENT SPATIAL LEVELS?

As indicated in Chapter 2, networks for SUD operate at different spatial levels from the global down to the local neighbourhood. In the context of a dominant paradigm of governance, networks have increasingly played an important role in how cities have pursued SUD.

In parallel to the increasing diversity of motivation and approach between cities, the role and form of networks has become increasingly complex. At least four possible explanations might be identified why this is the case. First, whilst Labour encouraged increasingly complex governance through partnership arrangements, there was nevertheless a degree of standardisation imposed by Whitehall. LSPs, Community Strategies, LAAs, Performance Indicators and CPA were all common features across cities. As already indicated, much of the requirement to maintain this infrastructure has disappeared and as a result cities have taken their own distinctive paths in developing different models. Second, the trend towards working across local authority boundaries into sub-regions (and city-regions) has evolved. Whilst all the cities are within LEP areas, the governance models being developed for each LEP are diverging. The institutional capacity between the best organised, biggest and stronger cities and the weaker ones may potentially widen into an enormous gulf. Third, cities themselves are developing different models for their own governance. Leeds is working with its partners to form a Combined Authority for the Leeds City Region. Leicester elected a City Mayor in 2011, and following a referendum, Bristol elected a City Mayor in November 2011. Fourth, a wider range of partners are being brought into networks. For example, a characteristic of the LEPs is that many capable private sector leaders are engaging with local authorities in public policy issues for the first time.

In this complex mix, it is challenging to pin down what is happening more specifically with regard to networks for SUD. In response to this perhaps the following trends might be identified.

First, within these case study cities, the main drive for networks for sustainable development is coming from the city council. However, even within this small group of cities there is diversity of approach. Birmingham has set up a Green Commission for the City, which is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Clean, Green and Safe City, with other key people from the City (university, private and community) sitting on it. Leicester has an Environmental Partnership Reference Group, the Chair of which sits on the City Mayor's City Partnership. As already noted above, Bristol's approach by comparison is being driven by the more arm's length Bristol Green Capital Partnership,¹⁸ which combines a high level Steering Group and an open invitation to membership for those committed to sign up to its

¹⁸ Information about Bristol Green Capital Partnership can be found at: <http://bristolgreencapital.org/>

'green pledge'. Newcastle, similarly has geared its environmental partnership around its European Green Capital aspirations. At the same time the role of LSPs seems to have been diminished, particularly in those cities that tied their LSPs into neighbourhood funding regimes. Newcastle has abolished theirs and the role of *Be Birmingham* and the *Bristol Partnership* has become more uncertain than it was pre-2010.

With the removal of a directive approach by government, cities are seeking to refine their approach:

“At a city level, the focus has been around creating an energy security and climate change framework. We have a corporate approach where we have created an enabling framework which looks at things like transport schemes, procurement, waste contracts and provides an overall umbrella through which these things and others can feed into progress towards achieving our climate change target.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“The challenge for Newcastle in moving forward is to articulate a new and updated vision around the green agenda in a unified way. There are various different parts of that. There is carbon reduction, where we have done a lot of really good work with partners like the universities. There is good progress on big initiatives like Warm up North and retrofitting housing. There has been a lot achieved with adaptation. We are now making progress in nurturing and growing companies in green industries. It is now about bringing all these parts together to create a unified green thread. It is something identified by the Majority Group prior to the May 2012 elections and the Portfolio lead is committed to ensuring that they have a green thread running through their decision making.”

(Case study interview)

Second, with the possible exception of Leeds, the case study cities have maintained an international focus in their participation in networks. As already identified, this was a key feature of the early stages of network development for SUD. These were seen as an important source for sharing knowledge and enabling the city to do more ambitious things that might have otherwise have been possible. Birmingham, Bristol and Newcastle have all retained their membership of ICLEI. Leicester (currently Vice-President) and Newcastle are still members of Energy Cities. However, in an era of austerity and extra scrutiny of Council budgets, they may in some cases not be as active in their participation as they were in the early days. Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle are all signatories to the European Covenant of Mayors, which commits them to making progress to meet or exceed the European Union's 20 per cent CO₂ reduction objective by 2020. The fact that European targets have been set has provided a useful frame of reference to define local targets. Birmingham is very active in Euro Cities and has recently taken on the chairmanship of its Environment Forum. As already highlighted, the European Green Capital Award has provided a useful context for Bristol and Newcastle to channel and focus the efforts of their local partners.

Third, at a national level the principal network highlighted in the interviews was that of the Core Cities Group, which provides a focus for collaboration for the eight Core Cities members. The LGA was hardly mentioned with regard to its present national contribution. However, there was clear evidence that it has performed a very important role over the period covered by this report and is continuing to do so (e.g. LGA,2010) . The LGA (along with the former IDeA) has been responsible for systematic evaluation through surveys of progress by local authorities in 2000 and 2002 (Allman et al, 2004). The IDeA was also responsible for a national scheme of knowledge transfer on sustainable energy development in 2006 and 2007 that is reported on in Argyriou et al (2012).

To some extent the cities (particularly Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Newcastle) look to each other to share knowledge and experience, particularly through the Core Cities Group. Attitudes towards Manchester were interesting:

“There is a massively different culture in Manchester. By moving quickly to a Combined Authority was a masterstroke and the other thing that they did that made an difference was to take a decision to locate their Enterprise Zone at the airport. What that said about Manchester is that they are open for international business and we are connected.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“We would look at Manchester in many ways, although perhaps less so on sustainability issues. Manchester economically and in other ways pushes itself outwards in a very confident way. We often feel that we are operating on its coat tails”

(Case study interview)

Fourth, the LEP area has become the primary context to develop the competitiveness of the local economy. As a result, in some cases there might appear to be a divergence between the sustainable development agenda being promoted from within the city and the emphasis on economic growth coming from the LEP. What might appear as a source of policy tension is beginning to be bridged as the LEP seeks to identify employment and growth opportunities through the green economy. Thus Bristol and the West of England LEP invited Kevin McCloud from Channel 4’s Grand Designs to host a visioning event for the Enterprise Zone around Temple Quarter. The push from stakeholders businesses was to create an energy positive and carbon neutral zone. The North East LEP has supported an Enterprise Zone with a strong emphasis around manufacturing possibilities around renewables, electric vehicles and offshore wind.

However, Leeds experience shows clearly how much an institutional capacity gap is opening up between LEP areas. Leeds is possibly the relative latecomer to the sustainable agenda compared with the other cities. Kirklees, within the city-region, was more active earlier. However, Leeds and its partners have been building city-regional capacity since the early 2000s. Progress has been gradual, rather than spectacular, but above all it has been consistent and sustained. Compare this with the North East, where despite the encouragement of the 2006 OECD Territorial Review to form effective city-regional

collaboration, the local authority partners have found it, in recent history, difficult to maintain consistent progress across the whole area. An effort to establish a Tyne & Wear City Region foundered following the abolition of the RDA and the new North East LEP has been started with very limited resources almost from scratch and is now working hard to catch up. However, progress is being made through an Independent Economic Review, chaired by Lord Adonis, and a locally supported proposal for a Combined Authority for the area. By comparison, Leeds City Region, like Manchester, has continually maintained momentum of its city-region agenda, quietly incorporating into its own methods of working positive features of a LEP, particularly gaining active new engagement of highly capable private sector leaders,. Leeds to some extent is an exception to the other cities. It is not because there was an absence of activity in networks for sustainable development at the level of the city; in fact there is a lot going on within Leeds. It is rather that the city has sought strategically to foster a city regional approach. For a while this did not really engage with the sustainable development agenda. Council Leaders took some time to be convinced that this was an appropriate agenda:

“The city-region project was about proving to central government that the Core Cities are serious economic big hitters and that from a national perspective it makes good sense to devolve powers downwards to them. There was a concern amongst our senior internal stakeholders that if we started to do the ‘nice but not essential environmental stuff’ then we might lose the wider economic argument with government.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“However, developing a strategy on green infrastructure for the city-region during 2009 to 2010 gave the local authority partners the opportunity to reflect on the wider climate change agenda. It offered them the first opportunity that they had to have a serious conversation about this at the city-region level and to reflect on the wider climate change agenda. Everyone soon got used to understanding that this was not something separate to the economy, but was a core element of it. By the time the strategy was signed off in 2010 the central importance of this agenda to the city-region was fully resolved.”

(Case study interview)

As a result momentum was created in the city-region with the publication of a ‘Green Infrastructure Strategy’¹⁹ in 2010, reinforced by a Mini-Stern Review for Leeds City Region in 2012²⁰ and the establishment of the Green Economy Panel in 2012. Given the institutional capacity within the City Region secretariat, the political leadership and support across the city region and strong private sector input, the agenda is more broadly based than within any of the other LEP areas going beyond narrow green economy issues to broader low carbon and quality of life issues.

¹⁹ Leeds City Region Green Infrastructure Strategy is available at: <http://www.leedscityregion.gov.uk/LCR-Corporate/media/Media/Research%20and%20publications/Green%20Economy/Green-Infrastructure-Strategy.pdf?ext=.pdf>

²⁰ Gouldson, A, Kerr, N, Topi, C, Dawkins, E, Kuylenstierna, J and Pearce, R (2012) The economics of low carbon cities: a mini-Stern review for the Leeds City Region, Centre for Low Carbon Futures.

Having summarised some of the key trends in the engagement of networks by cities at different spatial levels, the next Chapter moves on to identify key themes that were identified from the interviews around how networks have impacted on how the city pursues SUD.

Chapter 4: WHAT ARE THE KEY THEMES?

There are a number of important issues and trends that were identified through the interviews that impact on understanding how cities have pursued SUD through spatial networks. This section seeks to draw out those lessons prior to reaching conclusions in the final chapter.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

A key lesson is that the development of embedded expertise and knowledge within the local authority(s) and the city (and sub-regional) networks is a really important factor in sustaining progress in sustainable development over the longer-term. The cities that were motivated early on prior to the Rio process in 1992 largely remain the leading cities of expertise in SUD in the UK today. These include Leicester, Bristol, Birmingham and Newcastle. For example, Newcastle was the first local authority to produce an energy strategy, followed by Leicester and Bristol. Kirklees, positioned within the Leeds City Region was also an early pioneer.

Leicester is good example of a city that has built on its early record as a pioneering city in the environment. Because of its work at the time, it was one of three cities in Europe and 12 cities worldwide to be honoured at the Rio Summit. It has maintained its political ambition for sustainable development through the Mayor of Leicester and its high level of expertise both in the city council and within the city networks. Its commitment has remained almost constant, despite changes in political leadership, since the 1980s (e.g. see Fleming and Webber, 2004). It impacts almost all parts of city life, from neighbourhoods to the city. For example, the city's vision for CHP goes back to its Energy Strategy launched in December 1993, when there were practical obstacles to its delivery. However, as indicated above this has finally come to fruition with the launch of Leicester District Energy, a £15m project between Cofely District Energy Ltd²¹ and Leicester City Council in 2012. Once fully operational, it has the potential to become one of the largest District Heating Schemes in the UK. When Peter Soulsby was elected Mayor of Leicester in 2011, he made the environment central priority for the city, including renewing the ambition to be a Low Carbon City set out through a comprehensive Climate Change Action Plan²² and establishing a partnership to deliver large scale renewable energy measures across the city:

“When Environment City began, we brought departments together to consider whether we should apply for Environment City status. It soon became apparent that we had across all departments a mass of knowledge and key people who individually had been doing their own thing, but collectively meant that Environment City was there for the taking.”

(Case study interview)

²¹ For further information about Cofely District Energy Ltd see: <http://www.cofely-qdfsuez.co.uk/solutions/district-energy/>

²² Leicester City Council (2012) *A low carbon city: climate change – Leicester's programme of action and technical appendix*. Available from <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council-services/ep/the-environment/greener-leicester/climate-change-action-programme/>

As a result:

“It is significant that sustainable development has become part of Leicester’s culture and DNA and that it has become embedded into the way that the city thinks and works”

(Case study interview)

And:

“The partnership working here is much stronger than what I have seen elsewhere, particularly with De Montfort University and Leicester University providing a strong academic basis to key decisions that have been taken. Leicester has got on and done things that other cities have struggled with, such as securing an impressive reduction of carbon emissions in the Council’s activities.”

(Case study interview)

Whilst, these examples are given in relation to Leicester, they could be repeated elsewhere for the other case study cities, for example in Bristol’s shortlisting and becoming runner-up for the 2014 European Green Capital award. Such expertise is not built overnight, but through a long-term gradual process driven by political commitment and effective leadership centred on local ‘place-based’ factors. It is something that still may not be as appropriately understood within Whitehall policy system as it ought.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

A common factor identified in the interviews was the importance of effective leadership in driving the success of networks, as illustrated in this example:

“A major success factor in the success of networks is leadership. It might sound like an obvious thing to say. We have lots of committed people, but to make it all come together it requires leadership at the highest level. Once you have it, it impacts on the speed at which you can move. All the networks and partnership working is important, but it is leadership that is vital to get it right.”

(Case study interview)

Examples were given, such as in the development of Birmingham’s retrofit District Heating in the City Centre, which would not have happened without strong political leadership from within the Council.

However, effective leadership is not just seen as something that occurs within the local authority, but also requires a political capacity to manage collaboration across wider spatial areas:

“The public sector has tried to leave local politics at the door. When there is a competition, for example in the choice of Enterprise Zones, the public are made aware of it. If you are the Leader of a council and it is announced in the papers that another local authority won, people may question whether you supported it. It is important to understand that this creates difficult positions and developing the maturity to respond

that we might not have got the decision for our area, but we will benefit from what is created across the city region as a whole.”

(Case study interview)

The issue also came up in the context of different models of leadership. Not surprisingly Leicester highlighted the advantages that they found in having an elected City Mayor:

“Having an Elected Mayor has changed things massively in terms of leadership. The Mayor says ‘I want to do this’ and it gets done. It streamlines the whole political process. Instead of spending say two months going through a Cabinet process, the decision is taken in a couple of weeks.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“The benefit of having an Elected Mayor is that you have very clear leadership and accountability. Decisions are made much more quickly. You have the ability to have a strategic conversation about issues like land, property, economic development, sustainability and transport all at the same time. The biggest benefit by far is the pace that it brings. The Mayor is the natural civic leader, which makes networking operate so much easier. It is very different to the Leader model because the Mayor has been elected democratically by local people to be given a mandate to lead the City.”

(Case study interview)

After the completion of the interviews, Bristol became the second of the case study cities to elect a City Mayor. It was not possible and in any case would have been too early to identify any changes that having an Elected Mayor might make to that city, but it is something that would be interesting to follow up.

The other cities – Birmingham Leeds and Newcastle - would make the case strongly that an Elected Mayor is not a necessary condition for effective leadership. In their own ways, both at the level of the city and at sub-region/city-region they have recognised that leadership is a key success factor in the effectiveness of networks in promoting SUD and are developing different models to take this forward.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The importance of institutional capacity within the local authority (and across the city and sub-region) cannot be under-estimated in building effective networks for SUD.

Scale can be important in sustaining this:

“One of the advantages of our city (Leeds) is that it is a big place. If we are struggling somewhere you can usually find someone who knows somebody who can help. Inevitably there comes a point where some of these ideas start to manifest them at a

spatial level and a particular geography will open up opportunities to progress them, whether it is in energy, transport or green space.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“We are lucky in having in the Leeds City Region Leeds, which is big, Kirklees which has been innovative and then if you add in Bradford, Calderdale, Wakefield and York you have an appealing mass. The Yorkshire brand is also helpful. We are fortunate where we are to have the quality of our networks.”

(Case study interview)

But institutional capacity also relates other features that have already been highlighted, in particular the importance of building embedded knowledge and expertise in the city and the quality of leadership. Places that are able to maintain consistent forward momentum in developing their governance networks over long periods of time are much more likely to build effective institutional capacity to both manage and lead change for their areas. Again in the UK national policy context, with relatively short-term political cycles, this factor is probably neither appropriately understood nor appreciated in government.

LOCALISM, AUSTERITY AND INCENTIVES

It has already been observed that there appeared to be little support for the idea that 2000-2010 under Labour was a ‘golden period’ for the evolution of networks for SUD. This was despite it being a period of relative stability in local governance, relative growth in local and regional budgets and supported by regional institutions and infrastructure. Whilst serious policy and resource concerns were expressed about the present situation under the Coalition, nobody regrets the passing of Labour’s ‘conditional localism’ (Hildreth, 2011). Of all the performance and inspection regimes instituted by Labour on local authorities, the only element that was missed by interviewees was the national requirement to maintain local performance indicators for carbon reductions and climate adaptation. This is because, in the case of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle, they are signatories to the European Covenant of Mayors and in doing so have voluntarily committed to meet or exceed the European Union 20 per cent CO₂ reduction by 2020. This requires the cities to maintain their own indicators measurements, for which standardised comparison with other UK towns and cities would have been useful.

As already indicated, the removal of top down direction in the area of community leadership allows for greater diversity in approach between local authorities. This is generally welcomed. However, the downside has been the increasing austerity and cuts that have been imposed on local authority budgets through cuts in central government grants and the freezing of council tax over several years. There is absolutely no doubt that these

cuts have been biting increasingly hard.²³ In one way they act as an incentive to seek resources from other sources, such as through partnerships with Utility Companies and invest to save type projects around energy saving and renewable. However, there is a real danger that the momentum that presently exists in some cities around this agenda could be slowed down or even stopped because of resource constraints as local authorities and networks loose capacity and expertise. If that happens, it will be much harder to build up the momentum again.

This can be reinforced by the overall economic context, where the recession has been impacting on what the priorities are seen to be. For example:

“Before the economy took a downturn, there was a real commitment to climate change aspirations. Now, while there is still a strong desire to invest in renewables, as demonstrated by our Enterprise Zone, the focus now is more on what that means for economic growth, rather than what it means for the environment. Clearly, there is a strong business case for the environment and addressing climate change and we would acknowledge that. However, the primary focus is the economy.”

(Case study interview)

Another perspective was:

“On one hand we are having to find large savings and as a result are down-scaling the number of people that we are employing. The discretionary funding that we used to make things happen has gone. There is less freedom and flexibility around core funding because it goes on keeping basic services running. However, the positive is that there is a sense of an opportunity to be more entrepreneurial and more creative in financing things and looking to new models for delivery.”

(Case study interview)

Financial incentives also become increasingly important in motivating behaviour within local authorities and with their partners. So, for example, the increasing cost of landfill has made the value of recycling higher and more attractive. Incentives are also requiring local authorities to develop new entrepreneurial skills, for example in working with Utility Companies and the private sector:

“It is not difficult for those of us who have a background in policy and science to turn this into an agenda around planning, regeneration and development policies. It is however, a real challenge to stretch this into providing answers to how the financial levers can be made to work to make it commercially appealing for investment to take place. Being entrepreneurial is not a set of skills that comes naturally in local government.”

(Case study interview)

²³ For example, there has been widespread coverage in the Guardian newspaper about the impact of austerity on widespread cuts to arts funding in Newcastle, which is losing £100m funding over the next three years, equivalent to one third of its budget e.g. http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/jan/08/newcastle-council-nick-forbes-cuts?CMP=tw_t_gu

It was pointed out that this is going to be a real challenge:

“As a generalisation, local authority staff do not fully understand energy. Through their own development route they understand energy in their own working context, but their broader knowledge about energy is not so strong. They might say ‘because we are a local authority, we do not want to become an energy utility’. However, what they need to grasp that they should become an energy utility because that is now where the money is.”

(Case study interview)

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

One important development has been the growing involvement of the private sector in networks for SUD. In part this has been because of in the context of economic recession the public and private sectors are both in it together, reinforced by legislative changes such as the Energy Act 2011:

“We have noticed, probably in view of the recession, the private sector is much more willing to engage with the public sector. They understand that whilst the public sector does not have much money to spend, they are going to need us to play a key role in enabling that investment takes place. They see us as using our levers – planning powers, leadership or mobilising resources – to establish an environment where investors can feel confident to bring forward new projects or infrastructure, such as low carbon energy. Those private sector players, who may be in the business of making those kinds of investments, are more willing than they would have been a few years ago. That is partly because they realise that there are commercial opportunities out there, but to realise them you need to create a context that is appealing to investment. The public sector (and not just the council) can play a key role in facilitating that, because we might be anchor tenants for investment or aligning our planning policies to enable opportunities for investment. All these relationships have suddenly blossomed in the last year or two. It is not about a change in government, but everybody realises that they do not have money and will have to work together”

(Case study interview)

The other main development has been the creation of LEPs. Whilst there are various criticisms that can be made of the thinking behind LEPs (e.g. see Hildreth and Bailey, 2012; 2013), one positive outcome has been that it has brought highly able leaders from the private sector into joining LEP partnerships and working with the public sector strategies to develop the sub-regional economy. For many of these it is their first ever real engagement with the public sector. In Leeds, the private sector members of the LEP had the ambition to ‘position the city region as a UK leader in the green economy’ and have played a critical role in creation and work of the Green Economy Panel to lead this work for the city region within the context of the LEP, chaired by Paul Hamer, Chief Executive of WYG plc.

Whilst Leeds is not entirely an exception, since the West of England LEP is pursuing concerns relating to sustainable development, for the other city sub-regions the other LEPs are giving priority to economic growth. This is reinforcing the trend identified above where the LEP area is the primary context to develop (with the private sector) the competitiveness of the local economy. At the same time the city council becomes the primary context for promoting SUD (again increasingly involving the private sector as a partner).

It is also notable that the private sector partners are learning new and valuable lessons about how networks operate, which is very different to their experience of operating their companies and what they might have expected when they agreed to participate, as this example illustrates:

“What is really important about networks is that when you are trying to deliver something with an entity that only informally exists and has no money, you quickly realise that you will only make tangible progress by creating a network of networks. You stimulate ideas and create opportunities for these ideas to be delivered by other people in and around your network. The Panel will deliver low carbon benefits, but they will hardly fund or deliver a single project itself. This is very intangible for the private sector members. How do you deliver something when you do not own anything? When I joined the LEP I assumed that we would be given a pile of money and power to make change happen. I have learnt that it is not like that at all. I now understand how networks enable networks and we are getting quite good at it.”

(Case study interview)

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

As already indicated the role of Government policy is important in influencing the development of networks for SUD. The impact of Labour’s top down ‘conditional’ localism in encouraging standardisation in approaches has already been described. Therefore the signals that Whitehall gives, the incentives that it provides, the resources that it offers and the degree of trust in local and central relations are all important to shaping networks for sustainable development. The shift to the Coalition government’s form of localism has brought some benefits. The top-down standardisation has gone and local authorities are enjoying a greater degree of relative freedom in shaping their own policy priorities. New incentives, such as through the Energy Act 2011 to work with Utility Companies are leading to examples (e.g. Leicester’s energy partnership with Cofely District Energy Ltd) of innovation.

However, there is a sense in which government policy has become unhelpfully more uncertain. This is reflected, for example, in the context of City Deals:

“Nobody is quite sure what to do with climate change in the context of city deals. There has not been a particularly strong national approach on climate change or a strong local approach either. As a result it is not easy to identify something and say ‘we should devolve this’. It is not like transport or housing, where policy has been incredibly centralised for years and years.”

(Case study interview)

Others pointed to the absence of long-term strategic planning towards climate change as a key problem, which to some extent being balanced by a greater willingness by the key government departments to engage in dialogue with local governments:

“With the change of government to the Coalition, and the infatuation with deficit reduction, all sense of long-term energy planning has gone out of the window. However, the paradox is, partly under an agenda of localism, some of the key departments such as DECC and DEFRA, are more willing to work at a city level than they have ever been when it comes to energy, climate and resource matters”

(Case study interview)

Indeed, there were a number of reports that DECC and DEFRA actively engaged with the cities over the climate change agenda. This may be because:

“The government has woken up the fact that if they are going to hit the national carbon reduction target then they are going to do things about energy generation, supply and distribution and push on with District Heating. They have realised that to make progress they need to work with local authorities.”

(Case study interview)

Overall, what comes out is a rather mixed up picture, with some positives:

“All kinds of strange things are going on at the moment and it is a funny mixed up bag. In one sense there has not been much change between governments when it comes to this agenda, but in another there is potentially more room for flexibility now than there was even five years ago.”

(Case study interview)

However, underlying this all is a basic problem that has been emphasised about government’s failure to grasp the significance long-term local embedded nature of knowledge, institutional capacity and leadership in enabling effective change in ‘place’:

“I do have concerns about how well government departments are able to understand places and how much of policy is effectively spatially blind. As government shrinks further, its ability to understand local areas is receding even further.”

(Case study interview)

And:

“There is a big gap in understanding of both the challenges that the city-region faces both in terms of local geography and demographics and how local government works.”

(Case study interview)

POLICY TRANSFER AND LEARNING

Finally, the second question that this project sought to answer was in what ways have these networks for SUD contributed to policy transfer and learning? At the beginning of the paper three particular approaches were identified towards understanding policy transfer drawing from Prince (2012). Throughout this paper a number of issues have been identified, which can be summarised below:

Approach 1 - In relation to the broader economic, social and political landscape: Issues might be raised about assumptions made which underlined the evolution and then relative decline of the 'community leadership' model through the 1990s up to 2010. It was posited on the (3rd way) assumptions that a consensus-based framework could be established across organisational (public, private and community sectors) and geographical boundaries to reach common solutions for sustainable development (Raco and Flint, 2012). All sorts of issues could be raised: the sheer complexity of multi-level governance; dependence on an era of public sector funding growth; the impact of top-down 'conditional governance' intervention from Whitehall, on what might have been a more organic evolutionary approach that was beginning to emerge in the late 1990s and whether there was too much effort on trying to work together and too little on delivery. Further issues arise in relation to the respective roles of the Centre and cities in a context of evolving network governance at a multi-governance level.

Approach 2 – The way in which places are spatially constructed: Issues arise about the relevance of spaces in which networks were constructed from the global to the neighbourhood and community. What spaces worked and why? How does the global relate to the local? What did we learn from the efforts to engage from the pan-regional (e.g. Northern Way), the regional, the emerging sub-regions (e.g. LEPs) and working within local authority boundaries? The way in which places are spatially constructed has changed, not as a result of a process of policy transfer and learning, but as a consequence of structural change in sub-national governance initiated by the Coalition government for political reasons post-2010. The biggest change has been the abolition of Labour's regional institutional infrastructure of RDAs and Regional Assemblies. This has been replaced by a combination of 'localism' and 'centralism' as LEPs have been formed, RDA functions returned to the centre and an era of austerity initiated in local budgets. The outcome in most places (the exception is Leeds) is a creative tension between the local authority role in promoting SUD and the LEPs role in promoting the local economy. However, as has already been indicated, this may offer some possibilities of creative tension between economy and environment (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013) that need to be further worked through.

Approach 3 – Policy transfer: Issues arise about what was actually achieved in policy development and implementation through networks at different spatial levels. Has any real impact been made in reducing GHG emissions? What policy innovations have taken place?

In relation to 3 it is difficult to make a clear assessment. Questions were asked in the interviews about what formal evaluation of policy transfer and learning has been made. In practice, there were few examples that were made available by the case study cities and non that was recent. A possible factor was that cities often needed to access funds from a variety of different sources (UK and European) to implement measures. In the case of

Leicester for example, the Council chose to spend the vast majority of this finance for energy saving measures on implementing projects, rather than monitoring the savings (Fleming et al, 2004). It has also been pointed out that there were difficulties with data making it challenging to measure progress toward CO₂ emission reductions at a local and regional level in the UK (Ibid). It might be observed that policy transfer and learning have not been in a process sense seen as high priority issue by any of the case study cities. There was hardly any evidence in recent times of any systematic attempt to evaluate what has been learnt through specific policy initiatives in sustainable development that was made available during the interviews. An exception was a systematic review undertaken by Leicester of the impact of Local Agenda 21. However, as has already been reported earlier on in the paper, systematic evaluation has been conducted through the LGA and former IDeA (2002, 2002 and 2006/7), which is reported on by Allman et al (2004) and Argyriou et al (2012). These studies point to a number of key lessons that are complementary to the outcomes of the research interviews. The key learning points highlighted were the importance of:

- Effective leadership from the political, officer and technical levels;
- Developing inter-disciplinary and cross-departmental and cross-organisational collaboration and technical expertise;
- Legislative support from central government in moving climate change up the political agenda;
- Increasing awareness and knowledge around the issues surrounding climate change and the secondary benefits of tackling it (e.g. employment opportunities, improved quality of life and reduced fuel poverty);
- Sharing knowledge and best practice between local authorities in SUD

At a deeper institutional level, the examples given in this paper show that all five cities have been continually drawing on their experience and embedded knowledge and skills in maintaining the progress that they have made.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS: POLICY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section draws together the key issues, policy lessons and recommendations from this study.

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

This paper has explored how cities, primarily in a UK (English) context have pursued SUD through spatial networks. In doing so, it has addressed two questions. The first primary one is: what is the role of spatial networks in SUD? The second secondary one is: in what ways do these networks contribute to policy transfer and learning? These questions were explored in the context of the period since 1990, which when the issue of global warming gained significant international traction through the Rio Summit of June 1992. Since then there has been an expansion of network activity from the global to the local, to which local authorities and their partners have been important contributors. This research has drawn on a review of the literature and case study interviews based on five cities: Birmingham; Bristol; Leicester; Leeds and Newcastle.

The research has shown that the path that these networks have followed is not linear. It is possible to identify distinctive patterns (or waves) within three time periods since 1990 (1990 to 2000, 2000 to 2010 and 2010 onwards) covering networks within a national/sub-national context and internationally (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2012). With a risk of over-simplification, 1990-2000 can be identified as a period of experimentation in emergent networks and partnerships in an era of *municipal voluntarism* (*Ibid*). A number of leading cities, including our case study cities of Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle responded early on to the challenge of climate change and became at their own initiative frontrunners in the UK, participating internationally and locally from the beginning of this period onwards. Leeds was a front-runner in this period in a different way, through its leadership in the creation of a strategic partnership for the city in the form of the Leeds Initiative. 2000 to 2010 coincided with the mature years of the Labour government. This was a period when more bottom-up diverse approaches towards spatial networks that had evolved in the 1990s became increasingly conformed within a top-down 'community leadership' framework constrained within local agreements, targets, indicators and performance regimes. There were positive things about this period, including the national indicators for climate change (Cooper and Pearce, 2011) and the Climate Change Act 2008. However, what might have appeared to have been a benign decade of economic stability and relative resource availability (certainly compared with today), might now on reflection seem like an era of relative missed opportunity.

What has emerged post-2010, is both more diverse and more complex. The Coalition government has claimed a localism agenda. Much of the top-down performance and inspection infrastructure developed by Labour has gone. This has created new freedoms and opportunities for local authorities, including in relation to pursuing SUD. However, this is balanced by increasing austerity in local government budgets through reduced government grants and freezes in Council Tax. In this context varied patterns are emerging

in the way that different cities are responding in shaping their networks for SUD. Standardised top-down models imposed by the Centre (e.g. LSPs) are being replaced by more distinctive approaches designed locally appropriate to the different 'place-based' characteristics of the city (and its sub-region/city-region). These are driven by an increasingly complex range of motivations and drivers.

Within this context a number of important issues can be identified. First, within our case studies, the city is becoming the primary context for pursuing networks for SUD, whilst the sub-region (city-region) is becoming the main setting to progress the competitiveness of the local (and green) economy. This pattern has been reinforced by the abolition of (formal) regional spatial planning and the creation of private sector led LEPs around an economic growth agenda. An exception is Leeds, where the development of city-regional working is the most advanced of the case study cities (followed by the West of England LEP and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP).

Second, whilst the international dimension to networks for sustainable development is less pronounced than it was in the 1990s or even 2000s, it still remains important. Of the case study cities Birmingham, Bristol, Leicester and Newcastle are still particularly active internationally in networks (e.g. Euro Cities, ICLEI, Energy Cities, the European Covenant of Mayors and European Green Capital) and see participating in these as important to innovation in SUD locally.

Third, the role of networks in SUD has changed. In the early days (1990s) the focus was on developing relationships and trust within networks and identifying strategy, for example, through the LA21 process. Since 2000, not only have partnership networks become more mainstreamed, but the focus has also shifted increasingly from identifying strategy to delivery, as well as from mitigation to mitigation and adaptation (Bulkeley et al, 2012; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013). The emphasis on delivery has become even more pronounced since 2010. This is reinforced by the impact of austerity on local authority budgets and incentives, such as through the Energy Act 2011, to reach delivery agreements with Utility Companies, as well as increasing involvement by the private sector. This in turn is promoting a stronger emphasis on innovation, as local authorities are increasingly forced to search for new resource and network solutions to problems. However, as a number of interviewees noted, this is not an easy transition to make, as it involves harnessing new skills sets for local government officers, particularly in working in projects with the private sector.

POLICY LESSONS

Overall, policy lessons may be identified. First, relates to the role of central government. It is clear that the kind of 'conditional' model of localism pursued by Labour (Hildreth, 2011) had limitations for creating a context conducive to progressive responses by cities to climate change. The top-down target and performance regimes did offer some benefits. These included providing a focus on climate change indicators and targets, improving the quality expertise on and quality of data recorded, possibly encouraging local authorities to work in collaboration on climate change issues with the private and voluntary sectors and raising awareness of the need to put in place local measures to address climate change

(Cooper and Pearce, 2011). However, the downside is they were likely to have incentivised uniformity and discouraged local innovation. On the other hand, the experience so far of the Coalition government indicates that the absence of a clear national policy framework towards climate change makes it harder for cities to be settled about the directions that they should take. Nevertheless, the case studies interviewees welcomed that government departments like DECC and DEFRA are engaging more fully in dialogue with local authorities than in the past. A case was made by interviewees that this should be strengthened further. This would include greater dialogue and consideration of staff secondments across local and central government and even the private sector as a relatively low cost means to build cross-organisational competency, skills and understanding.

Second, there are limitations to the Coalition government's form of localism. A positive outcome is that the removal of Labour's performance framework and introducing new incentives has enabled innovation by the case study cities covered in this research. On the other hand this is likely to be impacted by the growing austerity in local authority budgets, where the incentive to find new solutions and manage budgets effectively is pushed to the point where cutting out important activities becomes the only option.

Third, there may also be a wider problem here; that central government, with its focus on short-term delivery within the space of a single government administration, fails fully to grasp the significance of the embedded nature of knowledge and expertise within the context of 'place'. Building effective local networks for SUD takes time and requires maintaining momentum over the long-term, well beyond the lifetime of a single Parliament. The role of the Centre in both challenging and incentivising creative change and innovation at the local level can be constructive. However, the chopping and changing of institutional frameworks has counter-productive elements. The cities (city-regions) that are best placed at the present time are those that have been able to absorb the best bits of new institutional changes (e.g. the engagement of private sector leaders who have not worked with the public sector before, through the creation of LEPs) and integrate them within their own long-term ambitions and structures. They are places that have consistently built upon robust networks across geographies and sectors and can rely on trust in relationships to resolve challenging issues. The cities (city-regions) least best placed are those that constantly find themselves starting almost all over again in response to a new central initiative, as they find it challenging to hold together effective network relationships across places within their area. The result is that institutional capacity between places is widening to a potential gulf. There will be a few places (particularly larger cities like Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and Bristol) that are very well placed to pursue a SUD agenda. There will be many others beyond the case study cities that will find it much more difficult. If government does believe that local places have a critical role to play in SUD (as well as building more locally competitive economies), it will need to more fully appreciate that it takes more than policy initiatives to enable success. It also requires appreciating the significance of local institutional and leadership capacity and enabling the conditions where it can develop and flourish effectively.

Finally, this study has demonstrated that cities have an important role to play in pursuing SUD through spatial networks:

“Perhaps one of the most surprising responses to climate change over the past two decades has been the growing involvement of municipal governments and other urban actors in efforts to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and increasingly to adopt adaptation measures. Traditionally conceived as a global problem requiring global solutions, the urban politics of climate change has been a key factor in challenging research and policy communities to reconsider how the governance of global environmental problems takes place”

(Bulkeley 2010, p230)

The evidence from the case study cities examined is that despite all the pressures that have been placed on them locally and centrally, cities, through their networks, are well placed to make an important contribution towards achieving SUD. In a context of ‘globalisation’ and the continuing ‘hollowing out’ of central government departments, Whitehall really does need strong sub-national actors to share in the governance of sustainable development and climate change. English cities are well placed to play this role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of these policy lessons, the following policy recommendations are made as issues for further reflection through a workshop to discuss the findings and through a proposed second stage of research:

1. It is clear that cities have an important role to play in the promotion of SUD and in the mitigation and adaptation to climate change. *Further reflection should be given to:*
 - a. How cities might be best incentivised to progress with this agenda?
 - b. How this agenda might be better formalised within City Deals and their successor arrangements?
2. Cities capacity to promote SUD is established crucially on long-term investment in the ‘place qualities’ of embedded knowledge, strong institutions, effective leadership and trusting network relationships, all of which may only be built up and sustained over time. This is reflected in evidence that those cities that currently offer leading expertise in SUD, have both sought to develop and maintain this expertise and commitment over much of the period examined in the research for this project. It reflects a different way of thinking to that of Whitehall, where institutional memory may be of lesser priority than general policy making expertise in response to the political requirements of the governing administration. *Further reflection should be given to:*
 - a. How might these differences be bridged in a better understanding and trust between local and central government?
 - b. How might these differences might be addressed within a multi-level governance framework and practical arrangements e.g. City Deals?
3. There is evidence that the top down ‘conditional’ model of localism that was a characteristic of Labour’s policy approach to local government, whilst offering benefits

through national indicators and encouraging a widening of engagement in climate change activities within local government, was not an effective model for fostering a context for innovation in local government. On the other hand, there is also growing evidence that the growing austerity of local authority budgets, which may initially have encouraged innovation, is putting at risk long-term processes of growing embedded capacity within cities. *Further reflection should be given to:*

- a. What kind of model of localism would best both incentivise local innovation and responsiveness, develop local capacity and leadership, whilst at the same time meet Whitehall's overall policy concerns?
4. There is a case for taking a multi-level governance approach towards the promotion of SUD. Whilst, as already indicated, there is little evidence that a 'top down' 'conditional' approach from Whitehall is effective, nevertheless, Whitehall has a vital role to play in creating a stable and strategic context for effective policy development. This includes a legislative framework for long-term energy and climate change policy that local authorities and their partners (including the private sector) may operate within. *Further reflection should be given to:*
 - a. How such a multi-level governance approach might be best designed?
 - b. What kind of measures should form part of a long-term energy and climate change policy framework?
 5. That the developing engagement by DECC and DEFRA with cities on SUD and climate change issues should be welcomed. Further reflection should be given to:
 - a. The scope to develop this further, for example through secondments and exchanges of experience between cities and government departments?
 6. There is evidence of an increasingly complex and diverse set of approaches towards networks for SUD across cities (and local areas) generally. At the same time there is potentially a widening gap emerging in institutional capacity between the leading and lagging authorities, which is likely to grow further over time. *Further consideration should be given to:*
 - a. What different governing frameworks for sustainable urban development look like across UK cities?
 - b. Whether this matters?
 - c. If it does, what implications does it have for the design of policy (e.g. for LEPs) and for cities?
 7. That the increasingly complexity and diversity of motivation and approach that is emerging both within and between cities (and other local areas) is an important characteristic of patterns of networks for SUD, which needs to be both better understood and recognised. *Further consideration should be given to:*
 - a. How these different trends might be identified and documented?
 - b. What lessons might be learnt from the different models being developed?

8. Part of this complexity is reflected in working out possible tensions between sustainable development and economic growth agendas and the respective roles of city councils (and their partners) and LEPs (and other sub-regional/city-regional) governance arrangements across different spatial scales. *Further consideration should be given to:*
 - a. How these tensions might be addressed in a practical way?
 - b. What lessons might be learnt from best practice so far?
 - c. What implications does this have for the different spatial levels at which networks operate?

9. That in the light of growing diversity and complexity of network practice, it is important that there are processes in place to capture policy learning across cities (and other places). The present austerity in local authority budgets is likely to put pressure any such activity. *Further consideration should be given to:*
 - a. What is the vital role for the Core Cities Group and for the LGA in leading the coordination of this work?
 - b. How might it be best achieved?

10. That austerity combined with financial incentives on local authorities to seek innovative solutions working with private sector and voluntary sector partners, will require new entrepreneurial skills and knowledge in local government. *Further consideration should be given to:*
 - a. How might these skills be best developed?
 - b. What scope is there for staff exchanges and other means of cross-organisational learning across local government, Whitehall, the private sector and the voluntary sector?

Appendix 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

CASE STUDY OF FIVE ENGLISH CITIES

The following interviews were conducted between September and November 2012:

Birmingham

Dave Carter, Head of Planning and Growth Strategy, Birmingham City Council

Sandy Taylor, Head of Climate Change, Birmingham City Council

Katie Trout, Executive Manager of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership

Bristol

Stephen Hilton, Service Director, Bristol Green, Economic and Digital Futures

Peter Jackson, Director, West of England Local Enterprise Partnership

Liz McDougall, Health Improvement Coordinator, Bristol City Council

Zoë Wilcox, Service Director, Planning and Sustainable Development, Bristol City Council

Leeds

Paul Hamer, Chief Executive, WYG Group and Chair of the Green Economy Panel, Leeds City Region

Dr Tom Knowland, Head of Sustainable Development, Leeds City Council

Melanie Taylor, Green Economy Lead, Leeds City Region Secretariat

Leicester

Carol Brass, Environmental Manager, Leicester City Council

Professor Paul Fleming, Director of Sustainable Development and Director, Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development, De Montfort University

Frank Jordon, Strategic Director City Development and Neighbourhoods, Leicester City Council

Newcastle

Kit England, Policy and Information Officer, Newcastle City Council

Rob Hamilton, Head of Economic Development, Newcastle City Council

Phil Hunter, Head of Policy, Newcastle City Council

Gillian Roll, Economic Strategy Manager, NELEP

Appendix 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please outline a summary history of the development of ‘partnerships’ and ‘networks’ for SUD in your area?
 - a. How has your approach changed over time?
 - b. What have been the main drivers of change?
 - c. Have changes in Government (e.g. Labour to Coalition) impacted and if so how?
2. What have been the principal drivers for the city’s promotion of/engagement with SUD?
3. Which of these have been important and why?
 - a. International concern and mediation over climate change (e.g. UN/EU)
 - b. Local Agenda 21
 - c. Government policy or encouragement
 - d. Political agenda from within the Council
 - e. Pressure/concern from local residents and other stakeholders
 - f. Financial pressures e.g. to reduce landfill
4. Are you a member of any international networks for SUD? If yes:
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What type of activities has your city participated in?
 - c. What has your city gained through participation in policy and practice?
5. What networks are you involved in at a national level for SUD?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What type of activities has your city participated in?
 - c. What has your city gained through participation in policy and practice?
6. What networks are you involved in at a sub-regional level for SUD?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What type of activities has your city participated in?
 - c. What has your city gained through participation in policy and practice?
7. What networks is your city involved in at the local authority level?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What type of activities has your city participated in?
 - c. What has your city gained through participation in policy and practice?
8. What networks is your city involved in at the community/neighbourhood level within the city?
 - a. Which ones?
 - b. What type of activities has your city participated in?
 - c. What has your city gained through participation in policy and practice?

9. How have the networks impacted on the context in which your city pursues SUD?
 - a. What has changed?
 - b. Are there any discernible trends?
 - c. Why do you think that is?

10. What role have networks played in how your city understands the spatial geography of the city in SUD (e.g. neighbourhoods and sub-region/city-region)?

11. What has been achieved and learnt in the implementation of SUD?
 - a. Please give examples
 - b. Are there areas where it has been easier to make progress than others (e.g. waste, transport or energy conservation)
 - c. How have networks made a difference to what you have achieved?

12. How have you assessed the effectiveness and impact of the networks that your city has been involved in on SUD:
 - a. What policy learning and transfer has taken place?
 - b. What evidence of this is there of this?

13. Would a city-network for SUD – or forum for discussion / learning (i.e. seminar series) – be useful (desirable/feasible) and what kinds of support individuals might be prepared to give to this.

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