

DISCUSSION NOTE 4 –The Existing Institutional Capacity?

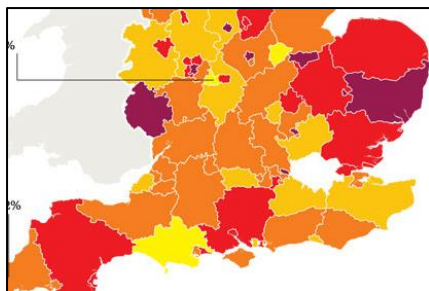
The work of Professor Wong has shown the sheer extent and diversity of [sources of spatially referenced information](#) that is held publicly but not coordinated or centrally accessed. In addition, the [Map for England](#) demonstrated the spatial expressions of government policies and programmes and has shown the power of such a facility to inform policy debate. As indicated earlier in this Discussion Note, there is a plethora of official data sources (see Appendix). These are uncoordinated and have potential inconsistencies between them, but their main weakness is that they are not used effectively to inform public debate about the spatial impacts. Therefore, it is appropriate to ask whether any of the existing organisations have the capacity to adapt to take on the role as the **NISS** or is a new body with dedicate responsibility required.

The purpose of this Discussion Note is to consider the feasibility of a coherent and integrated set of approaches for measuring and testing the spatial outcomes of public policy to enable more effective decision-making. Great attention to the choice of approaches will provide a strategic context and overview of output and outcomes at all levels of activity whether at national, regional or local levels. Consideration has therefore been given to whether existing institutional arrangements have the capacity to respond to the need for change. Consideration has also been given to bodies which provide examples, albeit in other fields of activity, of what is possible. These fall into the following categories, and some of the more relevant are considered below:

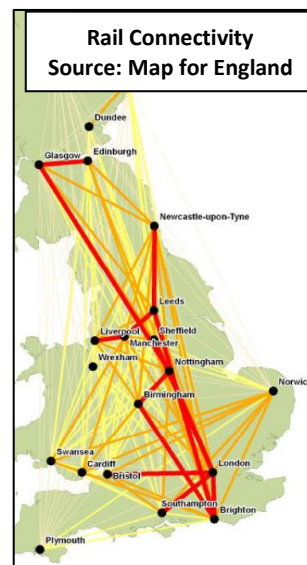
- Government Departments
- Statutory Bodies (e.g. UK Statistics Authority, ONS & OBR)
- Independent Bodies, including Private Foundations (e.g. IFS, IfG, & JRF)
- Research Bodies (e.g. ESRC, NATCEN & MORI)

Government Departments: Government Departments have begun establishing open-source data capacity, for example [DEFRA's statistical data sets](#). In particular the [MAGIC web-based data base](#) provides geographic information about the natural environment from across government. The information covers rural, urban, coastal and marine environments across Great Britain and is a cross-agency initiative. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to the work of a **NISS**, but needs to be linked to social-economic systems and be used to interrogate policy.

Statutory Bodies: There are two key arms of government with responsibility for providing rigorous analysis – the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) and the UK Statistics Authority / The Office for National Statistics (ONS). The OBR provides the type of critical independent analysis and challenge that is required. It is however being limited in its remit to budgetary issues and has to date not been spatial in its analytical frameworks. In the short term, it could be asked to provide spatial-proofing in all its outputs – i.e. the implications for places, cities and regions. It is also possible for this remit to be interpreted more widely, for example, to include social budgeting or ecosystem. services.



The ONS sets standards of excellence in data management systems. It increasingly presents spatially disaggregated information, beyond the normal local authority groupings. It also provides very valuable analyses, for example on the patterns of social inequalities in the Marmot Report (see [map](#)). Although it provides essential and high-quality data it is also now considered that it has even greater potential to initiate independent investigative policy analysis, reflected in its most recent initiatives.



International Experience: There are also international examples of governmental bodies which could act as an exemplar of what is feasible. The most recognised one is DATAR, situated in France and a Prime Ministerial Interdepartmental Delegation for Regional Development and Regional Attractiveness. As an interdepartmental agency it prepares, stimulates and coordinates state-led spatial planning policies. It includes L'Observatoire des Territoires which has three main goals, reporting to the Minister annually:

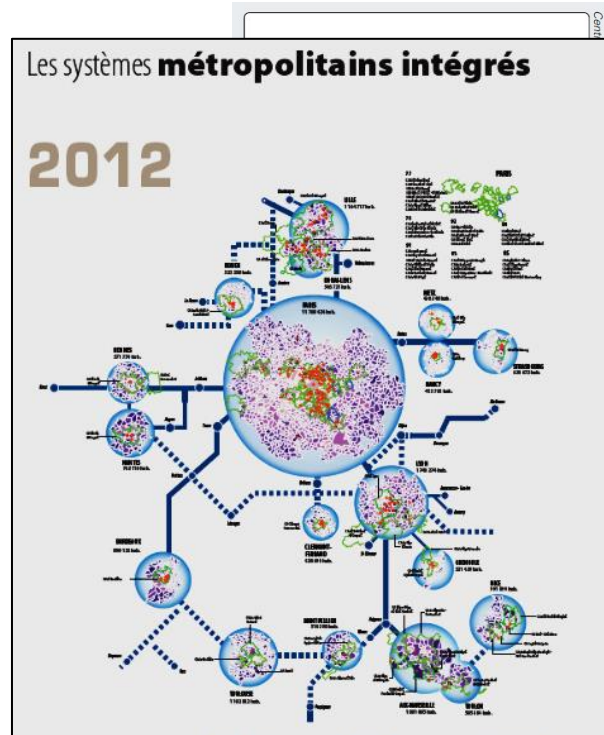
- **synthesis:** it brings together, analyses, disseminates information and data relating to territorial dynamics and inequalities as well as to policies carried out in the field of spatial planning and development.
- **exchanges of experience between the State and local and regional authorities,** which makes it possible to promote the harmonization of methods of observation and analysis, the pooling of knowledge and create the conditions for shared diagnosis on the state of the territories.
- **innovation and expertise:** it runs a programme of studies and research and contributes to the development of conceptual frameworks and tools adapted to the new needs for comparisons between territories on a European and international scale.

The Observatory is organized as a network of partners, with a policy council:

- under the chairmanship of a minister or commissioner;
- with representatives from key stakeholder sectors in government, agencies & NGOs;
- university experts.

Other international examples also exist. The Canadian government has set high standards, which have been sustained despite occasional challenges. The German Federal government also has been effective in providing an overview of the need for collaboration between urban systems, although formal powers for action lie with the state governments (the Länder). The power of spatial analysis in informing policy is also demonstrated by the work of [European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion](#) (ESPON). ESPON provides spatially based evidence for policy use of pan-European, comparable, systematic and reliable territorial evidence.

Independent Bodies: The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) which is supported by government offers an alternative model which has many of the merits of the OBR but is less constrained by a statutory remit. It also draws funding from a set of diverse sources and has the flexibility to act as host to other initiatives (e.g. Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy (CPP) and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA)). There have also been examples of support through secondment from a similarly independent bodies or firms or with a host body may be willing to make virtual and real desk-space available as did The Royal Institution when it launched and supported the Science Media Centre between x - y. The Centre for Cities has been a leading source of independent and relevant spatial analysis.



The value of independent authoritative advice on national policy has also been highlighted in the recent report by the Independent Industrial Commission. In its final report it calls for the creation of an **Office of Strategic Economic Management** whose role it summarises as follows

“It is crucial that the new industrial policy framework is monitored and measured effectively, and that the UK develops a policy culture and capacity to understand and use the subsequent data appropriately. Strategic management of the economy and meeting the goals of the state is a long-term endeavour. It is essential policy interventions are monitored over the long-term to ensure progress is being made and maintained.

- *The new Office for Strategic Economic Management should focus on evaluating government policy over the long-term, and on analysing the economic environment in which industrial strategy operates. It would provide independent advice to government and carry out specific commissions on behalf of government.*
- *The first key task of the new Office would be to develop and agree the metrics that it will monitor. Metrics should be designed by considering economic data that relate to meeting the strategic goals of the state.*
- *The new Office should publish in-depth analysis of the industrial strategy on a four or five- year basis and only once within a parliament. It should provide a summary assessment of its key overarching indicators on an annual basis, and report this to Parliament and the devolved national assemblies.*
- *To effectively monitor and measure the new strategy improved sub-national economic data is required. The new Office should work with the relevant data-producing national organisations, and local and regional institutions to agree metrics at the appropriate spatial and sectoral levels.*
- *New sub-national economic indicators should give consideration to measuring the resilience of local and regional economies.”*



Research Institutes: There is also a wealth of material that is produced and held by academic and other institutions. Exemplars are the application of spatial analysis to public policy and decision making at the Centre for Advanced Spatial Studies (CASA UCL) and the Heseltine Institute (Liverpool). There is also the seminal work of leading academics, including Cecilia Wong (Manchester), Alasdair Rae (Sheffield University), Philip McCann (Sheffield) and Danny Dorling (Oxford).

There are also key examples of international bodies which have informed *thinking in the UK. In particular the European Spatial Observatory Network ([ESPON](#)) and Maynooth Universities ([Atlas of Ireland](#)). There is also a role for leading independent research bodies such as the National Centre for Social Research and MORI to be part of the partnership.

