

A RESEARCH REPORT FOR BELFAST CONFLICT RESOLUTION CONSORTIUM

Building Sustainable Communities The Regeneration & Development of Interface Areas *Executive Summary*

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BCRC is supported by four partner organisations: Falls Community Council (lead agency), Epic, Charter NI and Intercomm.





Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC)¹ is a citywide cross-community partnership working to assist conflict transformation at Belfast's interfaces. The project's mission is to 'empower interface communities to develop the tools and resources to manage and address conflict transformation within their local areas and across the city of Belfast, underpinned by a community development ethos'. Currently it is funded to continue to deliver a peace building programme until June 2014.

Based on a series of workshop discussions², research reports and the direct feedback from its "on the ground" constituency of interest BCRC has sought to address the underlying issues in interface areas i.e. the causes and not just the symptoms.

The purpose of the Building Sustainable Communities: The Regeneration and Development of Interface Areas report, commissioned by BCRC and carried out by CMWorks³, is to examine potential barriers that persist regarding the regeneration and development of interface communities and to make recommendations for overcoming these.

The report places its findings from a methodology and activities that included desk research, 12 structured interviews⁴ and seven focus groups set within the generic context of interface communities across Belfast. The methodology proposed in the original research design and the actual activities undertaken changed during the process of the study. As reported later in the report this change in itself became a significant factor in understanding some of the particular issues that impact upon risk and opportunities in interface communities.

The main body of the report provides an analysis of potential regeneration and reconnection opportunities within specific interface locations in Belfast and to make recommendations on how these opportunities can be incorporated into existing and future regeneration processes. This executive summary report seeks to integrate the findings and analysis from the main body of the report into an accessible format as well as the final recommendations.

The report concluded that it is possible to understand the distinct nature of the factors that impact upon interface communities remaining within the most deprived wards in Belfast. These are summarised in the table that follows.

1 BCRC is supported by four partner organisations: Falls Community Council (lead agency), Epic, Charter NI and Intercomm.

2 Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium. (2010). BCRC Position Paper on Interfaces. Belfast, Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium.

3 This project is part-financed by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. www.seupb.eu. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or the Special EU Programmes Body.

4 Interview respondents included representatives from DOJ; OFMDFM; DSD; staff from interface network organisations; range of community workers and voluntary activists across the city and an academic with published research in interface issues.

Poverty, multiple deprivations and impact	Restricted access to education and training skills development	Poor physical environment Derelict shops and houses Neglected open spaces	Adverse housing conditions including segregated communities	Competition for scarce resources and impact upon relationships and networks
Levels of physical , emotional and mental health and well being	For some, absence of leaders, influencers and community advocates	Access to employment opportunities	Relationship with criminal justice agencies and/ or community safety initiatives	Lack of inward investment in housing and employment
Current Impact of militarized violence	Legacy of militarized violence	Prevalence and impact of different levels of violence experienced in interface communities	Low levels of social capital investment	Sectarianism and other forms of non-militarised violence
Too many reports and not enough action	No roadmap	Visible and invisible barriers to change and transition	Community voices not heard, understood nor utilised effectively	Diverse levels of confidence, capacity and capability to engage in renewal and regeneration

The report acknowledges that each specific interface location may best use the list of factors identified to present the relevant context for their own community. However, the findings, conclusions and recommendations in this Executive Summary reflect the generic analysis set out in the main body of the report.

This begins with the distinct nature of the factors that impact upon interface communities that remain within the most deprived wards in Belfast.

1. There is a need to address freedom from want as much as freedom from fear in interface locations

This report suggests that regeneration and renewal must be addressed with a focused response that acknowledges the multiplier effect of latent structural violence as much as the efforts to address the impact of direct forms of violence. It is the combination of direct and structural violence in so far as they threaten the lives of individuals and communities that need to be equally addressed as ways to deconstruct violence and to build peace in sustainable communities.

Violence in any form whether direct or latent has an adverse impact upon human security. Approaches to addressing violence in interface communities need to consider freedom from want as well as freedom from fear as a human rights issue.

The consequences of a more holistic view of human security as freedom from want as well as freedom from fear links social, economic and cultural development with a rights-based approach that is required also to be conflict sensitive.

The process and practice of a rights based approach to human security demands that all key stakeholders and representatives act accountably and encourage participation and inclusion, supporting local capacity building for the peaceful management of conflicts.

This report would argue that the indirect violence of poverty and deprivation and its impact need to be addressed with the same rigour by the Interdepartmental Working Group and within the overall Government response.


Roles and responsibilities, policy and practice regarding interface areas has to date been addressed within three distinct strands; good relations, community safety and economic regeneration. This report would suggest that other Government Departments such as Health, Education, Employment and Learning, Trade and Investment need also to “come to the table” to outline their contribution to the integrated package of actions announced in May 2013⁵.

The creation of an Interministerial Working Group to address the needs of interface communities as established already to address Domestic and Sexual Violence, would increase information sharing and mutual accountability placing locally elected representatives at the heart of the process and ensuring that the Government Strategies deliver on their objectives on a cross party and cross Departmental basis.

There is a need for robust mechanisms to ensure that the concerns, aspirations and plans voiced by local community residents and other stakeholders in each area are heard, understood and most crucially used in order to deliver regeneration, good relations and community safety initiatives in each area in order they too are placed at the heart of the process

This report found that the attitudes and understanding of the public representatives interviewed for this report emphasised the need for an integrated approach and their openness to hear from

⁵ Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. (2013). Together: Building a United Community. http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together_building_a_united_community.pdf. Belfast. Accessed May 2013.



networks and areas willing and able to work together and with government to address the issues in interface communities. Indeed this report would further suggest that there is a shared and common vision among public sector and community representatives as to the issues that need to be tackled in terms of multiple deprivation, its causes and impact within interface spaces.

This report would indicate that, at this moment in time, interface practitioners and networks have the opportunity to “push at an open door”. However, there is no point in going through an open door without a clear focus for conversation and planning when you get there. This report would suggest that those same practitioners and networks, including BCRC, need to consider their own strategic roles and responsibilities and future direction. It is recommended that they consider strategic and operational requirements to enhance their potential contribution to capacity building, economic, cultural, environmental and social development, and information sharing as well as the management of change and transition within interface locations and shared space projects throughout the City. Larger interface networks, such as BCRC might wish to provide support for individual projects and partnerships through facilitating robust training and development analysis based on the stage of readiness of the particular partnership members, their own assessment of need alongside signposting and/or the provision of appropriate interventions to meet those needs.

The development of social capital and the contribution of interface practitioners and community and residents groups to its’ investment and return is often not recognized in terms of additionality and “value for money” by some other stakeholder groups.


Social capital is “the social ‘glue’ which makes local communities work – the informal networks which are often invisible to outsiders, but which are such a vital component of community life”.⁶ This report would suggest that a key indicator that needs to be included into this framework of success indicators is the level and degree of social capital generated within each interface area through bonding, bridging and linking initiatives. It might also be utilised by BCRC and other social partners as a focus for identifying strengths, opportunities and limitations in some of the current and previous initiatives. The report found that there still remains a need to bring together the “ordinary people on the street” and to “knock on every door”.

The report also acknowledges the resilience of the individuals and families who live in such areas creating neighbourhoods with a strong sense of identity and pride. The challenge remains to find ways in which positive expressions of that pride and identity can be expressed and shared in formal and informal settings among and between interface communities and also between those communities and the wider population.

The report found that one of the most effective initiatives undertaken to assist capacity building in interface areas that emerged during the desk research was the work undertaken by Participation and Practice of Rights [PPR] in relation to the regenerations of Crumlin Road Goal and the Girdwood Barracks site⁷. The mechanism of the Residents Jury and the range of international and local experts evidence present to inform the residents jury is impressive and accessible through

6 Morrow, D. (2006) Sustainability in a Divided Society; Applying Social Capital Theory to Northern Ireland <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/fs/doc/issue2introduction.pdf>

7 [http://www.pprproject.org/content/urban-regeneration-resourcesFindings and Indicators from the Residents’ Jury on the Regeneration of Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks \(Oct 2008\)](http://www.pprproject.org/content/urban-regeneration-resourcesFindings and Indicators from the Residents’ Jury on the Regeneration of Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks (Oct 2008))



written and digital form⁸ It provides an excellent model that can be facilitated and delivered by expert practitioners while utilising opportunities to enhance learning and skills from others.

Interface areas need to be understood within a wider contextual understanding of the conditions and environmental setting that result in a concentration of ‘deprived’ households and individuals living in close proximity. These in turn create economic and social barriers that disconnect them from their more affluent neighbours and the positive opportunities and well-being that influence their lives. The context and impact of segregation is not confined to interface areas alone and in acknowledging that there needs to be a more comprehensive approach to City planning

It is this multiplier effect compounded by the range of levels of violence experienced heightened lack of mobility, the poverty of hope for some individuals and groups and the lack of private and public investment that has a compounding negative impact beyond that of other communities in the city who are also adversely affected by deprivation and violence.

2. Interface locations are often the site but not always the source of different levels of violence that impact upon individuals, families and communities

The report concluded that individuals and communities in interface areas experience a range of levels and forms of violence that exceed those of other “deprived” communities and groups in experiencing trauma, hurt or harm as a result of direct or latent conflict and violence. This includes “recreational”, “event-linked” “casual proximity-related” orchestrated and premeditated violence and other forms of non-militarized violence including the ‘lived experience’ of sectarianism.

The involvement of local community activists, workers and networks provide an essential safety mechanism for shared space discussions and negotiations to take place within each area. They contribute significantly on an ongoing basis to prevention, earlier intervention, protection and support interventions to address the “hotspots” and “hot events” that might potentially or actually flare up in a particular interface space. The preventative and earlier intervention aspects of reducing interface violence often is unrecognised in terms of resource allocation to the “on the ground” community organisations and networks that respond to the “flare ups” on an ongoing basis.

Specifically, this report acknowledges the contributions from ex-combatants from diverse communities of interest; inter and intra republican and loyalist groupings in their role as skilled community advocates and “tension monitors” in practice. The report concluded that the level of negotiation and working agreements reached inside and out of the formal structures of consultation and decision making goes a long way to explain some of the progress that has been made in the regeneration projects and sometimes the challenges they experience from others.

This history of their previous and current initiatives to work to create earlier intervention at times of unrest and to work with others to contribute to safety planning is apparent although not always recognised overtly in policy documents and strategic statements.

⁸ Videos from the Residents’ Jury on the Regeneration of Crumlin Road Gaol & Girdwood Barracks: Part 1. Part 2.

3. The individual and community barriers to change and transition need to be addressed with the same consideration and understanding as the physical structures of “defensive architecture”.

The use of different forms of language and words to describe the same structures, for example “defensive architecture”, “contested space” or a barrier that keep communities apart reflects differences in thinking and attitudes that needs to be acknowledged and considered particularly in regard to the pace and process of progress to respond to the same structures.


In the same way there is a need for those who live and work outside those communities to understand both the cultural history and experiences of individuals and groups living within the physical environment of “interface spaces” as well as the non-visible mental barriers and prior planning decisions that impact upon segregation in the city. The report affirmed previous studies that state that there is “no one size fixes all solution” and the need for cross sectoral engagement to formulate those solutions.

In addition this report suggest that there is a need to give consideration to the management of transition in order to acknowledge the “mental barriers” that individuals and groups are being asked to “dismantle”. It states that change “works” only if it takes root in people’s minds and hearts. Effective change management alone is not enough; the reality is that it’s often transition, not change that people resist. It suggests also that existing networks and in community resources are best equipped to assist that transition.

Their “cultural understanding and knowledge” in regard to the fears and hopes of their own and the “other” communities, the stage of readiness of the same communities to participate in discussion and work on shared space, particularly that might involve the removal or downgrading of some of the defensive architecture, was particularly notable in its contribution to progress. This interface practitioner expertise and their networks need to be harnessed and resourced to sustain the work developed to date and for the future.

4. Interface communities and the network organisations that support them are frustrated with too many plans, reports and not enough results. Conversely, there has been a lack of an integrated “road map” approach. Emerging opportunities exist to integrate current and future work more strategically with regional government actions and vice versa.

Interface communities are experiencing survey and consultation fatigue. For some there is a concern with some of the Government commissioned surveys and reports as to the authenticity and depth of consultation and decision making initiatives. There is a great deal of frustrations that despite the extent and range of the reports, surveys, masterplanning etc. that little positive benefit has been experienced in the lives of individuals and families in interface communities. In the same way there is an extensive catalogue of research in relation to the study of peace and conflict and interface areas in Northern Ireland with a subsequent array of recommendations as to mechanisms and strategies to address cause and impact. There may be some merit in creating



a virtual library of the resources to aid those involved in regeneration and the development of shared space locally, on a European basis and globally.

The OFMDFM announcement [May 2013] of the package of significant and strategic actions linked to the new good relations strategy provide a framework in which local interface communities can integrate their current and future work more strategically with regional government actions. Key principles have also been set out to ensure that a robust and inclusive approach is in place to ensure ownership and inclusivity of the consultation, planning and implementation process. Issues such as the authentic rather than tokenistic implementation of social clauses is essential to provide practice and tangible benefits to individuals and communities in interface locations.

This report suggests that it is essential that resources and mechanisms for the delivery of capacity building to ensure effective and efficient implementation are designed in collaboration with the networks and community activists best able to articulate community needs and proposed solutions. The involvement of community networks from interface areas in monitoring the outworking of these principles is essential as is the mutual accountability from community projects and networks to fulfil the commissioning and quality assurance requirements required to deliver on the ground initiatives.

BCRC, its Steering Group, staff and members are in a primary position to enable Government to speak directly to communities to hear their answers to this question, to collate and analyse results and to work with Government in an equitable partnership to ensure that progress is underpinned with participation, mutual accountability and inclusion.

Opportunities to integrate the growth of social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability with developments in social policy and specific funding and commissioning opportunities are being pursued to varying degrees by some of the projects examined for the purpose of this report.

The three area-based focus groups and potential shared space projects collectively illustrate aspects of some of the findings and analysis presented in other sub sections of this report;

- The factors identified in the first section such as location, political context, partnership working etc. could be used to enable each potential project to create its own profile and outline its state of readiness to progress shared space projects further.
- There is evidence of capability and cultural competence among and between the residents, workers and community activists in each area to contribute fully to any consultation and decision making process involving the potential shared space project within their own area.
- Relationships have been built to varying degrees on a cross community and cross sectoral basis to progress the projects.
- There is a need to secure funding to assist the projects through the different aspects of regeneration and for each project this may involve a distinct capacity building programme.

5. The models, resources and tools used as a framework in this report and the significant level of existing reports from others may be of future use to assist identifying evidence of need, assessing risk and opportunity and planning development in specific interface locations and potentially to a wider audience

The use of the Aid for Peace⁹ framework can assist the mapping of peace and conflict within each specific interface setting. Interface communities and potential regeneration projects within those areas may wish to utilise the themes and tools identified within this report to produce a profile of their own interface community, including the level and types of violence they experience.

Similarly, public representatives have the opportunity to share in a practical and pragmatic way the “the route map” to negotiating the twists and turns of compliance, funding, policy and legislative pathways required to move freely through the planned strategic plans and actions for promoting good relations, community safety and shared space in interface communities.

6. The current level of co-operation and collaboration of individuals and groups investing in developing safety and sustainability in interface areas and in specific projects is significant.

This report concludes that opportunities have, do and will exist for partnership working both formally and informally to deliver safer sustainable communities in interface locations. However the need for longer term regeneration initiatives needs to be balanced with the need for some “quick wins” informed and influenced by local groups to address the impact of deprivations including the poverty of hope and the apathy that can result for some individuals and groups.

It is essential that the contribution of expertise of interface practitioners’ is recognised and resourced.

It is a crucial time in terms of opportunity and risk to address renewal , regeneration and reconnection in interface areas on a cross sectoral basis and in an integrated way that reflects hopes, aspirations and tangible benefits for all social partners.

It is in the context of regeneration and reconnection that the recommendations that follow are made.

⁹ Bush Kenneth (2009) Aid for Peace www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/pdfs/Handbook-Aid_for_Peace.pdf

Recommendations

Commission existing expert interface practitioners such as BCRC to contribute to increasing the cultural competence of other social partners delivering regeneration in interface locations and to assist transition.

Create opportunities for public and private sector representatives to share their knowledge and skills to enhance the work of interface practitioner groups and partnerships.

Commission an audit to scope the level of investment in specific interface locations across the city to date.

Share best practice initiatives and projects developed within interface locations within a virtual library for use by others locally and globally.

Consider the formation of an Interministerial Group within Government to aid integration, inclusion and transparency to assist regeneration and reconnection in interface areas.

Create further opportunities within the good relations package announced by OFMDFM to address the need to manage transition as well as change within interface locations.

BCRC review their own strategic role and future direction and their opportunities to contribute positively to regeneration as well as peace-building and reconstruction in interface locations in Belfast.

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