

# CROSSING THE LINE

Key features of effective practice in the development of shared space in areas close to an interface

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## Abbreviations

ASF	A Shared Future
BCC	Belfast City Council
BCDA	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
BCRC	Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium
BIP	Belfast Interface Project
CEP	Community Empowerment Partnership
CRC	Community Relations Council (for Northern Ireland)
CRU	Community Relations Unit
CSI	Cohesion, Sharing and Integration
CNR	Catholic/Nationalist/Republican
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECNI	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
EPIC	Ex Prisoners Interpretative Centre
HMO	Houses of Multiple Occupation
NBCAU	North Belfast Community Action Unit
NBIN	North Belfast Interface Network
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NIHE CCU	Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Community Cohesion Unit
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
OFMdFM	Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister
PfG	Programme for Government
PPR Project	Participation and the Practice of Rights Project
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUL	Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RPA	Review of Public Administration
SEUPB	Special European Union Programme Board

SIF	Springfield Intercommunity Forum
SLIG	Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group
SRRP	Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project Limited
SWAT	South West Action Team
TAP	Triennial Action Plan (for A Shared Future and Race Equality Strategy)
VCU	Voluntary and Community Unit

# Executive Summary

## 1. A report on effective practice

BIP engaged Roz Goldie and Brid Ruddy to “document effective practice and engage with key stakeholders in the development of shared space in neighbourhoods close to an interface”. The findings are based on extensive desk research and twenty seven interviews conducted with key people from the statutory, voluntary, community, and academic sectors, and independent agencies. The Executive Summary is a synopsis of the key issues and findings for general distribution and the full report is targeted towards policy-makers and relevant statutory agencies.

## 2. Describing the interface

An interface may be a visible and recognised site in urban settings like Belfast, but in other places tends to be defined as contested space. Often these areas are associated with parades-related disputes, territory marking with flags and symbols, and/or youth-led, locality-specific violence. This report addresses how effective practice in promoting shared space at or near interfaces has emerged over the last decade.

## 3. The policy arena

The report also puts that practice in the context of a changing policy context. Key policy areas include the Northern Ireland Assembly strategic policy of Cohesion, Sharing and Integration, and the Assembly Commission Good Relations Action Plan for 2010-2011. Although postponed, the Review of Public Administration offers opportunities for interface stakeholders in regeneration and the process of planning. It may also set challenges to practitioners who are unfamiliar with the process of planning, and community planning in particular.

## 4. Policy Drivers

CRC has acknowledged that in the legacy of physical segregation, the perceptions of safety and security of the people living near to interfaces and interface barriers must be the priority. However, they also have said that “we should aspire to the removal of all interface barriers across the city of Belfast over time ... on the basis of sustainable



*regeneration as part of a process towards building a shared city for all the people of Belfast".* They have led in facilitating the cross-sectoral multi-agency Interface Working Group and the Interface Community Partnership which supports it.

## 5. Shared space as a continuum

The question 'what is shared space?' was asked in interviews, and the answers cover a range of responses. For some the emphasis is primarily on physical space. For others it is about social and psychological space. While it is relatively easy to share shopping centres and leisure facilities, shared housing is more difficult at or near interfaces. However, there is a general consensus that 'shared-ness' – both physical and metaphorical – exists on a continuum. This continuum has changed and developed over time and is likely to continue to change within the context of a post-conflict society. Although some found the language of shared space difficult, it is commonly used by practitioners, policy-makers and some politicians, and amounts to a workable description of what is safe, common, civic space for all.

## 6. The benefits of shared space

### ***Freedom of movement***

The benefits include freedom of movement and easy, welcome access to goods, amenities and services for everyone, without fear, hostility or threat. These are key post-conflict issues, given the high levels of violence and residential segregation that have been experienced in many districts of Belfast in particular.

### ***Promoting equality***

Analysis shows that social and employment inequalities are not simply the result of discrimination as *"the variable of space and how it regulates behaviour and restricts choice is crucial"*. So a benefit of transforming interface areas is promoting equality.

### ***Regeneration***

Social and economic regeneration provide the greatest material benefits of developing shared space. *"Regenerating interfaces is crucial to peace building and normalisation"*. Regeneration is an immediate incentive to promote shared space when profits from enterprise are returned to the community. Future statutory sector actions could ensure that the interface is identified in Community Planning in particular.

***Economic benefits from ending service duplication***

Segregation and social division have a financial as well as a social cost. Duplication of public services and facilities costs an extra £1.5 billion each year. Replacing division with shared space produces economic benefits. The social benefits are clear as conflict transformation creates a greater sense of safety and better relationships both between and inside communities.

**Conflict transformation**

Developing shared space produces benefits in that it signals conflict transformation, reduced levels of segregation and division, greater freedom of movement and an improved quality of life for local people.

**7. Factors that prevent shared space*****The chill factor***

The greatest impediment is the chill factor that comes from fear, distrust, and reluctance to use space that is identified as *'belonging to the other side'*. It reinforces the poor inter-community relationships that characterise some interface communities.

***Youth thrill-seeking behaviour and parades related disputes***

Other challenges to shared space are youth-led thrill-seeking behaviour and parades-related disputes, reinforcing rather than challenging segregation. These are overwhelmingly linked to areas which lie close to interface areas throughout Northern Ireland and are both the product and outcome of interface issues.

***Physical barriers preventing connectivity***

Sectarian interface rioting over many years necessitated building security gates and walls, and act as an obstacle to connectivity and free access in Belfast. The negative impact of these physical barriers was reinforced by the symbolism of territory marking, with hostile sectarian displays of graffiti, flags and emblems. And yet, for some residents, the key safety issues around removing interface walls and barriers are more about unwelcome road traffic than fear of violence.

***Lack of qualifications and skills***

Lack of educational qualifications and employment skills were cited as important issues for people living in or near interfaces. Given the absence of both employment and vocational training in these areas the only option is to travel for work and yet the necessary mobility is restricted.

***Poverty and educational disadvantage***

The poverty and exclusion that drives division and competition at or near interfaces must be taken into account if solutions are to be found. Interface conflict cannot be transformed by looking at its internal dynamics alone. In Belfast interfaces are located in the most deprived wards of the city. They offer few employment and training opportunities. The experience of SLIG legally owning inter-community facilities is a rare exception. The lack of such ownership and control is a barrier to promoting shared space. Knowing that there are advantages in shared space is an incentive for local people.

***The need for community ownership and community development approaches***

Community ownership of the process of building shared space in interface/community work was a significant theme in interview responses. Despite very positive opinion, however, there was an underlying suspicion that some community leaders acted as gatekeepers, manipulating views about removing barriers for example. This compounds already poor communication between the community and statutory agencies, and a possible lack of new interface workers.

***Contested interpretations of the shared space concept***

Another obstacle is that for some shared space is potentially about losing space, which is to say relinquishing territory originally inhabited exclusively by them (usually the PUL community). Where parading is contested using terms like sharing is complex as some nationalists see sharing as meaning permission for unwelcome parades whilst some unionists see sharing as the right to parade with or without the consent of nationalist residents. Language is not neutral and can be politically manipulated to assert the rights of one or other party within a contested situation.

**8. Factors promoting shared space**

The factors promoting shared space include declining levels of violence and murder (and the reduction of the 'chill factor'), suspending distrust in collaborative cross-community working (including meaningful inter-community dialogue), effective youth work, incentives for inter-community creation of shared space, the engagement of both public and private sectors, visible environmental improvements and policy and political enablers (with appropriate involvement of politicians).

***Creating visible improvements***

Creating visible improvements to the physical environment is a key factor identified by respondents, who believed that restoring communal pride in an area

empowered residents to take action in other areas of their lives, in the belief that improvement can happen. A community at peace with itself is viewed as being more capable of reaching out to different 'others'.

### ***Community Dialogue***

Dialogue can serve several purposes. It can serve as an immediate conflict resolution tool that is often visible. It can also be a long-term in-depth process of building trust, which is frequently invisible. At times dialogue must be private (not secret) to initiate and sustain good working relationships. It can happen at all levels, and can often be facilitated by external organisations and individuals.

### ***Strategic long-term youth work***

This is seen as an essential aspect of promoting shared space as some interface communities still experience high levels of youth-led sectarian violence, and this acts as an inhibitor to shared space. It is the sectarian nature of this behaviour that distinguishes interface violence from violence in other large urban settings.

### ***Economic development***

This is viewed as a lever for positive change in interface communities. Practitioners put great emphasis on 'social enterprise'. This is seen as a quality of life issue since developing the economy and providing jobs promotes local social cohesion (although this may also have the potential to reinforce segregation and possibly limit work mobility even further). However, it would be necessary to develop higher value sustainable social enterprise, beyond the current childcare and catering business to provide any realistic solutions.

### ***Community planning for regeneration***

Planning for regeneration is widely regarded as a central incentive to create shared space. Opinion is unanimous that there must be community involvement and equal ownership in that process, and that the best opportunity comes in post RPA community planning. It was also said that the focus of community planning must be on creating a vision of an inter-connected city. *"The disconnectedness of Belfast is at the root of problems in planning shared space. Community planning offers great opportunities to address the obstacles to improving what are deemed 'dysfunctional communities'."*

The link between community planning and integrated local strategies will come with the implementation of RPA, when local government will have a central role in planning. This offers the chance of increased connectivity and will make a

fundamental impact on life at or near interfaces through facilitating the move from managing conflict to transformation. It should be a priority for those concerned with the development of shared space close to an interface, and mainstreamed in strategies developed in the run up to the now-postponed RPA. There is also an important place for the private sector in local regeneration strategies.

### ***Learning from the mistakes of the past***

It was perceived that some past attempts at creating shared space failed because decisions were made by statutory agencies without dialogue, engagement, participation and ownership by local people. Community planning offers opportunities for inclusive decision-making and a strategic (and 'joined-up') approach to promoting shared space – moving from the current situation where statutory agencies have an inconsistent history of consulting and engaging local communities.

### ***Need for political support and leadership***

Most respondents wanted both politicians and statutory agencies to become more involved with them in finding ways to promote shared space. There were consistent reports of the lack of political support in tackling issues preventing the development of shared space, particularly in PUL areas of Belfast, but there was also some optimism that the political process is providing new opportunities for the regeneration of deprived interface communities. Practitioners felt that there was an increasingly important role for politicians as the changed funding and political climate requires greater co-operation and collective lobbying. So politicians might now reappraise their public role in supporting endeavours to create shared space.

### ***Importance of an overall vision***

Specific policy was rarely mentioned in interviews. However, CSI remains an important lever for implementing change that promotes shared space, and in planning regeneration at or near interfaces. *“Dealing with parading and interface issues are the only two outstanding issues now that policing and justice is resolved.”* Parading requires an appropriate policy response and agreed arrangements for dealing with parades-related disputes within the context of implementing the upcoming CSI programme. New proposals coming from the Hillsborough Agreement may have the potential to generate substantial progress in this regard.

## 9. The alternative to developing shared space

### *Increasing polarisation, segregation and violence*

The alternative to shared space is that interfaces communities will continue to experience polarisation and segregation. This will exacerbate existing division, distrust and fear both among and between communities. It will, by default, encourage youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour leaving these areas unsafe space.

### *Lack of physical regeneration and economic development*

Failing to address these issues will be detrimental to regeneration and economic development – even at the level of small social economy enterprise. This may lead to greater inequality and will not tackle the skills deficit in these deprived communities nor provide answers to the obstacles to training and employment. It colludes with the lack of urban connectivity and denies the need for a vision of post-conflict space.

### *Reinforcing the financial and social costs of division*

It is also to accept the huge financial and social cost of division and duplication of services. It is to agree to an additional annual expenditure of £1.5 billion and refuse to create safe, civic space for all people.

## 10. Conclusions

The conclusions are that core ingredients in promoting shared space, of a physical, social or organisational nature, include successful mobile phone networks, effective long-term (inter-community) dialogue, strong local/community leadership (and political support for this), a robust and agreed vision for transforming interfaces that integrates interfaces into the wider strategic redevelopment agenda and implementing CSI, and shared knowledge of good practice.

### *Successful use of mobile phone networks*

Over a decade what was conflict management and ‘fire fighting’ is now becoming conflict transformation. Effective practice requires cross-community trust at local level to tackle community-based problems, with a common agenda resting on critical dialogue. That was the foundation of the success of the mobile phone networks, and a vital element in defusing community fear and tension when violence and unrest threatened.

***Effective long-term (inter-community) dialogue***

The experience of long term inter-community dialogue has produced effective practice through mediation and, where appropriate, the use of external mediators. Suspending distrust allowed practitioners to establish appropriate working relationships and create a common agenda for addressing key interface issues. The positive results of dialogue provide an opportunity for sharing good practice and developing improved methods of working in the future.

***Strong local/community leadership (and political support for this)***

More needs to be done to embed trust and long-term relationships among community leaders, to sustain the trust that has been established and extend the suspension of distrust into the wider community. Those community leaders who have taken risks need to be supported strongly at local political level and in regional political strategies from all parties.

***The need for a Vision for transforming interfaces***

There must be a strong and agreed 'joined-up' interagency and cross-sectoral vision of what shared space could be and how to implement strategic policy for this. Cross-sectoral relationships must be effectively forged so that the community sector works in strategic partnership with the statutory agencies – and includes a place at the table for the private sector. This is the minimum requirement as the skills and educational deficit in areas of high-level, multiple deprivation pose a serious challenge for the future. And this has to happen in a wider strategic policy arena, where policy implementation has a vision of shared space that is focused on connectivity, participative decision making and meaningful consultation.

***Three essential approaches***

There are three approaches to promoting shared space, which must be used together. These are the adoption of a community-based conflict transformation approach, strategic multi-agency working and decision-making with local communities in an inclusive, participative process, and the development and use of a sound evidence-base for future practice and policy.

It is hoped that this publication, having identified some key features of effective practice, will make a useful contribution to developing this evidence base.

# 1. Introduction

This report is part of the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) 'Supporting Sharing' project 2010. Its aim is to enhance levels of knowledge about 'effective practice in promoting shared space in areas close to an interface' by using information from desk research and interviews conducted with key stakeholders/ practitioners in the first three months of 2010. The report describes the dynamics, and the positive and negative lessons that practitioners and key stakeholders working at or near interfaces have reported, rather than the history of projects that have already been documented<sup>1</sup> in detail.

BIP engaged Roz Goldie and Brid Ruddy of Roz Goldie Partnership to conduct this consultancy from January to December 2010. The brief from BIP was:

- To document effective practice and engage with key stakeholders in the development of shared space in neighbourhoods close to an interface;
- To carry out and record at least 12 interviews with practitioners experienced in the creation of shared space in neighbourhoods close to an interface; and,
- Based on the interviews, to write a new publication outlining key features of effective practice in the development of shared space.

A qualitative methodology was used, including desk research and interviews. Interviews were conducted with twenty-seven groups and individuals from the statutory, voluntary, community, and academic sectors, and independent agencies (see Appendix B).

Each interview was scrutinised for internal consistency. The analysis of findings was structured by identifying themes, consistencies and contradictions in the information gleaned from individual and group interviews, and seeing how these measured against the literature reviewed and completed desk research.

1. There are key studies in the literatures on interfaces, such as Byrne, 2006; Community Relations Council 2008; Cownie, 2008; Donnelly, 2006; Gaffikin et al, 2008; Heatley, 2004; Jarman, 2008; Jarman, 2006; Jarman, (2005a); Jarman, (2005b); Jarman, 2004; Jarman, 2002; MacBride, 2008; McQueen et al, 2008; Murtagh, 2008; O'Halloran et al, 2004; and, Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006.



Further details of the methodology and a copy of the questionnaire used are contained in Appendix A and Appendix C.

For the purposes of describing effective practice in promoting shared space at or near an interface, the following definitions are sufficiently broad to be applicable to places of contested space, both inside the boundaries of Belfast city and elsewhere in Northern Ireland.

*“An interface is a common boundary line between a predominantly Protestant/unionist area and a predominantly Catholic/nationalist area. An interface community is a community which lives alongside an interface.”* (Belfast Interface Project, 1998)

*“The conjunction or intersection of two or more territories or social spaces, which are dominated, contested or claimed by some or all members of the differing ethno-national groups.”* (Jarman, 2004)

An interface may be a visible and recognised site in urban settings like Belfast. However, outside Belfast in areas such as Derry/Londonderry and Ballymena Borough, these places may not be formally designated as interface areas, and tend to be defined as ‘contested space’. Often they are associated with factors such as parades related disputes, territory marking with flags and symbols, and/or youth-led, locality-specific violence.

*“It ... is important to recognise and acknowledge that interfaces are not a static phenomenon, nor a purely historical legacy of the Troubles, but rather they are a dynamic part of the social fabric of a community that is highly polarised and extensively segregated. ... localised attempts to reduce violence in established interface areas may only serve to displace the violence to other locations, which may be less easy to manage.”* (Jarman, 2004: 22)

This report addresses how efforts at promoting shared space have progressed.

## 2. Policy Environment

### 2.1 Introduction

As the level of large scale sectarian violence has diminished, both practice and policy have progressed. Effective practice in promoting shared space at or near interfaces has emerged over the last decade, and is now situated within a changing policy context.

### 2.2 Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI)

The Northern Ireland Executive's new (CSI) strategic policy framework is currently out for consultation. It builds upon the A Shared Future (ASF) policy, which came out of a lengthy consultation which elicited over 10,000 responses in 2003-4. From this *"Government was urged to take a cross-departmental approach that explicitly encouraged **"sharing over separation"** in delivering policies and services for good relations ... there is **overwhelming support for a shared society**. Specifically, three public policy areas attracted most attention during the consultation: security and law and order, education, and housing."* (www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk)

ASF identified the need to produce both a baseline and indicators of improvement across a number of priority areas, leading to A Triennial Action Plan (TAP). This gave government departments responsibility for actions under each of the priority areas. It also included priority areas coming out of the Race Equality Strategy.

When devolved government returned in 2007, OFMdfM began work on a new strategy integrating both race and community relations strategies. The 2008-11 Programme for Government did not mention ASF, but spoke of:

*"a shared and better future, based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. ... We will bring forward a programme of cohesion and integration for this shared and better future to address the divisions within our society and achieve measurable reductions in sectarianism, racism and hate crime. If we do not take this opportunity now there is a very real risk that the divisions of our past will be replicated in the new communities that have come here to live and work among us."* (www.pfgni.gov.uk)

While ASF and TAP set out objectives for government departments, CSI places greater emphasis at the local and community levels; including the aim that district councils make Action Plans as the core means of implementing this programme. An early draft of CSI states:

*“CSI signals a significant departure from previous policy in its emphasis on delivery at the local level. It empowers district councils – in partnership with local and community organisations - to develop relevant responses to suit local circumstances through active programmes to support cohesion, sharing and integration. This emphasis is accompanied by a significant long-term shift of resource and responsibility for delivery to the local level.”*  
(www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk)

In tandem with the CSI policy development, the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has developed a Good Relations Action Plan for 2010-2011. The consultation on this plan ended as this publication went to print.

### 2.3 Review of Public Administration, Community Planning

The changing context of governance and policy is also evident in the Review of Public Administration.

*“The Review of Public Administration (RPA) was the first major examination in over thirty years of how public services in Northern Ireland are organised and delivered. Formally launched in June 2002, the Executive decided to review Northern Ireland’s system of public administration with a view to putting in place modern, accountable and effective arrangements for public service delivery. Direct rule Ministers announced decisions on the RPA in November 2005 (Health, Education and Local Government) and March 2006 (remaining public bodies). However, with the return of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, departmental reviews on the RPA have been completed and further decisions agreed.”* (www.rpani.gov.uk.)

In particular, and of most importance to meeting the needs of people living at or near interfaces, there will be the following changes in local government:

- *The number of councils will reduce from 26 to 11 by May 2011<sup>2</sup>*

2. On 15th June 2010 the Minister, Edwin Poots announced that the date for implementing RPA would be postponed until 2014.

- *Community planning will be at the heart of local government*
- *A range of functions will transfer to local government including: aspects of planning, rural development, the public realm aspects of local roads functions, urban regeneration and community development, a range of housing related functions, local economic development and tourism (www.rpani.gov.uk.)*

There will be major changes, including Council powers for community planning, bringing with them the duty to consult on community plans.

*“One of the most important new functions for local government as a result of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) is community planning. In Northern Ireland there is currently no legislative requirement for local government to consult with organisations and communities to prepare a community plan.*

*The aim of community planning is to make sure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made about the public services which affect them. Allied to this is a commitment / duty by all those who deliver services in the council area to work together to provide co-ordinated, high-quality outcomes people rightly expect. The drive for community planning should be seen in the context of the process to create more responsive and effective public services for citizens.” (www.rpani.gov.uk.)*

This development offers interface stakeholders opportunities to add to their knowledge and expertise of regeneration and the process of planning. It may also set challenges to practitioners who are unfamiliar with the process of planning.

## **2.4 Community Relations Council**

The role of the Community Relations Council is important in this policy environment. Their report *“Towards Sustainable Security – Interfaces, Barriers and the Legacy of Segregation in Belfast”* (2008) put forward these four key principles:

1. In responding to the legacy of physical segregation the perceptions of safety and security of the people living near to interfaces and interface barriers must be the priority.
2. Notwithstanding this point, we should aspire to the removal of all interface barriers across the city of Belfast over time.

3. The process of removing interface barriers should be undertaken on the basis of sustainable regeneration as part of a process towards building a shared city for all the people of Belfast.
4. No more security barriers or structures that effectively serve to segregate communities should be built; rather priority must be given to other forms of investment in people and place that will provide appropriate levels of safety and security.

CRC held the “Challenge of Change” Conference, and its report (2009) asks for the same principles to underpin improved planning arrangements and progress and change in governance in light of the Review of Public Administration.

CRC facilitated the formation of the Interface Working Group (IWG) in 2009. This is a high-level multi-agency cross-sectoral group which has a remit to co-ordinate progress towards the long-term removal of interfaces, through local consultation, in accordance with those four principles. At this stage it is Belfast focused. IWG members include representatives from government departments and agencies including Belfast City Council, DSD, ECNI, NIHE, CRC, PSNI, NIO and the voluntary and community sector.

CRC has also facilitated the formation of the Interface Community Partnership (ICP), which includes key stakeholders in the community who are working to promote conflict transformation within and between interface communities. Records supplied by CRC show that the aim of ICP is:

*“to support the Interface Working Group’s strategic approach to benefit communities through the social, physical and economic regeneration of interface areas. The development of a coordinated process, to assist in the eventual creation of vibrant and sustainable communities in Belfast will be influential in supporting peace-building through putting in place a plan of short, medium and long-term actions to address social, community, physical and economic issues in interface areas.”*

The ICP objectives are to:

- *build capacity and infrastructure in all interface communities;*
- *provide practical, support, advice and resources to communities wishing to*
- *begin the pursuit of regeneration of their areas;*
- *share and develop a strong, coherent skills base in the sector;*

- *act as a conduit between grass roots issues and the IWG;*
- *lobby and advocate for this strategic approach; and*
- *report on progress after an agreed period of time; including a review of the area to be included and assist in reporting progress on good relations.*

## **2.5 Policy implementation**

The manner in which these policy changes and developments are implemented will impact on how much progress can be made in promoting shared space close to an interface. Where lessons have been learned in effective practice in promoting shared space, this may prove useful in policy making, service delivery and practice. The conclusions reached in this report will address how this experience might inform policy implementation.

## 3. Shared space

### 3.1 What is shared space?

Space is shared where there is socially integrated use, and safe and free movement with welcome access for all. It is space that is free from fear, hostility or threat. It has been called WAGS space – that is welcoming, accessible, good quality, safe space<sup>3</sup>. Shared social space can be seen operating in a range of programmes, activities, events. It may be shared physical space, shared psychological space or shared organisational space.

*“Social distancing is the problem created by community insularity. Simple things like getting cross-community work around commonalities can be really powerful. An example is Cross paths, here in East Belfast. It involves ex-combatants from each side and began by a simple exploration of WW1 commonalities and participation in the Messines project. Common historical exploration has broken down social distancing and this group now visits each other’s areas. This is a particularly big step for the loyalists as the only time many would have gone to Short Strand in the past would have been in the dead of night and to place an explosive device.” (Crown Project)*

Programmes designed to make main roads more shared have been effective. A Short Strand Partnership representative said, *“The Arterial Routes project has been very successful here, along all four/five main arterial routes into city centre. We co-operate with others in the local areas to do local small scale things like hanging baskets and in our own area, regeneration of the physical interface barrier.”* Interaction reported that *“one of the best consultations in regeneration has been around Arterial Routes from the Belfast City Council. ... what worked best over the last 10-20 years has been the Arterial Routes programme. It has high visibility on the Shankill and Falls. People need to see that so they know progress has been made.”*

For some the emphasis is primarily on physical space. *“Shared space requires no flags or emblems, accessibility from all parts of the city, so people feel safe in the environment”* (Peace & Reconciliation Group). *“People feeling secure and there is*

3. *“Guidance notes on completing a Part B application for Peace III Shared Cultural Space Funding”* Belfast City Council, Belfast, 2010: 6.

*banning of flags and other territory marking” (Springfarm). “Where people of all communities can live, work, learn and play together free from aggression, threat or intimidation – and the right to freedom of expression and assembly including freedom of movement” (SWAT/Finaghy)*

*“BCDA also offers physical space to facilitate interaction and create a community solidarity which is capable of withstanding sectarian or political incidents in Ballynafeigh. Together with Elgin Court development and Cooke Presbyterian Church hall they provide a neutral venue which all groups can access safely and without compromise. Recent statistics show that there are 88 active groups using the BCDA offices on the Ormeau Road alone.” (Carmichael & Murtagh: NIHE & Queen’s University, Sharing Place: 2005, pp.34)*

For others the core is about social and psychological space. *“Social mix, connection and security” (Forthspring). “A place that promotes interaction between groups, individuals and communities - where diversity, cultural expression and difference is expressed, tolerated and celebrated” (SWAT/Finaghy). “People staying long term in the estate” (Springfarm). “Trust building and working on personal attitudinal change” (SLIG). “Characteristics of shared space are an area where both sides will feel at ease. This is starting to happen but a community development model needs to go on being created so that communities feel confident through development and training that they can participate. Peace III from Belfast City Council is good at funding peace-line development and they have been supportive of our projects but a lot more needs to happen.” (Interaction)*

*“As well as real spaces and programmes, the construction of networks and informal governance arrangements (such as that for young people) help to build up scaffolding capable of supporting interventions, getting specific issues into the community discourse with a high degree of penetration. One illustration of this is the response to hate crimes, connected to the increasing ethnic diversity of Ballynafeigh. Here, BCDA has organised public meetings, supported victims, liaised with the Police and used their influence with community figures to censure attacks on ethnic minorities in particular. The development and acquisition of mediation services in response to neighbour disputes have helped to build the skill base of the organisation particularly in ways that might secure intra community stability. Building networks between local people, formal groups, agencies and the statutory sector has been a key strategy of the BCDA and these have worked externally, for instance, in the campaign over planning and housing developments. In addition, these have worked internally with initiatives such as the Clergy Fellowship, which*



*involves the Christian churches interacting to create the common understanding, reciprocation and trust on which real community relations can be based.”*  
(Carmichael & Murtagh: NIHE & Queen’s University, Sharing Place: 2005, pp.34)

The Crown Project in East Belfast referred to shared space in the workplace, saying, *“the workplace is one of the most mixed areas there are in Northern Ireland. Legislation etc has ensured that workplaces are mainly conflict free and everyone from all backgrounds can work together without fear. Mobility issues in this regard should not be exaggerated or reinforced.”*

Shared organisational space can be found in the collaboration of various groups, in co-operative ventures. An example is the joint working of Suffolk and Lenadoon in SLIG.

However, there are different degrees to which space is shared. *“There are different definitions of shared space. We have a shared space that is right in the middle of the two communities and it has facilities that can be used by all. In each community however, there will be facilities that will be shared by all in theory but in reality will be used by only one community. . . . We say that if Travellers as a minority community can have their own space allocated for them then we, as a minority community, can have our allocation of our own space that will be accessible to all; but naturally used mainly by us. We are a shared space project, but not all facilities in all our communities will in reality be shared fully.”* (SLIG)

### ***The continuum of shared space***

In describing effective practice in promoting shared space at or near interfaces, it must be remembered that there is a continuum along which communities are located – from the most divided and polarised to those that have seen a greater amount of cross-community trust-building, dialogue and co-operation. This is not simple or uniform, as some communities face more entrenched resistance to transformation than others.

Responses to the interview question ‘what counts as ‘shared space?’ varied with some listing what they believed were the key indicators of shared space, where others saw shared space as a continuum, ranging from what is ‘easy’ to what is more challenging. Some things are easier to share than others. It is easier to share leisure facilities than housing. *“Shared space is not one thing – it ranges from the ‘neutral sites’ like shared leisure centres and the open public realm, to shared neighbourhoods where people live together.”* (QUB Planning & Architecture)

Also some people are easier to share with than others, certainly within more highly segregated communities. *“Our shared space is between the Protestant and ‘new communities’. It is not considered realistic to place local Catholics in the area, and Catholic people would probably be afraid to move here, although there are Catholic students living in the area.”* (Village focus group)

Shared space is a concept that is situated at various and different points on a continuum of physical, temporal and organisational space and the symbolic, emotional, economic and ‘cultural’ realms. There is a general consensus that ‘shared-ness’ – both physical and metaphorical – exists on a continuum. This continuum has changed and developed over time and is likely to continue to change within the context of a post conflict society. Although some found the language of shared space difficult, it is commonly used by practitioners, policy-makers and some politicians, and amounts to a workable description of what is safe, common, civic space for all.

## **3.2 What are the benefits of shared space?**

The benefits of shared space are freedom of movement and easy, welcome access for everyone, without fear, hostility or threat. These are key post-conflict issues, given the high levels of violence and residential segregation that have been experienced in some districts of Belfast.

### **3.2.1 Mobility**

Fear of violence and threat resulted in the erection of physical barriers and walls separating predominantly PUL and CNR communities, creating enclaves in some areas, and drastically reducing the physical mobility of residents. This is an everyday experience in communities such as Suffolk, as *“there is still an issue of freedom of movement, particularly for young men”*.

Although the subject of mobility and urban connectivity<sup>4</sup> is not simple, there was a consensus that greater mobility was a benefit. The case is made for investing in the promotion of greater mobility by an academic-practitioner. *“There is a business case for investing in mobility, rather than retain spatial obsessions where boundaries limit the possibilities and embed territoriality.”* (QUB, Planning & Architecture)

4. See, for instance Boujenko et al (2008) and Bradley and Murtagh (2007)

Bradley and Murtagh (2007) examined the connection between good relations and local area planning in Belfast. They noted that while some areas are the 'progressing city' others have remained untouched, and *"losing out in economic and political restructuring"*, and emphasize the significant economic costs of segregation and interfaces. Clearly, there are economic and political benefits in developing and sustaining shared space.

Belfast City Council commissioned a discussion paper *"Improving Connectivity and Mobility in Belfast"* which notes that *"the inner city areas with more socially deprived and segregated populations ... continue to suffer from high unemployment and low education levels. These problems have been exacerbated by the sectarian divisions between the residential areas, resulting in low travel horizons and poor access to certain types of goods and services."* (Boujenko et al, June 2008: 30)

The benefits of shared space include greater freedom of travel and better access to goods, amenities and services.

Furthermore, since analysis of social and economic/employment inequalities shows these are not simply the result of discrimination, the benefits of transforming interface areas extend to the promotion of equality.

*"Labour market inequalities and social differentials have been couched in terms of discriminatory practices, but this review shows that the variable of space and how it regulates behaviour and restricts choice is crucial. The location of places of production, facilities and community services clearly affects the quality of life and life chances of the most marginal people in the city."* (Murtagh and Shirlow, 2007)

The provision of shared space has significant and positive economic and employment implications for interfaces. The benefits of shared space would be apparent in tackling inequality in a more effective manner than simply statistical description.

*"In Belfast labour market opportunities are mediated by spatial segregation, and especially in relation to interface areas – showing that inequalities must be addressed using a spatial approach rather than a simple 'head count'"*  
(Murtagh and Shirlow, 2007)

### **3.2.2 Social and economic regeneration**

Social and economic regeneration are the greatest potential benefit of developing shared space. For SLIG sustainable changes are to be seen in *“the regeneration of the whole road that is often commented on by visitors. The physical change has had positive impact on the psychology of the local communities and leads them into project work that incentivizes their further involvement. Practical benefits are really important to people. Sustainability depends a lot on long term funding, but we are receiving income from the businesses at present that ensures they pay their way.”*

In Derry/Londonderry regeneration was seen as a benefit, as *“the actual physical regeneration and particularly the roads changes make the city much more pleasant to get around”*.

There was awareness that shared organisational space could come from economic development at interfaces. For example SLIG has developed shared space in its social enterprise which generates income for the Suffolk and Lenadoon groups and the community-owned Stewartstown Road regeneration company and enhances the financial sustainability of all concerned. In an economic downturn and an increasingly competitive funding climate this is a considerable benefit.

Creating shared space assists in addressing segregation. It provides the benefits of greater equality and sustaining better intercommunity relationships – which is to say the social justice benefits and moral case for shared space. And there is an economic argument for tackling segregation and the ‘twin-speed city’ of Belfast, in the new knowledge economy.

*“A twin speed city has emerged in the last decade in which those with education and skills are doing well in key growth sectors whilst those without resources are increasingly corralled in ‘sink’ estates, stratified by poverty, segregation and fear. Thus, new interface separation barriers have been built in the last ten years at the same time as new mixed housing spaces have developed in the high value end of the housing market especially in the south of the city.”* (Murtagh, 2008, 4)

### **3.2.3 Economic benefits in public spending reduction and better services**

Residential segregation and social division have a financial as well as a social cost, with duplication of public services (such as health, education and libraries) and facilities (such as leisure centres). Deloitte research found that division accrued additional annual costs of £1.5 billion.

*“At a macro level, the research has compared the extent to which the NI public expenditure allocation differs from that of comparable regions and has identified the amount of additional spend on a per capita basis in the range of £1.5 billion per annum. Whilst a wide range of factors can be identified as potentially influencing the differential, the analysis reveals NI spends an additional £1.5 billion per annum on its public services and this could be considered to be the upper limit of the cost of the divide in NI.” (Deloitte, 2007: 88)*

Clearly another advantage of shared space is better services and facilities for less public money.

### **3.2.4 Conflict transformation**

Developing shared space produces benefits in that it signals conflict transformation and a reduction in the level of segregation and division. Transforming contested space enhances relationships within and between groups and communities. It facilitates movement from a culture of fear, division and the legacy of the past to sustain safe, open space where people can move freely and enjoy the benefits of the ‘peace dividend’. This improves the quality of life for local people by providing better opportunities for work, leisure and the use of public services and facilities.

## **3.3 What factors prevent shared space?**

The greatest impediment to shared space is the chill factor, arising from fear, lack of trust, and a reluctance to used space that is identified as ‘belonging to the other side’. For example, Suffolk is an enclave interface community with 700 people living in the PUL community and 12,000 in nearby Lenadoon, which is CNR. *“Young Protestant men are unwilling or afraid to use public transport or taxis along the Falls Road and Translink have economic cut backs so they can’t provide extra buses on Blacks Road.”* Similarly in the Village the experience is that *“The Park Centre is used by all, but one entrance is largely used by people from the ‘Protestant’ end so people are easily identified.”* In Forthspring there have been *“some discussions around this issue but no major change - though with a general reduction in tension [there is] arguably a greater ease of coming and going across interface, facilitated by practice of local community activists”.*

Few employment opportunities exist in many interface areas, and access to jobs elsewhere is prevented by perceived threat and the chill factor.

### **3.3.1 Youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour**

By far the most challenging part of promoting shared space at or near interfaces was youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour. There was widespread belief that the main source of interface violence has changed from orchestrated sectarian rioting to youth-led 'anti-social' thrill-seeking behaviour, reflecting the work of Jarman and others.

*"Increasingly interface problems have been recognised as one part of a broader web of activities and which means that interface workers are engaging with groups and individuals who are primarily concerned with such matters as community development work, youth issues and antisocial behaviour, environmental issues and regeneration."* (Jarman, 2006: 36)

The following responses summarise opinion on the situation on the ground at most interfaces.

*"Youngsters see a place to congregate for a rumble [at interfaces]. Most violence is non-sectarian and much of it is an initiation. People can use 'youth' as a reason to do nothing. Youth initiatives come mostly from the local community."* (Independent Consultant)

*"Anti-social behaviour at interfaces is largely from young people who are anti-social in their own community; and a plague in their own community."* (QUB, Law)

*"Our major problem at the minute is youth led violence. This is still sectarian but not as we know it!! These kids know one another, text one another to meet up for riots. Sometimes the riot is caused by a Catholic girl breaking up from a Protestant boy ... any excuse to get the thrill of chase from the peelers. There is plenty for the youth to do, this is thrill seeking behaviour and it can't be matched by our projects. Young Protestants are now using the excuse of 'we are rioting because our paramilitaries sold us out'. There is always a justification to be made."* (Short Strand)

### **3.3.2 Parades-related disputes**

Parades-related disputes prevent the promotion of shared space at or near many interfaces. In East Belfast the Crown Project said, *"Dealing with parading and interface issues are the only two outstanding issues now that policing and justice is resolved"*. This will continue to be a community safety issue. A comment by BCRC illustrates the impact of the contentious marches especially around the Twelfth of

July. *"The shop fronts on the Crumlin Road are shared space – except five days a year."* Clearly there are areas where shared space exists for most of the time but parades-related disputes can create division. SLIG said *"There are some parading issues and there is ongoing sectarian violence from young people who target houses in Suffolk (e.g. window smashing on a regular basis)."* Indeed unresolved issues about contentious parades, associated bands, parades-related protests, and abusive language were all said to fuel violence at interfaces in Forthspring, Springfarm, and North Belfast in general.

Parading remains an issue affecting freedom of movement, as for example, in Ballymena where members of the *"Parades Forum have undertaken substantial work in relation to improving the parading culture in the town – working on areas of drinking and marshalling etc."* Parades-related disputes still carry the potential for threat. *"We acknowledge that things have moved from inter-communal violence with communities feeling under organised threat. Now this is rooted within communities but manifests itself at interfaces – in alcohol fuelled incidents, and with seasonal parades and soccer matches."* (BCRC)

### **3.3.3 Physical barriers of peace walls and graffiti, flags and emblems**

Sectarian interface rioting over many years necessitated the erection of security gates and walls, such as the fence built by the NIO on the Upper Ballygomartin Road between Springmartin (predominantly PUL) and Moyard (predominantly CNR). Interface areas in Belfast<sup>5</sup> were characterised by peace walls, homes that were void or bricked up, and housing stock in need of improvement. These areas were described as *"not nice places to live"* and people were *"not proud of their neighbourhood"* (QUB, Law). The existence of these physical barriers remains a challenge as they prevent the freedom of safe movement and sharing of physical space. In some parts of Belfast the built environment and (non-) use of land positively accommodates those looking for fights or 'anti-social' behaviour. BCRC recently *"went on walkabout with DRD, NIHE, BCC and PSNI Crime Prevention to see 'hotspots'. The built environment had large tracts of derelict land and the street layout was a maze, with easily accessible escape routes."* BCRC urges *"a practical, co-ordinated response"* to get land use to prevent rather than encourage pre-arranged fights and other serious misconduct. For them, ownership is a crucial part of generating respect for the built environment and the example was given of

5. Although urban interfaces are likely to have physical barriers, rural interfaces are often much less visible, as Heatley (2004), Hamilton, (2008), and others have pointed out.

Ardoyne where much of the area is vandalised, but the grotto erected in memory of three young suicides from the area is never touched.

In East Belfast interface practitioners emphasized that *“Regenerating interfaces is crucial to peace building and normalisation”*. The work they prioritise is the development of the physical environment and the economy. *“Interface groups should be clear about their vision. Our target should not be to take down physical interfaces. That is up to the people who live beside them. Our target should be to regenerate interface areas, provide jobs and physical improvements leading to a better quality of life for people. When this happens people will be more secure and happy to mix with each other and the outcome will be that the walls come down.”*

NIO officials consider that, for some residents, the key safety issues around removing interface walls and barriers are more about unwelcome road traffic than fear of violence.

Historically, shared space has been prevented by obstructions to access with the erection of peace walls and fences; some put up on the wishes of the local community and others at the behest of the security forces. These physical barriers were reinforced by the symbolism of territory marking, with hostile sectarian displays of graffiti, flags and emblems. To achieve any sort of shared space, *“the physical environment needs to be freed of flags, graffiti, murals and other ‘signs’ of territory marking.”* (Areema Resident)

*“The buildings, roads, flags, graffiti murals and other ‘signs’ of interfaces are symptoms that can only be effectively addressed when people feel ownership. If local people have an input through residence, work and real choice they will not trash the area – but you have to engage people, knock doors, listen to what people say to make effective changes.”* (Independent Consultant)

Although flags and emblems are no longer regarded as the most significant threat to shared space, they remain a significant challenge, and strengthen visible territory marking. To transform contested territory into safe civic space the psychological if not physical barriers must be challenged, with the elimination of hostile graffiti and murals, moderation of flag flying and similar barriers to increased mobility.

The NIO has a role in the security elements of land use and the physical environment, and most notably the physical barriers at interfaces. *“The NIO*



*removes graffiti relating to security issues. The Council removes graffiti from Council property. Home and business owners are responsible for removing graffiti from their property. However, if an individual is too frightened to act, or if the graffiti is of a sectarian nature the NIO can intervene. Graffiti tends to be sporadic and reactive."*

### **3.3.4 Lack of mobility, skills and education deficit**

Promoting shared space is hindered by the lack of mobility that characterises interface communities. Freedom of movement is hampered by physical barriers and this results in *"poor access to certain types of goods and services."* (Boujenko et al, 2008: 30)

Lack of educational qualifications and skills were cited as important issues for people living in or near interfaces. Given the absence of employment in these areas the only option is to travel for work and yet the necessary mobility is restricted. *"Those without the training/education have few if any opportunities in the economic developments; and their neighbourhoods do not attract sustainable investment. This reproduces patterns of re-segregation and does not address the lack of mobility at/near interfaces."* (QUB, Planning & Architecture)

Addressing restrictions on freedom of movement is a major concern at or near interfaces – for employment, education, training and leisure purposes. *"For most people sectarianism is an everyday experience – not violence."* (QUB, Law)

In East Belfast the issues of mobility are the same as at other interfaces. This is seen by the Crown Project as part of the wider socio-economic problem of deprivation. *"I think we need to be realistic about two things. There is a skills and education deficit in interface areas. Those living in the more affluent areas find it difficult to develop enterprise and they have the money, the training and the social resources. How realistic is it, therefore to expect people living in disadvantaged areas to run social enterprise? The jobs that are developed through this method too often turn out to be low paid and low skill jobs. We should be seeking much higher quality jobs. Secondly, it is also a fact of modern life that labour has to be mobile. We cannot buy into the insularity of many interface areas in accepting that people can't travel for work - of course they can."*

This educational and skills deficit leads to a situation of 'no skills, no job, no reason to travel'. To compound this, the "insularity" of segregated communities obstructs the creation of shared physical, psychological and organisational space.

### **3.3.5 Lack of inter-community relationships, sectarianism**

Key obstacles to the development of shared space often include a lack of positive inter-community relationships and the expression of sectarianism and racism. These are reinforced by segregated communities. In East Belfast the Crown Project representative said that finding cross-community common ground was seen as a necessary catalyst for building trusting and sustainable relationships. Sectarianism is changing in its expression and in its 'use' by young people, as is clear from comments made by Short Strand Partnership – and these bear repeating. *"This is still sectarian but not as we know it."*

Sectarianism, in the form of misguided notions of what counts as 'culture' has reinforced division and acted against creating shared facilities. *"Bigotry should not be hidden behind the concept of 'culture'. For example, a sectarian mural was removed from a wall in the Fountain and re-attached to the mixed pre-school playgroup – putting off many parents from all backgrounds from using the facilities."* (Peace & Reconciliation Group)

The fact that much of interface violence is now youth-led may lead to the assumption that Belfast is much like other cities that lack cohesion and adequate services. However, a DSD official noted, *"the problem is UK-wide and about youth hooliganism, but it also has a strongly sectarian purpose and impact in Belfast"*.

This was evidenced in a number of areas, including Springfarm in Antrim. *"Simmering sectarianism in the town is always present and is a negative aspect in the background all the time. A positive aspect of Springtown's rural type isolation however, is the fact that we are far removed from paramilitary influence and political control."* This 'simmering sectarianism' should not be underestimated as a challenge to shared space.

*"The neighbourhood is made up of a vast range of groups and individuals and is diverse culturally, politically, religiously and across classes. Whilst the space has remained physically shared for many years, the neighbourhood is peppered with physical and psychological barriers and mini interfaces which at times resist the concept of a civic shared space for all."* (Ballynafeigh Community Development Association)

Sectarianism hinders shared space and is strengthened by segregation, separation and sustained distrust.

### 3.3.6 Lack of incentives

Shared space does not emerge where there are lack of incentives. Incentives may come in a variety of form including employment, training, housing, services and money.

*“Interface areas are the most deprived areas within deprived wards. Physical regeneration is the key to developing a more equal society where they can participate. Regenerating interface areas is a key post-conflict issue. They are a running sore within a more settled environment. People in these areas generally support the peace process but there is simmering resentment that they have not benefited economically.”* (Short Strand Partnership)

From an academic-practitioner perspective the lack of incentive comes from the deficiency in strategy, regulation and a wider vision of Belfast – and is a serious hindrance to effective practice in promoting shared space and increasing the connectivity of the city. *“The twin-speed city has seen change but there has been no policy on, or regulation of property development. The limited capacity of NIHE and DSD has made less impact than the private developments – in relation to shared space.”* (QUB, Planning & Architecture)

It is becoming apparent, from comments across the city, that poverty and lack of opportunities are disincentives for promoting and sustaining shared space. *“If issues of interface disadvantage are not addressed, we will not make progress in society generally. The issue is that important.”* (Short Strand Partnership)

There is a lack of incentive for many groups who have tried to work with public bodies. For example, Interaction felt that *“Most statutory agencies get involved but they don’t communicate enough with local people and local people don’t have the confidence to question them over who does what. Several residents I have worked with have experienced real frustration in finding out what agency is responsible for overgrown alleyways etc. They get pushed from one agency to the next with no avail. We arranged a focus group in each area where agencies did their presentations on their responsibilities with no problem. When it comes to doing this proactively on a regular basis however, they somehow think it is not their job. They need to communicate more.”*

Opinion on the need for better communication between community/interface groups and statutory agencies was almost unanimous, and this was seen as a disincentive to progress. At the same time these people acknowledged that communications between local groups themselves could also be improved.

### **3.3.7 Lack of community ownership, gatekeepers and 'succession' in interface work**

**3.3.7.1** As is clear from the experience of SLIG (detailed in section 3.4.6), legal ownership of inter-community facilities is a positive incentive. The lack of such ownership and control is a disincentive to promoting shared space. Knowing there are financial as well as other advantages in developing shared space is an incentive for local people.

#### **3.3.7.2 Lack of community ownership**

Community ownership of the process of building shared space and 'succession' in interface/community work were significant themes in interview responses. While some held very positive opinions of interface practitioners, there was an underlying suspicion that some community leaders and spokesmen (and they were almost exclusively male) acted as gatekeepers, filtering communications into and out of their areas, and 'managing' views about removing barriers – in other words, acting as an obstacle to appropriate community input in the process of promoting shared space.

When decisions are made without dialogue, engagement, participation and ownership by local people this can create quite unnecessary division and hostility. One example is the furore in Donegal Pass when plans for a purpose-built facility for the Chinese community were presented as a *fait accompli* to residents, who were losing their services at this time.

*"Officials failed to consult Donegal Pass residents (who were losing their after-school services) about a planned facility for the Chinese Welfare Association; which led directly to hostility and apparent racism in the area, and continued negative media coverage of the 'story'. Belfast City Council set up a meeting between residents and the Chinese Welfare Association during which it became clear that the concerns were about (imposed) government planning and loss of local services, rather than racism. What lessons were learned from this, if any? It is imperative that regeneration and community development involve the whole community, and not just one section of the population of a neighbourhood."* (PPR Project)

The statutory sector view of participation differs from the general consensus in the community sector. A DSD official stated that all facilities at interfaces should be shared, and that there must be consultation, but that this must have a long-term viability. *"In this respect we get criticism from [some] groups ... They start from the basis that you ask people what they want. This often gets unrealistic responses that have no long term perspective. We start from presenting the basis of what is*

*possible and ask people to focus on the next 15 years. Ours is a long term view. In the short term communities want a simple absence of violence but a long term strategic view must be posed by agencies in charge of social change. DSD and in particular CEP was criticised for developing too many local plans but we were working at where people were at. Now that there is a different approach and a move towards community planning, all plans must be joined up. CRU is now reorganised so that silos are abolished and a more co-ordinated approach is adopted. This must and will happen in government generally and especially when the long awaited 'cuts' arrive."*

### **3.3.7.3 Gatekeepers obstruct building shared space**

A Peace & Reconciliation worker in the North West said there had been positive outcomes only after *"acknowledgement of hard issues ... as before there were too many gatekeepers keeping out others"*. BCRC has concerns that not all paid workers do speak for their communities, and that they are acting as gatekeepers rather than truly representing the views of local people. *"Gatekeepers exist, and are not helpful in bringing communities along with peace building. There is an element of that there. There's an industry and more people are interested in keeping a job. You get the same people sitting round the table – no new people coming up – there's a bit too much of that. Some think it's their god-given right, saying 'our community wouldn't have it."*

Gatekeepers can obstruct building shared space. As a DSD official said, *"Interface work needs to start from the strong premise that the physical barriers must come down. Several arguments are made against this by those with vested interests; who allege that 'communities aren't ready' ... That is the view of gatekeepers and perhaps also of those who want or need to keep their jobs"*. He did not accept this because that is not what DSD have found when they talked with people door to door.

Another concern is that 'gatekeepers' in local groups can hinder spontaneous local action by residents. BCRC gave an example of a situation at Twaddell Avenue in North Belfast. Over the past few years, local people, many of them women, developed dialogue and opened communications with the 'other side' after what looked like a failed attempt by BCRC to bring folk together to talk. This was a spontaneous 'organic' process which was said to be to their credit rather than that of BCRC.

An independent consultant was clearly of the opinion that gatekeepers did exist and were influential. *"People are afraid to speak out in local areas because of 'vested interests' in keeping barriers up."*

There is some scepticism about the accountability of community work at interfaces, with several external commentators questioning the lack of specific outcomes to measure success to date. 'Showing the outcomes' is an important issue. In that connection a DSD official gave a very open and honest statement. *"NBCAU was set up seven years ago as a temporary measure and we are now being mainstreamed. We probably wasted [some] of our money we handed out at the beginning because we were a crisis intervention, but the [rest] has contributed to a situation where people are slowly but surely beginning to engage."*

The necessarily long-term nature of conflict transformation should not be forgotten, and particularly as many groups are still some way from shared space.

#### **3.3.7.4 Lack of new interface workers**

Another obstacle to creating shared space is a possible lack of new interface workers. One respondent posed the following question. *"A real problem is the void in this work. Who's coming through? Where are the next generation of thinkers and workers? We need the possibility of progression and to maintain the important experience that is there now."* Others registered concerns about *"no new people coming up"*.

Not only is there a problem of 'succession' in East Belfast where the *"loss of seasoned workers"* was reported, but *"there is also the problem of burn out of those who have been working long term in this area. It is an issue. It is particularly galling for them to have to listen to the policy makers devise new 'programmes' every 10 years to solve the same problem, which is, at root, social deprivation."*

There is a recurrent theme of the link between social deprivation and interfaces. Social deprivation is regarded as both an obstacle to shared space and the result of division and segregation.

#### **3.3.8 Perceptions of 'shared space' and the language of shared space.**

For some, 'shared space' is seen as potentially losing space, and particularly in the PUL communities, as was instanced in the experience at the Finaghy Crossroads interface. *"Had 'shared space' been the focus of bringing together community representatives I have no doubt that representatives, particularly from the unionist/loyalist community would not have participated or engaged."* (SWAT)

In this case shared space was understood as relinquishing territory that was inhabited exclusively by the PUL community. To promote shared space the

language and conversation must change from notions of exclusive ownership to the benefits of civic space.

And the language of shared space poses problems for some.

*“Shared space is not one thing – it ranges from the ‘neutral sites’ like shared leisure centres and the open public realm, to shared neighbourhoods where people live together (promoted by NIHE/DSD/IFI and challenged and stopped by the ECNI on equality grounds).”* (QUB, Planning & Architecture)

*“‘Sharing’ is based on the fiction of blamelessness and false history. Bad things did happen – people did do wrong. It is not shared but public space – paid for by taxes and public money. It is space that belongs to citizens. It is civic. The idea that we ‘share’ it as a new or good thing is not helpful.”* (QUB, Law)

There is not a universal acceptance of the notion of ‘sharing’, and for various reasons. Where parading issues are sensitive at particular interfaces, the use of terms like ‘sharing’ is a complicated matter – as some nationalists may see ‘sharing’ as coded language for permission for parades in areas where residents do not welcome them, and some unionists may see ‘sharing’ as the right to parade in areas with a nationalist population. *“The term ‘shared space’ is not used much in BCRC. We talk about a shared agenda. ‘Shared space’ has been used as a term of convenience by those advocating parades through nationalist areas. We don’t see the terms as part of the collective voice”* (BCRC). And although SWAT had a clear notion of what ‘shared space’ meant to them, they felt they had to avoid the use of the language in order to begin dialogue and trust-building.

### **3.4 What factors promote shared space?**

The factors that promote shared space at or near interfaces are the decline in violence and murder (and the reduction of the ‘chill factor’), the building of trust and collaborative cross-community working, effective interface youth work, incentive for inter-community creation of shared space, the engagement of both public and private sectors, and policy and political enablers (with appropriate involvement of politicians). The creation of visible change to the physical environment is also a key factor.

#### **3.4.1 Community safety initiatives**

A reduction in the level of sectarian violence was confirmed; *“the level of sectarian murder and violence has substantially reduced, and credit should be given to those*

*working on the ground” (QUB, Planning & Architecture), and echoed by others. Forthspring spoke of “a considerable reduction in number of deaths and injuries”. “Things have changed. Look at PSNI statistics. Sectarian crime has declined by 30% in the past year.” (QUB, Law)*

Groundwork is a regeneration agency that engaged in long term work in Duncairn Gardens/Tigers Bay to promote greater community safety. Intercomm supported this project and it led to the moving of a bonfire site that had been a long standing source of problems to both communities in North Belfast. This led to developing a new shop front and the area in general being physically tidied. It also widened out access to local people who are now using facilities such as Grove swimming pool where they would not have done so before. The chill factor was reduced due to the dialogue and moving the bonfire site but more importantly this has led to physical changes that people notice. Intercomm and their community leadership programme (held at local level) were important actors in all of this. Other important agencies involved in this process were NIHE, BCC and PSNI.

In South West Belfast addressing the problems at the Finaghy Crossroads interface entailed using community safety as the focus of the early work, and the common target of those engaged in dialogue and working with the police and local people. *“Our [independent] facilitator excelled in bringing together republican and loyalist community representatives in dialogue; which subsequently led to the formation of one constituted cross-community group made of representatives from both communities. The group concentrated on community safety approaches to numerous issues associated with the development of Finaghy Crossroads.” (SWAT)*

In East Belfast the Short Strand Partnership tackled the issue of youth-led violence by working with the community safety partnership. *“Youth seem to feel most vulnerable, which is strange when you consider that they all know each other, form romantic attachments etc. The riots seem to be their form of weekend leisure. BCC Community Safety Partnership has created an Inner East Belfast Interface Youth project that brings together all the youth agencies (Community/youth Development Worker, BELB, Ballymac Youth Centre, Alternatives etc). They recently launched a leaflet and video.”*

### **3.4.2 Building trust**

Building trust and collaborative working across the ‘divide’ has been effective. For example, Short Strand Partnership stated: *“All barriers are breaking down on an ongoing basis. With new building and development due to the Titanic quarter this will*



*continue at an accelerated pace. All agencies and whole varieties of partnerships are involved in developing this but, in reality, the work of the community sector over the years has created the trust. When the Peace monies were handed out for cross-community work, there were a lot of groups who were box ticking and a lot of money wasted. On the other hand, this low level work may not have been completely wasted as we are now doing the real work facing difficult issues and meeting each other on previously contested ground, so basically the community sector did it for ourselves and things have now improved dramatically."*

### **3.4.3 Mobile phone networks**

Mobile phone networks have worked well. There was a consensus that the mobile phone networks had been successful in managing violence at interfaces. *"North and West Belfast have had successes in mobile phone networks and shared practice – in NBIN, for instance"* (QUB, Planning & Architecture). SLIG reported that *"There is an interface and mobile phone group within SLIG. Rioting is not so regular as before; now there are just mainly low level attacks."*

*"Good work has been done ... by middle management paramilitaries who've taken responsibility for the community. NBIN and BIP did liaise with the police (despite the lack of PSNI continuity in community policing). They did stop riots, effectively used mobile phone networks. This worked well with people in the hot spots and in crisis times. NBIN have documented these successes. Intercom trained activists and have challenged the community to accept policing. We need to sustain and monitor this work – not least because politicians are a block rather than a bridge to this effective practice."* (QUB, Law)

Several participants reported important and successful developments where local people tackled issues around freedom of movement, by using phone networks. For example, there are thirty local people in the BCRC 'key area contacts' who live on or near interfaces and can respond to a phone call in the event of an incident. They can verify if there is a substantial problem, *"prevent Chinese whispers and decide how best to deal with the situation"*. SWAT runs a telephone network to respond when there is rioting at the interfaces.

Mobile phone networks have proven valuable in managing conflict and sustaining good cross-community communications. They remain a necessary part of effective practice. However, these are not enough to promote shared space, by themselves. In many cases it has been necessary to have a policing or security element<sup>6</sup>, backed

6. See Byrne, 2006 for details of managing conflict in East Belfast in 2002.

by the support of the local community, and a campaign to let young people know that violence is not acceptable in the community – as in the *“Think B 4 U Act”* initiative. So, mobile phone networks must be strengthened by meaningful dialogue and other services that address ‘anti-social’ behaviour.

#### **3.4.4 Dialogue**

Dialogue of various kinds has helped prepare the ground for a common agenda and promoting shared space at or near interfaces. Interviewees described the process of community dialogue (including the use of mediators or external facilitators), and any positive or negative results, reporting a wide range of activity.

SLIG *“has worked with a whole range of agencies in the public sector and this has been central to the success of the two community groups’ work”*. The well known parades dispute resolution in Derry/Londonderry happened through a process of confidential mediation and because the Apprentice boys wanted to resolve the situation. However, this model was not considered to be applicable elsewhere. Forthspring planning group brings together local residents to discuss local issues and meet with key people. The group has worked well to date, having been facilitated by two external facilitators.

In Ballymena Borough dialogue has been used in response to disputes and community tensions; around flags, bonfires and other provocative ‘signifiers’. *“Mediators have been brought in at various stages to defuse tensions. Various flags disputes have been effectively addressed, where there were negotiations between the community and flag erectors. And the Council developed the Bonfire Management Scheme in conjunction with community representatives and statutory agencies to help clean up the environment before and after bonfires.”*

Dialogue is a central element of BCRC work. Externally, a reservoir of trust and more open relationships has developed. Internally the organisation has accommodated greater confidence and trust, and reduced the level of fear. *“Five years ago you would never see me that exposed.”* People working in ‘mixed’ projects now feel safe to visit ‘other’ areas, give each other lifts and maintain friendly relationships. BCRC has not obvious signs of heavy security – in marked contrast to the PSNI station a few yards away. There is an evident increase in levels of trust and sense of safety of movement, which was regarded as the result of effective dialogue.

In contrast, we heard from the Village Focus Group: *“There has not been a lot of community dialogue [in the Village], and the Good Relations strategy suggests that*

*this should begin to develop. The stigma attached to the Village has made it very difficult to get new communities in particular to become involved. The process of housing redevelopment has created schisms and jealousies within the community and it is not cohesive. The GR strategy suggests that community cohesion and dialogue needs to be built and NIHE Shared Neighbourhood scheme is strongly supporting this."*

There is an increasing awareness of the need for dialogue in the greater Village area since they engaged in producing their own good relations strategy. *"Facilitated dialogue is a must. Rumour control is essential. It defuses tension before it erupts. Cross community working on interfaces is a must. The village is 40% owned by private developers who are faceless and who have no contact with us. This needs to open out. The churches have an important role but they do not play it. They need to bring God into the community. Windsor Football pitch is another local amenity that does not relate to local people, as is the Hospital – so there is a need for them to enter dialogue. Lastly it is important to address the stigma of living in an interface community that has experienced racism and sectarianism. We tend to get labeled as the bigots because the issues are more exposed in our area. People need to stand up, speak out and develop initiatives that can be constantly promoted in the local media."* (Village focus group)

*"Ballynafeigh's innovative Interdependence Project (IDP) has been built on 36 years practice and experience of working in the 'shared neighbourhood' of Ballynafeigh. The Project recognises the value of the diversity of skills and cultures present through the multiplicity of identities who continue to share the physical space of the neighbourhood. The project aims to demystify many of the psychological interfaces/barriers through developing relationships, levels of understanding and sharing skills between very different groups some of whom have polarised ideologies. This process is committed to achieving this without detracting from anyone's culture, sense of belonging or identity. ... Through our Ballynafeigh Champion's Programme (a strand of IDP), for example, physical barriers such as flags in Kimberley Street and outside the Apprentice Boys band hall were addressed, allowing those with opposing viewpoints to begin to understand each other's perspective and personal understanding of barriers, identity and culture, and to begin to take ownership of the identity of the neighbourhood."* (Ballynafeigh Community Development Association)

It is interesting that the Crown Project see the value of dialogue as being in the hard work that local people must put into the process – aside from the efforts of external facilitators. *"Dialogue has been a powerful tool, sometimes facilitated but often not. External facilitation is useful but sometimes it can be a 'lazy tool'."*

Evidently, dialogue can serve several purposes. It can be an immediate conflict resolution tool that is often visible and/or it can serve as a long term in-depth trust building process that is frequently ‘invisible’ until it manifests in an obvious improvements.

Regarding the experience around Finaghy crossroads, SWAT reported: *“Cross community co-operation in relation to minimising graffiti, (getting it moved etc). Positive cross- community dialogue regarding informal arrangements on flags (how long and how many are flown etc).”* In some cases there has been sustained and effective dialogue, such as the work supported by Intercomm.

Interaction said *“there is a lot of community dialogue in this area. This has been built up by Springfield Inter-Community Forum over a period of ten years. People know each other and trust has been built so no external mediators have been necessary.”*

Short Strand Partnership reported that *“BCRC has done a major amount of work, developing key area contacts in liaison with PSNI, bringing residents together to discuss hard issues, developing protocols and procedures for interventions. Confidence building workshops with East Belfast Mission include diversity workshops, interface walls discussion and freedom of movement discussion; City East is a new meeting place, a new area which is used by all.”*

It is evident that dialogue has been integral to effective practice in promoting shared space. However, as is clear from section 3.1 the language of good relations and shared space is not universally accepted as useful and effective. Indeed some see ‘dialogue’ as potential subterfuge. *“There is no role for single identity dialogue – it must be an inclusive group addressing issues. Dialogue can be a cover for side-deals and horse-trading. Genuine dialogue requires a shared narrative of what dialogue is, and is part of citizenship.”* (QUB, Law)

Facilitated or otherwise, meaningful and sustained long-term dialogue is integral to effective practice and inter-community work.

### **3.4.5 Youth work**

Effective interface youth work enables the promotion of shared space at interfaces, and particularly the work that moves beyond one-off diversionary programmes.

Numerous youth-oriented initiatives and projects were reported. Examples include a Groundwork re-imaging project in Springvale, statutory youth service

involvement in the West Belfast Area Youth Project and Upper Shankill Area Youth Partnership.

There are many targeted and effective youth interventions in local neighbourhoods. The Village Focus Group provides diversionary youth activities and works within SWAT to provide response-based cover to sectarian and racist attacks. However, diversionary activities are not always productive.

There is evidence of promoting shared space in youth initiatives and programmes. For example *“Forthspring Youth provision is both centre-based and detached [operating] in Clonard Youth Club Respect programme and Greater Shankill Alternatives”* (Forthspring). *“Despite cynicism the Scouting organisation in Belvoir has trained over 1200 young people on citizenship, understanding the identity of the ‘other’ side and interacting with them. Diversionary programmes don’t tackle the selective history”* (QUB, Law). BCRC was involved in the Clifton Park Avenue area where hostilities among young people were a nightly occurrence. They worked with local community representatives every night from 6 until 10 for seven weeks, and the PSNI provided static policing from 10 until 2am. However, this sort of ‘solution’ is not sustainable in any of the areas, as there is inevitable burn out of long term volunteers.

So, although the level and severity of violence at interfaces has reduced, all the people interviewed believe that these areas still experience high levels of youth-led sectarian violence. They also believe that this violence acts as an inhibitor to shared space – which distinguishes interface problems from those of most large urban settings.

### **3.4.6 Incentives**

Incentives for creating of shared space include economic opportunities, social housing provision, a meaningful sense of community ownership and community safety initiatives. Taken together these provide incentives for people buying into safe, civic space. For example SLIG have the incentive that their shared ownership allows them to divide profit from social enterprise so that monies are equally shared between the Suffolk and Lenadoon groups and the Stewartstown Road regeneration company.

#### **3.4.6.1 Economic activity and the social economy**

The lack of economic activity at/near interfaces was reported by all, bringing with it the challenge of people having to go out of their neighbourhood for work. Issues

around economic activity (such as jobs, shops, post office, and social economy developments like the Credit Union) were important to participants who voiced a consensus on the need for jobs; *“there are not opportunities in interface areas”* (BCRC). However, evidence shows that social enterprise may not always be shared; as instanced in Londonderry/Derry where there are two Credit Unions perceived as ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ as they are affiliated to the Irish and UK Credit Union movements, respectively.

Economic developments in interface areas are viewed as a lever for positive change. A lot of emphasis was placed on ‘social enterprise’ by practitioners. This was seen as a quality of life issue for all communities as they believe that developing the economy and providing jobs close to and/or on interfaces can promote local social cohesion (although this also has the potential to reinforce segregation and possibly limiting work mobility even further). Forthspring suggested *“running a community café and childcare facility as social economy businesses in a shared facility”*. Interaction proposed *“Plans to develop a Training Centre for youth - there is a lot of work going on to develop this concept.”* A representative from the Crown Project East Belfast felt that the *“skills and education deficit in interface areas”* was a huge barrier to any significant development or change.

SLIG, with its focus on shared economic activity, is another example of where shared facilities can be developed successfully – although with a caveat. *“In each community however, there will be facilities that will be shared by all in theory but in reality will be used by only one community. In that instance we agree to support each other’s development of our own facilities. We monitor use of our projects through attendance forms for funders, so we know that our projects have cross community participation. We cannot tell who uses the shops and other facilities however, as that would be impossible to physically monitor, we rely instead on our observations of service users.”*

There is a large social economy sector in Ballymena Borough, developed over the past eight to ten years, in which a number of areas such as Ballymena South, Broughshane, Ballykeel, Cullybackey, Ballymena North and Portglenone have created social enterprises with small scale businesses providing local jobs. This developed, alongside the work of the Community Safety Partnership and inter-schools projects, in direct response to the ‘spiral of sectarian violence’ and the subsequent murder of Michael McIlveen.

Although the social economy is considered an incentive, solutions to the lack of employment opportunities at or near interfaces may well be beyond the reach of local small-scale social enterprise. It is in developing high-value sustainable social enterprise that some answers may be found.

### 3.4.6.2 Regeneration

Planning for regeneration is widely regarded as a central incentive to create shared space. There was a consensus that progression towards this must have both community involvement and a sense of ownership in that process, and that the greatest incentive is community planning.

The most salient benefits anticipated, mentioned by almost all participants, were the regeneration of the built environment and social relationships. There was more discussion about these than about removing peace walls and barriers. A respondent from Short Strand said, *“The goal of interface workers should be to regenerate the interfaces. People who see physical improvements and jobs come to their areas gain the confidence to see neighbours as friends. The outcome is that the walls come down both in a physical and psychological sense. Regeneration is the challenge and the main aim for interface areas.”*

The academic-practitioner view of community planning was more focused on creating a vision of an inter-connected city. *“The disconnectedness of Belfast is at the root of problems in planning shared space. Community planning offers great opportunities to address the obstacles to improving what are deemed ‘dysfunctional communities.’”* (QUB Planning & Architecture)

Regeneration and environmental improvements can act as a positive incentive to counter segregation and create more shared space. In Ballymena Borough, over the last five to eight years, there have been a wide range of initiatives developed to address the attractiveness of the physical environment and create alternatives to territory marking. Where flags and painted curb stones once marked outlying villages, floral displays now provide alternatives. The Council promotes an Environmental Grant that villages apply for, to carry out environmental work in their villages. It also provides flower baskets and plants out flowerbeds in the villages together with a wide-ranging programme in Ballymena Town Centre. A number of local groups have applied to the Re-imaging Communities fund to assist in re-imaging their areas, such as Broughshane, Cullybackey, Kells, Dunclug and Harryville. The Council developed the Bonfire Management Scheme in conjunction with community representatives and statutory agencies to help clean

up the environment before/after bonfires. The Community Safety Partnership worked in conjunction with NIHE to remove unwanted political, sectarian, racist graffiti from walls in the Borough. Environmental projects and schemes throughout the Borough have improved the look of the town centre and villages such as Dunclug, Harryville, and Portglenone.

NIHE CCU is engaged in a raft of environmental improvements to promote shared space. They are currently involved in the Markets Area, specifically with the Markets Development Association's social economy Tunnels Project. The Tunnels Project has a vision for developing the area that links it to the Belfast City Council regeneration of Lower Ormeau, the local community environmental scheme and (private) developers' plans for the area. The project challenges the standard 'land use' model and is supported by DSD VCU as well as the NIHE 'Shared Neighbourhood' strategy. This wider, inclusive and bottom-up approach developed as an organic process. It emphasises connectivity between sectors and agencies, and it operates by "*putting good relations at the heart of our work*". The Community Cohesion Unit engages in the regeneration of neighbourhoods by listening to the local community, and feeding ideas, options and plans into the NIHE local/district office where it becomes part of mainstream housing/development work. NIHE CCU understand that traditional planning 'solutions' and land use models need to be changed to promote shared space and a sense of local ownership.

NIHE also reported that an example of alternative uses of contested space can be found in Suffolk where there is vacant NIHE land on green space where housing has been demolished, and which is not zoned for building. There are demands from Lenadoon for building social housing, given the shortage and demand in the Nationalist community. An economic alternative has been proposed, in plans for making two fishing lakes, extending the lease on the existing Total Tree Company (a social economic enterprise harvesting and using trees in the area) and opening up the facility to the wider Belfast area. Developing this facility would open the space up, take away the dispute over land use and entail phasing in a beacon to replace the 11th July bonfire site, while land straddling the main road dividing Suffolk and Lenadoon would be made into allotments for use by both communities and adjoining schools.

There are linkages between community planning and integrated local strategies which will emerge after RPA. At that stage local government will have a central role in community planning, which presages an increased connectivity throughout



Belfast city. All these changes will impact significantly, if not fundamentally, on life at or near interfaces. They are on a par with the move from 'conflict management' to 'conflict transformation' and should be at the top of the agenda for those concerned with interfaces. The view in East Belfast was that *"RPA will shift funding and power to CRC and local Councils. Interface groups need to be working in partnership with these agencies in a unified way."*

It was said that conflict transformation by promoting shared space should be a central aim of governance in Northern Ireland. *"Evidence of chill factors should be at the heart of organisations like the Equality Commission and the Programme for Government. There should be Government-led interventions – for instance locating business to accommodate a 'shared' or mixed labour force. Freedom of movement and chill factors affect work, schools and so on."* (QUB, Law)

#### **3.4.6.3 The private sector**

The role of the private sector is not a simple one, in the context of interface areas. It was reported that local community representatives met Asda, who have taken over the old Dunnes Stores site at the Flax Street gate. They met to discuss options for accommodating a mixed work force, including long-term unemployed people – by providing training (on basic work skills and working with 'difference'), and supporting changes in the external environment to allow access for deliveries, mobility and safety for workers and generating good working relations with the community (including consultation).

In marked contrast an official from DSD reported that a local business person told him, *"It's not just that you have to cope with the reluctance of people to take up work and the generally depressing environment of a disadvantaged area. We have social responsibility and we recognise that it is a good thing to try to work against these. It is the fact that 'cultural issues' are brought into the workplace, groups asking for funding for 'their language or cultural event'. This compromises us and puts us in situations where we are 'taking sides'. Frankly we are there to make profit and do some social good in the process if we can; we don't want to fund anybody's culture."*

This example raises the question of how far local 'ownership' can reasonably extend.

Groundwork were of the opinion that since the private sector has little corporate responsibility in the field of regeneration this is something that needs to be addressed, perhaps in a public forum at interface meetings. Groundwork said that the negative publicity on developers and politicians, which is now becoming

public shows, there is also a political aspect to this work. In contrast, another participant cited the example of corporate responsibility, in Docklands in Dublin, where private sector developers had to guarantee to build affordable housing.

Indeed there is legislation obliging private developers to provide social housing in new build estates. *“There is legislation that new development must contain 20% social housing (arising from the Semple Report). This did not happen at Laganside and it is not happening with Titanic. People in housing need are beginning to kick up about this and will do so on a cross community basis.”* (Crown Project)

There is an important place for the private sector in local regeneration strategies.

### **3.4.7 Planning and countering the physical barriers to shared space**

Three officials in the NIO were interviewed about interfaces and walls/barriers in Belfast, which restrict freedom of movement.

*“At present NIO has responsibility for policy, maintenance and removal of peace walls and security barriers. This will be transferred to the Department of Justice when justice and policing powers are devolved to the NI Executive (12 April 2010). The NIO role is to ensure the maintenance of peace walls and barriers, and to facilitate in removing them, when there is community consent. While the structures were originally erected for security reasons there are some indications that the walls also offer a reassurance to the community in other ways e.g. safety issues. If some of the walls were to be removed that could result in increased traffic flow and may be a concern for families in the area. It is not just about removing the walls but also working with others to address the concerns of the community.”*

*“There is no desire to erect further structures, but we are left with the legacy of those already up. There are other ‘interface areas’ that do not have physical barriers.”*

Positive changes regarding the physical environment, cited by NIO, include *“cleaning and over-painting murals to make them more acceptable to the community. [Cross-] community dialogue is to be welcomed and supported. Better relationships between the PSNI and community groups have developed. In Belfast, for example, there are formal and informal meetings with PSNI and local communities. Incremental changes to the peace wall for example, reducing the height of walls, painting them, altering the appearance helps to soften the appearance and may in some cases be a first step in the process of achieving the ultimate aim of removing the walls. Another positive step and worthy of note is the reduction in the number of flags and painted curb stones.”*

As regards tackling the physical barriers to create safe, let alone shared space, an official who *“was specifically involved in the planning of the Regeneration Programme for the Dunclug area”* explained that this initiative *“attracted major funding from the DSD for the regeneration of the four estates. The regeneration work in Dunclug is in its second year where much work has taken place on the physical environment – street lighting, demolitions, environmental schemes, graffiti removal, re-imaging projects to replace unwanted sectarian graffiti. Sustainability will depend on the whole plan being implemented with community development/relationships.”* The official understood the importance of planning and regeneration noting, *“Community Planning is a new area where Councils will have specific responsibility for co-ordinating planning for the Borough. This is a relatively new concept and is being developed at senior management level.”*

Practitioners consider that planning must include community involvement and a sense of ownership in the process of creating share space. Consultation that fails to deliver good outcomes, inadequate consultation, or the lack of consultation, have all occurred, and worked against promoting shared space. Participation by local communities is necessary. *“Physical planning is what went wrong when the developers of the Westlink did not consult with the community and built a new footbridge that became a total sectarian flashpoint.”* (Village)

Practitioners had a limited understanding of what role interface residents/workers would have in developing planning and how they might make their voices heard in a meaningful way. However, they did understand that the transition from crisis management (‘fire fighting’) to sustainable and shared practice in promoting shared space needs to include a transparent community engagement process. Attempts to create shared space in the past have failed because decisions were made without dialogue, engagement, participation and ownership by local people. Community planning offers new and positive opportunities for inclusive decision-making and a strategic (and ‘joined-up’) approach to promoting shared space – given that consultation and effective engagement of communities by statutory agencies appears patchy.

### **3.4.8 Political engagement and policy advances**

#### **3.4.8.1 Political engagement**

Political leadership in promoting shared space at or near interfaces is regarded as a crucial element of making progress. Forthspring reported that a *“lack of development perpetuates division and mistrust. The lack of political leadership and will is corrosive.”* In predominantly Unionist/Loyalist areas, like Finaghy and the

Village, the message was clear, *“Unionist politicians are very disengaged.”* Also, as a DSD official said *“There is a problem of lack of political leadership generally but particularly in the Unionist community.”*

There was a significant desire from most people that both politicians and statutory agencies become more involved. Springfarm would welcome more involvement from *“Assembly politicians, development of a sharing policy, Antrim Borough Council ... and the youth service.”*

The absence of political support for tackling interface issues in PUL areas of Belfast is reported consistently. In the East it seems that *“politicians representing PUL will not take up the issue of interfaces easily. Firstly, there are not many interfaces in loyalist areas and secondly, the PUL community doesn't really ‘do’ tackling social deprivation. Catholic areas will have a social mix and some leadership from their middle class. In PUL areas those who have the means to move out, go and they never go back or have any contact with the sink community they left behind. It's part of the whole ‘individual’ as opposed to collective approach of Protestantism. It will only be solved when those communities start challenging their politicians. With the constitutional issue now largely resolved, this may well begin to happen.”* This has implications for creating sustainable shared space, and particularly if there is party political decision-making on plans and funding of regeneration in interface areas.

However, there was also some optimism that the political process is providing new opportunities for developing deprived interface communities. *“Devolution is working and is changing expectations. People are demanding more of local politicians... This will accelerate, and in East Belfast it will be on a cross community basis in regard to the Titanic quarter.”* (Crown Project) The Short Strand Partnership was also positive about bringing politicians into their peace building work. *“There is a perceived difficulty in getting Unionist leaders to participate, but through active lobbying this will change. When there was a delay in the implementation of policing and justice, the groundswell from the activists up led to pressure on the politicians to do the work and they made the deal. We were ahead of them – they knew we had community confidence. This is an accelerating trend. It prompts the need for a united approach and specific lobbying and it will work in the future.”*

Although it was said that *“No politicians”* were involved in finding practical solutions in the Finaghy/SWAT areas, there were reasons for this, as a facilitator commented. Work on the Finaghy Crossroads interface began long before the current power-sharing executive and the return to devolved government. At that

stage directly involving politicians in a very heated territorial dispute would have held them to ransom – with each ‘side’ expecting ‘their’ politicians to condemn actions of the ‘other side’. As a former resident noted, there were politicians involved in peripheral discussions but this was deliberately kept low profile. A decade later, politicians might now reappraise their public role in supporting endeavours to create shared space.

The role of political leaders in promoting shared space is seen by practitioners as increasingly important as the changed funding and political climate requires greater co-operation and collective lobbying. *“The community-voluntary sector will contract and people will need to be ready for this. Stop-start funding was never a good idea, and for those groups left, there must be the promise of 10 year funding as originally proposed in past reviews. Lobbying will become essential to put the needs of disadvantaged communities at the forefront or we will have a two speed society solidify.”* (Crown Project)

#### **3.4.8.2 Engagement of former combatants**

In 2004 BIP recommended<sup>7</sup> that paramilitary organisations act to reduce feelings of threat and redefine their role in peace-building, and noted that this was “already underway”. A community worker said that he often talks with PUL ex-combatants who have significant control within most of the estates in Antrim town and that they seem to support the concept of a shared community; as do all the politicians who visit.

7. *“In many areas, local people have mixed feelings about local paramilitary representatives and organisations. On the one hand, paramilitary organisations may be locally supported particularly at times of perceived threat from within the ‘other’ community or paramilitary organisation. On the other hand, particularly in the absence or decline of such threat, feelings towards paramilitary organisations may be more negative especially if they are viewed as exerting non-democratic, illegal, and unaccountable forms of control within the community. With this in mind, there is a need for paramilitary organisations to play their part in reducing that feeling of threat stemming from within the other community, so that defence is no longer required over time. Similarly, there is a need for paramilitary organisations to redefine their role and function in order to better support and engage with locally democratic and accountable regenerative and peace-building activities. There is evidence that this process of positive change is already underway in a number of areas.”* (O’Halloran et al, 2004: 24)

It seems the trend BIP noted in 2004 is emerging more strongly, as this was reported in South, West and East Belfast. For example in East Belfast the Crown Project representative cited cross-community work which *“involves ex-combatants from each side”* and from Short Strand Partnership spoke of *“work below the radar, involving ex-combatants amongst others has created the new situation of dialogue.”* In South and West Belfast SWAT had engaged with ex-combatants from the start. This may still be a contentious area for some.

### 3.4.8.3 Policy advances

Policy advances are an incentive in this context. While the current CSI policy was barely mentioned in interviews, this remains an important foundation for implementing change that promotes shared space, and in planning regeneration at or near interfaces.

Insofar as policy issues were directly raised, these concerned developing interfaces, and removing barriers (physical and psychological), by resolving parades-related disputes. *“Dealing with parading and interface issues are the only two outstanding issues now that policing and justice is resolved”* (Short Strand). This will continue to be a community safety issue, and therefore will need new policy and agreed arrangements for dealing with parades-related disputes. New proposals emerging from the Hillsborough Agreement offer the potential for substantial progress.

It was felt that the statutory sector needs to share more information in policy and planning to promote civic space. *“Maximise opportunities to ensure consultation and sharing of information with communities, (residents, community representatives, community groups, youth groups etc) in relation to community engagement, interface work and shared space initiatives.”* (SWAT/Finaghy)

Policy development is anticipated with RPA and new community planning powers for local government. These have the potential to develop community engagement, participation and ownership in creating shared space. The Scottish Community Engagement model (detailed in Appendix D) provides a strong basis to develop a robust local model to ensure that all citizens are involved in providing solutions to the problems of their areas. Equally ‘dialogue’ for trust building should extend to dialogue with statutory agencies as well as local residents.

### 3.5 What are the alternatives to shared space?

The alternatives to developing and sustaining shared space at or near interface communities are continued polarisation and segregation reinforcing existing division, prolonged distrust and fear between communities and a perpetual cycle of youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour. This leaves these areas unsafe space. It hinders regeneration and stifles economic development – in even modest attempts at creating a social economy. This will increase the skills deficit in these deprived areas and will not address the obstacles to training and employment.

The lack of development of shared space in areas close to interfaces also fails to resolve the crucial matter of connectivity and ignores the key issue of a need for a vision of post-conflict space. *“We need a bigger picture with coordinated investment in an urban vision – not land use in pockets of separated spatial areas... Community planning offers great opportunities to address the obstacles to improving what are deemed ‘dysfunctional communities’. These obstacles are resistance in technocratic planning (with its land-use approach rather than an urban vision), lack of resources/investment (for which there is a business case) and political resistance (and ‘double speak’) from those who benefit from community tensions, interfaces and segregation. Ask the people who live in/near interfaces and they’d take the walls down.”* (QUB, Architecture & Planning)

Furthermore, the cost of division and duplication of services cannot be reduced unless there is safe, civic space through which all people can travel.

Who benefits from this ‘benign apartheid’? Some would say that those with the largest stake in sectarian politics are the main beneficiaries. Echoing the views of several respondents one official said *“It is amazing how politicians work the local system in a way that seems in direct contradiction to their party political line at Stormont, but that is vote-catching for you!”*

The alternative to shared space has huge economic cost. Bradley and Murtagh (2007) examined the connection between good relations and local area planning in Belfast. They noted that while some parts are the ‘progressing city’ others have remained untouched, and “losing out in economic and political restructuring”, and emphasize the significant economic costs of segregation.

## 4. Summary

### 4.1 What is shared space?

Shared space has socially integrated use that is safe, welcoming and allows freedom of movement. It is free from fear, hostility or threat. Shared social space is apparent in a range of programmes, activities, events. It may be shared physical space, shared psychological space or shared organisational space. It is evident in inter-community work around commonalities – be those historical or relating to identity, social need, economic matters or community safety. For some the issues are primarily about physical space, such as effective programmes designed to make main roads more shared or remove physical barriers. For others the core is about social and psychological ‘space’, through trust building and working on attitudinal change.

However, there are different degrees to which space can be shared. In this way there is a continuum along which communities are located – from the most divided and polarised to those that have seen a greater amount of inter-community trust-building, dialogue and co-operation. This is not simple or uniform, as some communities face more entrenched resistance to transformation than others. Some things are easier to share than others. It is easier to share leisure facilities than housing. And some people are easier to share with than others, in polarised communities. *“Our shared space is between the Protestant and ‘new communities’. It is not considered realistic to place local Catholics in the area”.*

Shared space belongs on a continuum of physical, temporal and organisational space and the symbolic, emotional, economic and ‘cultural’ realms. This continuum has changed and developed over time and is likely to continue to change within the context of a post conflict society.

### 4.2 What are the benefits of shared space?

The benefits of shared space are freedom of movement and easy, welcome access, without fear, hostility or threat. The most salient benefits anticipated were the regeneration of the built environment and social relationships. These are key post-conflict issues, and an integral part of the social and economic regeneration of interface areas; creating what has been called civic space. The business case is



made for investing in the promotion of greater mobility, which would create greater freedom to travel and better access to goods, amenities and services. As analysis of social and economic/employment inequalities shows, these are not simply the result of discrimination. The benefits of transforming interface areas extend to the promotion of more equal access to employment opportunities. These inequalities stem from more complex dynamics than discrimination and must be measured in a more effective manner than simply statistical description.

There is economic benefit in developing shared space because it avoids the cost of division in Northern Ireland, which is estimated at £1.5 billion each year.

### **4.3 What factors prevent shared space?**

The chill factor remains an everyday experience in all interface communities. Few if any employment opportunities exist in interface areas, and access to jobs elsewhere is prevented by perceived threat and the chill factor. By far the most challenging factor was youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour. There was widespread belief that the main source of interface violence has changed from orchestrated sectarian rioting to youth-led 'anti-social' thrill-seeking behaviour, reflecting the research literature.

There was unanimity that a multi-agency strategic response is necessary in youth work initiatives, and that effective plans and strategies were needed. It was said that 'thrill-seeking behaviour' could not be effectively addressed by current local projects, the funding for many of which is short term and unsure. Yet, opinion was divided about the appropriate responses to youth-led violence – ranging from 'zero tolerance' and policing-cum-community safety, through provision of youth facilities and training to mentoring and awareness programmes.

Parades-related disputes prevent the promotion of shared space and freedom of movement in some places. These continue to be a community safety issue. Unresolved issues regarding contentious parades, associated bands, parades-related protests and abusive language were all mentioned as fuelling violence at interfaces in Forthspring, Springfarm, and North Belfast in general (as was the lack of effective community policing).

Territory marking with hostile sectarian graffiti, flags and emblems, and the physical barriers of peace walls and fences are the legacies of the conflict and mitigate against shared space.

Flags and emblems are no longer the most significant threat to shared space, but they remain a significant challenge. One response to interface violence over many years was the erection of security gates and walls. The existence of these physical barriers remains a major challenge, preventing the sharing of physical space. The NIO has a role in the security elements of land use and the physical environment, and most notably the physical barriers at interfaces (a role now transferred to the Department of Justice). *“There is no desire to erect further structures, but we are left with the legacy of those already up.”* The NIO see removing peace walls as a matter that must have community consent.

Lack of mobility, and a skills and education deficit are major hindrances to creating and sustaining sharing space, and are characteristic of interface communities. Freedom of movement is hampered not only by fear but also by physical barriers and the *“low travel horizons and poor access to certain types of goods and services.”* (Boujenko et al, June 2008: 30) There is an economic argument for tackling segregation and the ‘twin-speed city’ of Belfast, in the new knowledge economy. The educational/skills deficit and *“insularity”* in segregated communities obstructs the creation of shared physical, psychological and organisational space.

A key obstacle to shared space is a lack of positive inter-community relationships, and the expression of sectarianism and racism. These are reinforced by segregation and increase the polarisation of communities. Finding cross-community common ground was seen as a necessary catalyst for suspending mistrust and forming sustainable relationships. The expression and ‘use’ of sectarianism has changed for young people, often manifesting as thrill-seeking activity at a ‘cross-community’ level. However, it cannot be assumed that Belfast is much like other cities that lack cohesion and adequate services, as *“the problem ... also has a strongly sectarian purpose and impact in Belfast”*. More widely, there are still pockets of hostility and *“simmering sectarianism ... is always there”* as a serious challenge to shared space.

Shared space does not emerge where there is lack of incentives. Poverty and lack of opportunities are disincentives for promoting shared space. Deprivation marks out interface areas and *“if issues of interface disadvantage are not addressed, we will not make progress in society generally. The issue is that important.”* Incentives come in the form of employment, training, housing, services and in regeneration and economic development – and all of these depend on a level of community safety. From a wider perspective, academic-practitioners see disincentive coming from the deficiency in strategy, over-emphasis on regulation and the lack of a wider vision of Belfast that entails increasing the connectivity of the city.

There is a lack of incentive for many groups who are trying to work with public bodies because engagement is considered to be inadequate and consultation is regarded as perfunctory. Indeed, opinion on the need for better communication between community/interface groups and statutory agencies was almost unanimous. At the same time these people acknowledged that communications between local groups could also be improved.

Although there were very positive reports about the value of interface practice, there was acknowledgement that some community leaders and spokesmen (and they were almost exclusively male) acted as gatekeepers, filtering communications into and out of their areas, and 'managing' views about removing barriers. Another obstacle to creating shared space is a possible lack of new interface workers, the problem of burn out among existing practitioners and the *"loss of seasoned workers."*

Perceptions of 'shared space' and the language of shared space are ambivalent. For some, 'shared space' is seen as potentially losing space. This is often found in PUL communities, who may see 'sharing' as giving up ownership of territory that has historically been 'theirs'. There is not a universal acceptance of the notion of 'sharing'. Where parading issues are sensitive, using terms like 'sharing' is taken by some nationalists as a coded message of permission for unionists to parade, and as a coded message that they have the right to parade wherever they please. Although PUL groups had a clear notion of what 'shared space' meant to them, they felt they sometimes had to avoid using this language in order to engage their own community to begin a process of dialogue and trust-building.

#### **4.4 What factors promote shared space?**

The factors that promote shared space at or near interfaces are the decline in sectarian violence and murder (and the reduction of the 'chill factor'), the building of trust and collaborative cross-community working and dialogue, in effective youth work, mobile phone networks and incentives for inter-community shared space (coming from the engagement of both public and private sectors, and policy and political enablers, with appropriate involvement of politicians). The creation of visible change to the physical environment is also a key factor.

Using community safety as a focus, there have been notable successes in dialogue and working with the police and local people. Building trust and collaborative working across the 'divide' has been effective. There was a consensus that the

mobile phone networks have been successful in managing violence at interfaces. They remain a necessary part of effective practice but these are not enough to manage violence by themselves, let alone promote shared space. In many cases it has been necessary to have a policing or security element<sup>8</sup>, backed by the support of the local community, and a campaign to let young people know that violence is not acceptable in the community.

Dialogue has helped prepare the ground for developing a common agenda and promoting shared space at or near interfaces. However, this has not happened in all interface communities and remains a challenge for some. The *“serious lack of community cohesion”* in some communities constricts the range and effectiveness of dialogue. Sustained and effective dialogue occurred where there was support from community leaders and other important agencies such as NIHE, BCC and PSNI. And dialogue must be cross-community. *“There is no role for single identity dialogue – it must be an inclusive group addressing issues. Dialogue can be a cover for side-deals and horse-trading. Genuine dialogue requires a shared narrative of what dialogue is and be part of citizenship.”* (QUB, Law)

Facilitated or otherwise, meaningful and sustained long-term dialogue is integral to effective practice and inter-community work.

Effective interface youth work enables the promotion of shared space at interfaces, and particularly the work that moves beyond one-off diversionary programmes. There are many targeted and effective youth interventions in local neighbourhoods. It is concerning that only a few cases of strategic response were reported, since this is clearly needed and distinguishes interface problems from those of most large urban settings throughout the islands of Britain and Ireland.

Incentives for creating shared space include economic opportunities, social housing provision, a meaningful sense of community ownership and community safety initiatives. Taken together these provide incentives for people buying into safe, civic space. Economic developments in interface areas are viewed as a lever for positive change. Much emphasis was placed on social enterprise by practitioners, who believe that developing the economy and providing jobs close to and/or on interfaces can promote local social cohesion. Although the social economy is considered an incentive, creating employment opportunities may well be beyond

8. See Byrne, 2006.

the reach of small-scale social enterprise. If such ventures are to provide employment and training solutions they must be high-value and sustainable, and more akin to the knowledge economy than the existing local cafes and child care facilities. Regeneration and environmental improvements act as an incentive to sharing space. There have been a wide range of initiatives to enhance the attractiveness of the physical environment and create alternatives to territory marking and substantial improvements made by removing graffiti, and moderating the display of flags. NIHE CCU understand that traditional planning 'solutions' and land use models need to be changed to promoted shared space and a sense of local ownership.

The private sector has a role in the regeneration of interface areas, not least in housing developments, where private developers are obliged to provide social housing. So too does private enterprise. Yet it is unrealistic to expect any major investment in areas which are marred by violence and division. The private sector is placed to act as an incentive in local regeneration strategies.

Planning regeneration needs to include both community involvement and a sense of ownership that could create incentives for people to share space. Practitioners consider community planning to be a process that includes community involvement and a sense of ownership, in creating shared space. This contrasts with their experience of consultation (that failed to deliver good outcomes), inadequate consultation, or the lack of consultation, all of which worked against promoting shared space.

As it was felt that there is not enough sharing of information and effective practice in promoting civic space, networking and sharing experience is regarded as an incentive.

Community engagement, participation and ownership in creating shared space need to develop, and the Scottish Community Engagement model (detailed in Appendix D) provides a basis for a local model of engaging all citizens in providing solutions to the problems of their areas. In that way, 'dialogue' for trust building would extend to dialogue with statutory agencies as well as local residents.

The academic-practitioner view of community planning was more focused on creating a vision of an inter-connected city.

Political leadership in promoting shared space is seen as a crucial element of progress at or near interfaces. Most people wanted both politicians and statutory

agencies to become more involved. There is a perceived lack of political support for addressing issues relating to conflict and division, particularly with in PUL areas of Belfast, and this has implications for creating sustainable shared space, and particularly if there is party political decision-making on plans and funding of regeneration in interface areas. However, some felt that the political process now gives new opportunities for developing deprived interface communities.

There were reasons “*no politicians*” were publicly involved in finding solutions in the Finaghy/SWAT areas in the late 1990s, because involving politicians might have exacerbated an already volatile situation. Ten years on, politicians could usefully review their role in supporting local communities to create shared space. Given that the changed funding and political climate necessitates more co-operation and collective lobbying, the role of political leaders is increasingly important.

Overall there was agreement on the importance of involving former combatants in cross-community work. This may still be a difficult area for some, but the statutory agencies and politicians are now used to working with former combatants.

Although the CSI policy was rarely mentioned in interviews, it is important in informing the change that promotes shared space, and in planning regeneration.

Where policy issues were directly raised in interviews they concerned the regeneration and development of interfaces, and removing barriers (physical and psychological) by dealing effectively with parades-related disputes. These will continue to be a community safety issue, and therefore will need new policy and agreed arrangements for dealing with parades-related disputes. It is hoped that these are now in progress given their important place in the Hillsborough Agreement.

#### **4.5 What alternative is there to shared space?**

The alternative to shared space is a continued polarisation and segregation that will reinforce existing division and prolong distrust and fear between communities and perpetuate a cycle of youth-led violence and thrill-seeking behaviour.

Interface areas will remain unsafe places, hindering regeneration and economic development. This will not tackle the skills deficit of many people living in these deprived areas and will not address the obstacles to training and employment. It

will entrench disadvantage for people living in these, the most deprived areas. It bars the way to reducing the costs of duplication of services and facilities in segregated communities – which will become an increasingly urgent problem as the current round of swingeing cuts in public spending take effect.

Who benefits from this ‘benign apartheid’? Some would say that those with the largest stake in sectarian politics are the main beneficiaries. Certainly there is no benefit to residents, or to those youth engaged in what is uncritically labelled ‘anti-social’ behaviour.

The alternative to shared space is a failure to deal with division, deprivation and the poor inter-community relationships that are the legacy of the past. It is a lack of a vision of a sustainable peaceful society where everyone is safe to live, work and travel and have the opportunity to avail of the peace dividend.

# 5. Conclusions

## 5.1 Core ingredients of creating civic space

Key features in the effective practice of promoting shared space, of a physical, social or organisational nature, include:

- successful use of mobile phone networks;
- effective long-term (cross-community) dialogue;
- strong local/community leadership (and political support for this);
- 'joined-up' interagency and cross-sectoral work;
- shared knowledge of good practice; and,
- a vision for creating shared space and transforming contested space.

### *5.1.1 Good communication*

Every aspect of effective practice requires good communication between local groups on the ground, and between those groups and statutory and voluntary sector agencies (including appropriate trust and mutual respect). A decade ago, work at or near interfaces was 'fire fighting' and crisis management, but that conflict management is now developing into conflict transformation.

### *5.1.2 Effective inter-community relationships*

Meaningful effective practice in promoting shared space can only happen where effective cross-community working relationships have been built at local level so that groups can tackle communal problems, with a common agenda that rests on a solid foundation of sustained critical dialogue. Trust built between local community leaders was the basis on which the mobile phone networks operated. Trusting 'the other side' was the key element in defusing community fears and tensions when there was the threat of violence and unrest. In many cases this trust-building process begins with a suspension of mistrust.

### *5.1.3 Cross-sectoral relationships*

However, achieving substantial progress needs more than building sustained trust and long term relationships among community leaders. It also requires building relationships between community leaders and the key stakeholders in the public and voluntary sector and, ideally, also the private sector. To address the obstacles to shared space, there must be a strategic inter-agency response to youth-led violence, and an ongoing evaluation of effective practice in this area.



The longer-term problem of the skills and educational deficit in areas of high-level, multiple deprivation pose a serious challenge, as does the persistence of high levels of poverty and underemployment.

It is not the remit of this report to advocate a strategy for the removal of all physical interface structures, except to note that where such a strategy is considered it seems appropriate that it should be complemented with a strategy for the development of open, safe, good quality, civic space in place of those structures.

### ***5.1.4 The wider policy arena***

Attempts to tackle these issues must also happen within a wider strategic policy arena, where practice and service delivery are situated in a vision of shared space that is focused on connectivity, participative decision making and meaningful consultation. Community planning, and implementing the 'duty of well-being', if implemented in the future, may be part of a structure which will give local government scope and opportunity to find sustainable solutions and a creative implementation of policy.

## **5.2 Three approaches to promoting shared space**

### ***5.2.1 The approaches***

The effective promotion of shared space at or near interfaces therefore requires a mixture of three approaches.

- Firstly there is the community-based conflict transformation approach, making the journey from contested to civic space. The community-safety-cum-policing approach alone is crisis management or 'fire-fighting'. Successful as they have been, the mobile phone networks are a conflict management tool. Although they have a vital role in conflict management and 'rapid response' to unrest they will not, by themselves, transform divided space into shared space – because they lack positive promotion of civic space and simply manage division. However, proactive inter-community engagement can be transformative in building confidence, trust and common purpose. Effective dialogue and mediation have been shown to promote better inter-community relationships and create opportunities for more shared space.
- Secondly, there is the approach of multi-agency working and decision-making that engages local communities (well beyond the standard consultative mechanisms that currently exist) in a truly inclusive and participative process;

this encompasses the responsibilities of statutory providers in (urban) planning, roads, policing, security, health, housing, and education; as well as local government's future duties and powers of community planning and the power of well-being. Conflict transformation must include all those involved, in a participative process of decision making. There is an important role for both the Interface Working Group and the Interface Community Partnership (whose members are working to promote shared space at or near interfaces) in taking this forward. However, this conflict transformation can only be developed on a sound evidence base.

- Thirdly, there is the approach of using an evidence-base for future practice and policy. This includes the development of the practice, literature, research and evidence-based policy making in relation to interfaces. Independent critical evaluation has the potential to inform future practice and innovation. It can also reveal poor implementation of policy and anticipate new trends. In this way policy and practice can change and improve simultaneously on a raft of evidence on turning divided hostile interfaces into civic space, and transforming conflict into collaboration on common issues.

### ***5.2.2 Not a one-size-fits-all method***

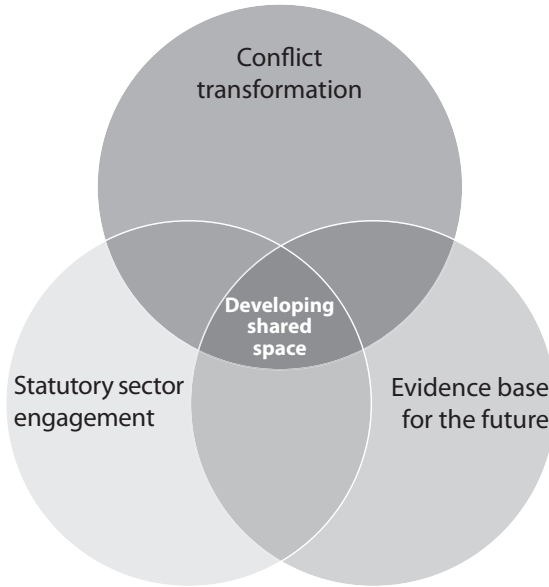
Taking the three approaches will not determine the specific policy or practice response to interface issues. It is not a one-size-fits-all method of working. Rather, ongoing local level action research, larger scale surveys and qualitative research and policy appraisal can demonstrate where transformation is taking place and how best to achieve this outcome.

### ***5.2.3 Approaches that overlap and are mutually supporting***

As Diagram 1 shows, the three approaches can overlap, may reinforce each other and all three gain from sharing past experience, in Northern Ireland and beyond. In a post-conflict society what works in conflict management will change, with time and experience, to become conflict transformation.

Effective practice in promoting shared space needs to include three complementary dimensions. It has to manage conflict and division sufficiently to transform contested space and conflict into civic space. It requires multi-agency statutory sector engagement that is inclusive and participative. And it must provide, disseminate and share an evidence base for future practice.

**Diagram 1: Developing shared space: the three dimensions**



**5.2.4 Investing in a post-conflict vision of a shared future**

Many interface communities have seen little benefit in the “peace dividend” and see little prospect for the future regeneration of their areas.

Creating shared space can be the catalyst for reversing the social and economic decline in many interface communities, delivering tangible benefits at a time of planned reductions in public spending.

The problem of youth-led interface violence presents a challenge which must be addressed if this is to be achieved.

The alternative to removing the physical and psychological barriers to shared space is the reinforcement of conflict and division.

The development of shared space must be driven initially by government and the statutory sector in order to translate a post-conflict vision of a shared future into reality, delivering safety, mobility and opportunity as rights rather than aspirations.

# Appendix A: Methodology

This work adopted largely qualitative methods, using desk research, and interviews to establish baseline findings. Quantitative data was only incorporated into the analysis, where appropriate. Initially liaison arrangements with key participants were identified and the first stage of desk research completed, with a review of relevant literature, research and policy. Access to relevant community and interface workers was gained through BIP and the researchers' professional experience. This ensured reflexivity<sup>9</sup> in the work and put emphasis on effective engagement with participants.

## Questionnaire pilot

Before conducting interviews in the field, the interview schedule/questionnaire was pilot tested and amended. While confidentiality was an option the interviews were open, and agreement was sought from all to put the findings in the public arena. No objections to this were encountered. However, participants are not named because in at least one case the respondent was under threat. Where requested, findings from interviews were confirmed by sending a preliminary analysis (and all direct quotations) to individual interviewees, to ensure factual accuracy, transparency and respect aspects of confidentiality; empowering each person with the opportunity to give an informed response.

9. Bryman's definition of reflexivity covers the core concerns. *"A term used in research methodology to refer to a reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate of their methods, values, biases, decisions and mere presence in the very situations they investigate."* (p. 543) The knowledge this work will generate is an enhanced understanding of addressing the needs of Belfast interface communities, through effective practice. Reflecting on possible bias, the researchers have the professional awareness and experience necessary to identify sources of impartiality and managing these. Some participants would be acquainted professionally with them providing sufficient trust to mediate conscious bias.

## **Interviewees**

In order to fulfil this brief the views of twenty-seven stakeholder/ practitioners on effective practice in promoting shared space at or near an interface area were taken on board. Participants were contacted, and sent a letter of introduction and a schedule for the interview: both of which had been seen and approved by BIP. Participants and others quoted are listed in Appendix B.

## **Questionnaire themes**

Having completed preliminary desk research and an initial literature review, the original interview questions were pilot-tested, and finalised for the interview schedule/ questionnaire; which is reproduced in Appendix C. Questions in the first section were based on the key findings from this, with an emphasis on Belfast Interface Project's research (O'Halloran, Shirlow and Murtagh, 2004). This laid emphasis on four main themes as per:

- Attractiveness of the Physical Environment (buildings, roads, flags, graffiti murals and other 'signs')
- Economic Activity (jobs, shops, post office, social economy things like the Credit Union)
- Freedom of Movement (physical barriers, transport options, 'chill factor')
- Inter-community tension/intimidation /violence (physical threat, youth fights, parades, 'chill factor' etc)

Interviewees were given pointers for response to questions; such as local community, other community, Youth workers/Service, Politicians, Mediation, voluntary sector like Groundwork, statutory sector like the local Council, NIHE, and PSNI. They were asked what they had learned and gained (or not) from their endeavours. Where the context is directly relevant there are also quotations from other interviews conducted for BIP (on policy networking).

## **Desk Research**

Where directly relevant and informative, reference to research findings and reports from desk research and the literature review has been added. However, unless there is a significant discrepancy between 'the literature' and the information gained from interviews, material that is already available from numerous other sources is not reproduced.

## Analytical framework

A robust analytical framework was employed (as per Yin, 2003<sup>10</sup> and Miles et al, 1994<sup>11</sup>). Yin points out that qualitative research cannot rely on survey research alone (important as that may be). "Survey research relies on statistical generalisation, whereas case studies (as with experiments) rely on analytical generalisation." (Yin, 2003: 37). Analytical generalisation also requires data reduction, data display, verification and reaching conclusions "verified by the examination of rival interpretations and the internal rigour of the interviews, and by secondary source documentation" (Miles et al, 1994: 112).

This was achieved by scrutinising each interview for internal consistency, and the body of interview information for its fit with research and the main literature on interfaces. The analysis of findings was structured by identifying themes and contradictions in the information gleaned from interviews, and seeing what new issues emerged, and what these added to understanding effective practice in promoting shared space close to interface communities.

10. Yin, Robert, K *"Case Study Research: Design and Methods"* Third Edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 5, Sage, London, 2003.

11. Miles, Matthew B. and Huberman, Michael *"Qualitative Data Analysis"* Second Edition, Sage, London, 1994.

# **Appendix B:**

## **Interview participants**

1. Short Strand Partnership
2. Community Relations Council Official
3. Finaghy Crossroads/SWAT
4. Upper Springfield Road Interaction
5. The Village focus group/South West Action Team
6. Antrim Springfarm
7. Peace & Reconciliation Group Brandywell/Fountain Derry/Londonderry
8. Ballymena Borough Council Official
9. Ballymena Borough, Council Economic Development Official
10. QUB School of Planning Architecture & Civil Engineering
11. Groundwork
12. Forthspring
13. Independent consultant
14. Community Planning NI,
15. NIHE, CCU Official
16. QUB School of Law
17. BCRC
18. Stewartstown Road/SLIG
19. Mediation Northern Ireland
20. DSD North Belfast Community Action Unit Official
- 21-23. NIO Officials (3)
24. Crown Project
- 25-27. BIP steering group (3)

# Appendix C:

## Interview schedule/ questionnaire



**European Union**  
European Regional  
Development Fund  
Investing in your future



**Supporting Sharing' evaluation – Roz Goldie Partnership  
funded by Belfast City Council and the European Regional Development Fund**

**Effective practice on shared space near an interface: interview with key  
stakeholders/practitioners**

**Section 1 Can you describe effective – that is positive – practice in your area on  
the development of:**

Attractiveness of the **Physical Environment** (buildings, roads, flags, graffiti murals  
and other 'signs')

Who was involved? (Local community, other community, voluntary sector like  
Groundwork, statutory sector like Council, NIHE, PSNI, Roads)

**Economic Activity** (jobs, shops, post office, social economy things like the Credit  
Union)

Who was involved? (Local/other community, voluntary sector like NICVA, business/  
industry, statutory sector like Council or government?)

**Freedom of Movement** (physical barriers, transport options, 'chill factor')

Who was involved? (Local/other community, former prisoner/paramilitary,  
voluntary sector like Groundwork, statutory sector like Council or Transport?)

**Inter-community tension/ intimidation /violence** (physical threat, youth fights,  
parades, 'chill factor' etc)

Who was involved? (Local/other community, Youth workers/Service, Politicians,  
Mediation, voluntary sector like Groundwork, statutory sector like Council, NIHE, PSNI)

**Youth work initiatives, plans and strategies**

Who was involved? (Local/other community, Youth workers/Service, Politicians,



Mediation, voluntary sector like Groundwork, statutory sector like Council, NIHE, PSNI)

## **Section 2 Working with others to plan, create and sustain shared space**

**Community Dialogue** – please give specific events/developments, details of those taking part (like mediators or external facilitators) and describe the process and any positive (or negative) results.

Have you been involved in any consultations or discussions about **planning and the regeneration of your neighbourhood?** – please give specific details of those taking part (like the Council, government departments, or external facilitators) and the results of these.

What sustainable changes have there been in the past 5 years?

What do you consider to be the key indicators of shared space?

**The Equality Monitoring form which the funders have asked us to give you has a stamped addressed envelope for returning to NISRA**

**Thank you for taking the time to help us – it is much appreciated.**

# Appendix D: Community Engagement Model (Scottish Model)

## National Standards for Community Engagement

### Summary

The national Standards for Community Engagement have been developed with the involvement of over 500 people from communities and agencies throughout Scotland. They are a practical tool to help improve the experience of all participants involved in community engagement to achieve the highest quality of process and results.

The standards can be used in both formal and informal community engagement. During the development of the standards for more formal settings such as community planning partnerships, community engagement was defined as:

*Developing and sustaining a working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group to help them both to understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experiences.*

These formal arrangements for community engagement are very important, however, it should be noted that the standards are also applicable to less formal ways of engaging people and can be used to enable large numbers to participate.

In testing the standards a number of useful learning points were identified.

These included:-

- Seeking agreement to use the standards from all those involved in the process;
- Nominating a key person to lead on the use of standards; and
- Prioritizing their standards to reflect the purpose of the engagement and experience of community partners and agencies.

The standards are based on the following principles:

Fairness, equality and inclusion must underpin all aspects of community engagement and should be reflected in both community engagement policies and the way that everyone involved participates;

Community engagement should have clear and agreed purposes and methods that achieve these purposes;

Skill must be exercised in order to build communities, to ensure practice of equalities principles, to share ownership of the agenda and to enable all viewpoints to be reflected;

As all parties to community engagement possess knowledge based on study, experience, observation and reflection, effective engagement processes will share and use that knowledge;

All participants should be given the opportunity to build on their knowledge and skills; and,

Accurate, timely information is crucial for effective engagement.

In summary, these principles highlight the importance of equality and recognizing the diversity of people and communities; a clear sense of purpose; effective methods for achieving change; building on the skills and knowledge of all those involved; commitment to learning for continuous improvement.

National standards for community engagement

1. Involvement; we will identify and involve the people and organizations who have an interest in the focus of the engagement.
2. Support; we will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.
3. Planning; we will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this evidence to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.
4. Methods; we will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.
5. Working together we will agree and use clear procedures that enable the participants to work with one another effectively and efficiently.

6. Sharing information; we will ensure that necessary information is communicated between the participants.
7. Working with others; we will work effectively with others with an interest in engagement.
8. Improvement; we will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.
9. Feedback; we will feed back the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.
10. Monitoring and evaluation; we will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement achieves its purposes and meets the national standards for community engagement.

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This report is part of the Belfast Interface Project (BIP) 'Supporting Sharing' project 2010. The report considers 'effective practice in promoting shared space at or near an interface' by using information from desk research and interviews conducted with key stakeholders / practitioners. It describes the dynamics and the positive and negative lessons that practitioners and key stakeholders working at or near interfaces have reported.

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