INTRODUCTION

Northern Ireland has changed dramatically in the last ten years, but the difficulties around interface areas have not gone away. Population decline in these areas has not ended the occurrence of sectarian incidents at interface flashpoints. Interface communities are often looked on as ‘problems’ in desperate need of ‘solutions’. This has created a situation in which the social, cultural and economic potential in interface communities is often not being fully realised.

Conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not primarily see the setting and the people in it as the problem and the outsider as the answer. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting...


Although interface locations are often contested and prone to violence, some have also become the scene for private development. Many interface areas are located in central locations close to the urban core of Northern Ireland’s cities with high revenue generating potential.

This exhibition charts a research project by the Architectural Research in Tensioned Societies group (ARTS) at the University of Ulster, investigating the potential of a shared response, by interface communities, to issues affecting both sides of the divide.
THE PROJECT CONTEXT

The Fountain/Bishop Street interface is located on the west bank of the city and divides the smaller protestant Fountain area from the larger, Catholic Bishop Street. This interface is located very close to the city’s historic walls and, with its easy access to the River Foyle, could potentially be a prime location for redevelopment.

This project attempted to listen to what the communities at the interface wanted and to map out a potential ALTERNATIVE development course for these areas: one which prioritises the social capital in these communities and respects and promotes their ambitions and visions.

Unlike previous research with interface communities, this project explored the issues that offered the greatest potential for development across these communities through active engagement in determining the values and concerns of all those involved:

Art workshops, run by local artists, were used to gather community experience, and art intervention projects on both sides of the interface were created to express this ‘community view’ to the wider community in order to gather additional belief and experience. In addition, representatives from community, statutory and private sectors were interviewed.

‘Community participation is an attitude about a force for change in the creation and management of environments for people. Its strength lies in being a movement that cuts across traditional professional boundaries and cultures. The activity of community participation is based on the principle that the environment works better if citizens are active and involved in its creation and management instead of being treated as passive consumers.’


To analyse the material collected, the responses from each generative workshop and interview were mapped against Audit Commission Area Profile Indicators as a means to identify areas of shared concern or “co-influence”.

A. Existing Housing in Derry
B. New development in Derry/Londonderry
C. Foyle Valley Railway Museum on the banks of the River Foyle
D. Looking towards the Bogside/Brandywell from the City Walls at Bishop Street.
THE PROJECT CONTEXT

The ARTS team developed a new model by which to include local residents in the process of sustaining their communities. The proposed model was designed to share the power of shaping the built environment amongst all those affected by it. This is a model based on a sustainable, interdependence in which the roles of all players, no matter how small, are held as distinct and important. All players were engaged in this study around the themes covered by the Nobel Indicators, which measure issues of Multiple Deprivation. These indicators served as a means by which the responses could be charted.
PARTICIPANT RESPONSE & POTENTIAL CO-INFLUENCE POTENTIAL

The following radars highlight the priorities raised by different groups within this study. The priorities highlighted by this study do not claim to be the most quantifiably pressing needs of Interface Study Area communities, but instead aim to identify themes within which the most potential for shared future outcomes exist.

**ECONOMIC WELLBEING**
Response Range 0-16

Unsurprisingly private sector response in this indicator were strong, while supporting interests in the statutory sector reflect obligations and responsibilities for socio-economic improvement. Responses however are unexpectedly weak in the community and voluntary sector given the levels of deprivation associated with the area at ward level.

**CULTURE AND LEISURE**
Response Range 0-14

Physical renewal figures heavily in this indicator, particularly with regards to leisure activities and spaces for leisure activities. Issues around history and identity also figure strongly in community and statutory positions. Perhaps the direct connection between urban space and its use for leisure activities at community level.

**ENVIRONMENT**
Response Range 0-9

In this study, Community and Voluntary sector issues raised within the environment theme can be summarised as relating to visibility. The Private and Statutory sector responses recorded were generally weak but across communities there are shared concerns around issues of traffic, pollution and littering. Green spaces and health are particularly valued at community level. Substantial responses relating to car parking in this distinct form of use within this study were recorded within the Transport and Access theme.

**SOCIAL COHESION & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**
Response Range 1-12

This indicator had the most even responses across sectors. Interestingly, private sector agents emphasised that a necessary body of evidence suggested that strategies excluding voluntary control were unlikely to have long-term success.

**EDUCATION**
Response Range 0-4

Within the education indicator response was too weak to establish any meaningful co-influence links. The results suggest that key participants were focussed on development models in addressing the significant problems associated with education and training in the UK. Despite including one of the best Grammar schools in Northern Ireland, an analysis of the study area based on Nobel indicators reveals a profile of unusually low educational achievement.

**COMMUNITY SAFETY**
Response Range 0-7

While issues around the interface dominate discussions with statutory authorities and in the statutory positions, a related issue that also applies, particularly in the Bogside and Brandywell and Bishop Street/Riverview areas is the perceived rise in general anti-social behaviour. Threats to housing conditions in the Fountain area is one of the best Grammar schools in Northern Ireland, an analysis of the study area based on Nobel indicators reveals a profile of unusually low educational achievement.

**HOUSING**
Response Range 0-12

Concern regarding general quality and condition of housing which is commented on throughout the ISA as increasing demand for, and cost of, private ownership in the Bishop Street/Riverview and Brandywell and Brannagh area. Land banking is also seen as a potential threat to housing conditions in the Fountain as conditions of Satisfaction make it in adjacent properties and streets less attractive.

**TRANSPORT AND ACCESS**
Response Range 0-12

The immediate and strategic impact of car parking is recognised as a potential constraint. However, the evidence suggests that strategies excluding voluntary control are unlikely to have long-term success. The Private and Statutory sector responses recorded were generally weak but across communities there are shared concerns around issues of traffic, pollution and littering. Green spaces and health are particularly valued at community level. Substantial responses relating to car parking in this distinct form of use within this study were recorded within the Transport and Access theme.

**HEALTH & SOCIAL WELL BEING**
Response Range 0-5

Few participants however, were likely to make or take issues within this indicator directly to urban development. A mixed study revealed these findings with 47% of people satisfied with the health and well being in the area which remains officially classified as one of the worst performers for multiple deprivation in the UK. "Community directed development" in the area is an effective way to improve community cohesion. Perhaps the most telling finding in this theme is the distance between citizens’ experience and community representatives understanding and acceptance of policies and potential benefits. As one Open Studio participant observed, within a close-knit social network, “Communities are just areas detached from the wider urban communities where each area has its own community.”

**PEOPLE & PLACE**
Response Range 0-10

Perhaps the most telling finding in this theme is the distance between citizens’ experience and community representatives understanding and acceptance of policies and potential benefits. As one Open Studio participant observed, within a close-knit social network, “Communities are just areas detached from the wider urban communities where each area has its own community.”

**Response Range 0-16**

**Response Range 0-4**

**Response Range 0-7**

**Response Range 0-12**

**Response Range 0-12**

**Response Range 0-5**

**Response Range 0-10**

**Bishop Street / Riverview**

**Brandywell and Bogside area**

**Fountain Area**

**Open in generic community positions**

**Statutory Agency Representative**

**Private Sector Agent**

**Independent Review / Agent**
Simple portraits were taken of local residents and then projected onto different gable walls creating ‘living murals’ which reflected the local community. The study presented back to the community, a reflection of the life within the area. A gazebo was erected outside the Bishop Street Youth Club and photographs were taken of all those who passed.

The project highlighted a number of issues - The potential of key sites within the locale and the potential for public art as a means of both expression and communication.

Interestingly, the gable wall, which was painted for the final celebration and presentation of the portraits, has remained clean and hasn’t been vandalised with any graffiti.

The project also went into the local schools and asked children to draw their favourite parts of the city and asked them to talk about their experiences within the city. This work acted as a backdrop to the living murals that were created.

Pilot Study

ARTS worked with the Derry City Council Arts & Regeneration Programme funded by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to facilitate the development of a community vision for the Bishop Street & Riverview. The project aimed to record the aspirations and needs of local residents and to explore and record local community experience, memory and history and acted as a springboard for the ‘Your Space or Mine’ project.
RECOMMENDATIONS
A MODEL APPROACH TO ISA DEVELOPMENT
Following the project fieldwork and analysis, a series of practical recommendations were developed as a model for cross-community/cross-sector interface development towards shared future outcomes. Each recommendation forms a single step within the sequential process through the model.

01. Identify and agree initial extent of the Interface Study Area (ISA) with interface communities and statutory authorities, incorporating to as great a degree possible, areas of substantial development potential.

02. Facilitate a statutory supported/led interface regeneration process incorporating the formation of a Cross-Community Development Trust (CCDT) prioritising participatory processes to determine and realise co-influence positions.

03. Maximise and secure asset transfer to the CCDT (eg FVRM site) and establish immediate revenue streams (eg Carparking/advertising/rental income).

04. Establish an integral and substantial but independent ‘honest broker’ position.

05. Initiate open-ended participatory engagement process.

06. Review existing and proposed public sector ownership, policy and expenditure within the study area and where possible reframe these to meet engagement needs and identified outcomes within the co-influence approach.

07. Prioritise realisation of permanent or temporary elements within multi-stakeholder and long term co-influence themes.

08. Once established, extend the participatory process through construction of a co-influence project brief and an associated framework for assessment (including full economic appraisal) for use in conjunction with a ‘Call for Expressions of Interest’ or similar process, engaging cross-section interests and development ambitions.

A Model Approach to ISA Development
Following the project fieldwork and analysis, a series of practical recommendations were developed as a model for cross-community/cross-sector interface development towards shared future outcomes. Each recommendation forms a single step within the sequential process through the model.
One private sector agent taking part in this study cited Field Marshall Montgomery as a source for the following:

“talk all you want...but for f**ks sake do something!”

Cynicism regarding ‘talking shops’ is a powerful force derailing ambition for engagement, particularly in the absence of a clear structure or model through which the process can be read. The spectre of the ‘talking shop’ further emphasises the value of ‘doing’ or ‘making’ ‘things’, however small, along the way, providing legibility and accessibility for those not already engaged in the discussion.

A more complex issue lies in the fear that just processes can produce unjust results, in this regard, the co-influence approach adopted perhaps offers the potential of multiple outcomes which can be taken up or left aside, renegotiated between communities or developed to find new aligned interests beyond existing positions. Within outcomes determined in this process, no single community or agent can be the sole author of any others participants future and the only certainty is that failure to engage ensures inability to direct. In such a case it is always an option to leave future outcomes for others outside the process to decide.

Assuming that this limited project, or another yet to be formulated, offers a potential way forward for interface communities the question remains as to whether or not the opportunity will be taken up by those who have most to benefit. Waiting for a critical mass of demand to develop is unlikely to be effective in areas subject to depopulation and demographic change, so the question remains “who cares?”. 

CONCLUSION

“Communities aren’t just areas discussed in this project – but smaller communities within each area – each street has its own community.” OPEN STUDIO PARTICIPANT

YOUR SPACE OR MINE?

with the UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER