YOUR SPACE OR MINE?

with the UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER
The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Ulster or the Community Relations Council.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this research project, particularly:

- Participants in the various workshops and interviews.
- Dr. Cherie Driver for input in the early stages of the project.
- Artist Peter McCaughey for help in co-ordinating public art interventions
- Dr Neil Jarman for objective and constructive comments throughout the life of the project.

The authors of this report are based in the School of Architecture and Design at the University of Ulster, Belfast Campus.

For further information contact:
School of Architecture and Design
University of Ulster
Art College
Belfast Campus
York Street
Belfast BT15 1 ED

www.ulster.ac.uk
Project website www.yoursempire.org.uk

Thanks to the sponsors

© Mike McQueen, Hisham ElKadi, Jenny Millar, Peter Geoghegan, Community Relations Council 2008.

The authors and CRC permit use of all or part of this material; for academic research or reference purposes, however full acknowledgement of the authors and Community Relations Council, as commissioning body, must be given. The moral rights of the authors will not be affected by this permission.

Crown Copyright material is reproduced with the permission of Land & Property Services under delegated authority from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown copyright and database rights. Permit No. 80211.
YOUR SPACE OR MINE?

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.

Northern Ireland has changed dramatically in the last ten years, but the difficulties around interface areas have not gone away. Recent population decline in these areas has not prevented sporadic growth in sectarian incidents. 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.

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 and with high revenue generating potential for developers.

As the property and construction market in Northern Ireland booms, developers and speculators are beginning to turn their attention to interface areas. The absence of community involvement in these redevelopment initiatives has emerged as an issue of grave concern across both sides of the interface.

1 Figures for the period 2004-05 released by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency indicate that populations at interface areas have dropped. Police Service of Northern Ireland statistics recorded a 30% increase in sectarian incidents from July 2005 to July 2006, with many of these taking place at interface flashpoints.
As development is taking place around them, many interface communities feel that they are not being listened to. Government consultations often fail to make it past community ‘gate-keepers’ and rarely find out how people living in interface areas actually feel about their area and its future. In engaging directly with communities on both sides of the Brandywell/Fountain Street interface in Derry/Londonderry, this project, conducted by ARTS at the University of Ulster, has sought to listen to interface communities and what they are saying about their area.

The Brandywell/Fountain Street interface is located on the west bank of the city and divides the smaller 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 what issues were most pressing for these communities through active engagement in these areas: Art workshops 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 addition belief and experience. In addition, representatives from community, statutory and private sectors were interviewed.

This report explains how this research was conducted, presents its findings and suggests recommendations for creating a new, community-led vision of interface development.

‘It is relatively easy to outline the geography of the interface. It is less easy to say how we can impact on the fears and uncertainties which keep it in place in our hearts and in our minds.’

TRIAX TASKFORCE. (2003) Tackling Inequalities – Bridging the Gap (Triax Consultation Report)
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.

SANOFF, H. (2000) COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION METHODS IN DESIGN AND PLANNING, WILEY, NEW YORK.

In the main, attempts to engage with diverse communities and their interests have prioritised the building of consensus amongst groups. Consensus building requires the use of facilitators to encourage communities to enter into dialogue to consider problems together. The goal of these techniques is to get communities to shift their positions on different issues to achieve a ‘Oneness of Mind’ across diverse groups.

While consensus building is an important method for engaging the public, it has its limits. In a fractured society like Northern Ireland and, particularly, in interface areas, communities often hold very deep-seated, and opposing, beliefs and positions. When two (or more) groups enter a discussion with predetermined and diametrically opposing positions the potential for consensus is obvious minimal.
Instead of seeking to build a consensus across the two communities about the future of the interface, this project looked to identify common issues of concern across all groups. These common issues are referred to as ‘points of co-influence’ and it is these points which provide a basis for prioritising the actual role of interface communities in defining and realising their own sustainable development into the future. In this process, the roles of all players, no matter how small, are held as distinct and significant, rather than being aggregated and compromised to the goal of achieving consensus.

This research aimed to engage directly with the neighbouring communities of Bishop Street, Riverview, the Bogside, the Brandywell and the Fountain to determine areas of commonality between positions with regards to their immediate environment. This research broke with the norm of replying solely on the opinions of community ‘gatekeepers’ and instead used public art workshops to engage directly with communities and place them at the centre of the research process.

The public art workshops involved an artist working with people of all ages and backgrounds in both interface communities. Where possible, a local artist was used to facilitate these workshops. Each artist used the relationships they had already built up with the communities and their resources to explore community experiences and concerns.

Each artist was given the following set of questions to guide the art workshop which were conducted as a series of either two full-day or four half-day workshops:

- What are the key issues of concern in your area?
- What do you value in your community?
- What do you want to protect in your community and how can you do that?
- What area of your neighbourhood would you like to appropriate and transform?
The artist was also given a large (1800x2400mm) laminated aerial photograph of the study area and briefed to use this photograph as a basis for exploring the research questions.

The aerial photograph acted as a direct tool for engaging participants in how they felt about and understood their built environment. Participants were encouraged to draw on the aerial photographs, to walk across them and to attach post-it notes on them to reflect and express their various experiences and concerns.

The workshops were rarely static affairs. Holding the workshops in the actual areas being talked about often led to participants going out and engaging with their immediate environment. Children were encouraged to move the workshop out into the spaces of their community to identify what was important to them in the place they lived in.

As large, tactile, physical objects the aerial photographs themselves stimulated direct engagement. Participants often enjoyed standing on the photograph, walking around their area and commenting on what they saw.

IMAGES
Aerial Maps within the Riverview and Bishop Street Workshops
Based on participant’s responses, the artist and the project team used findings from the art workshops to create arts interventions in the physical environment of the interface communities. Over a week-long period, these “interpretive” workshops constructed various pieces in the study area to reflect directly some of the issues and concerns raised by the community themselves. For example, in response to concerns raised around green space and play areas during workshops in the Fountain, a temporary football pitch was laid out over car parking spaces in the area. In response to concerns around graffiti and vandalism raised by children from Bishop Street, a removable piece of ‘vandalism’ was created using vinyl stickers and put up in the area.

The interface itself was also raised as an issue in many workshops. Participants in the Fountain highlighted the difficulties of entering and exiting the area posed by the metal perimeter fence, and so a temporary notional ‘doorway’ through the interface was constructed.

Other interventions dealt with issues around personal safety, community facilities and environmental improvements.

A newsletter was produced to publicise these art interventions in the communities and encourage community participation in their construction and this week of art interventions ended with a celebration event in The Junction, a neutral space in the city centre.

The process gave communities the opportunity to agree or disagree with the comments that had been raised within the art workshops and granted the ARTS team opportunity to reach a large proportion of the community who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to become involved in the research process. Community engagement is a time-consuming activity and can often lead to a small group presenting the feelings and beliefs of a much larger collection of people. By using art interventions, the comments raised within the workshops were validated within the community as they used direct visual methods of engagement.
As well as recording the findings from the arts workshops and interventions, a series of semi-structured interviews were carried out with relevant stakeholders in the study area. These stakeholders were identified as belonging to four separate categories: community, statutory, private sector and ‘independent’. The community category was made up of those community groups active around the Fountain/Bishop Street interface.

The statutory sector comprised those organisations whose remit included processes of regeneration in the study area. The private sector consultation was with developers active in or in possession of key sites in the area as well as some developers with experience of development in other interface areas. The ‘independent’ category consisted of academics and others with experience of issues related to interface development.

These interviews provided valuable data on the relative positions of different stakeholders in the study area. Through the art workshops and interviewing process a range of different positions around community indicators were identified and charted.
YOUR SPACE OR MINE?

SECTION TWO
ENGAGING THE PUBLIC
09

IMAGE
Top row Bogside & Brandywell workshops
Bottom row Bishop Street workshops
YOUR SPACE OR MINE?

SECTION TWO
ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

IMAGES Above
The Fountain workshops

IMAGES Above
Riverview workshop
The next step in the project was to analyse the data from the arts workshops and stakeholder interviews to identify potential positions of shared concerns (‘co-influence’) across all groups in the study area.

Instead of trying to force agreement across all stakeholders, this research aimed to identify areas in which productive working relationships with tangible community-focused benefit could be established. This was achieved by looking at each workshop and interview to identify, extract and chart key positions related to ten indicators of community sustainability developed by the Audit Commission.

The first step: in the analysis process was to chart all the stakeholder views expressed in the interviews and art workshops against each of the Audit Commission Themes to identify potential areas of co-influence.

The first step in the analysis process was to chart all the stakeholder views expressed in the interviews and art workshops against each of the Audit Commission Themes to identify potential areas of co-influence.

These indicators assess how sustainable a community according to the following measures:

- Economic wellbeing
- Culture and leisure
- Environment
- Social Cohesion
- Education
- Community Safety
- Housing
- Transport and Access
- Health and Social Wellbeing
- People and Place
One of the major concerns around this type of research is the difficulty in communicating how findings have been interpreted and conclusions reached.

In order to help clarify conclusions drawn from the findings, ‘priority diagrams’ were developed from the theme matrix tables above. These diagrams provided a useful reference and illustration of interpretations of priorities when explaining conclusions.

These diagrams are not meant to be definitive but were developed to reflect the strength of response with regards to each theme from each workshop or interview.

In the full project report each diagram is accompanied by a bullet point summary of the co-influence potential within this theme and brief discussion of relevant findings.
The second stage of analysis looked across all the themes to identify and link areas of co-influence into strategies with potential to inform urban development direction. In contrast to the Priorities highlighted by the TRIAX report of 2003, this research, using a very different form of engagement came up with strikingly different results.

As the radar diagram highlighting priorities of co-influence suggests, within the work carried out at the Fountain/Brandywell interface in this project, two areas have emerged as having substantial potential for co-influence; the development of an interface car parking strategy and the development of an interface specific strategy for tourism.
Neither of these are obvious interface priorities, nor does private car use fit comfortably within sustainable development strategies. However findings suggested that these areas offer substantial potential to address cross-community and cross-sector interests in the development of the area moving relationships towards shared future outcomes.

Through supportive art workshops and analysis of findings against holistic development indicators, the project sought to understand the complexity of positions in interface communities, revealing opportunities and constraints beyond measures of deprivation and statistical analysis.

The full project report goes on to compare interface priorities discovered through this process against neighbourhood renewal priorities established through the more usual process of reference to Noble Indicators of Deprivation, community representative meetings and questionnaires.

This comparison uncovers new opportunities for cross-community and cross-sector working in contested urban spaces easily missed in more conventional consultation approaches.

Within the co-influence approach the ability to retain revenue within the interface to finance continued peace building and shared future activities is key. The following section outlines potential opportunities and constraints offered by the social economy to support this work.
Having found significant points of ‘co-influence’ and potential for community-led development processes across the interface, the next challenge was to identify a development model appropriate to this approach.

The retention of capital from development is key and clearly the peace process has brought dividends to real estate interests in Northern Ireland:

With this in mind, research identified a cross-community social economy enterprise as a potential vehicle for retaining and strengthening social and community capital at the Fountain/Bishop Street interface. Social economy businesses often use the existing resources in communities and their built environment to meet identified market needs. In being guided by social principles and objectives beyond owner or shareholder profit, social economy enterprises provide alternative development opportunities, particularly at ‘hot spots’ of social exclusion, such as at interfaces areas.

The annual turnover of the construction industry in Northern Ireland increased from £3.36 BILLION in 2000 to £6 BILLION in 2006.

The annual turnover of the real estate, renting and business activities sector in Northern Ireland has grown from £2.34 BILLION in 2000 to £4.57 BILLION in 2006.
This project has identified the built environment in the area as a vital resource which both communities could use within social economy enterprises. As the Fountain/Bishop Street interface is located close to the River Foyle and the city centre, its location could potentially be very profitable. The Foyle Valley Railway Museum (FVRM) site on the banks of the Foyle was identified as a particularly significant site with revenue generating potential.

The idea of a cross-community social enterprise development process at the Fountain/Bishop Street interface may sound new, radical or perhaps far fetched, but there is a precedent of innovative, successful social economy enterprises at contested sites, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

The report details three case studies illustrating the potential for realising community-led development in the area:

- The Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG), Belfast.
- The Farset International Hostel, Belfast.
- Coin Street Community Builders, London.
The following case studies were identified and presented to both communities to show the potential for realising community-led development in the area:

**The Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG)**

- SLIG is a cross-community group which has developed a social economy enterprise across the interface between Protestant Suffolk and Catholic Lenadoon in West Belfast. This is an area which was badly hit by ‘the Troubles’ with significant tension across the interface between the two communities. Following tentative cross-community contact in the early 1990s, SLIG was formed in 1997 to promote cross-community development.  

- The Stewartstown Road Regeneration Company (SRRC) was created to replace a derelict property on the interface with a community-led social enterprise. The property was transformed from a vacant site into a two-storey shop and office block. Since its opening in 2002 it has created employment opportunities for local people and began turning over a profit for use in meeting the needs of both communities.

---

4 A broader history of the Suffolk and Lenadoon and the effects of ‘the Troubles’ on community relations in these areas can be found in Building bridges at the grassroots: The experience of the Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group (Island Pamphlets #81, published in 2007). This booklet is a very useful resource on the history and development of SLIG.
Profits from the Stewartstown Road site are returned equally to both communities. Regular consultation takes place in both communities to ensure that SLiG is representative of all interests. To ensure openness and transparency, the twelve directors of the company are drawn four from both communities with four non-aligned independents. The building itself is dual access, as well as each community having equal space in the building there are separate entrances from each side of the interface.

The success of SLiG has been predicated on its explicit refusal to deny or “water down” the identity or values of either side of the interface. Instead, it provides a vehicle for both communities to move forward into a sustainable future.

During the project, representatives of SLiG came to the study site, met with different stakeholder groups and gave a public talk at the Verbal Arts Centre.
Farset International Hostel

- The Farset International Hostel is a social economy hostel and conference centre which opened in January 2003 on formerly derelict land close to the Shankill/Falls interface in West Belfast. This area was one of the worst hit by ‘the Troubles’ and tensions along this interface have historically been very high.

- The Farset Interface Partnership created the business to contribute to social and economic regeneration, improve community relations and attract tourists into the area. Today the hostel comprises of 36 en-suite rooms, meeting and conference facilities and a restaurant and café and employs 25 staff (7 full-time) drawn equally from both sides of the interface.

- Rather than maximising profit potential, the Farset International has looked to build infrastructure in an interface area. The business turns over a small profit, which is currently being re-invested in hostel. Although it required start-up funding, the enterprise is now fully self-sustainable.

- The Farset International has been remarkably successful in attracting tourists into an area of the city which they otherwise would not stay in. This success has been based on not marketing itself as an attraction for ‘dark tourism’. Instead, it provides excellent accommodation at very reasonable rates. Also, the enterprise has worked hard to build and maintain cross-community trust. Both communities are represented on the board and, since opening, the hostel has had both Catholic and Protestant managers.
Coin Street Community Builders, London

- Coin Street Community Builders (CSCB) is a vibrant and highly profitable social enterprise and development trust located on a formerly derelict 13-acre site on London’s South Bank. Since its formation in 1984 CSCB have transformed what was once a no-man’s land into a thriving mixed use neighbourhood comprising co-operative housing; shops; galleries; restaurants; café and bars as well as sports and leisure facilities and a park and riverside walkway.

- CSCB emerged directly from community opposition to plans for commercial office developments. Once control of the site was gained, with the help of the Greater London Council, CSCB demolished many of the derelict buildings and constructed social housing. Since the first housing co-operative was opened in 1988, many more have followed along with design workshops, shops, conference facilities and even a Harvey Nicholls restaurant.
• CSCB have succeeded in utilising their land and location to realise social and economic regeneration across the wider South Bank area. By adopting a pragmatic and flexible economic strategy, CSCB have created a busy, attractive and profitable urban environment for both its residents and tourists.

• The Coin Street development shows the potential for social enterprises which take advantage of a strategic riverfront location close to an urban core. During the research process, Ian Tuckett of CSCB came to the study site, met with all the stakeholder groups and delivered a public talk. At this talk he highlighted that, in its early years, the Coin Street development relied on car parking to generate income and that it was this revenue that they were able to use to invest in social housing and, eventually, larger social economy projects.
There is significant potential for utilising the built environment in social economy enterprises for community-led regeneration at the Fountain/Bishop Street interface. In our research, tourism was identified as a shared concern across all stakeholders that could potentially be the basis for a cross-community social enterprise.

Like Coin Street, this is an inner-city area with a riverfront location of great, as yet unrealised, tourist potential. The Farest International provides a great model for the provision of accommodation on or near an interface area.

This research also identified development opportunities in the area. For example, the Foyle Valley Railway Museum site, instead of lying largely unused, could be turned over to a cross-community trust. This site could be used for car parking with revenue generated going to meet community needs and ambitions. As the experience of Coin Street showed, car parking can provide significant revenue streams from which other social outcomes can be realised.
Although the interface location causes specific problems for developing a social economy enterprise, this is not an insurmountable obstacle, as both SLIG and the Farset International in Belfast show. What is needed is for cross-community trust and partnership working to be developed and nurtured from the ground up. This is a long and painstaking process which requires openness, honesty, and strong leadership. Any cross-community initiative must represent both communities equally and be directly answerable to their communities. The adoption of a transparent management structure is vital in this regard.

The choice facing the communities around Fountain / Bishop Street interface could not be starker. Communities can either work together to create and develop a shared future or have their future dictated to them by development processes.

The statutory sector also has a key role to play in defining the future of the interface and potentially facilitating a cross-community social economy enterprise. The research identified the need for structural reform to better define the relationship between regeneration bodies, including a more pragmatic approach to the issue of ‘best value’, and closer working between the statutory sector and community groups.

Having identified a potential approach to shared future development, precedent models capable of financing the process and resources with which to begin, the final stage of the project was to summarise the findings in the form of recommendations for action.
Each recommendation forms a single step within a sequential process leading to a broad based cross community, cross-sector development model. Ownership of the process can only be determined in the context of a specific Interface Study Area.

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 car parking / 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 co-influence approach:

This proposal constitutes a substantial shift from development mindsets which invest in the belief that community benefit will naturally ‘trickle down’ from private sector success in interface areas and instead provides a framework for continuous community level engagement and empowerment. The creative interpretation and linking of potential co-influence themes into substantial development strategies challenges normal construction industry and statutory decision making practice and challenges conventional professional roles within urban renewal.

The significance of this projects ambition to prioritise social cohesion in development, has previously been acknowledged by Derry City Council, Triax and by community representatives on both sides of the interface.

While beleaguered interface communities and supporting agencies welcome contributions towards shared futures, discussions with stakeholders have confirmed that the ‘devil is in the detail’, particularly when it comes to leadership of the process.

Experience in successful precedent projects has shown that personal commitment of key individuals, persisting in the face of hostile and at times threatening opposition has been essential for success. The project proposes a incentive loop through which improvements in community relations can be tangibly rewarded, and challenges statutory bodies to initiate leadership of this process or for communities to identify personalities who are capable of translating verbal support for community self determination into direct action.

The construction of a methodology for a development approach promoting reconciliation does not in itself guarantee solutions. However, the definition of such a framework and demonstration of previous models of good practice, offers interface communities, statutory bodies and private sector agents, a basis upon which negotiations for sustainable, shared future outcomes can be supported rather than undermined by development processes.

A full account of the project findings along with recommendations for their specific application to the Fountain/Brandywell interface and a summary of step changes proposed in existing urban renewal policy and practice to support their implementation are included within the full report, available at www.yourspaceormine.org.uk
Within a project, limited by time and budget, it is impossible to claim authority in understanding a situation as complex as the Fountain/Brandywell Interface.

It can however be said with sincerity that conditions are understood substantially better by the research team at the end of the project than at its start. The intention of this project has been to explore ways in which this understanding can be developed, communicated and validated. Opinions on where solutions for shared future development approaches might lie have been able to be formed and can be tested and refined through further consultation and experimentation.

There is an urgent need to move beyond a poorly defined hope that shared future outcomes will emerge from remote investment and decision making, the challenge to ‘understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting’. (Lederach 1995) needs to be substantially addressed. Experience in this project suggests that the evolution and incorporation of participatory engagement strategies in development processes, empowering interface communities, can offer a ‘new set of lenses’ (Lederach 1995) through which shared future outcomes can begin to come into focus.

In terms of EU Peace 2.1 objectives, this project contributes to the promotion of reconciliation for sustainable peace and the legacy of the conflict by proposing a sustainable means with which to address the disabling levels of segregation of social and physical community capital, in existing interface locations. It suggests that the value of these divided resources, if pooled, could be much greater than the sum of the parts and can offer long term revenue streams with which to address community specific ambition and need. Mechanisms are identified through which co-influential development strategies can retain this locked-in capital within communities and encourage interface re-integration within larger urban contexts.

The project further offers a redefined framework for policy and practice in which development form can substantially contribute towards improved community life and good relations. This framework offers interface communities a positive, empowered and integral role in urban renewal and challenges current statutory priorities, structures and practice as well as conventional construction industry roles and relationships.
Images
Local children taking part in art workshops and community members at an art intervention
The project has its origins in a request by a community group to investigate potential for community centred development of a prominent riverside site adjacent to the Wapping Lane/Abercorn Road interface with the neighbouring protestant Fountain community.

Through various projects culminating in this Peace 2.1 funded research, a “model approach” to interface development has been proposed. This however, has brought into focus a number of constraints in existing statutory and professional urban renewal policy and practice which currently disadvantage existing interface community ambitions. The report provides a structure within which interface communities and their representatives might begin to overcome these obstacles and engage with urban renewal processes in a substantial way.

At a statutory level within the Brandywell/Fountain context, a copy of the report has been requested by the local office of the Department for Social Development, whose representatives also took part in the research. While community level ambition is central to the research, it has been clear that statutory decision making processes can either critically enhance or diminish the potential for positive change.

A key relationship identified is that between DSD and DETI and their respective responsibilities, which if restructured, could substantially support the replacement of structural funding for peace building through revenue generated from urban renewal. The research suggests that statutory commitment to time-consuming and challenging but ultimately rewarding community-centered engagement processes, as a valid starting point for urban renewal proposals in interface locations, could transform cross-community and cross-sector relationships.

The model also substantially challenges the traditional roles of construction industry and design professionals in demanding comprehensive participatory design processes and solutions which are ‘of’ rather than ‘for’ communities. As a piece of research delivered through a School of Architecture and Design, this raises questions regarding the role of education in moving towards sustainable urban communities.
The project addresses longer term challenges of peace and reconciliation work in NI by substantially linking urban regeneration processes to capacity and peace building within interface communities.

Post conflict reductions in UK and EU funding for peace and reconciliation work have continued to gather pace. At community level, this deficit is combined with significantly increased pressure from external economic drivers, challenging the ability of successful inter-community initiatives to influence ‘top-down’ decision-making processes.

Findings from this report however, suggest that carefully constructed urban development processes can make significant contributions to shared future outcomes. Given the pace at which the ‘peace process’ has brought local exposure to global economic conditions, it seems entirely possible that long-standing interface communities face the irony of surviving through the ‘troubles’ only to disappear through displacement in ‘peace’. Such a superficial resolution to these complex social contexts risks the redistribution, rather than resolution, of sectarian division. If this scenario is to be avoided, there is an essential and immediate need for committed leadership towards shared future development approaches for interface communities, at all statutory and community levels.
“Communities aren’t just areas discussed in this project – but smaller communities within each area – each street has its own community.”

OPEN STUDIO PARTICIPANT

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**k’s 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 other participant’s 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?’