



# Voluntary Action and Community Relations in Northern Ireland

A Report of a Research Project  
funded by the Community Relations Council and the Office  
of First Minister and Deputy First Minister



*Centre for Voluntary Action Studies*

**Dr Nicholas Acheson**  
**Professor Arthur Williamson**

*School of Psychology*

**Professor Ed Cairns**  
**Professor Maurice Stringer**

**University of Ulster**  
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## **Foreword by**

**Dr Duncan Morrow**

Margaret Thatcher once famously announced that ‘there is no such thing as society’. Without evidence of voluntary and community activity, she might be right. Because, above all, it is this kind of activity which is most organised towards others and in which each person has an active experience of their connection to a greater whole.

Precisely because it is undertaken with free will, or because it is undertaken to advance the quality of life of a whole group, voluntary and community activity is our best available evidence that critical social concepts like citizenship, reciprocity, service and community exist in anything other than theory. In representing the things which we do when left to ourselves, voluntary activity is also a mirror against which we can identify the priorities which society gives to each of its different aspects.

Northern Ireland is famously a divided and contested society. Over the years, the voluntary and community sector has been the site of much of the effort to build bridges, to address rather than avoid complex and controversial issues and to develop new skills for conflict resolution, cultural diversity and civic partnership. What this report does, is to lift the lid on the complexity of that engagement, illustrating that while the voluntary sector was an important area of community relations work over many years, much of the voluntary sector also reflected society’s ambivalences and uncertainties rather than tackled them. The report underlines how long and difficult the process of peacebuilding actually is in a society which is coping with injury and trauma and the associated grief, anger and bitterness.

Good relations is not a matter of instant harmony. In practical terms it is about bringing ever more difficult issues into the light for proper dialogue, discussion and peaceful resolution. The findings of this report are an important milestone in the process, recording both heroic work and the scale of the task yet to be completed. While the work is fully independent, CRC is delighted that through the EU PEACE II programme we have made a contribution to the content and quality of an important topic.

**Duncan Morrow**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Community Relations Council**

## **Foreword by**

**Mr Seamus McAleavey**

NICVA recognises the findings of this research as a realistic picture of the voluntary and community sector in which we work and the society in which we live. It sets out in black and white many of the things we knew anecdotally about how the sector operates and the pressures it is under. It provides, for the first time, a baseline, from which we can measure the progress of our work in dealing with a divided society.

It would be unfair to interpret these findings as a sector captured by division and struggling to bring about transformation. The voluntary and community sector is not a magic kingdom where all is rosy and everyone agrees – organisations are rooted in the neighbourhoods with whom and for whom they work and in a spatially segregated society they themselves often reflect the wider divisions. If we take this as a realistic baseline we should be all the more encouraged by the distances some organisations have been able to travel in undertaking work which explores the nature of our divisions and seeks to reach out to 'the other side'.

The report also highlights that we, like other sectors, are at the mercy of the wider policy context in which we find ourselves. Despite our traditions of pushing against the flow on issues of social justice, this is a useful reminder that we need to continue to focus our efforts on that wider context if our day to day work is really to bring about change.

**Seamus McAleavey**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action**

## Preface

This report contains the findings of a research project that explores the impact of Northern Ireland's ethnic and religious divisions on voluntary and community organizations and their work. It considers and illustrates the implications that those divisions have for community relations and the potential that voluntary and community organizations have to foster improved community relations. These are topics which are of considerable interest and policy relevance within the context of the Shared Future debate and the government's emerging Good Relations policies. Our work began in October 2004 and finished in June 2006. The research was conducted by Dr Nicholas Acheson of the Centre for Voluntary Action Studies, who was the project's research officer and who also wrote this report.

The theme of identity is central to this research and the contrasting identities of Northern Ireland's two main communities are the backdrop to all that is reported and discussed. It should be understood that the terms "Protestant" and "Catholic" are used only as indicators of community background, and not as ascriptors of religious belief or practice.

An early focus on the theme of voluntary action and community relations was a speech at the annual conference of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action at Armagh on 14 October 2003 when Frances McCandless, NICVA's deputy director, raised new and uncomfortable questions about the impact of Northern Ireland's divisions on the voluntary and community sector. Some three years later we are able to present research findings that will provide an evidence base that will increase our understanding of these questions.

The Nobel laureate and Harvard economist, Amartya Sen, provides a useful intellectual context for our work. His recent book *Identity and Violence: the Illusion of Destiny* is an eloquent and powerful indictment of the fallacy and danger of "solitarist" ideas of identity. He asserts that these simplistic categories assume that human identities are formed by membership of a single social group and that they promote, and reinforce, divisions between people. We hope that this research report will help to illustrate, within contemporary Northern Ireland society, some of the settings in which multiple identities are being formed, as people work together as active citizens and participate in voluntary action with others from different communities.

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## Acknowledgements

This research project was conducted by a team at the University of Ulster in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action. The Research Team wish to acknowledge NICVA's key role in the development of the project and its facilitation of the project's Reference Group which met on 5 occasions over a period of 21 months. The comments and guidance of the members of the Reference Group helped to shape the development of the research and contributed to our analysis, as presented in this report.

We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of many people who generously gave their time, and shared their expertise and insights with us. Without them it would have been impossible to undertake our research. We thank both our interview respondents, to whom we gave an undertaking to protect their anonymity, and those who responded to our survey on behalf of their voluntary and community organizations.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Community Relations Council, (which administered Measure 2.1 "Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace" of the European Union's Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland), and of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

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## PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims of this research project were set out in the funding proposal dated 13 February 2004.

**TO ESTABLISH** the extent to which voluntary and community organizations in Northern Ireland (organised around issues that in themselves have nothing to do with the conflict, which is true of much of the voluntary and community sector) nevertheless have the potential to contribute to improved community relations.

**TO IDENTIFY** the contribution that voluntary and community organizations currently make to the resolution of inter-communal tensions in Northern Ireland.

**TO PROVIDE** new knowledge and understanding of the voluntary and community sector by providing an ethnic and socio/political breakdown of the sector.

**TO IDENTIFY** the extent to which ethnic and identity questions within organizations adversely affect their work and thereby impact negatively on beneficiaries, staff and volunteers and/or inhibit contact or joint working with other organizations.

**TO PROVIDE** guidance and information as to how voluntary and community sector organizations may more effectively contribute to promoting peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and may more effectively contribute to reducing sectarianism and ethnic tensions.

**TO PROVIDE** valid and reliable data on the extent and impact of intercommunal contact within the voluntary and community sector.

**TO PROVIDE** new ways of thinking about the relationship between voluntary activity and ethnic/socio political divisions in Northern Ireland.

**TO SHOWCASE** evidence of good practice.

**TO PROVIDE** an opportunity for reflection and learning among voluntary and community organizations and within the policy community.

**TO ENHANCE** the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to be effective agents of change in a deeply divided society.

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The Research Team is grateful for the contribution of NICVA to its work. In the funding application, referred to above, the following was stated:

*“With regard to the lasting benefits of the project we refer to the collaborative partnership that we have established with NICVA in relation to this project. It will be for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland to roll-out the benefits of this project across the province. NICVA (and probably other umbrella organizations) will be given the tools and the knowledge base to do the job that they wish to do.”*

Commenting on the potential value and likely usefulness of the research, the deputy director of NICVA said:

*“The outcomes of the project will contribute directly to the ability of voluntary and community organizations to plan and to deliver projects which address division within the context of their own wider work. This project will help to identify the tools necessary for this work and the barriers that currently exist.” (Frances McCandless, 13.02.04).*

## **Voluntary Action and Community Relations in Northern Ireland**

### *Executive Summary*

The research on which this report is based was commissioned by the Community Relations Council under its allocation of funds from the second European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. The research approach adopted took as its starting point the view that the conflict in Northern Ireland has both political and communal identity dimensions. It is a conflict that, while based on a long-standing and as yet unresolved political dynamic between Britain and Ireland, is played out within Northern Ireland itself through direct competition for resources and territory between two deeply divided ethno-religious groups each of whose identities cuts through other social formations in particular social class. In a deeply divided civil society it makes sense to ask in what ways the formal voluntary and community sector relates to these divisions.

The research was also undertaken in a context in which there is a renewed and vigorous international discussion both among academics and politicians on the contribution that voluntary and community organizations make to resolving social divisions and strengthening democratic institutions. The assumption that they can do this underpins some recent developments in policy at the level of the European Union towards civil society in many European states, and most particularly in the UK. Elsewhere in the world there has been attention paid to the role of civil society in addressing conflict in countries such as India, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

In this context, our research asks what the potential contribution of voluntary and community organizations is to improving community relations in Northern Ireland. We chose to measure the extent to which they 'belong' in one or other of the two main communities with reference to the known communal affiliations of their management committees or boards of directors, as being the best measure of this. We surveyed a representative sample of 535 organizations and achieved a response rate of 67%. We conducted interviews with voluntary sector leaders and community activists in six case study areas chosen as representative of both urban and rural settings and as typical of a range of single identity communities.

### **Summary of findings**

- The voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland remains embedded to a significant extent in each of the two main communities, in that 73.9% of organizations have management committees or boards of directors that are either wholly or mainly from one community; (that is to say they have at least twice as many Protestants as Catholics or twice as many Catholics as Protestants).

- Just over a quarter of organizations (26.8%) are either wholly Protestant or Catholic in this respect.
- Most (70.9%) said there had been no change from their background. There were no significant differences between Catholic and Protestant organizations in this respect. Organizations that were wholly Catholic or Protestant were the least likely to report any movement. Of those that believed they had moved away from their background, almost half (46.3%) gave the reason as being involved in joint (cross-community) projects.
- The voluntary and community sector is an important site in Northern Ireland for cross-community mixing. Over 90% of respondents said their organizations provided opportunities for people to do things together and to cooperate on common tasks. Over three-quarters said these activities had indirect community relations spin-offs. Just 9% of respondents thought their staff or volunteers would feel anxious about cross-community contact in work-related settings.
- Organizations were more likely to engage in discussion about equality of access to their services (60.1%) than discuss the issue of Catholics and Protestants working together in the workplace (29.9%). On both issues, organizations whose management committees were wholly or mostly Catholic were more likely to do so than wholly or mainly Protestant organizations. Reflecting the high proportion of organizations that provide opportunities for mixing, there is a widely held view that by not addressing the issue of the divided society directly, organizations were opening up a ‘civic space’ in which people from widely differing political and religious backgrounds could meet and tackle issues they could agree on. Some see this as a virtue, but this approach may mean that organizations risk ignoring the impact of community divisions on their missions and operations.
- Some organizations in the study denied the relevance of ethno-sectarian divisions, but it was more common for organizations to assume that, because the issues they deal with impact on both the main communities in Northern Ireland, they have no need to make reference to community divisions and that to do so might be damaging and divisive. Voluntary and community organizations involved in meeting a range of welfare needs tended to put greater emphasis on the individual and his or her need in relation to the organization’s purposes than on the wider social situation in which their clients or users lived. For some, it was important to build a “firewall” between need and politics and community relations issues.
- More than 80% of organizations reported having experienced no external pressure to work in a more cross-community way, although more than half (57.8%) said there were people within their organizations who promoted cross-community work. The main barriers to greater cross-community

engagement identified by organizations were their single identity origins (where this was the case) and the segregated nature of living patterns in Northern Ireland. Many organizations felt they lacked the capacity to address the issue and some identified an unhelpful funding environment.

- Lack of political agreement is a significant barrier to greater cross-community working. At local level a relatively stable political settlement with ‘buy-in’ from all political parties appears necessary for effective joint work between neighbouring areas with opposing identities. In its absence, Protestant communities in particular appear vulnerable to fragmentation and the influence of paramilitary organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Although Northern Ireland’s voluntary and community sector is embedded in the Protestant or Catholic community, voluntary and community organizations appear to be able to build cross-community coalitions around cross-cutting themes and issues. This is one of their strengths. We conclude however, that, in most cases, voluntary and community organizations are unwilling, or are reluctant, to address the implications of the cross-community nature of much of their work in relation to the broader issue of sectarian divisions in this society. This may change in response to the Government’s *Shared Future* strategy, but it seems to us to reflect both the hitherto disinterested policy environment and a perceived lack of capacity on the part of the organizations. Hence, avoidance of the community relations agenda has appeared as a rational strategy for many. The significant level of cross-community mixing that this report identifies may be one of the factors that has mitigated some of the worst effects of community conflict. However, we do not yet have the evidence to assess whether, or if so to what extent, this has, in fact, taken place. The evidence that we have assembled suggests that, thus far, the voluntary and community sector has contributed relatively little to the resolution of community conflict in Northern Ireland.

## **Voluntary Action and Community Relations in Northern Ireland**

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

*When you hear people talking about Nazism and things like that (and I know this is nothing like the extermination that went on in World War II) – the silence is very similar. The silence would deafen you.*

(Interviewee)

*I make sure, as secretary, that we DO NOT (emphasis in original) have speakers that would hold views that would annoy the members. Over the years we have had priests, clergymen, etc. as speakers and members. Two months ago we had a representative from the Society of Friends. At the February meeting, when your questionnaire was discussed, folk felt that the questions did not apply to our group and if we queried into them it could rouse discord.*

(Additional comment of questionnaire respondent)

### **Background**

This report reports on the findings of research into the rôle of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland in promoting better relations between the Protestant and Catholic communities. The research was funded by the Community Relations Council under its allocation from the second European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister in the Northern Ireland Government. The work was based on collaboration between the research team from the University of Ulster, the authors of this report, and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action. It was guided by a research reference group made up of practitioners from the voluntary and community sector which was facilitated by NICVA and which met on a total of five occasions as the research progressed.<sup>1</sup>

In this introductory chapter we set out some of the background to the research. We discuss the reasons for conducting the research, consider the context in which it was conducted and consider some key insights from the international academic

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<sup>1</sup> The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

literature on civil society in contemporary welfare states that can assist with the interpretation of the findings and help guide the development of a framework for understanding the potential and the limitations of the contribution that voluntary action can make to the future development of Northern Ireland. We will set out the core questions that we have tried to address and describe the methods we used to investigate them.

For the final thirty years of the twentieth century Northern Ireland experienced (with the exception of the former Yugoslavia) the most sustained violent conflict over national identity experienced in Europe during those years. Over 3,500 people were killed and about 48,000 injured (Hayes and McAllister, 2004). The social and economic costs have been formidable, exemplified by high levels of spatial and social segregation between Protestants and Catholics, matched by deep distrust, significant levels of poverty and inequalities in wealth and income. Measured by income distribution, Northern Ireland is among the most unequal regions in Europe (Hillyard et al, 2003).

Since the early 1990s, there has been a series of self-conscious attempts by government to support the development of, and then engage with elements within, civil society to help manage the conflict, address some of its social consequences and to help build the peace (Kearney and Williamson, 2001). Funding from regional government sources to voluntary and community organizations increased from just under £17m in 1988/89 to over £70m in 2001/02, an increase in over 400% (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004). This was apart from public expenditure to voluntary organizations providing contracted out public services, which also increased by a similar margin over the same period. In addition it is estimated that over £50m went to the voluntary and community organizations between 1994 and 1999 from mainstream European Union structural funds (Acheson et al, 2004). This extraordinary investment in voluntary action was matched by a strong growth in the numbers of organizations. There are estimated to be in the region of 4,500 organizations or associations for a population of about 1.7 million people, and over

half of these have been established since 1986 (NICVA, 1998, 2001, 2005). Together, they provide employment for almost 29,000 people, 4.4% of the workforce, and have a combined asset base of over £755m (NICVA, 2005).

Current Government policy affirms the assumed value of voluntary and community organizations to the promotion of better relations between the main ethno-religious groups in Northern Ireland.

There is a clear recognition that the voluntary and community sector has made a powerful contribution to the achievement of better relations between communities. It is important that that rôle is underscored, especially in the most disadvantaged and interface areas. It is recognised also that there is a relationship between community development and community relations. The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and the *Investing Together* report on resourcing the sector are very important developments. The development of, and investment in, social capital – particularly bridging social capital – through community development can help promote relationships within and between communities. This is particularly so in the work being taken forward across government to tackle the problems facing working class areas particularly, although not confined to, Loyalist areas.  
(OFMDFM (2005) ‘Good Relations Strategy’, para 3.4.1, p. 57)

Broadly speaking this policy has guided the government’s approach to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland since its earliest expression in the ground-breaking 1993 document, *Government Support for Voluntary Action and Community Development*. In a distinct departure from the then government policy in the rest of the United Kingdom at that time, this document recognised the value of community development as a promoter of cohesion and acknowledged a government responsibility towards it.

Since the election of the New Labour government in 1997, policy has developed in Northern Ireland in a way that more closely reflects government strategy towards the voluntary and community sector in the United Kingdom as a whole. Most recently, the work of the Task Force on Funding the Voluntary and Community Sector and the government’s response to it, together with the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy provide an update and set out a clear framework for government policy towards the sector. Both reiterate the core assumption that the sector is, or can be, a source of better relations. The current policy context is

described and discussed in greater detail below but its general approach reflects a widely held consensus in the academic literature and in government policies around the world from the mid 1990s onwards that civil society organizations are independent sources of social cohesion and that sensitive government policy frameworks can help them realize their potential in this regard.<sup>2</sup>

However, to affirm that something is the case does not necessarily make it so. In the context of Northern Ireland there is a large gap in our knowledge about the extent of communal division and fragmentation in the voluntary and community sector and the extent to which voluntary and community organizations create and participate in networks that cut across these divisions. Little is known about the significance of the sector's work for conflict management and resolution and for broader political developments. In order to assess the contribution of both area-based community organizations and thematic organizations to community relations we need to know more about the extent to which, and the ways in which, they are embedded in communal divisions. Where they do offer links and opportunities for joint working and a more shared vision of social problems, we need to know how much weight to give to this, and how significant it is for improving relations in the Northern Ireland context.

Addressing these issues is important as without evidence there may be an understandable tendency within both the sector itself and on the part of government to generalise too readily from the many examples of good practice, some of which we report on below, and to oversell the actual and potential contribution of the sector on two levels. Firstly, there may be a temptation to consider the impact of the sector on community relations as a general one whereas it may be more appropriate to think of these impacts as local and circumstantial. Doing this may help to focus on the kinds of circumstances and conditions that enhance the capacity of the sector in this regard, as well as having a more realistic view of its limitations. Secondly, it is important to guard against the view that action by community and voluntary organizations is

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed discussion of these issues can be found in the appended literature review.

somehow a key to 'solving the Northern Ireland problem', dissolving the conflict rather than managing its more violent consequences.

Previous research in this area has tended to focus on the work of specialist peace or community relations organizations. Little attention has been given to the myriad of community-based and thematic organizations that dominate the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. There is evidence that the specialist agencies did help anchor the framework for peace that allowed the 'Good Friday' agreement to be reached in 1998 (Couto, 2001; Cochrane and Dunn, 2002; Taylor, 2001). However, these gains do not seem to have been built on since that time (Guelke, 2003; Acheson and Milofsky, 2004). Despite the substantial government investment in voluntary and community organizations, community divisions have deepened significantly since 1998. Spatial segregation has accelerated and support for cross-community integration seems to be declining.

These developments suggest that at the very least a healthy scepticism might be in order in relation to the larger claims that are sometimes made for the sector's rôle in peace building. This is not to say that it has no or little impact, but we wish to suggest that it might be helpful to step back and try to be more specific about the nature of that impact and the contexts in which it is effective. This discussion is addressed in greater detail in a literature review in Appendix A.

We start from the viewpoint that the fundamental political dynamic in Northern Ireland remains a fundamental conflict over national identity between ethno-sectarian groups competing over territory and resources. Following common practice in Northern Ireland, we call these two groups Protestant and Catholic, but this does not mean we interpret the conflict as driven mainly by religion. Many people in Northern Ireland live lives that are largely segregated from people in the other main group, either living in geographically segregated spaces or, where this is not possible, adopting patterns of life that tend to avoid contact (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). The forces generating these divided and competing patterns of living

are deeply rooted in history and although they are being modified to a small degree by contemporary economic and social forces (such as economic migration from the new member states of the European Union), they are not fundamentally changed by them. Despite the 'peace process' there remains a high degree of distrust between Protestant and Catholic people (Harbison and Lo, 2004). A low level of sectarian violence remains, especially along interface communities where segregated single identity areas abut one another.

The focus of our research has been to try to assess the potential contribution of voluntary and community organizations, in particular those that are not community relations specialists, to community relations in Northern Ireland. We have addressed this task by looking at the extent to which these organizations are embedded in either the Protestant or Catholic communities, the extent that any of their activities reach across the communal divide, and by drawing out some of the factors that either facilitate or hinder work that crosses this divide. Our qualitative data gives an indication of the value placed on this by some of those involved, but we make no systematic attempt in this project to evaluate the general significance of the work of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland to improved community relations as a whole. This would be a different and much more complex task to accomplish.

The central research questions in this study thus concern the contribution (direct and indirect) of voluntary action in Northern Ireland to mediating deep communal divisions between the Protestant and Catholic communities. Specifically we were concerned to explore its actual and potential contribution to building trust between the two main competing communities in Northern Ireland. Our approach was thus informed by theory that emphasizes the capacity of organizations within civil society to encompass networks and norms that can generate such trust and thus underpin social cohesion and the democratic effectiveness of government.

There are several thousand voluntary and community organizations, most of which are neither 'community relations' specialists nor organizations, like the Orange Order or the Gaelic Athletic Association, that exist exclusively within the context of specific communal identities. At present little is known about the extent to which these organizations actively involve people from both communities and the extent to which their participation in wider networks that are built on issues that transcend communal divisions and identities, influences cross-community relations. Furthermore, little is known about the impact this might have.

We proceed in this chapter to outline briefly what is known about the general features of voluntary and community organizations in Northern Ireland and to describe the policy context in which government voluntary sector relations are conducted. Chapter One is completed by a more detailed discussion of the research questions, our research approach and methodology.

Chapter Two sets out the issues that the research was designed to address as evidenced by interviews with a number of key informants in both government and voluntary sector agencies and by narratives provided by respondents to our questionnaire. The chapter then presents evidence about the ethnic divisions that we found in the Northern Ireland voluntary sector and how these are structured around existing typological categories of industry-type, aims and methods of work. The impact on these of differing deprivation levels and other salient social statistics is presented and discussed.

Chapter Three sets out our findings about the experiences of organizations that address thematic welfare issues or which represent interest groups that cut across ethnic divisions, such as women, older people and disabled people. Chapter Four discusses community development, local politics and community relations and Chapter Five summarizes the evidence and offers some conclusions and recommendations.

## **The development of voluntary action in Northern Ireland**

The problem of defining the field of enquiry must be addressed in any research into what Kendall and Knapp have memorably referred to as a “loose and baggy monster” (1995). The extent and nature of the field of voluntary action is neither self-evident nor securely defined within clear boundaries. For the purposes of this research we follow current practice in the United Kingdom and use the definition first developed by the Office for National Statistics in 1990 and subsequently modified. A more detailed discussion can be found in *State of the Sector IV* (NICVA, 2005) but for the sake of clarity we repeat the six fundamental criteria:

1. Formality;
2. Independence;
3. Non-profit distribution;
4. Self-governance;
5. Voluntarism;
6. Public rather than private benefit.

The field potentially includes a very large range of organizations from the smallest self-help group to major multi-national organizations handling budgets of many millions of pounds annually. Our working definition includes all of these, with the exception of worshipping church congregations. Other church-run or faith-based organizations are included. The survey was addressed to a sample of all such organizations in Northern Ireland that were known to exist. The interview data was drawn from a narrower range of organizations and focused more on those working in the field of social welfare and on area-based community organizations.

Following Evers and Laville (2004) we understand the voluntary sector to occupy a ‘tension field’ at the centre of a triangular relationship between the three sources of welfare: the state, the market and the family and informal systems of support. This way of understanding helps focus attention on the complex inter-relationships between the elements of this model, rather than seeing the state, the market and the voluntary sector as occupying three sets of boxes standing next to one

another. Questions about where, and why, voluntary organizations emerge and about their subsequent 'careers' can thus only be understood with reference to the interdependent ways in which the state, the market and informal welfare interact.

A core and often noted feature of voluntary action is its diversity and particularity. Every conceivable cause and interest group might be said to be represented by at least one organization, and sometimes more. The idea that this diversity of organizations can be said to lie within a single 'sector' is a relatively recent import to Northern Ireland. It originated in management literature in the USA in the early 1970s and made its first appearance in policy discussions in the United Kingdom in the report of the Wolfenden Committee into voluntary action which was published in 1978 (Wolfenden Report, 1978).

The Wolfenden Committee's inquiry included evidence from Northern Ireland, on which its report had a separate chapter, and it was in the response of the government of the day that the metaphor of a 'sector' entered the language of the Northern Irish policy community. However, the historical evidence shows that this sectoral metaphor was imported on top of what was then, and remains, a highly bifurcated situation in which there were two parallel worlds of voluntary action, one in each of the main communities and between which there was very little intercourse (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004). Recognizably modern forms of voluntary action had emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but by 1914 there was an almost complete split along sectarian lines (Jordan, 1989). Protestant organizations were closely associated with a strong Victorian social movement based in evangelical Christianity that was active in the major industrial cities in Britain as well as in Belfast, while Catholic voluntary action was based on the social teaching of the Roman Catholic church and tended to be either parish based or institutionally embedded in the Catholic religious orders. Clergy played predominant rôles in both.

There is very little historical research into voluntary action in the period between Partition and the start of the 'Troubles' in the early 1970s. However, the evidence that is available suggests that very little changed in this picture during the first 50 years of the existence of Northern Ireland (Acheson, Harvey, Kearney and Williamson, 2004). There was a relatively low rate of start-up of new organizations, although the establishment, by the Northern Ireland Government, of the Northern Ireland Council of Social Service in 1938 was an exception. Many of the organizations that had been established in the early years of the twentieth century remained an important source of welfare services up until the 1970s. However, the onset of the 'Troubles' in the early 1970s coincided with the emergence of what has been described as the third wave in voluntary action, strongly secular, more radical and with significant anti-statist leanings. Out of this movement came organizations such as Gingerbread, Shelter and the Simon Community as well as a secularized version of area-based community development around which a secular leadership emerged in Catholic neighbourhoods, thus reducing the influence of the clergy, some of whom had been influential in initiating cooperative enterprises.

The concerns of this new secular and reformist form of voluntary action, which was largely focused on perceived failings in the welfare state, were embedded in the driving ideology of the newly conceptualized voluntary sector. They received institutional confirmation with the re-organization of the former Northern Ireland Council of Social Service in 1985 into the renamed Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). An apparent paradox emerged in which the idea of a unitary voluntary sector was promoted both by leading organizations within the sector and by government as it moved towards a more sophisticated and unitary policy towards voluntary organizations. At the same time the deep divisions between voluntary action in the Catholic and Protestant communities were seldom acknowledged or explored.

The 1980s and 1990s were both a period of very rapid growth in the numbers of organizations and of increasing formalization of relations between the voluntary

sector and government. Evidence from NICVA's series of *State of the Sector* survey and census based reports show that at least half of the estimated 4,500 organizations and associations in Northern Ireland were set up since 1985 (NICVA, 1998, 2002, 2005). But it would be wrong to infer that this growth was prompted solely by the increasing flow of funds from government and the European Union. From the mid 1980s there was a rapid rise in the rate of increase in the numbers of organizations and associations in the sector. This rise was evident among organizations that did not access the main sources of government funding at the time, which were the Youth Training Programme and the Action for Community Employment scheme (Acheson et al, 2004). Much of this increase was among self-help associations and it is likely that this trend was a local manifestation of a broad worldwide phenomenon associated with shortcomings in welfare states and government reform programmes of the day (Salamon and Anheir, 1996, 1998).

### **The Policy Context**

Developments in policy in Northern Ireland are local effects of broad changes in governance structures in developed economies. In varying degrees these countries have seen a growing complexity in structures involving government, its agents and independent actors in both the private and the not-for-profit sectors in most significant policy arenas. In addition supra national bodies, in particular the European Union, create parallel sets of policy drivers and centres of power and influence. The introduction of quasi-markets and new public management in the United Kingdom in the 1990s in particular have had a profound impact on public administration and on the rôle and expectations of voluntary and community organizations. They are now implicated in a plethora of consultative, participatory and partnership structures in a wide range of policy arenas and they are taking a much more central rôle in the delivery of public services. As a result, relations between government and voluntary and community organizations are conducted in the context of competing paradigms of efficient and effective service delivery, citizen engagement in decision-making and securing greater social cohesion.

These changes are in turn a response to the process of globalization that features mobile international capital and fluid labour markets. These wider forces and the steps taken by governments to manage the complexity of contemporary societies together impact on all three systems of welfare that we have identified as structuring the voluntary sector. States change their rôles in response to complexity and the market both retreats, and expands, as opportunities change.

Northern Ireland has been subject to these trends in ways similar to those experienced elsewhere. More specifically in the United Kingdom context the public rôle of voluntary and community organizations is being profoundly influenced by the recent focus on the voluntary sector as a key partner in the ‘modernization’ of the welfare state in the context of the so-called ‘third way’ approach to welfare adopted by the Labour government in the United Kingdom since 1997. In this respect, voluntary organizations in Northern Ireland share characteristics with similar organizations elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It explains the similarities in structure and function that are found in the voluntary sector throughout the United Kingdom (Acheson et al, 2004). The extra dimension in Northern Ireland is the rôle awarded to voluntary and community organizations in government policy towards the conflict.

These developments took place against a background of further changes in the formal relationship between the government and the voluntary and community sector that flowed from the Labour victory in the 1997 United Kingdom general election. Labour’s approach to the participation of voluntary and community organizations in governance structures was heavily influenced by the Deakin Commission Report for England (NCVO, 1996) and the parallel Kemp Report for Scotland (SCVO, 1997) (Alcock and Scott, 2002).

These reports envisaged the recognition by government through *Compacts*, an agreed set of general principles, of the positive rôle of voluntary action towards

underpinning democracy. Both reports had laid considerable emphasis on the rôle of voluntary action in securing social cohesion through the promotion of civic engagement. These themes reflected the intellectual underpinning of Labour's approach at that time in which the place of voluntary and community sector interests was interpreted in the light of the need for government to play a lead part in the fostering and renewal of civic culture (Giddens, 1998).

The approach of the Blair New Labour government has thus emphasised the need for collective action by citizens taking responsibility for addressing locally experienced social problems. This approach forms part of a wider European defence of the welfare state in the face of globalization which emphasises personal responsibility and active labour market measures and which has had the consequence of redefining the relationship between the state and voluntarism (Lewis, 2004). It has fostered the belief that partnerships between state agencies and local communities is an important way of addressing social problems by giving local communities a stake in both problem definition and in the implementation of solutions and paved the way for a style of public administration that focused on the use of partnerships addressing defined policy problems.

The arrival of the Blair government in 1997 thus saw a quite marked change in tone in policies towards voluntary and community organizations (Lewis, 1999; Kendall, 2003). The previous Conservative administration had tended to see relations between government and the voluntary sector solely in terms of what voluntary organizations could do to deliver government initiatives. After 1997, rhetoric on community governance led to a plethora of initiatives both to address social exclusion and to promote the regeneration of poor areas in Britain (Plowden, 2001). In Northern Ireland the changes were less noticeable than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In 1993 the government had published its groundbreaking *Strategy for Support for Voluntary Organizations and for Community Development* which, in a distinct departure from policy elsewhere in the United Kingdom, had recognised the contribution of community development to social cohesion. Influenced by the impact

of European Union funding programmes that became available in the 1990s, partnerships with a significant rôle for voluntary and community organizations developed some years earlier in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

After the 1997 elections and in common with the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland acquired a *Compact* between government and the voluntary and community sector, couched in very similar language to those in England, Scotland and Wales. The Northern Ireland *Compact* emerged in 1998, the same year as the ‘Good Friday’ agreement. Its subsequent endorsement of the Good Friday, or ‘Belfast’ Agreement by referendum in both Irish jurisdictions and the Northern Ireland Act gave it legislative force. The Northern Ireland Executive endorsed the *Compact* as the basis of its relationship with the sector. The key rôle of the sector and the importance of involving it in policies and programmes aimed at strengthening ‘community well-being’ were clearly stated in the Executive’s first *Programme for Government* for the three years from April 2001 and reiterated a year later in the second *Programme for Government*. The adoption of the *Compact* was accompanied by the establishment of a joint government voluntary sector forum with a coordinating and monitoring rôle in relation to the undertakings entered into in the *Compact* itself.

The *Compact* was followed up by a government strategy document, *Partners for Change: A Government Strategy for the Support of Voluntary and Community Organizations* (2003). This indicated that it was:

driven by a vision of government working with the voluntary and community sector, to build a just and inclusive society which meets the needs of the people of Northern Ireland, particularly those in areas of greatest need. This can only be achieved by developing links with a wide range of organizations in the voluntary and community sector. Government particularly seeks to engage with smaller groups who may not previously have been involved in policy making (DSD, 2003).

The *Strategy* thus reiterated the policy assumption that the government’s own objectives could only be met through partnership arrangements, an assumption

repeated in the work of the *Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector* set up by government in 2003 and which reported at the end of 2004. In its consultation document the Task Force said:

Voluntary and community action is important because it encourages active participation by individuals and groups in decisions that affect their lives, enhances the quality of life and encourages people to work together to solve common problems that are often rooted in poverty and inequality. The work of the voluntary and community sector is essential at a community and organizational level, but it also has a much wider influence particularly in encouraging civic participation in decision-making in our divided society. Many organizations within the sector have been actively engaged in the development of policies and programmes to tackle inequality, communal and social divisions and to promote peace and reconciliation. This has included working closely with Government Departments and agencies in addressing the needs of victims of the 'Troubles' and other aspects of peace building.

The work of the Task Force thus served to highlight connections between the work of voluntary and community organizations in other fields and peace and reconciliation outcomes, although what these links are have never been spelled out. The theme is developed in the government's *Good Relations Strategy* published in 2005 which, as described above, sets out a vision of the rôle to be played in the sector and suggests that work should be done to integrate peace and reconciliation outcomes across all government programmes through which voluntary and community organizations are funded.

The aspirational language of the Task Force has to be set against the reality that the bulk of government funding to voluntary and community organizations continues to be in respect of the delivery of public services, especially in the fields of health and social care. Taken together, grants and contracts awarded from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and from health and social services trusts are by far the biggest single source of government funding for the sector (NICVA, 2005). Driven by reforms of community care in the early 1990s the amount of money increased fourfold between 1992 and 1996 (Acheson et al, 2004) and has continued to rise steadily since then. It is reflected also in the steady increase (as a proportion of voluntary sector income (NICVA, 2005)) in the importance of sales of services through contracts to government agencies.

These circumstances are reflected in a narrowing in focus of the government's interest in the voluntary and community sector nationally towards the contribution the sector can make towards its modernization of public services agenda. The changing emphasis in United Kingdom national policy is reflected in the 2002 Treasury cross-cutting review of funding the sector (HM Treasury, 2002) and a report released by the National Audit Office in summer 2005 (NAO, 2005). Both stress the importance of the rôle of the sector in service delivery as the primary basis of government sector relations.

There are thus tensions in government policy towards the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland where an aspirational commitment to the sector's rôle in developing a shared society may sit awkwardly with a more practical and hard-headed focus on service delivery matters in which it is difficult to specify just how a growing rôle for the sector in delivering public services will impact on community relations issues either positively or indeed negatively. The Review of Public Administration, which is reshaping the structures of government in Northern Ireland profoundly and, in particular, reconfiguring the rôle of local councils, and the infrastructure of health and social service bodies, will in addition have an unpredictable effect on the capacity and ability of voluntary and community organizations to live up to the aspirations of the Task Force and *Shared Future* agenda.

### **Research questions and Methodology**

The research comprised preliminary interviews and two main stages. Six scoping interviews were carried out with leading 'experts' in civil society and community relations in Northern Ireland, chosen from government agencies and major voluntary organizations. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed in full and subjected to a manual content analysis. They were designed to elicit a range of views about perceptions of the central issues and were used to help design the

research instruments. These comprised a two stage design. The first part was a postal questionnaire sent to a sample of 535 organizations. The sampling frame utilized an earlier survey into volunteer management committees in which a questionnaire had been sent to the known population of voluntary and community associations in Northern Ireland (NIVDA, 2003). Our sampling frame comprised all the respondents to this survey, already validated as representative of the population as a whole (NIVDA, 2003). A total of 358 responses was achieved, a response rate of 67%. Of these, 135 (37.7% of respondents) supplied additional written comments. These were analysed using *NVivo* qualitative data analysis software.

### Specification of Case Study Areas

<i>Case Study Area</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
<b>A</b>	Mainly Protestant urban area; high levels of deprivation; rapidly increasing Catholic population.
<b>B</b>	Urban area with high levels of deprivation; many interfaces between a patchwork of Protestant or Catholic single identity enclaves.
<b>C</b>	Mainly Protestant county town; low wage economy; district council under Unionist control.
<b>D</b>	Urban area with close to 100% Catholic population; high levels of deprivation.
<b>E</b>	Mainly Catholic town; longstanding responsibility-sharing in district council.
<b>F</b>	Urban community with Protestant and Catholic enclaves and at least one mixed housing area; high levels of deprivation; old working class community threatened by gentrification and commercial development.

The second stage of the design comprised six area case studies. The areas covered two urban areas in each of (London)Derry and Belfast and two other towns and their immediate rural hinterlands, one in the east of Northern Ireland with a majority Protestant population and one in the west, with a majority Catholic population. In each area, semi-structured interviews were carried out with leaders (either paid staff or chair people of management committees) of between six and eight organizations, varying in type from large service providing or social economy organizations to small community-based self-help organizations. In each area interviews were also conducted with officials in local government offices. In all, 38 interviews were completed. Each lasted between one hour and one hour and a half. Most interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Two interviews comprised guided group discussions. These were recorded by notes as were two others, one at the request of the interviewee and the other as a result of technical failure of the recording equipment. The data was analysed using *NVivo* data analysis software.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Fault Lines of Voluntary Action in Northern Ireland**

In this chapter we present evidence from the survey that shows the ways in which the voluntary and community sector is structured in relation to the main ethnic divisions in Northern Ireland, based on evidence from the survey data about how organizations and associations within the voluntary and community sector seek to address the issues. We find that the sector remains substantially structured along communal lines, although organizations that are exclusively either Protestant or Catholic in their formation are in a minority. The sector appears to be an arena of life in Northern Ireland where there is a great deal of contact between the two groups, but it is not clear how significant this is. We summarise comments supplied by many of the respondents to the survey to illustrate some of the strategies organizations adopt to address the issues of communal divisions in their work.

We preface this evidence with an overview of the issues as identified by the six ‘expert’ witnesses we interviewed at the start of the project. The interviewees were selected to represent a range of views on the core issues addressed in this research and to provide perspectives from within government, from practitioners within the voluntary and community sector and from political and policy commentators.

The complexity of the relationship between civic action, intercommunal contact and the conflict in Northern Ireland is emphasized in their comments. There was recognition that there is a strong tendency for civic associations of all kinds to be structured along ethno/religious lines. One interviewee (Interviewee ‘A’<sup>3</sup>) suggested that the default position in Northern Ireland was avoidance and separate development and that in effect there was a ‘huge societal effort’ to diluting cross-community initiatives. It was just too hard – “like pushing water up a hill”.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviewed, 13/12/04

Other interviewees reinforced this assessment. Interviewee ‘B’<sup>4</sup> noted that the organization for which he worked had emerged in the early 1990s as strongly male and Catholic in identity and had only been able to address this by a focused and self-conscious effort that had taken years of work. Reflecting on the lack of a shared sense of civic identity in Northern Ireland, Interviewee ‘C’<sup>5</sup> noted that, in effect, the word ‘community’ means ‘side’. Interviewee ‘D’<sup>6</sup> asserted:

...a great many other people who define themselves as community workers are not, they are party political workers – not even so much workers as party political pets. That’s disastrous. ...on the other side of that there are people who don't see any relationship between this work and politics. That's nearly as bad. So there are those two: the ones who continue to sort of bark, as it were, according to the pattern of barking that's laid out to them; and the others who whimper.

Underpinning this assessment was an appreciation of the fact that voluntary action tends to be structured in quite different ways in the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Interviewee ‘A’ emphasized the structural differences that are internal to each community:

There's a Catholic model of community development, which is the parish taking responsibility in the absence of what the state should subscribe to. In the 1990s, Sinn Fein and Republicanism moved into that space in what is called community development. The Protestant community has got pockets of that. It strikes me that the history of Protestantism was that the government took responsibility for the whole and individuals or small groups took responsibility for the parts. That was emphasised by the fact that there wasn't a single structure – short of the Orange Order, I suppose, or the Unionist party – underneath the state, therefore Protestant voluntarism worked through taking responsibility for specific issues within the institution it did have responsibility for, like the church... There is a movement on the Protestant side to kind of imitate the Catholic, and then at the same time there is rejection of that, because they can't make it work. And then there's the problem in terms of linking those two together – joint single identity projects aren't easy to work. But structures are actually very different. Furthermore, single policies in Northern Ireland don't have the same impact, depending upon what structures they have to work through.

The impact of these structural differences was noted by interviewee ‘E’<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewed, 10/12/04

<sup>5</sup> Interviewed 24/01/05

<sup>6</sup> Interviewed 15/12/04

<sup>7</sup> Interviewed: 05/01/05

The outcome of that has been very different with Catholic areas being much stronger, ironically, probably because they have a longer history of not depending on the state. If you look in Belfast, at present Protestant working class areas, they're all pretty grim areas that, I think, reflect much more the dynamics of socially excluded areas in England, Scotland and Wales. It's the Catholic areas that are unusual in how effective they are in, dare I say it, managing poverty. They're much more integrated.

There was a strongly held view that the influx of state and European funding into the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland had in practice done little to moderate the differences between the two communities. Interviewees noted a “lack of willingness” in government to prioritize reconciliation in policy. Government had followed “the path of least resistance to go just along the communal ground” (Interviewee ‘C’). Interviewee ‘E’ went so far as to assert that public money had effectively funded separate development over the past 25 years, and had been given to community development organizations “almost as a way of assuaging government guilt”. As a consequence there was evidence that government funding structures actually inhibited developments even where there was a demand among community organizations to work inter-communally.<sup>8</sup>

There was thus awareness that the first European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation that ran from 1994 until 2000, represented a wasted opportunity to pin down the relationship between community development and inter-communal relationships.<sup>9</sup> The lack of a specific focus meant that it was too easy to avoid the issue. According to interviewee ‘A’:

Peace I and II came in with the notion that Northern Ireland should move towards reconciliation, based on some kind of shared future. Now people don't like that step – it's too hard. They do like the other bit that the shared future should be rooted in inclusion, which basically means it should have a stake for all and prosperity, which means it has to be worth having a stake in. They are willing to do that and if you don't watch out, there's loads of people doing prosperity work; loads of people doing inclusion work, and everybody has missed the main point of the programme... When Peace II is extended, that's actually what is

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<sup>8</sup> Interviewee ‘F’, interviewed 15/12/04

<sup>9</sup> The first EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation was approved at the Berlin Summit in 1994 and channelled 350m ECUs into Northern Ireland between 1994 and 2000 in addition to the Structural Funds. Just under 60% of this was allocated to voluntary and community organizations, mostly around broadly conceived programmes of social inclusion. A perceived weakness of focus on addressing inter-communal relationships in this Programme was addressed by the much tighter criteria applied by its successor Programme ‘Peace II’, running from 2000 to 2006.

going to happen. This is going to get knocked out. This inclusion is going to get knocked out, prosperity is going to get knocked out and all that is going to be left is inter-communal relations. Everybody outside Northern Ireland looks at Northern Ireland and says this is the key bit to our future. Everybody inside Northern Ireland has spent their entire political life avoiding that consequence.

Policy frameworks that ignored communal differences, no matter how worthwhile on their own terms, could also feed separate development by default. Interviewee 'A' highlighted this as a problem and noted that the current enthusiasm for partnerships can allow people to choose separate development and take the money, while offering no challenge mechanism. If participation is the primary virtue rather than solidarity, then segregation can be rewarded.

One result of what appeared to some as long-term government acquiescence in separate development was that much of the voluntary sector appeared ill-equipped for the challenge presented by the need to self-consciously and reflexively engage with community relations issues. Many ignored the problem. There was a "sea of indifference" (Interviewee 'A'). According to Interviewee 'E', new leadership was needed among voluntary and community organizations:

My personal view is that the sectarian nature of our society is the biggest challenge now. Hopefully, the sector will play a key rôle in both highlighting the problem and developing some of the solutions. I think there's a big issue there for the sector to turn all that round, and I think it will take time for new people to emerge who have the right kind of focus.

There was a general awareness, however, that despite the difficulties there was evidence of effective inter-community networking generated from local community-based organizations as the following three remarks by three of the interviewees indicate.

A lot of stuff goes on below the kind of media waterline and huge amount of really positive stuff just never gets reported. I think there's quite a lot that's going on that is not recognised and reported that is positive. So I think there are plenty of people out there in the voluntary sector who do want to see things change.

There is a cartel of people in the voluntary and community sector who are, I think, committed to social change and, therefore, the broader *raison d'être* for the voluntary community sector in our free society has been about social change and challenge.

You'll find people who have done more and more interesting projects in the voluntary sector than in any of the other sectors because they're committed and they do it... it's a question of there are specific opportunities in the voluntary sector. Around personal responsibility, around small-scale action, around real quality of life change, around risks which can be taken by other people, around reaching into communities which can't be done by the state or by anybody else, where you can get fairly good projects and where we need to work.

In particular there was a recognition that at the level of élites within the voluntary and community sector there was a high degree of inter-community networking that had now become pervasive and “normal”. This had helped create a leadership that had shared values and a shared recognition of the issues.

There was a need to emphasize the positive, according to interviewee ‘B’.

What we've tended to do is focus on separation... but what you learn out of focusing on separation is quite limited because you're really looking at hopelessness and fracture. But what you could learn and, I think, need to address, is the audit of what is holding the linkages, however tenuous.

A crucial task, he believed, was to construct and sustain institutional spaces where people were willing and able to meet on an inter-community basis. He felt that there was a lack of analysis of where that shared space was in Northern Ireland and insufficient understanding of what held what linkages there were together.

### **The Survey Findings**

This section of the chapter describes the main findings from the survey. Details of the survey methodology were set out in Chapter One and the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B. The aims and objectives of the survey were: to establish reliable baseline data on the extent to which voluntary and community organizations were embedded in the two main communities in Northern Ireland together with an assessment from within the sector on the extent to which this has been changing. Second, to identify levers and barriers to change, both external and internal to the organizations themselves and, third, to identify the extent to which the

work of organizations provided opportunities for cross-community mixing together with the levels of anxiety that surround that.

### The community embeddedness of voluntary and community organizations

Respondents were asked to identify the numbers of their management committees or boards of directors who were Protestant, Catholic or neither. Management committee or board membership was chosen as the main measure of the extent to which organizations were 'located' in either of the two main communities in Northern Ireland as we judged that this would be the most accurate reflection available of the organizations' social background.<sup>10</sup> The qualitative data reported in later chapters suggests that management committee make-up is more resistant to change than other aspects of organizational life.

The summary results are set out in Table One:

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<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, we refer to Protestant and Catholic organizations for the sake of brevity. As noted earlier we use these terms, as is conventionally done in Northern Ireland, as convenient indication of 'Irish' or 'British' ethnicity and community background. It is important to bear in mind that we are referring to the communal affiliations of their management committee or board members only and the extent to which they are predominantly from one or the other main community. As the evidence we present shows, this measure should not be taken to refer to all aspects of organizational life.

**Table One**

**Communal affiliation of Northern Ireland Voluntary Sector Management Committees**

<b>Communal affiliation of management committee members</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid per cent</b>
<b>Wholly Catholic</b>	40	13.1
<b>Mainly Catholic</b>	69	22.5
<b>Mixed</b>	80	26.1
<b>Mainly Protestant</b>	75	24.5
<b>Wholly Protestant</b>	42	13.7
<b>Total valid respondents</b>	306	100
<b>Missing</b>	50	
<b>Total</b>	356	

Note: wholly Catholic=100%, Mainly Catholic = Catholic Protestant ratio > 2:1, Mixed = Protestant Catholic ratio < 2:1, Mainly Protestant = Protestant Catholic ratio > 2:1, Wholly Protestant =100% Protestant.

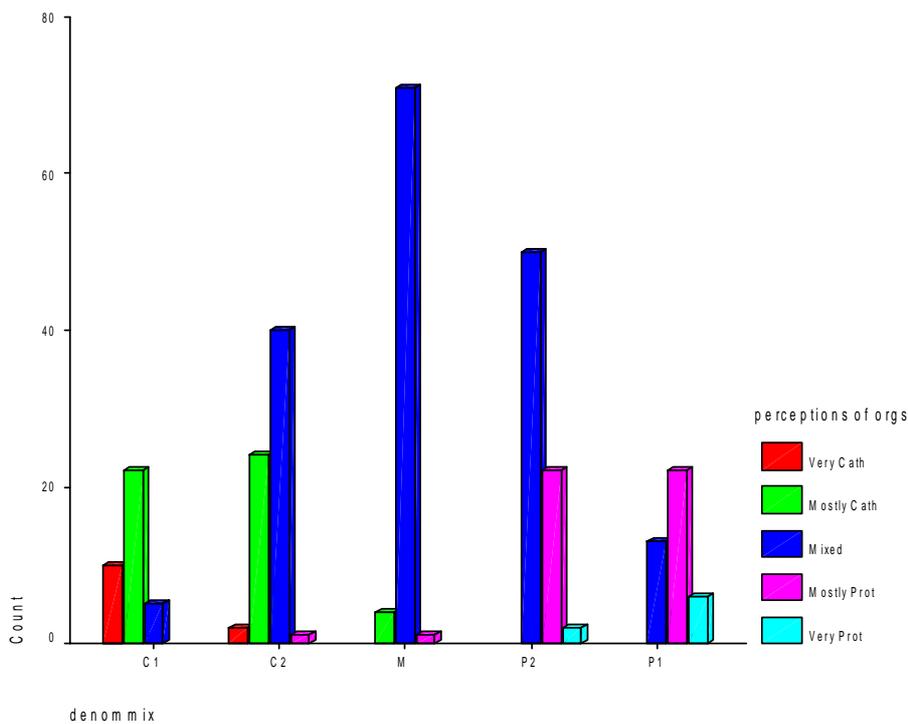
The table shows that only just over one quarter (26.1%) of the valid responses reported mixed management committees in that there were less than twice as many of their members either Protestant or Catholic. A similar proportion (26.8 %) was either wholly Catholic or wholly Protestant. The remaining organizations were either mostly Protestant or mostly Catholic. This evidence shows that the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland remains embedded to a significant extent in each of the two main communities, in that 73.9% of organizations have committees that are either wholly or mainly from one community or the other. But this finding needs to be qualified by noting that there is also evidence of cross-community

collective work even if in most cases this is within organizations that lean heavily in one direction or the other. It is notable that the proportions of organizations that are either wholly Catholic or wholly Protestant are very similar as indeed are those that are mostly either one or the other.

To what extent do organizations feel they have moved away from their background? Most (70.9%) said there had not been any move away from their background. There were no significant differences between Catholic and Protestant organizations in this respect. Where there had been movement, it was focused on the organizations with more mixed management committees. Organizations that were wholly Catholic or Protestant in this regard were the least likely to report any such movement. Of those that felt they had moved away from their background, almost half (46.3%) gave the reason as being involved in joint projects; 24.1% said there had been changes in respect to staff, volunteers or their committees and a further 25.9% reported a change in their beneficiary profile.

Respondents were asked how they thought their organizations would be perceived by members of the public; whether they were very or mostly Catholic, mixed, or very or mostly Protestant. Figure One shows that while organizations with mixed management committees were clear that they were perceived as being mixed, those that were either mostly Protestant or mostly Catholic felt that they were perceived as being more mixed than the make-up of their management committees would suggest. Furthermore, organizations whose management committees were either wholly Protestant or wholly Catholic were likely to say that they were less exclusive than the make-up of their committees would suggest. Organizations with wholly Protestant committees were more likely to think they would be perceived as mixed than were organizations with wholly Catholic committees.

**Figure One**  
**Estimation of public perceptions of organizations by make-up of management committees**



Overall, this evidence shows that the Northern Ireland voluntary and community sector remains substantially structured along communal lines, although only a minority of organizations is either wholly Protestant or Catholic. There has been little overall movement away from original community backgrounds and where there has, the commonest reason given has been an involvement in joint projects. There is a tendency for organizations to believe that they are more mixed than the membership of their management committees would suggest.

### Drivers for change

Survey respondents were asked if they felt under any external pressure for change or whether they could identify champions for change within their organizations. The summary results are reported in Tables Two and Three.

**Table Two**  
**Reports of pressure to work in a more cross-community way**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid per cent</b>
<b>Experienced pressure</b>	65	19.3
<b>Experienced no pressure</b>	272	80.7
<b>Total valid responses</b>	337	100
<b>Missing</b>	19	
<b>Total</b>	356	

**Table Three**  
**Internal champions for change**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid per cent</b>
<b>Internal champions</b>	190	57.8
<b>No internal champions</b>	139	42.2
<b>Total valid responses</b>	329	100
<b>Missing</b>	27	
<b>Total</b>	356	

These results show that more than 80% of organizations responding to the question reported experiencing no external pressure to work in a more cross-

community way. There were differences between Protestant and Catholic organizations. Those that were wholly Catholic were the most likely to report external pressure for change, and those that were mostly Catholic, the least. Both mostly and wholly Protestant organizations were very close to the average figure of 80.7%. These results suggest that wholly Catholic organizations may be more sensitive to this issue than are Protestant organizations, but it is very hard to interpret the results in the light of the much lower sense of pressure among mostly Catholic organizations. Very few organizations (n=50, 14%) indicated where the pressure came from. Those that did suggested funders as the most likely source (66%).

There was more evidence of internal promoters, where 57.8% of respondents reported that there were people within their organizations who promoted or ‘pushed’ for change. This disparity with the results for external pressure suggests the possibility that there is a lack of external incentives for organizations to work in a more cross-community way, but that in the majority of organizations the presence of champions might indicate that they could do more if they were given more direct incentives.

#### Barriers to cross-community working

The generally positive views expressed about cross-community contact among respondents were also reflected in the low levels of responses to questions about barriers or threats. Just 17.7% of respondents (n=356) identified any obstacles to engaging in cross-community initiatives. Of those that did, the commonest obstacle identified was a general reluctance or suspicion, followed by funding, lack of neutral venues and interface violence. Paramilitary threats were the least mentioned obstacle. Only 3.4% of respondents felt that engaging in community relations activities might be harmful to their other work and of the rest 14% felt it might be a potential threat. In contrast to the 57.8% of respondents who identified people in their organizations who promoted cross-community work, only 7.7% were able to identify people in their organizations who opposed it.

### Readiness to address the issue of greater cross-community working

A large majority of organizations (71.1%) said that the question of Protestants and Catholics working together did not come up in discussions about organizations' work, notwithstanding the reported presence of internal champions. The majority of those that did discuss the issue said it was not a contentious issue for them. However, a much larger proportion of organizations reported addressing equality of access to services. 60.1% of respondents reported having done so and, for the large majority of these (78.1%), it was not at all divisive. These results suggest that the broad issue of Protestant / Catholic relations is most readily addressed within the context of the service functions of organizations, but that there is a resistance to confronting the issue in more general contexts.

There were differences between the responses of the Protestant and the Catholic organizations to these questions. Taking together, and comparing organizations that are wholly and mostly Catholic with those that are wholly and mostly Protestant, it is evident that the Protestant organizations are much less likely to engage with issues to do with cross-community working.<sup>11</sup> The summary results are set out in Table Four. They show that a notably higher proportion of the all-Catholic organizations are both willing to discuss working together in general and to address the issue of equality of access to services than is the case for the all-Protestant group of organizations.

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<sup>11</sup> The two questions asked were: 'Does the question of Protestants and Catholics working together in your organization ever come up in your discussions of your organizations' work?' And: 'Do people in your organization ever discuss how to make the services you offer equally available to people in the Protestant and Catholic communities?'

**Table Four**  
**Proportion of organizations indicating a willingness to engage in cross-community discussion by Catholic and Protestant**

	<b>Catholics and Protestants working together: % saying ‘yes’</b>	<b>Equal access to services for Catholics and Protestants: % saying ‘yes’</b>
<b>All Catholic organizations</b>	41.5	71.4
<b>All Protestant organizations</b>	25.4	49.1
<b>All organizations</b>	33.2	60.0

Significance levels:                      chi sq=6.39, df(1), p < 0.05      chi sq=11.17, df(1), p< 0.01

The composition of management committees thus appears to have a bearing on the openness of organizations to address directly the relationship between communal divisions and their work. From the evidence presented the reasons are hard to deduce as the observed relationship is likely to be affected by other factors, for example, the type of organization or other defining features of the management committee members. It is also important to stress that this is not a causal relationship. Although organizations relatively more resistant to addressing the issues are predominantly Protestant, this is not to say that the latter feature causes the former feature.

Extent and type of cross-community contact in organizations’ work

Most respondents indicated that the activities of their organizations provided opportunities for people from the two main communities to do things together and cooperate on common tasks. This was reflected in the 72.2% of all respondents who thought that the activities of their organizations had community relations spin-offs and the 77% who thought their organizations undertook community relations work indirectly, although when asked a more specific question about community relations

focused work, rather fewer responded positively. There were no significant differences in the responses of Protestant and Catholic organizations. The summary results are set out in Table Five.

**Table Five**  
**Organizations providing cross-community opportunities: Numbers answering ‘yes’**

	Numbers	Valid percentage
<b>Opportunities to do things together</b>	325	96.2
<b>Opportunities to cooperate on common tasks</b>	304	93
<b>Encouragement to work on cross-community issues</b>	202	65

These results confirm that the voluntary and community sector is an important site for cross-community mixing. In particular the fact that 65% of respondents who thought their work encouraged people from the two main communities to work on community relations focused projects might be considered an encouragingly high proportion even if, in the light of the evidence already set out about the reluctance of organizations to discuss the issues internally, it is hard to work out what respondents had in mind in completing this section of the questionnaire. There may be a tendency to interpret activity that involves some degree of cross-community contact as having a community relations aspect; in retrospect it might have been worthwhile to ask respondents what they meant by the term ‘community relations’ in this context. But at a general level at least, there is evidence that the sector itself feels its work has community relations impacts.

In addition our findings provided evidence that some single identity committees meet regularly with other organizations on a formal basis, although most do not. The numbers were small in each case, but almost one third (32.4%) of wholly

Catholic organizations and 30% of wholly Protestant reported that they meet with other organizations on this basis.

One measure of the impact of cross-community mixing is the extent to which friendships develop as a result. Overall, just under two thirds of all respondents (65.7%) said that friendships had developed as a result of the activities of their organizations. Examples were given by 35% of respondents, the commonest being friendships and socializing (20.5%), but opportunities provided by working together on joint projects were cited by a further 10% of respondents. A reliable breakdown of the results by the denominational mix of management committees was not possible as the numbers in the individual cells were too small.

The relatively high levels of mixing within organizational contexts were accompanied by quite low levels of anxiety about meeting members of organizations from ‘the other community’. Respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “People in my organization would feel anxious about mixing with people in the other community”. The summary results are given in Table Six:

**Table Six**  
**People in my organization would feel anxious about mixing with people in the other community**

	Frequency	Valid percent
<b>Strongly agree</b>	10	3.0
<b>Agree</b>	20	6.1
<b>Don’t know</b>	19	5.8
<b>Disagree</b>	106	32.1
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	175	53.0
<b>Total valid responses</b>	330	100
<b>Missing</b>	26	

<b>Total</b>	356	
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There was a general disagreement with the statement. Over 85% of those who responded either disagreed or strongly disagreed. But there remains a notable minority (9.1%) that either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. No relationship was found with the community background of the respondents.

Summary of emerging evidence

In summary, the survey results show that to a significant extent voluntary and community organizations in Northern Ireland remain structured along communal lines. More than three quarters of organizations have management committees that are wholly, or mostly, either Protestant or Catholic in background. Few of them report having moved away from that background although among those that did so, there appears to have been an increase in joint work on projects and a greater mixing among beneficiaries.

Organizations reported having experienced little external pressure to change towards greater cross-community engagement and there appears to be a general resistance to addressing the issue in organizational life. However, there would appear to be a considerable degree of cross-community contact in work-related areas and a readiness to believe that this contact has a community relations dimension in that most organizations assert that their work has indirect community relations spin-offs. Many organizations report cross-community friendships emerging from their work. Few organizations report barriers to change and there are low levels of anxiety and sense of threat reported.

A willingness to put a community relations gloss on their work in the context of responding to a questionnaire on the topic is suggested by the greater numbers who identified an internal champion of cross-community work than of those who reported discussing within their organizations the topic of Protestants and Catholics working

together. The findings suggest that there is a general openness to working across the communal divide, but less willingness to address sectarian issues in the workplace. These are quite subtle distinctions, but they were nevertheless evident in the additional free-text comments that respondents provided on the back of the questionnaires. It is to the analysis of these that we now turn.

### **Survey respondents' comments**

The survey respondents were invited to submit their comments on the issues raised by the questionnaire on the back of the questionnaire document. 135 replied, representing 37.7% of respondents. The comments were amalgamated into a single file and analyzed using *NVivo* data analysis software.

In interpreting the data it is important to bear in mind that the respondents may have been using the opportunity to comment for a number of reasons including, among others, the need to explain themselves personally, to justify their organization's stance where they might have thought they were falling short of a perceived ideal, to state how well their organizations are doing, or to deny the relevance of the issues to their work. Thus the responses may represent a measure of how the respondents felt about being confronted with the questionnaire as much as being a measure of organizational performance on community relations issues. The data should, therefore, be treated in this light.

We discuss the evidence with reference to two broad themes. First, we consider the range of types of response under three headings: the *deniers*; the *complacent*, and the *engaged*. Second, we discuss the kinds of barriers that respondents identified. This section concludes with a brief assessment of what is needed to change things, based on this evidence.

### Types of response

It was apparent that responses tended to fall into one of three categories although these should not be considered mutually exclusive and respondents were by no means internally consistent. First there was a group of respondents that *denied* that the subject of the questionnaire was at all relevant to their work. The tone of their responses tended to be defensive. As a typical example one wrote:

A lot of this is pointless. Our organization wants to serve visual handicap of (area). We have about 150 recipients of our tapes and I would have no idea of the religious breakdown amongst them. I do know that this is mixed and, seeing the area we serve, there is probably a preponderance of Protestants, but we would never ask a person's religion.

Respondents in this category tended to work with organizations that addressed the perceived needs of a group of people with a named physical impairment or medical condition. Most are small and reliant on volunteers, although this was not always the case (as the following response from an organization with professional staff as well as an extensive network of volunteers attests):

Our society and its members (whether they be a committee member or a member living with (name of medical condition)) are not interested in the religion of a fellow member – (the condition) and its problems are their main concerns. The members want to support each other and their carers, regardless of the stage their (condition) is at or whether they be mobile or not.

The concern here is with asserting the primacy of the medical condition as the focus of the organization's activities. There appears to be an assumption that any attempt to address topics such as the cross-community impact of the work would pose a threat. It may simply be easier to work on the assumption that because the condition can affect anybody, the organization's neutrality and accessibility is self-evident.

In this, these respondents shared a position adopted by the largest of the three categories, those that tended to assert that their work was cross-community, but who offered no evidence to support this statement. Some responses appeared more thoughtful than others but, in general, the assumption tended to be made on the basis of the non-communal focus of the organizations' purposes. There thus appeared to be a tendency among respondents from thematic or issue based organizations that cut

across communal divisions to assume that this meant that their work was cross-community in fact.

Examples of this attitude include the following:

We are a needs led organization and respond to all women and children who approach us for help. Our awareness raising and training is extended to all the community.

\* \* \*

(Name of organization) is an organization for disabled people. Our groups are cross-community. The common interest is activities and groups to counter isolation being stronger than the pull of political mumbo jumbo! We have an open door policy. All sides of the community are welcome.

\* \* \*

Religion has never been a problem with our organization. We have no difficulty mixing with sections of the other community and at present we have a mixed workforce.

Other respondents expressed awareness that the work of their organizations was affected by communal divisions even if they were, in intention, open to all who might feel a need for that organization's services. One respondent noted:

We have a religious imbalance in our community so there are, therefore, more of one section than the other who use our services. However, we do seek to include people from all sections and generally this is successful as we are recognised as being a neutral venue.

Another noted that although their service was open to all, its cross-community impact had been adversely affected by the establishment of a rival service in a church-based institution nearby.

It was easy, therefore, for me when I went to the church committee about starting a playgroup, to say I wanted it for the benefit of the whole community. We would have had more Catholic families at the beginning, before new playgroups and nursery units became available and some went to ones attached to the school their children would later attend.

In this case, voluntary sector pre-school provision, although located in a church facility drew cross-community support, but the perception was that this had been undermined by the opening of pre-school provision in a nearby grant maintained primary school.

Other respondents noted that periods of heightened tension could threaten cross-community interaction in their organization's work.

There are no difficulties around the question of people mixing and meeting, of respecting each other's cultures and traditions, of understanding the emotional attachment to such cultural expressions. Admittedly, at times of tension, eg. Drumcree, there are noticeable uncomfortable feelings amongst all sections.

Respondents in these two categories tended to deal with the issue of sectarianism or communal division through strategies of avoidance. This was usually expressed through a determination *not to know*, based on the view that if the issue being addressed reached across the community divide, then so too would those who had become involved, either as volunteers or service users. For example:

Religion and politics is not a subject this organization is obliged to raise. That fact is also written into our constitution. Application forms do not ask, directly or indirectly, a person's religion or political preferences. In theory we do not know nor care. Everyone is welcome.

This approach is based upon a welfare ideology built around the concept of individual need that is indivisible on the basis of religious or communal affiliation. It can, as in the following example, enable organizations to see their mission or rôle as standing in opposition to other ways of categorising people. The concept of the 'welfare of the individual', as it were, trumps other concerns.

We work with families and individuals and, while recognising that there are potential areas of contention, our focus is not on religious or community division, it is on the welfare of the individual.

The strategies referred to by the respondents to deal with this issue varied. Some, as in the example above, had adopted a constitution that precluded addressing “religion and politics” in the manner described. It was one of a number of strategies to avoid the issue of sectarian division that were reported. Sometimes this involved a proactive stance being taken by a programme organizer to avoid potentially contentious issues.

It would be wrong to always view these strategies in a negative light. Some respondents, working in deeply divided communities where their organizations were providing a service that reached into both ethnic groups considered, that it was better to keep quiet in order to get on with the work.

We don't highlight the community involvement in which we are involved – if we did I feel it would have an adverse effect on the impacts we have. Our motto is “Making the Community Mobile”. [Our] Mission Statement [name of organization] will target transport needs and transport poverty through the delivery of safe, accessible and affordable transport services which will combat the social exclusion suffered by the most disadvantaged in our area of benefit”.

The implication of this view, namely that beneficial social impact and a greater openness about the nature of the divided society that an organization was working in are mutually exclusive, will become an important central theme of this report. It was reflected in the view that by deliberately avoiding the issue, organizations were opening up a civic space in which people from widely differing political and religious backgrounds could meet and share concerns. Avoidance from this perspective was seen as a virtue.

Our work is a reversal of active community relations. By treating disability inclusively we bypass sectarian Catholic / Protestant issues. This is why Peace funding is not accessible to our group because we deliberately do not record Catholic / Protestant at our events. However, by focusing on issues affecting families of disabled children, we include everyone who wants to be included, no matter what their religion. In a recent housing campaign we engaged all 18 Northern Ireland MPs in support of this issue, and with parents, community and voluntary groups, researchers, housing officials and occupational therapists, we managed to change policy. Policy at that time seemed to be impossible to change. Religion did not feature and I feel this is the way forward.

In this instance the respondent pointed to positive gains as a result of this strategy whereby a cross-community alliance had been constructed to achieve a

campaigning goal. It was more common to express the benefits of avoidance more modestly, although in the following example there is awareness that external political events can impose constraints on what people feel able to do.

I find it better not to force the pace too much and the group concentrates on environmental work, which will benefit both communities and provide space to meet. Within the group only a small number would oppose contact. Most are remarkably open and have gained in confidence over the past few years. They have very definitely become much more open to working together, though recent political events will not help the process. The group has about 18 steady members and a steering committee of eight people.

In the eyes of many, it would seem that there is a perception of a direct pay-off between effectiveness in achieving a mission that cut across communal divisions and in opening up an issue perceived as a threat. This reflects, we believe, a widely held view within the voluntary and community sector that, in turn, reflects an important strategy of general conflict management in Northern Ireland as a whole whereby everyday life is conducted on the principle that certain topics should never be alluded to except among close friends or within families and certainly never with strangers. As the respondents quoted here make clear, the fear of the consequences of breaching this etiquette keeps certain matters off the agenda.

In the face of such constraints, it was, however, noticeable how many of the respondents showed a clear and reflexive view of the impact of divisions on their organizations' work and a determination to engage directly with its implications. Sometimes this involved self-conscious monitoring of cross-community availability of services and/or their impact. As one respondent put it:

The (name of) electoral ward is represented as approximately 75% Protestant and 25% Catholic. Our staff mix, beneficiaries mix would reflect this also. We are always actively considering if opportunities for services, etc. are equal and equitable.

Sometimes there was a self-conscious strategy of service expansion from a base within one community into the other main community in ways that ensured that services could be accessed equitably.

Our advice services operate a hospital based 5-day service, outreach clinics and a home visit service for everyone, regardless of background. Many people from diverse backgrounds also use our advice office. Our (name of project) provides its service openly and equitably to all communities throughout (name of area). Of the beneficiaries of the service we have approximately 20% from the other main community.<sup>12</sup> In the last 18 months we rented premises in both (names of two interface communities) to operate this project across that interface area.

Other respondents indicated that their organizations had a cross-community commitment written into their constitutions. Most of these had a specific community relations brief in their work.

[Name of organization] has two main foci – promoting good relations and environmental awareness. All of our activities are guided by strong principles of equality and we make a point of working not just with Catholics and Protestants, but with members of ethnic minorities; people with physical and learning disabilities; people with mental health problems; victims of the conflict; prisoners and ex-prisoners and people of all ages.

However, not all did.

Community relations is written into the aims and objectives of our local community organization which ensures that even when relationships fluctuate and become difficult we are committed to continue working to build links and develop relationships, based on tackling common needs, with groups and individuals across our community divide.

The second quotation is the only example, among our respondents, of an area-based community organization that has a self-conscious constitution and policy embracing the need for better community relations in order to fulfill its main mission towards the (single identity) community in which it is based. There were others who saw the need and welcomed opportunities to progress better community relations in their localities, but this was more commonly expressed on pragmatic grounds. For the community organization with the constitutional commitment, however, the benefits of this approach were clear in that it committed the organization even in difficult times.

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<sup>12</sup> This closely reflects the demographic balance in the area that this organization serves.

Although care must be taken in interpreting this finding as this respondent may simply have been the only one to have chosen to share this constitutional commitment, the evidence does suggest that this approach is rare and is much less common than its exact antithesis, discussed above, of constitutionally banning community relations issues.

### Barriers

Many of the respondents provided reasons why it was difficult for their organizations to develop cross-community work. In interpreting the data, it is important to remember that respondents were not specifically asked about barriers. The responses on this issue were from those who chose to comment. The willingness to do so may reflect a perception among respondents that they needed to provide a rationale for the policy and practices adopted by their organizations.

However, their comments are consistent with the findings from the interviews conducted in the six case studies undertaken at the beginning of the project and there is therefore no reason to think that respondents were doing other than reporting some of their genuine concerns. Three kinds of barriers were identified: those that were internal to the organizations themselves; those that were a feature of the communities in which the organizations operated; and those that were a feature of the broader political or administrative environment.

It should not be surprising that in a context where respondents might have felt they were laying themselves open to judgement, that very few mentioned difficulties within their organizations as a barrier, although one did mention a lack of capacity in a volunteer management committee, an issue that might be considered self-evident and one that would merit further investigation.

Respondents were more willing to mention external barriers. One important theme in this respect, mentioned by several respondents, concerned difficulties in

overcoming and addressing a sectarian background in their organizations' histories. Organizations that had emerged from either one or the other community found it challenging to change, often for understandable reasons.

Although the community mix of the regional committee appears to be mainly Protestant, this simply reflects an historical situation where the volunteers seem to come from that background. Volunteers on the regional committee seem to go on for ever, so there is little in the way of a turnover. The criteria for service on the regional committee are task related and perceived experience and competence is the paramount requirement. To the best of my knowledge religious background has not really come up as an issue in the local groups as they are always short of volunteers and are glad to take anyone they can get without being restrictive. It may well be that the community mix in the local groups is more representative of the areas in which they operate.

The problem was felt particularly among thematic organizations that had emerged from the Protestant community and were addressing particular issues. But it had its equivalent variation among organizations that were based in predominantly Catholic areas but which were concerned to reach out to a wider constituency:

All pre-school organizations are cross-community with an equal opportunity policy / anti sectarian policy. But the area we live and work in is 98% Catholic.

Doing something about this could be seen as just too difficult and beyond the organization's capacity.

We have an open door policy. All sides of the community are welcome. This is a predominantly Catholic area. We are not that interested in carrying out projects with groups from a different region, whether they are Catholic or Protestant. These projects are very time-consuming, and we do not have the manpower to contribute to them.

'Burn-out' was also perceived as a problem:

Voluntary organizations are still at the bottom of the heap, doing the work in the community and complying with all the bureaucracy foisted on top of them. Volunteers are 'burnt out' and weary after years of struggling.

Some respondents also mentioned a lack of reciprocity. One victims' group noted that it was difficult to work with other groups that harboured grievances and

“insisted on keeping their members in a state of fear and resentment”. In a theme that we will return to later in the report, another, from a single identity Catholic area, mentioned the problem of reciprocation from neighbouring Protestant communities.

As outlined in some of the answers, our organization has worked to try and promote better community relations. This would be a requirement under certain funding conditions but, to date, we have experienced little reciprocation from organizations from the Protestant Unionist tradition.

Poor or unavailable infrastructure was also mentioned by a number of respondents. This was often a result of the segregated nature of the areas in which they worked. A lack of neutral space for meetings was a problem for some and one respondent argued strongly for more single identity work to remedy deficiencies in infrastructure which were holding back development.

A lot of communities have little or poor infrastructure. Lack of social and economic development stunts the growth of such areas. Therefore, problems have to be approached and addressed within the areas before work can be done externally, especially in the cross-community aspect of work. Lack of funding and resources also leads to big problems.

However, another respondent felt that government propensity to fund small single-identity organizations was holding back work that would encourage more cross-community contact. A further barrier referred to was either poorly targeted, and inconsistent, funding or simply inadequate funding. Some respondents were blunt in their views:

It is our view that the community and voluntary sector is seriously under-funded and the partnerships that could develop with statutory bodies will not happen due to the recent cutbacks in education and health.

But there was also a lack of consistency and long-term commitment in funding arrangements.

...funding bodies [need to] begin to take a long-term view and explore prospects of five to ten year funding packages for key voluntary and community services. This would allow for sustainable projects with a long-term impact on health, welfare and the social economy, including improved community relations.

However, a more frequently mentioned barrier lay in the lack of province wide political agreement. Several respondents believed this made it very difficult to make progress on the ground.

Improved community relations will become more of the reality when our politicians begin to work with each other again and do the job for which they were elected (in the interim their 70% salary, which they claim, should be distributed amongst the community and voluntary sector).

## **Conclusions**

This chapter has presented both quantitative and qualitative evidence on the extent to which voluntary and community organizations in Northern Ireland reflect the ethno-sectarian divisions in society and the extent to which they tend to overcome these divisions. The evidence combines to reflect overall trends rather than exemplars of either good or bad practice.

A number of themes stand out. The first is the extent to which organizations remain structured along ethno-sectarian lines. Over three-quarters of organizations are either predominantly or wholly Catholic or Protestant in the make-up of their management committees. Given that nearly all organizations report that their activities enable people from both the main communities to interact on joint work and projects, this might not be considered relevant. However, it is clear that management committee make-up is closely related to the likelihood of organizations addressing issues of divisions directly, even to the extent to which they discuss equality of access to their services. Organizations which are predominantly Protestant in this sense are less likely than Catholic organizations to tackle these issues directly. Care should be taken in interpreting these findings, as they will be influenced by the extent to which organizations are restricted by the extent of residential segregation in Northern Ireland. But they suggest that there is a marked mismatch between the extent of cross-community mixing in their activities and the extent to which their management committees were structured along ethno-sectarian divisions.

A second major theme is related to the first. The evidence from the additional comments made by the respondents to the questionnaire suggests that the ability of voluntary and community organizations to provide a shared space for people from both the Protestant and the Catholic traditions to address common problems is closely linked to strategies of avoidance or denial. While there are exceptions, many organizations see merit in this approach and many tend to assume that because the issues they are set up to address cross ethno-sectarian divisions, then so too does their work. Some organizations are concerned about equality of access to their services, but there appears to be little appreciation of the ways in which ethno-sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland might influence the problems they were addressing.

The third theme derives from the finding that a large majority of organizations experience no external pressure to change their practices and structures in respect to this issue. It would appear that the environment in which the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland has operated has imposed few costs on organizations that do nothing about community relations, with the consequence that it has been left to the exceptional case to indicate the kinds of action that would be open to organizations. As a result there would appear to be many organizations that feel they lack the capacity, or the incentives, necessary for change. Accordingly, the evidence indicates that the extent of inter-community mixing in the life of many voluntary and community organizations may represent an unrealized resource for trust building across the divide which, if there were better incentives, could become a more potent force for change in this area.

## Chapter Three

### Welfare, Communities of Interest and Community Relations

#### Introduction

Organizations providing services to categories of people experiencing certain kinds of needs comprise the biggest part of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Organizations may address the needs of certain kinds of people – elderly people, disabled people, women, people from ethnic minorities, for example – or they may address certain kinds of issues – homelessness, illness or disease, domestic violence, or addiction. Evidence from NICVA's *State of the Sector* surveys shows that the most prevalent activity is providing services to identifiable individuals and this is true whether organizations are specialist service providers or are area-based community associations (NICVA, 2002, 2005).

Welfare organizations thus comprise the biggest part of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, reflecting the general pattern across the United Kingdom. Historically, the United Kingdom welfare state has afforded considerable space for voluntary organizations to provide services that address welfare needs of sections of the population, reflecting the voluntarist origins of social provision. A pattern of philanthropy that was established in the nineteenth century, survived and then prospered in the post-war welfare state. The numbers of organizations and their concerns were augmented in the 1960s and 1970s by the so-called 'third wave' voluntary organizations that emerged around unmet needs and demands for group rights among people whose aspirations had been insufficiently acknowledged in the original welfare state settlement of the 1940s. The social care reforms of the early 1990s accelerated the development of this part of the voluntary sector as large sums of 'new' money became available for voluntary organizations to deliver services on behalf of the state. The trend of ever increasing engagement in service delivery by the

sector will be further reinforced by the current government's public service modernization agenda.

Northern Ireland shares this very general history. This is the reason why, although the sector remains substantially indigenous and organizationally independent, it shares the general structure of the voluntary sector in Britain with similar organizations fulfilling similar functions (NICVA, 2005). The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, together with the health and social services trusts comprise by far the biggest single source of voluntary sector income in Northern Ireland if we combine income from grants and that from the sale of services. To that may be added money from the European Social Fund in particular and from the Department of Employment and Learning for training and preparation for work schemes aimed at disadvantaged groups like disabled people and lone parents.

In the context of Northern Ireland, two key features of the work of these organizations is that, with the exception of ethnic minorities, they address issues that penetrate both the main communities, and that their work is organized around collective identities and sets of perceived needs that are shared across these communal boundaries. Although there has been no attempt at quantifying its extent, there can be little argument with the proposition that many thousands of people, many of whom would have deeply felt and opposed political views, regularly meet, share services and doubtless share stories about similar experiences whether they be elderly, disabled, mothers of pre-school children, lone parents, or homeless.

Unlike the cases of primary and secondary school education and housing, where state provision remains largely segregated along communal lines, state health and social care services are organized on a basis that is blind to communal divisions. There is now evidence that these services have developed and been managed largely in a state of denial about the impact of sectarianism and inter-ethnic conflict (Williamson and Darby, 1978; Smyth et al, 2001). Statutory social services in North and West Belfast in the 1970s were typified by Williamson and Darby as being

administratively and professionally blind to the pervasive impact of the violence of that decade. More than twenty years later the study conducted by Smyth et al. commented that “the past ethos of health and social services policy where the existence of the Troubles was not formally recognised in policy terms, has meant that...staff have had to operate as if the Troubles were not happening” (Smyth et al., 2001: 86). Both the earlier and the later studies comment on the absence of research into the impact of violence and division on the provision of social welfare services.

We may surmise that the picture in the voluntary sector is likely to be similar to that in state social services agencies, in the light of evidence of a shared value system (Acheson, 2003). However, it should be clear from the evidence we have presented in Chapter Two, that matters are more complicated. Firstly, we must take into account that the traditions of voluntarism are very different in the Catholic and Protestant communities. In the former case, welfare services developed through the medium of centralized church structures, either through religious orders, or through a general welfare service based on the geographical parish, best epitomised by the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Many of the service models were based on experience in continental Europe, particularly France. This structure of welfare philanthropy, already well embedded by the 1940s, was substantially left intact by the welfare state reforms of that decade. Protestant philanthropy often had evangelical roots and tended to focus on the problems of particular groups. It implied a very different relationship with the state after the welfare state settlement in which the state would look after the big picture leaving voluntarism to operate at the edges.

Secondly, the legacy of this history is that we retain a sector that remains significantly structured along communal lines. As we shall see, welfare voluntary organizations have often grown organically from either one, or the other, main community in Northern Ireland and it has proved a difficult challenge for many of them to address this bifurcated legacy. From the comments of the survey respondents we know that there is a tendency to adopt an ideology of need that denies the relevance of the issue. Even where organizations adopt strategies of reaching out

across divides they often face formidable problems caused by the extent of residential segregation across Northern Ireland.

However, ideologies of need are often based on the indivisibility of human experience. This can provide a basis for organizations to break out from their past and reflexively engage with the communal divisions that permeate their work. In this respect voluntary organizations can move faster than state bodies that may be providing similar services and some can achieve a distinct break with their past. This chapter explores these issues from the perspectives of those who work in the midst of the dilemmas presented. It discusses the extent to which the organizations in this study have emerged from an identifiable communal background and the extent that they have moved away from that. It looks at the impact of geographical location and the extent to which this is perceived as an issue. It considers the strategies that some organizations adopt to manage communal divisions (whether by design or by default), and it seeks to relate this to the accounts given by the respondents about the ruling beliefs of the organizations and the paradigms of the problem that they are seeking to address.

The data used in the analysis that follows consists in transcribed interviews with managers or committee chairs of seven organizations that provide welfare services, broadly defined. In addition we draw on findings from the responses to a short questionnaire that included two scenarios and from group discussions in two senior citizens' forums in two of the case study areas. In each case between 15 and 20 older people participated.

### **Communal embeddedness**

By communal embeddedness we mean the extent to which voluntary organizations have emerged from, or remain, embedded in either the Protestant or Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. As we have shown in the survey results, to a significant extent the sector as a whole can be said to remain within the orbit of one

or the other of the two main communities. Organizations that straddle the divide, on an equivalent basis, at committee level remain in a minority. In the datasets available to us, we were unable to ascertain the degree, if any, of communal difference in relation to the kinds of beneficiaries or types of intervention. In all six case study areas we looked at organizations that had clearly emerged within one or the other tradition / community and which were addressing welfare issues that penetrated both tradition / community and which seek to provide services within both.

### **Two strategies**

The comments of the survey respondents reported in Chapter Two show a strong tendency to cope with the issue of community relations in their work through a denial of its relevance. This appears to be based on a strong belief that needs are indivisible and that the shared experience of a need in the context of the organization's work overrides other considerations. The belief appears to be bolstered by a more practical worry of opening a Pandora's box that could compromise the organization's work. On the other hand there is a minority position that seeks to embed a direct approach to community relations issues as they affect the work as a core part of its approach. Ironically, both strategies have a similar impact, that of securing a wider community trust in the organizations concerned.

We examine this issue by presenting evidence from two contrasting cases. In one of these the organization has erected and maintains a firewall between 'need' and 'politics'; the other is an organization that has opted to directly tackle community relations issues head-on in its daily work.

#### Organization One

This organization was founded in the early 1970s by a nun who retained her leadership rôle for the following 15 years. The organization still retains its founding ethos. It was set up and remains based in the heart of a large almost exclusively

Catholic urban area and its primary focus remains within that area. However, it also delivers a range of services that are offered to people living elsewhere. Its strategy has been to focus on the integrity and quality of its services to the exclusion of other considerations.

We're not interested in people's background; we're not interested in their political allegiance – we're interested in delivering a service for people in need and to alleviate loneliness; to stop all this isolation that they've got. And one thing I will say is that we've worked on a lot of sides for thirty years and we never, ever, ever come up against any problems.

We're non-political, very non-political – we work from a Christian ethos which is that we are here to serve the community wherever that community comes from within the district. And the board of directors reflect that... We're not interested in people's religion – that's of no interest whatsoever. It's if someone is in need then that's what our mission is.

Among its other activities, the organization provides a day care service for elderly people in its premises. This attracts people from across the communal divide and efforts are made within the programme it offers to reflect the cultural diversity of its clients. This service has been developed under contract with the local Health and Social Services Trust on the basis that it can draw people from across the Trust's area. In this largely urban area residential segregation is the norm so this organization would be able to ascertain, from the addresses of its clients, their likely communal affiliation. But as the quotation above shows, the organization's ethos and policy has been not to take this into account. There is an implicit assumption that the integrity and quality of the service and the need to make use of it are sufficient to overcome any 'freeze' factors arising from its location. An important consequence of this is that there was no mechanism for checking the extent to which this was true, beyond anecdotal evidence derived from experience.

The defence of its non-political stance had made Organization One reluctant to engage with other local community based organizations in the area in which it was based. It took the view that many of these were compromised by political involvement and that cooperation might have the potential to taint its independent standing. Although it had taken the precaution of having a local Unionist councillor co-opted onto the management committee, there was a notable lack of strategy behind

its approach to cross-community engagement. To illustrate, a joint project that it had developed with a church-based organization in a Protestant neighbourhood had come about as a result of a chance meeting rather than as a result of a planned engagement. Replication of Organization One's service model in the Protestant neighbourhood had led, however, to some joint planning and events involving clients from both areas.

### Organization Two

Organization Two is an organization that was established in the early 1970s by parents of disabled children in a provincial town. By chance, perhaps, the founding committee were all from the Catholic community and as a consequence until the 1990s, the organization was perceived locally as a Catholic organization, although there is no evidence to show whether, or to what extent, its services were used by people from both the main communities in the town during those early years. For many years, it ran a volunteer-led day care service for adult disabled people, based in premises that it rented from a Catholic church-based voluntary organization in which the founder parent was also involved. In the early 1990s, the organization secured additional funding from the local health and social services trust enabling it to employ a professional manager and to relocate to more neutral and more accessible premises. It is now the sole provider of adult day care services for disabled people in the district. Its main funder remains the HPSS Trust.

This organization presents a very strong contrast with Organization One. It has taken a direct approach to issues of difference and division among its clients and has adopted a development strategy that seeks both to confront issues as they have emerged among clients and staff, and to reach out to the Protestant community.

There is this tendency to say, oh, you know, we're all different... in terms of disability – disability knows no boundaries, disability knows no barriers, etc, etc. Bullshit – because we all have barriers and we all have boundaries and they're there. I think it's a major copout that people say we have too much other things in our lives... You know, we could very easily have said here, 'Let's only deal with disability issues', and ignore anything that was going around outside. But people's lives aren't like that. You know, your life was formed by wherever you were born, who your parents are, your childhood experience, your schooling,

the university you went to, the sports you played, etc, etc. How can you ignore that dynamic because that devalues people? ...you're talking about sexuality and the person opposite you says, 'I suppose there'd be no gay people here?' and you go, 'Why?' and it's merely, like, well you can't be gay and have a disability, or, you can't be sectarian and have a disability and it's something that does not protect us from the prejudices that the rest of society has – we have them all. You know, if you don't think of a person with a disability as a sexual person then you don't have to deal with that issue. If you don't think of them as a sectarian person then you don't have to deal with it.

This approach meant that incidents over day-to-day matters such as appropriate dress codes and offensive remarks were confronted directly rather than being avoided or ignored. A willingness to engage directly with such issues enabled events celebrated by one community rather than the other, such as GAA triumphs, to be acknowledged in the daily life of the centre.

The manager, a Catholic woman, had made strenuous efforts over the years to build bridges directly with the Protestant community, viewing this work as an extension to her commitment to building the cross-community credibility of her organization. She described switching on the Christmas tree lights in a 'Loyalist' village nearby as a highlight of the work that took her to other areas to which people from her community background seldom, if ever, went. A willingness to make these links had placed her as a leading figure in the local voluntary sector's contribution to developing better relations in the area.

You know, if you were to talk about funding, for example, we would never see ourselves as community relations oriented but it's a huge part of the work that we do. If you think that we came out here in '92, we have worked through ceasefires, broken ceasefires, Drumcree I, II, whatever political change, and political state of flux, what have you... Now, we could have put our heads down and said, 'Oh, that's not happening out there' – but we chose not to do that.

Organization Two now operates from a neutral venue, leased from the HPSS Trust; a small majority of its users are from a Protestant background, although the area has a significant Catholic majority, and it has developed good working relationships with local politicians from both the DUP and Sinn Fein. Its Catholic roots and the communal Catholic identity of its public face in the person of the organization's manager mean that it has retained a residual communal identity.

Within the past five years, Unionist councillors have felt the need to seek reassurance about its standing (in this case from the former UUP MP for the area) before personally feeling comfortable in dealing with it directly. The fact that the reassurance was forthcoming is perhaps evidence of the success of the organization's outreach strategy.

### **Residential segregation, need, and service delivery**

All but one of the welfare organizations we studied were based in a location that had a clear single identity. All but one of these were delivering services to people from outside that particular area as well as with in it. There were two patterns. In one, services were delivered in other areas either through outreach offices or through franchise arrangements, or as with Organization One discussed above, by encouraging people to travel in to a single identity area from outside.

We now discuss a third organization. Organization Three is a community association based in a large Catholic housing area. It pioneered a new service that was initially delivered to the residents in the area in which it is based. It proved such an attractive idea, based on a call centre model that it has been rolled out into other areas, including Protestant areas nearby where local outreach offices have been established and which have been locally staffed. However, the call centre has remained based at the original site. This service model has now spread to other towns in Northern Ireland and across the border into the Republic of Ireland. Support for the roll out has been forthcoming from the local HPSS Trust which was instrumental in providing some of the necessary funding. Its support also validated the service among others who might have needed some reassurance about the service.

A fourth organization, Organization Four, has some similarities with Organization One, but it is coping with very different local circumstances that have meant it has had to directly confront issues that have arisen from its location in a staunchly Republican area in a town that has a large Protestant majority. This

organization, like Organization One was founded by a nun and shares a similar ethos and faces similar dilemmas. Its service focus is on women and children and it has drawn clients from a wide area beyond its immediate neighbourhood, both for its training and mental health management programmes and for an after schools club that draws children from three local primary schools, one maintained, one controlled and one integrated.

The interview data suggests a greater awareness of the ‘freeze’ factors associated with its location than appeared to be the case with Organization One. Fears raised by outsiders would be challenged:

I would always challenge. When people would come here with, say, an occupational therapist or a social worker, to use the service – whatever part of the service they decide to use – and they would say, you know, ‘Well, (name of area)...’ and I would say, ‘What are your fears?’ Sometimes it’s someone told them six years ago that they were up here and their car was stopped and they were asked where they were going. And, somebody else, their car was damaged. Somebody else, you know, a flag... And so, you just go through the issues with them and at every opportunity you would do a wee hop on, hop off. You know, when people come here for the first time... especially if they’re coming from (name of Loyalist estate nearby) and places like that, you tell them, ‘Come on into the bus and I’ll show you...’ And you take them and show them the fairy hill; you show them the stones and pictures to welcome you to (name of area).

The consequence of the organization’s presence in the area and its work has been a softening of outsiders’ attitudes towards an area that might otherwise be written off in the perception of others. The interviewee from this organization recalled conversations with Unionist politicians that had indicated their perceptions had been changed by the “good work we had been doing”.

Until 2005 referrals from outside the area had remained high, but during the following year, there had been a significant fall in the numbers undertaking the organization’s programmes in IT training. In an area where there are few alternative providers of pre-school and after school services for children, adult training may be more susceptible to changing perceptions of safety among outsiders. A take-over of the local community association by Republican elements hostile to Sinn Fein, which we discuss in more detail in the chapter on community development, led to

perceptions of the area as being less safe than it had been. This has had a devastating direct impact on Organization Four in that a key member of staff and her family had been driven off the estate into hiding and they are believed to be in England as a result of an incident arising from the parades disturbances in September 2005.

The injustice, threatened violence and suddenness of this incident proved beyond the capacity of the organization to address directly.

This happened over the weekend; she said to me that what was going to happen was they were going to be put on the police... they were going to be put on to the police protection programme but I was not to say to anyone that she was leaving. She would be in on Monday as usual... And when people asked on Monday, we said, 'She's not in but she will be here tomorrow.'

*Interviewer: But she left. This just happened a few weeks ago... I remember it was in the paper.*

I haven't heard from her but another girl has got one text message one night which was the last message... it must have been the last of her messages to people. And it just said that the family were not in the country and they had decided they were going to do their best to make a new start, a fresh start. Where they were there was plenty of work and, all things considered, the family had settled.

*Interviewer: Well, that must have had quite a devastating effect on the staff here. You would have thought it would have been difficult for you to deal with.*

Yes. Well, you know, that's one of the things... you know, when you hear people talking about Nazism and things like that (and I know there's nothing like the extermination that went on in World War II) but the silence is very similar. The silence would deafen you. There are people in here who used to be Sinn Fein and work here and that one particular person has yet to say to me, 'She's not here'.

*Interviewer: Everybody knows, but nothing's being said about it.*

Yes. There was one member of staff who told us – who would have been friendly with (name of person concerned) – and she came in – something must have happened... on the Thursday because I'd seen (name) on a Friday – and when (another named staff member) came into work she said, 'I was talking to such and such a person and she says (name) went down to the Housing Executive and she's moving out and she's getting a house somewhere else'. And we said, 'Oh, is that right? Well, as far as we're concerned she's just having a couple of days off and she'll be in.' And then the same girl came in on the Monday and I said to her, 'Is there any further word on (name)?' And the girl just burst and she cried and she sobbed and she said, you know, 'This is terrible and she's gone!' and it was awful to watch.

## **Welfare categories and cross-community contact**

Recent research evidence has consistently shown a general reluctance of people in Northern Ireland to enter geographical territory perceived as being dominated by the other main community (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). In his study of north Belfast, Shirlow refers to an interviewee from a Protestant area who shopped in Catholic West Belfast but who felt the need to hide this fact from her neighbours by disguising her shopping bags (Shirlow, 2004). This reticence about shopping appears not to extend to the use of certain welfare services; in many areas it is common practice for individuals to use services within territory that they would otherwise be unlikely to venture into.

The interviewees from both Organizations One and Two discussed above referred to incidents in which their marked buses had had to negotiate access to individuals past Protestant paramilitaries in the street.

We have no problem. We have absolutely no problem. We have got our senior citizens out on the 11<sup>th</sup> day and returned them on the 11<sup>th</sup> evening and we've pushed the young fellows out of the road till we get past. We have no problems going and we have no problems returning... And we go over into the estates – (and I recall a couple of years back going over to pick up this lady) – actually I drove the bus myself to pick up this lady in one of the so-called Loyalist areas and the whole place decked out in all their colours – I had no problem with it. I don't care. I tell you if I rise up tomorrow morning and they tell me I belong to China, I couldn't care less. I went over there and the boys were all out having their drink in the street and they had all their flags, and somebody said, 'would you move that... move them chairs out of the way till we get the bus up to pick up my mother' – that's how they view this bus because *we're coming with that kind of attitude and we're trusted.* (emphasis added)  
(Interviewee, Organization One)

Comments from respondents to the questionnaire reported in Chapter Two referred to instances where individuals appeared happy to meet quite freely across geographical and attitudinal barriers in the context of receiving a service to meet a need associated with health or disability. This phenomenon requires more detailed investigation that is beyond the scope of the present study. We know little about either the extent to which this takes place or about the terms on which people feel comfortable mixing on this basis. Such mixing occurs within service settings that are not confined to the voluntary sector and is likely to be closely associated with the prevalent service ideology of addressing needs as if communal divisions were

irrelevant. In this context, the evidence we have suggests that the approach taken by Organization Two described earlier in this chapter is unusual.

However, in an attempt to delineate some of the boundaries and explore this topic in a preliminary manner the researcher met with two senior citizens' groups, one in a rural area and one in an urban area. In each case the occasion was one of the group's regular monthly meetings. In the rural group, the researcher attended the whole meeting, while in the urban group he was invited to address the meeting once the formal business had been dealt with. A short questionnaire was administered to those present asking for information about the community backgrounds of those present and presenting respondents with the following two vignettes:

- (i) *A member says that he or she and others from his or her community background are much worse off than people from the other main community in Northern Ireland and that the senior citizens forum should adopt this view as policy.*
- (ii) *At one meeting, you discover that a member has been an active member of a paramilitary organization during the 'Troubles' although as far as you know he or she has not been convicted of a crime, but you can't be sure of what, if anything, they have done...*

The vignettes were designed to elicit responses to situations that could be interpreted as challenging the boundaries of what was acceptable within the group. They were both drawn from scenarios that had proved problematic and were referred to by case study interviewees. Respondents were asked to indicate how they would feel and what they would do.<sup>13</sup>

In both cases, the forum members were all representatives of smaller local groups, or pensioners' clubs. In the rural group it was difficult to raise the issue of community relations in discussion and in the urban group impossible to do so. The urban group was focused on external issues relevant to older people such as social security benefits and threats over the future of a local hospital. The meeting's chair

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<sup>13</sup> The full text of the questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix B

was a former trades union official; she dominated the discussion and was deferred to by the other members present. The rural group was focused to a much greater extent on opportunities for networking and socializing and there was a more open atmosphere reflected in the fact that it met around a large table rather than sitting in rows facing a table at which the officers sat as was the case in the urban group.

There were 16 people present at the rural group meeting attended. Of these 14 completed the questionnaire, 5 of whom self-identified as Protestants and 8 as Catholics (one ticked both boxes). It was very difficult to generate a discussion about the community relations impact of the group. It clearly did not otherwise come up for discussion and this was probably the first time it had arisen for many people. The general view was that not only was the forum cross-community, but so too was the membership of individual clubs. Those who spoke said it was very important that the forum was cross-community. “We’re all human beings and we have similar needs”, and, “You have to get on with your neighbours” were typical remarks.

Senior citizens, it was felt, are among the better groups. “We seem to operate above all that, we don’t get involved and stay clear”. “There are no sticky questions – not within the clubs. We’d pay no heed to this”.

Vignette One revealed quite clear rules about what it was appropriate to raise within the group and that transgression would give rise to disturbed feelings among a majority of those present. The sense of it being inappropriate and potentially divisive was reinforced by one of the two that thought they would be pleased with the proposal, who qualified their agreement by indicating that they felt that it was inappropriate to raise the matter. In other words, what seems to be indicated here is agreement with the main proposition, but disagreement that it should be a matter for the Forum. There were no real differences in responses between the Protestants and Catholics to this vignette which suggest that this kind of issue would be unlikely to drive a wedge between the two.

The responses to Vignette Two revealed considerable anxiety about the presence of someone with a paramilitary background in the group, should that ever emerge. Differences in the responses among the Protestant and Catholic group members possibly reflected a greater sensitivity about this issue in general in the Protestant community, but it hints at a potential for instability in the group if a member were to arrive who had an active paramilitary past. Trust would be compromised.

The urban group was a great deal more combative in its attitude to the discussion and the questionnaire. Most of the speaking was left to the chair, who emphasised the cross-community credentials of the group.

There was some general resistance to completing the questionnaire. Once the questionnaire was handed out, one lady strode up to the front and demanded why they were being asked these questions and was visibly upset by being asked to answer the question about her community background. "There's a group of us here who don't believe in this kind of thing". In the end there were 20 responses from a total of 28 present, of whom 12 were Protestant and 5 were Catholic. The remaining three respondents did not answer the question.

In Vignette One someone makes a bid to get the group to adopt support for a communal position. Of those who responded, there was an even split between those who would feel nothing in particular and those who would feel either anxious or annoyed. There was no discernable bias as between Protestant and Catholic respondents on this question. Most would have been annoyed and would have taken steps to ensure the matter was not raised again. It would seem that the one respondent, who said she agreed with the view expressed in the vignette, would have got short shrift if she had tried to raise this point of view in a meeting.

There was less anxiety, and more annoyance, about the second vignette than was the case in the rural group. The lower rate of anxiety may relate to a realistic

assessment of life in their immediate area where open conflict continued to be much more common than in the rural area. This was a much more issue-focused and politically-aware group than the rural group, reflected in the trades union background of the chair. It is probable that the higher degree of annoyance than was the case in the rural group, and the greater sense of inter-communal solidarity on the issue that was expressed, were connected to a greater sense of mission that this group expressed. People may have been readier to feel annoyance over disruption because of the greater salience of the mission.

These results do throw some light on some of the rules that enable groups, such as these senior citizens' forums, to operate. Politicising the groups in a Northern Ireland sense is off limits and would be disruptive if pushed too hard. Effort needs to be expended on ensuring that this rule is kept in focus on the assumption that whatever members think about the issues, forum membership is about being a senior citizen and only works if other identities are kept firmly in the background. The responses to the vignettes show what can happen when this rule is undermined. Group solidarity is immediately threatened and where there is not a strong sense of shared mission, there are dangers of a split along community background lines. This suggests some limits over who is likely to be welcomed, or the terms on which they would be welcome. A senior citizen who was still an active Sinn Fein member and known as such, or who was an Orangeman who had made provocative remarks in the past, could be quite disruptive.

### **Women's organizations**

Women's organizations have built a strong network of cross-community relationships over the years, based on information sharing networks and a set of community based women's centres that have maintained close ties. Whilst their activities have enabled many thousands of women to meet and share experiences in ways that they would have been unlikely to do otherwise, the fate of the Women's Coalition as a political party perhaps illustrates how difficult it is to translate effective

and persistent cross-community ties around the everyday experiences and concerns of the women involved into political programmes in the context of Northern Ireland.

However, our interviews indicate the value of women's organizations both in supporting women from working class communities and broadening their expectations and horizons in work that, even in the most difficult of circumstances, reaches across ethno-sectarian divisions. One interviewee speculated on why this was possible:

I think that the whole sectarian thing doesn't seem to be as relevant to women for some reason. We can all have our own views, obviously – they've got their views and we have their own views – we come from a Nationalist area and they come from a Protestant area but when we get together in a room that doesn't matter because we're all the same. We all have the same problems; we all have childcare problems; we all have health problems; we all have poverty.

There is a recognition here that the meeting of minds over a shared agenda they can agree on, while more important than their differences, nevertheless does not impact on their underlying political views. There is a hint of fatalism underlying the evident pragmatic willingness to engage in cross-community activity. But these encounters can change perceptions for working class women and challenge their preconceptions:

We were at the residential at... The women from (name of Protestant estate) were talking about their lives... it was an eye-opener to the women from (name of Catholic estate) who thought that Protestant women were born with a silver spoon in their mouth and couldn't believe some of the stories about poverty and, going back to the start of the 'Troubles', they discovered that those people, going back to their upbringing – six to a bed and housing problems... all those things, the same issues – it was an eye-opener for the Catholic women so it was... so it was quite interesting.

A strong sense of a shared experience is not, however, always enough to enable the women involved to travel into their political opponents' territory. The evidence suggests that the constraints tend to be stronger among Protestant women than among Catholic women, reflecting other evidence of differences between the two communities in how they use segregated space (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006).

Encounters are easier to arrange with people who are not from neighbouring communities and often neutral venues are essential to overcome some of these problems. There have been some notable successes, particularly in women's centres in Protestant single-identity communities where women have gone to Dublin and had organized trips to stay in hotels across the border. Many of those involved had never been across the border before.

Women will, however, travel to such centres.

So our view is if you're putting on good high quality courses people will travel to them. We've often had people from (name of Catholic area). We've no problem with people coming here. And even though we are in what's perceived as a highly Loyalist area, we're very proud of the fact that we have a mixed team – mixed tutors, mixed users, mixed management committee – the whole thing, and that brings its own problems at times of heightened sectarianism, and yet we feel that you need to be opening your doors to people. And, if you're putting on affordable classes, where people get some of them free; childcare that's high quality – our childcare workers, I'd defy you to find a course that they haven't done.

How is this done in areas that can be hampered by the presence of paramilitary organizations, not to mention socially conservative people? Part of the story lies in the quality of the leadership:

We would not have been well received in the area for a long time and people were calling me a lesbian. I mean, a minister calling me a lesbian to my face – I had to make a formal complaint about him in the end. We were communists; we were plants from the Dublin government... I mean, there was a lot of hostility to women only, and I suppose I would ask the question, 'Why, when you say 'women' do people immediately feel hostile?' If you say a men's group people would say, 'That's interesting.' If you say there's a women's group – people say, 'Why are women getting into that.'

A strength of this kind of community initiative also lies in the practical and effective nature of the work that is done. The use of training, childcare and other programmes run by the centres, by the families of local paramilitary leaders can help create a more permissive 'space' for the work to continue.

## **Conclusions**

The evidence presented in this chapter has focused on organizations that address either a particular constituency, such as women or older people, or a set of problems that cut across communal divisions. They all share the feature of bringing people from both Catholic and Protestant communities into a shared social setting and inviting them to build a shared narrative around the issues they are addressing. The process can have a powerful effect in creating shared sources of solidarity, evident in both the women's and the senior citizens' groups that give these groups considerable stability and often, as Darby (1986) pointed out, giving them greater staying power than organizations created for the express purpose of engendering cross-community contact.

Welfare remains an important arena in which people from different community backgrounds meet. Identity labels like that of 'senior citizen' can be powerful sources of solidarity among people who assent to adopt them and meet under their banner. The evidence we present here is incomplete and we can only give a preliminary assessment of the social norms that underpin their strength. The evidence provided by the participants in the two senior citizens' forums studied suggests that for those involved there is a powerful and unspoken assumption that the identity will remain a source of solidarity provided that other identities are kept at bay. Each forum generated an agenda of 'safe' topics that could be discussed with a reasonable degree of certainty that they would not cause offence. The women's organizations, while offering extensive opportunities for cross-community contact, appeared to operate within similar constraints whereby the political differences of the women were never addressed directly.

The social benefit derived from such organizations can hardly be in doubt. But the temptation to protect those benefits by circumnavigating the harder issues is, not surprisingly, very strong. The strategy adopted by Organization One (described at the start of this chapter) is one outcome of this pressure. The evidence presented in this chapter shows how norms of solidarity around a shared identity, may have no implications for the development of similar norms around areas of contentious

difference. How these boundaries are negotiated and 'policed' is not investigated here and we lack understanding of the extent to which they might be modified or challenged. The paradox at the heart of this type of voluntary action in the context of Northern Ireland may lie in the fact that its continued health may depend on its *inability* to challenge divisions yet its continued existence may place limits on the damage that might result from those divisions. The extent to which this is the case should be the subject for further investigation.

## Chapter Four

### Community Development and Community Relations

#### Introduction

The chapter presents evidence from the case study interviews on the relationship between community development and community relations in Northern Ireland. This is a complex area of investigation and the material in this chapter can only hope to provide an overview of the evidence gathered from the interviews which were both wide-ranging and deep. The aim is to identify from the evidence what appear to us to be the major themes and issues that face practitioners and policy-makers in this field.

The evidence is drawn from interviews with community-based leaders and some local public officials in each of the six case study areas. All but one of these areas contained interfaces, those spaces where ethnically controlled areas abut one another. The chapter presents the evidence thematically. This will help highlight the issues, but it has also been necessary to protect the anonymity of the interviewees who for the most part were very open and honest in their appraisal of the work and the issues they face. This was judged necessary because they are public figures in the areas in which they work and could otherwise easily be identified. This approach carries a disadvantage in that the evidence demonstrates the important rôle of local geographical and political factors in determining what can be done. However, we believe that some loss of context is more than compensated for by the depth of the interview material on which we can thereby draw. The interviews were conducted between May 2005 and January 2006 and were conducted face to face, with some follow-up interviews carried out over the telephone. They were either recorded or written up in contemporaneous notes. The transcriptions and notes were machine analysed using *NVivo* qualitative data analysis software.

## **Policy context**

As discussed in Chapter One, community development has come to be seen as an important component of public policies designed to tackle endemic problems in the poorest and most marginal communities in Northern Ireland. From the initial public recognition of its potential in the government's 1993 *Strategy for Support of Voluntary Organizations and Community Development*, there has been consistent support for the view that community development has an important contribution to make to public policy and in particular for the view that it offers a route towards better relations between the two main communities especially in interface areas. The publication of the government's Good Relations Strategy, *A Shared Future* in 2005 reiterated this view.

The evidence reported in this chapter examines the extent to which community development interventions can intervene effectively as a route to establishing greater inter-community trust in areas of Northern Ireland where trust tends to be in very short supply. It considers some examples of what has been achieved and reflects on the constraints and opportunities that structure what is possible.

Area-based community development practice in Northern Ireland is mostly carried out in single identity communities as a result of the extent of residential segregation. In practice daily life in these communities is conducted in ways that maintain segregation and which work around it (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). The sanctity of these arrangements is, in many areas, controlled by paramilitary groupings; the extent to which these groupings are able to do this has a substantial bearing on what may or may not be done. Furthermore, within many single identity communities there are power struggles between differing paramilitary factions on the Protestant side, and between the SDLP and Sinn Fein and, on occasion, between Sinn Fein and the Real or Continuity IRA, on the Catholic side. The question we address in the present study is to what extent, and notwithstanding this context, community

development practice develops structures and provides opportunities for people to work together on collective issues that cross these geographical and ethnic boundaries.

Given this context, one might wonder that cross-community structures established through community development in these communities work at all. Yet we know from the work of agencies like the Belfast Interface Project that, in the right circumstances, progress is possible (BIP, 2004). But our evidence also shows how ethnic competition is frequently not far below the surface and can rip apart in minutes initiatives that may have taken months of painstaking work to construct. Our aim in this chapter, based on the perceptions of people whose work is at the frontline, is to present evidence on what can be done, and in what circumstances, if community development is to have an impact on better relations between ethnically segregated communities.

Our evidence suggests that community development processes on their own do not have sufficient power to influence the patterns of segregation and relationships between segregated areas, even if, if the circumstances permit it, they can, as one interviewee put it, “massage the interfaces” and reduce tension and violence around incidents like Orange parades and similar celebrations. The qualifier is important. *Circumstances and context are crucial.*

### **Some key contextual factors**

#### Demography and geography

Demography and geography are important background factors that shape relationships between communities and the patterns of daily life that form the backdrop to the work of community development. In two of the areas we studied (areas “A” and “B”) the past 10 to 20 years have seen a relative increase in the proportions of Catholics living in those area and a corresponding Protestant retreat.

Whilst in both areas this has tended to engender a greater sense of defensiveness and isolation in the Protestant communities, there were nevertheless substantial differences in how community groups from these areas had responded. In one of these cases there has been a struggle between, on the one hand, people with a tendency to nurse grievances, and on the other, a group of pragmatists who have argued for a direct engagement in the new circumstances. At the time of the research the pragmatists were in the ascendancy. In the other case, interviewees from the Protestant community expressed a palpable sense of threat and a strong sense of a community feeling that its interests were not been taken into account. Demographics on their own are not able to account for these differences.

One interviewee suggested that broader geography may play a rôle in this. He noted that pragmatism had grown in an area where there was more physical separation between the two communities concerned and where the majority of people could go about their business without confronting an interface. Although there were important interfaces in the area that we will consider later, in the view of this interviewee one of the problems in the area (where there was a great deal more tension) was that it was very difficult to conduct everyday life without confronting an interface. Here there is a series of small enclaves facing each other across physical barriers and it is difficult to go to the shops, or for children to go to school, without infringing other people's sense of territorial control.

In the area (Area "A") with more pragmatically inclined Protestant community associations there are two striking examples of joint working across their respective interfaces, whereas in the other area interface work has been faltering or non-existent. In the latter case there appears to be more at stake and thus it becomes harder to engage effectively simply as a by product of the geography of segregation.

#### Ethnic competition and local politics

Our evidence suggests that a much more important contextual factor is the general level of ethnic competition in the area and the consequent state of local politics. These can either freeze local antagonisms or provide a facilitative environment in which community organizations are encouraged to create cross-community links and are given the material and human resources to do so. In area “A” the Protestant community forms part of a wider Protestant minority population in which power at the level of the District Council has been ceded to Nationalist or Republican parties. Although there are unresolved issues about matters such as planning and commercial development and access to the commercial and cultural centre of the district, the Protestant community has remained engaged in local politics and is involved in a local responsibility sharing arrangement at Council level. A relatively stable political settlement at local level underpins a proactive cross-community policy in the Council which has channeled money into Protestant areas. It has also enabled the Local Strategy Partnership [LSP], which has had responsibility for spending funds from the second European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, to engage in proactive and innovative initiatives that have encouraged more local cross-community partnerships to work together to identify needs and plan strategies to meet these, drawing down funds to put them into action.

Interviewees whose organizations had been involved in setting up and running cross-community partnerships believed that this work would not have been possible without the proactive support of the LSP. This support had made it possible to pay for a cross-community residential and facilitators to enable these organizations to develop the necessary trust and relationships.

There are difficulties, and there remains distrust among both Protestant and Catholic groups in the area. One interviewee, voicing a Protestant perspective, said:

That's one of the things that we find, when you say to young people, 'Look we're going to work with (name of area)' (which is seen as a Republican enclave) and the feeling is: 'You're expecting us to go with these people who are totally different. We want nothing to do with them.' That's the reality that's there, and I don't think that some of the funding organizations really realise that it is going to take time to break it down. It's going to take a long time.

Similarly there have been difficulties with Catholic groups engaging with partnership structures in the area and having equal access to resources.

It is perceived that the area partnership is mainly a Protestant organization, and you can hear intimated frustration from Nationalist communities, thinking that they will get nothing out of that and that is no point in going along to that table because it is led by a particular individual... that was the potential of key individuals and their organizations to snare a lot of this money because it is the Loyalist community, and you can see Nationalist areas are saying, 'Hold on! We're not part of that. So what chance is there of us getting this money?' If nothing else, there will be a suspicion, and that's all it takes in this country to really create some issues.

Both Protestant and Catholic community activists in the area expressed the view that this individual had tended to present himself as a spokesman on behalf of the Protestant community, complaining how poorly treated they were. He had played a leading rôle in establishing this partnership body. Putting the matter at its mildest, among Catholics this had served to colour perceptions of the organization he chaired that it would not address their interests and needs.

In this context it was significant that during the course of the field work this individual resigned his position in the context of the establishment of urban regeneration partnerships that had been drawn up to cover otherwise segregated communities. In this area this initiative had encouraged local community organizations to work together, encouraging the pragmatic tendency within the Protestant community to further consolidate its influence.

In contrast Area "B" might fairly be described as the frontline in an unresolved ethnic competition for space and power in the wider district. In this context there was political capital to be gained by communal politicians from both sides in either undermining, or promoting, community-based initiatives that might suit their political agendas. One interviewee from a community organization in a Catholic area thought that it was "politically convenient" for the DUP to promote a view that weak community infrastructure was a problem specific to Protestant areas.

A lot of the stuff I find around Protestant Loyalist groups is all about control and stops people actually working across-community and making their own judgement on these issues. There's a huge issue there about leadership and who can do it and who doesn't are the controlling features... The DUP have this huge political issue which poisons the infrastructure.

We do not have corroborating evidence, but it is the perception of some politicians that in this context cross-community partnerships are seen as a threat to the Protestant community. This is accompanied by the perception, for this interviewee at any rate, that this is undermining attempts to create structures that engage both communities on a basis of equality. A consequence has been that while large sums of public money have been made available to the area in the past few years, all the local structures on the ground at area level delivering programmes are based on single identity communities in complete contrast to the situation that was found in Area "A".

Some of the same features were found in Area "C". This is a country town with a substantial Protestant majority where there have been problems in establishing and sustaining cross-community structures for voluntary and community organizations. Our evidence suggests that this is in part due to the attitudes of the local elected councillors, although as we shall describe later in this chapter, this is by no means the only problem. There is an active local voluntary and community sector, the local district council having 320 groups on its database. Yet it appears relatively poorly resourced, and council officials note that none employ their own workers with the result that many have struggled to access funds and support. It is notable how little money has flowed into community organizations from either of the two Peace and Reconciliation Programmes. They have had a negligible impact at the level of area-based community associations.

The absence of a strategically driven and facilitative environment is evidenced by the difficulties faced by the local community forum, an organization that once drew its membership from most of the housing estates in the town. It continues to

support work, for example, with pensioners and migrant workers in the town. Whilst issue based associations such as Women's Aid and the local Citizens' Advice Bureau have remained in membership and the forum retains considerable credibility among such organizations, the community associations based in Protestant areas have fallen away. As we will discuss in the next section, the forum has been undermined by the growing strength of paramilitary groups in both Protestant and Catholic estates, but there is also a perception that it has suffered from a lack of support from the District Council. The following exchange with the current chair of the forum sums up this point of view:

We find it disappointing that we can't get into... where we need to be seen... The areas where we work we work hard in. We lobby a terrible lot to do with the asbestos and stuff like that there. And we still work on the cross-community things that we have to. But we don't get the praise... I don't think we get the praise that we deserve because we're looked on as very pan-nationalist, which is absolute crap.

*Interviewer: There would be people – local unionist political leaders – viewing the Community Forum as a Nationalist kind of thing...therefore somehow illegitimate?*

Yes – which is absolutely crap. Then we have the situation when we approach council for funding, that they just will not fund. So we run it on a very tight shoestring... We've won cases that has shown council and we have certainly got the people to address council and we could certainly put people up for election at council and we would certainly take a couple of seats if we wanted to, but we want to play the game out. Hopefully when the councils change everything will change.

This council is probably the worst council that I've ever dealt with – on community relations, absolute pitfall, absolute... you know. On anything I sit on – on anything I come into contact with them – I certainly have great difficulties with them.

*Interviewer: From what you've been saying it sounds that your perception is that, in fact, the councillors have actually made things worse rather than better.*

Oh, yes.

*Interviewer: And made it easier for paramilitaries to take over the estates?*

Yes. I certainly was at a meeting where one of the Loyalist paramilitaries walked up and warned a councillor... that he could make sure he would be buried. And it's very much the Loyalist councillors are afraid of the Loyalist paramilitaries, and that is the way it is. I've seen these things.

The same interviewee noted that he could see only four community associations operating in the town where once there had been 16. The rise of paramilitary influence on the estates had increased the level of ethnic competition and

made it more difficult for people to work together. This view is corroborated by an interviewee from an association on a Loyalist estate who commented about the only time he attended a forum meeting:

I never liked the vibes. I got the feeling that there was a bit of politics in it. Quite a lot of the estates weren't in it. It was a wee bit political... What came up at the meeting was brought into a religious context. Some said: 'We were the hard-done by people', and I had to say you couldn't bring it down to a religious thing.

The apparent lack of commitment to the forum as a vehicle for cross-community work, or indeed to a cross-community focus for community development work in general on the part of the council may be exemplified by the actions of a few councillors that led to the establishment of a project that reached across a number of Loyalist estates in the town and which, perhaps ironically, drew down the only substantial grant from the Peace and Reconciliation Programme for a community-based initiative. The project was conceived by a particular councillor who applied for the money and then only subsequently engaged with the estates that were targeted and established a committee to run it. The perception from within the project, both from the project worker and the chair of the committee, was that the forum was untrustworthy and mostly irrelevant. Whilst there is no direct evidence that it perceives itself as a rival to the forum, one interviewee did make the comment that her perception was that the councillor who set it up is hoping that it will usurp the community forum and take over its rôle.

#### Who controls the local community?

The power of paramilitaries to exert direct control over councillors as implied in Area "C" is less evident elsewhere although there is no reason to doubt that similar threats to the one witnessed by the interviewee quoted above have occurred elsewhere. Yet ethnic control over territory that is policed by paramilitary organizations is the reality in many estates in Northern Ireland and, in many estates, community associations are either controlled by them or have a very uneasy relationship with them. Of our case study areas, Area "C" provides the most

compelling evidence both of the process of take-over and some of the consequences that flow from it. However, the story there is not typical of Catholic areas which our evidence suggests tend to be more homogeneous with a closer identification between community associations and local political leadership than would usually be the case in Protestant areas. The latter tend to be more fragmented and subject to greater rivalry for control among paramilitary gangs.

We will begin the section by considering the case of Area “C”. It is important because the evidence suggests that the problem has become noticeably more pronounced in the years since the ‘Good Friday’ agreement in 1998 and it presents a set of circumstances that have not proved at all amenable to the policy levers that have been available, such as the European Union Peace and Reconciliation Programme, since that time. The section will then consider evidence from other areas that expand on these issues.

The issue of paramilitary take-over in Area “C” has affected both Loyalist and Republican estates. In one Loyalist estate, which a council officer described as having “gone feral”, had become an “LVF stronghold” and there had been a consequent collapse of the community association. The council officer described the estate as being beyond the council’s influence. The estate was one of a number included in the project set up by the councillor described in the last section. The development worker who came from outside the area told us:

This estate is LVF – very highly driven by the LVF so that people who have tried before sort of get knocked on the head. I kind of get away with it because I obviously don’t live in the area and can go from the ethos – I’m a worker, I’m doing this for the good of your community and go away again – they don’t see me as too much of a threat or too much of an influence because I’m coming in and out.

Work in these Loyalist estates proceeds through permission of local paramilitary leaders. Speaking of her work on another estate, the same interviewee told us of a visit she received shortly after she began work:

In my first week here the paramilitaries knocked on the door – ‘You got £106,000, what did you get that for? What are we getting out of this kind of thing?’ So you do have to appease them as I’m sure you know in this kind of work. So it was like, yes, this is what we are doing, but don’t call us, we’ll call you.

In the view of this interviewee, the main concern of the local paramilitaries was control over territory, often defined around matters such which side of a road a project works on.

The more we sort of edge into doing stuff over that side of the road, they say, ‘You’re working here, just make sure you tell us what you are doing’. Once they realise that it is for their kids and for the greater good of the area, they’re not too bad, although obviously, they have to be seen to make sure they know everything that is going on as well, which is the way of this country; it does sound terrible, but you do – you have to involve them to a certain extent. It is a big issue in this town.

The way they were involved and the sense of deference towards them felt by others in the community was made clear by this worker’s chairperson. It had been “a reasonably rough estate” six years previously with the appearance of being under paramilitary control. He described how there were 16 people on the committee at the start, including “some of the undesirable people with paramilitary leanings”. But as a result, the committee had been able to clean up the image of the estate. Kerbs were cleaned up as were gable end walls. The people with “paramilitary leanings” had operated as messengers between the committee and the paramilitary bosses. “We were able to ask, ‘Can you tell us if this can be done?’ We were able to clean up the image of the estate with the cooperation of the paramilitaries through liaison and getting permission to get things done”.

In contrast to community development by permission of paramilitary leaders, elsewhere in this town a community association had been taken over by Republican elements that were hostile to Sinn Fein and its approach to the Peace Process. The chairman of this association had been a former IRA activist who had been released from prison under the terms of the ‘Good Friday’ agreement. Formerly mixed, this estate had become almost exclusively Catholic and staunchly Republican.

According to a witness to the events, who was interviewed for this research, this had been a Sinn Fein stronghold for some years and the community association had been under the control of Sinn Fein. The interviewee described a public meeting of the community association at which “there were old Republicans brought in by bus from all over the north”. The interviewee said the occasion was reminiscent of a revivalist meeting with people making testimony as to why Sinn Fein had let them down. This public and orchestrated denunciation of Sinn Fein was followed that evening by the entire community association committee resigning from Sinn Fein.

This account was supported by the remarks made by the council official we interviewed who said that while the committee was now aligned with dissident Republicans, it was unclear what their agenda was. One outcome of this putsch was the chain of events described in Chapter Three where the family of the employee in the welfare project described in that chapter was forced to move to England as a result of threats issued by the man who currently chairs the community association. The sense that it had now become difficult in this town to promote open engagement around community relations issues was emphasized by the interviewee from the council who described a project supported by the council and funded through the Peace and Reconciliation Programme as “a way for groups to keep in contact with each other without physically having to meet. We are trying to initiate conversations in a way that is safe for people”.

It can also be the case for issues to do with paramilitary control to operate as ‘mood music’ behind community development activities particularly in Loyalist areas. An interviewee from a Protestant area within Area “B” suggested that paramilitary activity was a normal part of community life in that the people involved were local people. While the community organization she worked for would never refuse to provide a service to someone they knew to be involved in a paramilitary organization, they would keep their distance. “Paramilitaries do what paramilitaries do; they form part of our community...but we would not associate ourselves with paramilitary activity.” But,

I wouldn't paint it as bad as that, that we as a community organization would have to watch our backs. No, definitely not. I don't believe that and I've been here two years. If a problem arose we could probably know someone who knew someone... and if it was that serious a problem we would know the ways of getting... If a problem raised its head we would have ways and means of seeing if we could get some dialogue to sort that out.

However, elsewhere in Area "B" community development had been difficult in Protestant areas as a result of infighting among paramilitary groups for control of territory, even in very small areas. The challenge has been to draw these subdivisions, often each only encompassing a few streets, together to develop a shared strategy for the area as a whole. One interviewee, a church leader, whose patch covered this territory commented that "the big problem in Protestant communities is fragmentation", a fragmentation that was itself often maintained through paramilitary control. He expressed the view that it was sometimes appropriate in such areas to use institutions such as the churches to bridge that gap and he gave his work as an example of how both church buildings, congregations and church leaders could provide an infrastructure for people in these communities to begin talking together about what they needed and wanted for their future in the absence of other structures not under paramilitary control. "The churches are the one thing that act as overarching organizations and can bring people together over the division and fragmentation within Loyalist areas".

Our evidence suggests that the events described that took place in the Republican estate in Area "C" are rather exceptional. In the Catholic areas where we conducted interviews there was evidence of the ways in which a close and sometimes symbiotic relationship had developed between local community associations and Sinn Fein. A process of politicization of community development was evident in areas where community associations became involved in a local struggle for political supremacy between Sinn Fein and the SDLP, in which the associations themselves were a vehicle for political control over a neighbourhood. Area "D" is a large Catholic housing area, geographically isolated from any Protestant areas, with a population of about 35,000. As a result of fierce competition for votes between the

SDLP and Sinn Fein the local intermediary voluntary body, which has about 50 local member associations, described having to devote a great deal of time and energy on trying to maintain a middle path.

The interviewees from this organization said there was now a tendency for local associations to be labelled as ‘one’ or ‘the other’ and it could take time to work this out as labelling often depended on who was involved as much as what any association did or said. Because Sinn Fein had been very active on the ground, particularly in helping groups to get set up, in practice, most of their work had been with Sinn Fein groups, and as a result, the organization had tended to get labelled as a Sinn Fein organization. This process of political labelling helps explain the tactic of non-involvement in local community associations adopted by Organization One, described in Chapter Three, which was based in the same area. It appears as a rational approach to defending that organization’s strategy of erecting a ‘firewall’ between politics and need.

Whilst not always the case, in that we did meet local associations that were both politically and organizationally at some remove from Sinn Fein, there were also cases where the identification was close. In Area “A” an organization was established to promote a development strategy for a Republican neighbourhood that is largely surrounded by Protestant areas and which felt itself to be geographically isolated from its natural hinterland. The initiative had broad political backing with both Sinn Fein and SDLP involvement at the start. A Sinn Fein councillor now chairs the organization although our interviewee from this organization pointed out that she had been involved from the start in the mid 1990s as a local community activist and there was no sense of a political take-over; the process was more organic. This strategically driven initiative was embedded in a network of more local and issue-specific associations in the neighbourhood and there was a strong sense of collective purpose shared between the people involved and the local political leadership. The sense of shared purpose and the numbers of associational networks in the neighbourhood had

given the organization an assurance and confidence that it was hard to find in the Protestant community.

In those cases where community associations in Catholic areas were not so closely aligned with Sinn Fein, there was typically little sense of deference towards Sinn Fein as a political party, nor to former paramilitaries, nor even to dissident Republicans. The manager of a large community business in a Catholic area had this to say:

Well, the guy from Continuity comes in... the OC for Continuity... his brother works for me. OK, the first time we ever had anybody in here... a guy came in and said...I was asked to represent Sinn Fein because there was riots and somebody had broken into the building and wanted to talk to their local politicians and then somebody came down to me and said, 'Well, can you talk to me?' and I said, 'Who are you?' and it turned out he was the local RA and I didn't know. I told him to go away. I told him, 'You know, we're funded here. There's an understanding.' And away he went, OK. And no matter what the background is, we can operate in that sort of... and we're lucky. We might hire a night guard or something like that, quite legitimate, but we don't pay protection. We've made sure of that... there's a different attitude towards that here. But I know in other Nationalist areas and especially in Loyalist areas – they're paying through the nose in the Loyalist area. They're not paying here. So, I'm lucky in a way. I really can operate – so, therefore, I can say things and do things – I'm lucky. Others can't.

The assertion made here, that many community organizations have to pay protection money was, by its nature impossible to check. But the tone of this interviewee's remarks suggests that it may be common knowledge among community activists in the area, although it is something that is never acknowledged openly. And even here, in showing the door to the paramilitary representative, this interviewee referred to what would appear to be an informal "understanding" with the IRA locally that there would be no interference in his organization's work.

#### The boundaries of paramilitary control

The ability to carve out a space free of paramilitary interference was not confined to community organizations in Catholic areas. Loyalist paramilitaries can be circumvented, even in localities where they retain a strong presence. Area "E" is a

country town in a region of Northern Ireland with a small, but not decisive Catholic majority. As in the case of Area “A” there has been a responsibility sharing arrangement at the local district council for many years and, until recently, strong and pragmatically orientated leadership in the Unionist community. The area has a number of strong and longstanding community enterprises, among them a major initiative in a small Loyalist village community.

This initiative has succeeded in redefining the space that is exclusively Protestant, enabling Catholics from outside the area to work and do business at its facilities.

This would be regarded as an LVF village. It’s 110% Protestant (even the cats are Protestant), very tight and very Loyalist. For the project to be built, it was necessary to move the glass wall at the top of the road into the village beyond which Catholics would never venture. Through Cooperation Ireland we brought in a partner from the Republic of Ireland and immediately we had a mixed workforce. The development became ‘mixed to an acceptable level’. People started coming from outside the area – strangers were starting to mix; people could see strangers coming into the village. By growing slowly, it allowed the village to develop and feel comfortable. Catholics started coming here... They felt comfortable coming here. They never came before; they would have been petrified. There’s a whole spectrum of society that comes here and there is a level of mixing that is unheard of in the area that has happened because we have left it alone and let it happen naturally. It’s not contrived; it’s not organized; it just happens.

(Some details altered to protect anonymity of interviewee)

The process had not been without its difficulties, however. The initiative for the development had come from local politicians and businessmen who formulated the business plan and carried out the feasibility study before seeking to involve the local residents who had been suspicious and reluctant to get involved at first. Priorities were different; the villagers wanted a village hall, while the project promoters wanted to create employment. While local people have now become involved in the community association and board of the social business it runs, in the view of the interviewee from this project,

Protestant people are not engaging in society; it’s all right if the council is running something – there might be 12 people who are in everything. What happened in the South after partition is happening here now... Protestants are reluctant to take money; it’s an indictment of not making it themselves. Taking money is an admission of defeat. There’s a strong Presbyterian tendency. The committee wouldn’t take IFI money because it was seen as blood money

although the IFI was looking for good Protestant single identity projects – it was just too radical. The committee started with nil capacity and haven't done a thing with other groups. The directors have never been away on a training course, a day away, anything.

This apparent reluctance to get involved, although overcome to the extent that some local people had overcome their scepticism to join the committee, did not extend to any other networking activities. The manager of the project was himself on the board of a cross-community training initiative that had emerged from the Catholic community, but he had done this in his own time and had not told his committee.

The project had had other cross-community spin offs in addition to carving out a large neutral space for itself from space that was formerly ethnically defined. A number of local people are now attending computer training courses at premises on the other side of the district town in Catholic territory where they would otherwise never have ventured. The same organization is providing outreach services in the village itself. Slowly, preconceptions have been broken down in both communities in this context and in what was hitherto an insular Protestant community there are some signs of reaching out. The paramilitary figures in the village have not stood in the way of these developments.

The decisive factor in these developments appears to have been the involvement from the start of a group of people from outside the areas who had the necessary skills to get them off the ground and who were not subject to whatever control mechanisms operated within the village community itself. Put simply, they were never subject to paramilitary sanctions and their personal standing may have helped give permission for others in the local community to become involved.

Elsewhere, it would appear that the power of paramilitary leadership, together with community leadership closely associated with in the Protestant community, simply seems to be in retreat. Area "A" provides a stark contrast to the way events have unfolded in Area "C". Here it seems that the power of those who had a reputation for promoting an exclusively communal claim on resources has been in

retreat. The damage that this position can wreak was illustrated by one of our interviewees who recalled the following incident:

In one particular example, we were developing a project with the two areas and we were involving employers and so on and it was going great guns, and everybody around the table thought this a great thing. And suddenly, one of the key Loyalist representatives started spouting a diatribe about how there had been years of Catholic intimidation and Protestants were continually put upon and listening to it, you couldn't understand where it was coming from. That one spanner in the works literally put the entire thing through the floor.

Two of the Protestant estates on the periphery of Area "A" had undertaken major community development initiatives in the 1990s and had drawn down significant sums of money from the first European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. A community leader from one of these areas commented that the view that Protestants never got anything had been quite strong in the area, but this had changed with the advent of the second Peace and Reconciliation Programme when, in his view, people saw what his and the other successful association had achieved in the previous five years and "people started thinking that we needed to get off our backsides and benefit under Peace II and we will no longer listen to certain individuals... People have started a rise up against that".

This informant believed that there were two individuals in the area who had promoting themselves as spokespeople for the Protestants in the area. One of these had had close paramilitary links. Both had sought to interfere in the running of his committee, by putting people up to join it and to influence its agenda. Physical distance played its part in minimising their influence. The interviewee felt that it was "no coincidence" that the two areas that had benefited most from the first Peace and Reconciliation programme were at some distance from the heart of these individuals' power bases.

The committee here has always been very strong. It is no coincidence that two communities that developed quickest were both communities outside the reach of (name of individual), and that was ourselves and (name of other area). (Name of individual) tried to dictate, he tried to plant people on our committee; he tried to speak to agencies on our behalf, and our committee, told him they were not having it and that they could do things on their own. The other committee was the same. It was a strong committee that was physically out of his reach

as well. A lot of the people from areas closer in were on his training programmes so that gave him a hold over them as well, whereas out here, people were not using his training. We had no accountability to him.

(Some details changed to protect anonymity)

Yet it had taken time to see them off, in one case facing down publicly a threat of violence. These threats from outside the community association's immediate neighbourhood appear not to have been matched from within the neighbourhood. People with paramilitary links had been involved in the committee, but had never been able to take it over and were eventually sidelined. In the end the committee's success spoke for itself and underpinned its legitimacy; bringing over £2m in grants into an area with less than 250 houses meant that people in the neighbourhood could see the benefits for themselves.

This is a theme that we have already touched on and will return to again. This interviewee was also clear that the cause of pragmatic engagement among Protestant communities had been assisted by changes in the focus of public policy. The change in strategy that accompanied the introduction of the second European Union's Peace and Reconciliation Programme had been particularly helpful in that it channeled money more strategically than in the first Programme which had been much more indiscriminate. The local LSP had adopted a hands-on approach focused on processes that had made it easier for associations from Protestant neighbourhoods to become engaged. In addition, the approach that had been taken by the Department of Social Development in urban regeneration had, he thought, also helped to sideline those who had previously sought to promote the view that the Protestant community had been especially poorly treated.

The centrality of segregation in determining what can or cannot take place in poor communities in Northern Ireland has been well established in the literature.<sup>14</sup> In area 'G', a mixed neighbourhood, it was clear that the community association felt free to act as it saw fit. Whilst it had to tread carefully, there was no sense of having to

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<sup>14</sup> See Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) for an overview of this issue.

take into account any overt threat from within the area itself. Established in the 1970s, it has always viewed its remit as including the maintenance of the mixed neighbourhood. It has worked consistently but quietly to maintain the public space in the area as neutral and to ensure that it has remained an attractive place to live for those who wish to live in such a neighbourhood. Its contribution has been described as “critical”. “It always kept the idea alive that this was a mixed community. You know, I think that must be quite critical.”

The need to be reflexively engaged with the issue of diversity has been important for this organization which has focused on an absolute requirement to ensure that relations between neighbours remain functional and cordial. Its contribution to achieving this goal has enabled this association to sustain the view that the neighbourhood could be viable as a mixed community in a context in which it was assumed that any neighbourhood would inevitably become either a Protestant or Catholic single-identity area. There was a tendency for outsiders, in particular, to view the situation as anomalous and inevitably unstable.

There's a couple of things there that are noteworthy in the fact that in Northern Ireland – you're no use unless you're one or the other. So, they can't look at a mixed community in terms of it being the way it is. No matter what politician you're talking to – they'll be thinking that we're on the way to being something else. Even if those other pressures were under control, they would automatically assume that given the nature of Northern Ireland society, we are on our way to being something else – being segregated, because that's the norm. And whether you say you're not, or trying to be not, then they don't take you as seriously as they should.

### Success stories and the contributing factors

In this section we describe three examples of cooperation across interfaces that we examined. Two of them were in Area “A” and one contrasting case in Area “F”. We will call them Interfaces 1, 2 and 3. In Interface 1, the neighbourhood described in the preceding few paragraphs was faced by a very similar Catholic estate where in the past there had been a history of trouble at the interface between them. The Catholic estate is about 20 years newer than the Protestant estate in this pair and

was built in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was originally a mixed estate with a Protestant majority and was itself a no-man's land between another Catholic estate further up the road and the Protestant estate. Over the years the interface moved towards the Protestant area as Protestant families tended to be the first to move out, mostly to be closer to facilities like shops and schools. The view of our informant from this estate was that this was a process shaped by a combination of individual families' social aspirations and the broader geography of divisions in Area "A".

The community association on this estate had been established in 1989 to address serious problems of lack of access to facilities and the absence of a bus service. The informant had been involved with the association from the beginning and had survived a period of turmoil when the estate had been effectively overrun by drug dealers. "At one time there were three drug dealers on every street. It was ridiculous". The community association's premises had been smashed up on more than one occasion and once our informant had had all his fingers deliberately broken by members of the drug gangs. He said that these gangs tended to whip up sectarian feeling on the estate and had used drug money to pay for the bonfire on the night of 15<sup>th</sup> August. By 1998 the gang trouble had subsided following the shooting of a leading dealer by rival dealers. Since then the community association has worked to improve the facilities on the estate and the community's self-respect.

A key part of its success has been the developing relationship with the community association in the neighbouring Protestant estate. In what he described as a "model of good practice" the informant from the Protestant estate described what had been achieved:

I was part of this group when things were horrendous. We put a whole lot of work into building up relations with the community group up there and were very lucky with the people who are working up there. We did a lot of work around interface problems, in terms of dealing with problems around the marching season. We run a mobile phone scheme at this time of year, which keeps lines of communication open between the two areas. We have developed meaningful relations between the two areas. Last year, we launched a neighbourhood action plan for the two areas. We each have our own facilities and we have individual projects as well, but also as far as possible, we try and run joint programmes. On the last Thursday of every month, for example, our community safety officer would run an

event for senior citizens that is very much cross-community, about 50-50 between the two areas. Those meetings alternate between the two areas. We have a joint sports diversionary program, where young people from the two communities can use sport to bring people together. We have a local cricket team and two local football teams, a local hockey team and a local rugby team. We also have a summer diversionary program, where we basically take young people out of the estate during periods of high tension. We target the young people who might be involved in trouble. About a month ago, we launched a joint community safety action plan.  
(Some details changed to protect anonymity)

The worker on the Catholic estate said they were driven to developing joint work because things were getting so bad between the estates. The mobile phones were provided by an outside organization which also facilitated a series of joint meetings of the two committees at a neutral venue away from the area to hammer out an agreement on the way forward. The joint work programme evolved from this and it now includes a shared community safety officer who works with both committees in a project managed on behalf of both estates by a regional voluntary organization with appropriate specialist knowledge. At the time of the interviews (summer 2005) there had been no serious trouble between the two estates for more than 18 months and an indication of the reduction in tension was the letting, in the Catholic area, of houses next to the actual interface itself for the first time for a number of years.

Interface 2 comprises a Protestant area of older public housing dating from the 1950s abutting what is now a Catholic area of rather newer housing (the oldest dating from the early 1970s) but which was originally mixed. Through a natural process of separation from the 1970s onwards the two areas gained their separate identities. The community association in the Protestant estate had been established within three years of the interviews taking place and had rapidly developed projects in partnership with the local Council to develop facilities in the area. The Catholic area of this pair was described earlier in this chapter in respect to its relationships with Sinn Fein. The strategic community association, for the reasons discussed above, has been able to deal with its neighbours from a position of strength and with little fear of contradiction from within its own community.

As we have discussed, this can be more problematic in Protestant areas. In this case, our informants said that the committee of the community association included a number of people whose presence would help reassure others in the community. Potentially awkward symbolic issues were dealt with pragmatically through knowledge of who in the community might take offence at what. There was little overt evidence of a paramilitary presence on the estate and the respondents gave no indication of any difficulties being caused by them. One person, a former paramilitary prisoner who worked for an ex-prisoners' project and who had threatened the association's staff member, had been dealt with by telling him that his project and job were on the line unless he withdrew. The fact that ex-prisoners projects on both sides of the divide were funded and were fully engaged in the development process was, in the opinion of our informant from the Protestant estate, an important factor in keeping them on board.

The two community associations have now established a formal partnership comprising a single strategic body to oversee development in the wider area and, in the process, to establish a geographical identity that includes both estates. At the time of the interview the structures were in place. Much of the work had barely begun, but it was already striking to the outsider to note the level of commitment and confidence in the venture that was expressed by those interviewed from both sides. The interviewee from the Catholic community explained the nature of the dynamic from his perspective:

In a sense, high walls made good neighbours during the conflict, especially if you lived in a dislocated community like this. ...it was detached from its hinterland; ...it was detached from their kindred community. That created a very resilient sense of community, very coherent and very tight knit. Now you can either take those attributes and create the context where it becomes a positive thing, or you can allow it to fall into some kind of stasis, where you can't move the community forward, and it actually becomes negative. So what are trying to do is to create a space where that sense of community solidarity and community cohesion contributes, where we become net providers to the overall development of community relations and also to the overall development of the wider area. Certainly now I think there is a broad recognition that rather than being a place apart, we are integral to the whole thing working. I think people recognise that there is a renewed confidence among people to move forward. That has been demonstrated by the development of the new partnership.  
(Some details changed to protect anonymity)

The association appeared very confident in going forward and saw no difficulty in developing joint and permanent structures with its neighbour. As we suggested in our discussion of broader political factors, and as is hinted at in the quotation above, there is a strong sense in this district of the war being over and that it is time to move on, hopefully underpinned by a stable political settlement in which the Protestant community feels it has a sufficient stake to take up the opportunities presented.

This willingness and openness to engagement that was a feature of both communities is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the joint work to progress. A key factor has been the way in which the opportunities presented by the second Peace and Reconciliation Programme have interacted with the communities' readiness. Firstly, the Programme funded the development of the association in the Protestant estate, enabling it to employ a development worker and establish itself properly in the neighbourhood. Secondly, the interface money available to the LSP was used to create interface partnership committees to establish priorities and make recommendations on projects to be funded for ratification by the LSP board. The LSP also paid for and organized a residential meeting for the two committees to develop a set of joint priorities and programme of work. On that occasion the idea of a more permanent joint structure was mooted (by a committee member from the Protestant association) and was taken up.

Our informants from both communities believed that both the availability of the Peace Programme money, and the way in which it had been administered, were crucial to stabilising relations between them and laying the groundwork for a jointly conceived future. For the Protestant community association in particular, these funds provided a safety net for them in dealing with potential sceptics in their own community. It meant that the committee could defend the cross-community aspects of their work by pointing out that cross-community involvement was a condition of getting the money; this explanation was acceptable because the money also delivered tangible benefits to local people.

Interface 3 in Area “F” consists in two older inner city communities. Each has been redeveloped and features housing built in the 1970s. The interviewees in both the Catholic and Protestant sides of this interface stressed the pressure that their communities had been under through both private housing and office development that was eating into the working class communities they represented. Housing redevelopment had reduced the size of the areas and had reduced the numbers of residents as lower housing densities meant fewer houses replaced those that were knocked down. The two associations had both been formed independently of each other in the mid 1990s in response to similar pressures. As a result it had been relatively easy to find a set of issues to work on together. An ambitious joint community plan had been drawn up with private sector partners to redevelop a site owned by the local council. The plan failed to get off the ground because the council had rejected it. At that time it was not possible in this particular council to get the DUP and Sinn Fein to vote together on any issue. However, they had received funding from an independent source for a large scale training programme that was run on a joint basis.

The existence of common issues brought the local associations together but the success of their work was based on the vision and the trust that had developed between the community workers in the two areas. One of them explained:

...as we work together on common areas we bring in some of our committee and eventually you reach the stage where they can actually meet. But the community worker is sort of the cement round which this is built. I mean, my community worker has confidence in me; I have confidence in her so there's that transferral thing. You think, no, there's no hidden agenda here – and you can take it from me there's no hidden agenda. And, you know, community relations isn't built up overnight – it takes time – and each community has its own devils to put to bed, if you like, as well. ...I really believe that the community workers... hold a position in society that is bigger than what most people believe, not because we want it to be so but it's because they underpin the whole progress of community relations for it's based on working together and understanding each other.

At the time of the interviews the community worker in the Protestant association had recently left and, as might be expected in such circumstances, this had thrown the association into a period of transition. It had also effectively put a stop, for

the time being, to the more developmental aspects of the cross-community partnership, although links between the two remained active and the structures to deal with interface trouble when it arose were still in place. These, however, were perceived to be very vulnerable to volunteer burn-out.

In contrast to Interfaces 1 and 2 in these examples, here in Interface 3 the catalyst for developmental cross-community work was different. Although it was similarly driven and sustained by the relationship between the workers involved, it was much less dependent on external resources. Changes within each of the two communities since the mid 1990s appear to have been important. In the Catholic community the ceasefires had seen both the ending of long-standing feuds between factions within Republicanism and a more recent decline in the potency of the Republican political project as an issue of concern. This had led to a more pragmatic style of politics in the face of the external commercial pressure being exerted on the area. In the Protestant community it seemed that the leadership of the community association was becoming increasingly able to challenge the paramilitary leadership about what they were doing and to get them involved particularly through cultural and historical activity.

...the leaders of the paramilitaries ruled by fear for a number of years but that has changed also. I think another thing that has changed too is that, I'm not a bit shy about going to the door and talking to these people and I would just tell them exactly how I feel, and I wouldn't be with them if I thought they were wrong, and I'd tell them they were wrong – and I do believe that they are starting to change; they're starting to come on board and see the community development.... There's still certain issues – obviously with any working class area you have issues that are there – they're not going away, you know, but we need to bring them on board. We need to bring them on the Forum; we need to sit them down and we need to work with them. I mean, they know nothing else – you know, it's their life. If we bring the paramilitaries on board, you know, and hopefully they'll start to change – they are starting to change, they are starting to get more involved in the community, for the benefit of the community, rather than for the benefit of themselves. The young ones – I feel that we need to grab them. We need to educate them on the likes of the UVF... they need to know their history.

A weakening of internal constraints together with a set of pressing shared concerns had provided the context in which these relationships developed. The key

factor in driving the work forward was the availability of effective and, (importantly), politically non-aligned leadership in each community.

#### Cross-community partnerships in a hostile environment

At one interface in Area “B” several initiatives that have been run jointly between the community associations on each side of the divide have struggled in the face of other pressures in the wider area and of funding difficulties. These included a joint skills development programme, a shared community relations worker and joint participation in a cross-Border initiative with a partner in the Republic of Ireland, a series of initiatives funded through measures in the Peace and Reconciliation Programme. The programmes have had some successes, but the funding environment has been difficult and relations between the two associations have sometimes been strained. Changes in personnel have made personal relationships and trust hard to build and differences in approach between the associations to the funding opportunities available have made it difficult to sustain joint bids. Differing structures have also proved problematic. The association in the Catholic community is a single organization, well established in its community and in a position to take a leadership rôle when necessary. The association in the Protestant community is a forum and its members are other local organizations. It has found it more difficult to take risks partly because its members have differing priorities but also because of fragmentation and territorial turf wars in the neighbourhood. This has made it very difficult to put forward joint initiatives on a basis of equality where risks and rewards are shared equally.

The interviewees from both sides of this relationship also felt that guidance from funders and government agencies had not always been helpful. As a result, despite a history of collaboration going back as far as 1996, an opportunity to create a single development partnership for the two areas, together with a substantial funding package, was missed. The available evidence makes it difficult to assess the exact nature of the problem but at its heart it appears that insufficient trust between the key

players in each community association was an important factor. The association in the Protestant area suffered from a sense of inferiority. An interviewee from a government funded partnership agency that covered Area “B” told us:

The local partnership collapsed because the perception on the Protestant side was that the other side was better led, better organized and got everything while they were struggling. While the Catholic side is relatively homogeneous, in the Protestant area there are divisions upon divisions. There is still a great sense of vulnerability and people feel that ‘the other lot are out to get us... They don’t recognise our poverty’. The problems are not worse than anywhere else. They lack of a sense of being part of something that is going somewhere.

In the background, and in the wider area, there has been continuing ethnic tension and rivalry. This has fed feelings of insecurity among the Protestant community and the sense of being unfairly criticized by community associations in Catholic areas whose members find it difficult to understand why associations in Protestant areas are often under developed or have limited effectiveness. This unpromising environment was summed up by our interviewee in the Catholic association. From his perspective:

There was that lack of continuity but there were people in the background whom it suited to accept that the worst was worst and not resolve it. And also, statutory-wise, I think there were huge problems – people not willing to deal with that issue. Our experience of being the lead partner is: you put your head above the parapet, you try and do things well, somebody complains about you – they’re only too willing to do it, especially if it’s a Loyalist organization.

## **Conclusions**

The informants in these cases all emphasized the importance of the friendship and trust that had been built up between the staff of the associations. The driving force behind the initiatives described here lay in the reliability of these relationships for those involved. The creation of a cadre of community leaders in salaried jobs has been an important driver of change in areas where there are opportunities for effective joint work. Our respondents emphasized that change depends both on reliable leadership and on the existence of opportunities. The evidence we have presented in this chapter attests to the formidable obstacles that lie in the path of a community

development practice that seeks to work across areas comprising people with competing communal identities. Many community workers possess dedication, skill, determination and often sheer bloody mindedness. For joint work of this kind to be successful there must be relative stability in local politics, a relevant policy environment and effectively applied funding programmes. Another important factor is an easing of the levels of paramilitary control within communities that grew up during the 'Troubles'. This has provided an opportunity for pragmatic leadership to emerge and to be become established.

Without these factors the relative powerlessness of community development as a form of social intervention in the face of the forces that reinforce separation and difference is painfully evident. Our findings draw attention to a number of issues. The first is that the penetration of community associations into their own communities is often limited. Their activities may directly engage only a minority of those living in the communities in which they work. Even in those areas where there have been innovative cross-community initiatives, a great deal rests on the personal relationships between very few leaders in each of the communities. These relationships may not extend far beyond the employed staff. The removal of any of these people can make progress very difficult. This was apparent from events that occurred in Area "F" but this is an issue that was also mentioned by our informant from Area "D". It will be recalled that this was a large wholly Catholic housing area with a deep infrastructure of about 78 local associations. This interviewee pointed out that the total population of the area was around 35,000 and that all the local associations together probably mobilised about 1,000 people as volunteers, or 3.5%. Of course this is not the whole picture. Of equal importance is who is involved and what networks they participate in. The existence of such a huge majority of passive 'free riders' is an inbuilt limitation to community development as a method of social intervention and source of social change.

In addition to our questions concerning the depth of engagement that community associations can mobilize there are other questions about the nature of the

contact that this engagement entails. Our evidence has illustrated the kinds of gains that can be made if single identity area communities engage with each other. There may be evidence of a growing recognition of a measure of interdependence between communities at least in some areas. In Chapter Two we presented survey evidence that suggests that although there is considerable contact among Catholics and Protestants in voluntary and community associations, this appears to be restricted to work rôles and is accompanied by a general reluctance to discuss differences in other settings. In Chapter Three we discussed the observation that where people in welfare orientated associations cross communal barriers they tend to do so in ways that ensure that fundamental communal differences are not addressed. Our evidence suggests that community development may have its own version of the same problem.

A number of respondents referred to this issue. One noted that there had been considerable growth in shared activity around issue-focused partnerships such as Health Action Zones, work track consortia and other initiatives based in public policy. Furthermore, the funding environment had tended to throw associations together. Those involved tended to approach these initiatives in a “business-like manner”, go to the meetings and do what had to be done. Much of this contact appears to be driven by funding opportunities and one respondent expressed a concern that, as these will diminish in the years after 2008, and with the end of some important funding streams, these contacts may likewise wither. Some of this contact may be opportunistic in that for some activists the motivation for getting involved in cross-community structures has been to draw down money for their own areas. We have no direct evidence of this, but some interviewees expressed a little cynicism. For example, in the view of one:

We are aware of two groups at an interface where the committee members went away on a residential and got their photographs taken in or to show to a funder whatever is necessary. But, as regards what work is being done, I think the only work is being done by the two development officers that are actually meeting and discussing things. Committees are not meeting, and people on the ground are certainly not meeting. The development workers are communicating and discussing issues that are mutual to them... The development leaders are

working together to make sure – almost a pact – ‘We’ll split the money, you get half and we’ll get half’. So it is very much tokenism.

Whether, or to what extent, some cross-community structures have been established just to access funding opportunities is impossible to measure. Underlying these anxieties about the vulnerability of these initiatives lies a belief that in practice progress very often depends upon the trust and personal relationships established between the paid workers. As in Interface 3, described above, the departure of one person can not only create problems for the association for which they were working, but can effectively bring to a halt the cross-community programmes that they had developed. The evidence thus suggests that community development has the potential to cross deeply divided communities where there is sufficient local political stability to allow an easing of community control and defensiveness, where there are common projects to be tackled, and where there is sufficient trust between an effective paid leadership. This will only be possible where secure and sensitively applied resources are available.

## Chapter Five

### **Conclusion and Implications: Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The evidence presented in this report shows that the ethno-sectarian divisions of Northern Ireland profoundly permeate the voluntary and community sector and that it is to a substantial degree structured by them. Nevertheless, the sector is a site in which there is a high level of cross-community contact around shared concerns and issues. There is no way of assessing the contribution of this degree of shared activity for contributing to whatever stability there may be. However, for the most part, the potential of this contact to impact positively on community relations is undermined by a set of crucial factors, some of which have to do with the ways in which organizations have come to operate and with the context in which they work.

There is evidence of a zero sum calculation in which the reported quite low levels of anxiety surrounding cross-community contact in organizational contexts (among staff, volunteers and/or service users) and the extent to which it takes place is bought at the cost of ignoring (sometimes by default, and sometimes deliberately) the relevance and impact of ethno-sectarian divisions on the missions or operations of the organizations. As an example to admit that disabled Catholics might have worse educational or job-related outcomes than disabled Protestants, could raise questions of ethno-sectarian competition for resources in an organization concerned with such issues. This could, in turn, put at risk the largely anxiety-free level of cross-community contact that might currently exist.

One key problem for voluntary organizations whose rationale is to address a particular theme or issue that crosses ethno-sectarian divisions is a tendency to believe that their work can be effective and at the same time be blind to the divided context in which they work. To trust the 'other' in these organizations can be at the cost of even acknowledging, let alone addressing, differences.

As a consequence trust developed within organizations is not readily generalised to trusting the 'other' in the broader context of Northern Ireland as a whole. The experience of organizations working in interface communities, where avoidance of the issue is not possible, shows that cross-community trust, even to the extent of developing joint projects, is hard won, easily undermined, and often restricted to very few individuals.

During very difficult decades, habits of avoidance and of limiting the content of cross-community contact to non-contentious and shared concerns have helped preserve the integrity of the work and social and economic impact of voluntary and community organizations. Context has reinforced these habits. Many organizations have had to address their single-identity origins while working in the context of geographically segregated patterns of living in which there is little informal cross-community contact and in the context of what some have perceived to be an unhelpful funding environment. Many organizations reported feeling they quite simply did not have the capacity to directly address what they perceived as difficult and challenging issues.

The voluntary and community sector has been shaped by decades of public administration in Northern Ireland that has often acted as if the 'Troubles' did not exist. The sector cannot be asked to assume the burden of changing its operational habits without that context changing. The sector can never be an independent source of generalized trust, but in the context of *A Shared Future*, could be incentivized to turn the civic space it occupies into a place where trust-building of this sort can start.

But both context and operational habits will have to change.

Our research evidence about the relative successes and failures of community organizations, (those that are primarily concerned with the social and economic well-being of a neighbourhood which in this context usually means a single identity neighbourhood), may suggest what might be done in terms of improving the context.

Forced to confront ethno-sectarian differences, these organizations were always at risk of being pulled into an ethno-sectarian competition. Where trust had developed, however, there has always been enough local political stability to free people to take risks to establish local structures in which differences could be resolved and where shared strategies could be developed. External facilitation was often required. Even then, there were real anxieties that shared structures would be vulnerable to changes in funding. The absence of trust-building between community organizations on either side of the divide is usually associated with unstable local politics that allowed 'space' for narratives of competition to take hold in single-identity communities.

Voluntary organizations have largely avoided such problems by avoiding the issue of communal difference altogether. But if they are to change then a much more facilitative context must be created. This might contain the following elements:

1. A requirement in the letting of contracts or service agreements for the delivery of public services that all organizations receiving these services have equality impact assessments in place based on the requirements of Section 75 of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act and that there are needs assessments and strategies in place that acknowledge any impact of ethno-sectarian, racial or other differences.
2. The availability of a fund to support any external facilitation considered necessary or appropriate to enable management committees and staff groups to implement the necessary changes in attitudes, problem definition or structures. Such a fund would constitute a public acknowledgement of the potential of service delivery voluntary organizations use in the way they bring people together as a source of reconciliation and to overcome some of the criticism of the European Union Peace Programmes that they effectively discount or ignore this potential.

3. The development of robust evaluation measures to accompany public funding and that would capture the ‘added value’ of participation in funded programmes either as staff, volunteers or service users to the building of generalized trust. Funds might be required initially to build up the necessary internal and consultancy expertise to develop and put such an evaluation framework into place.<sup>15</sup>

In line with the aspiration in *A Shared Future* that public administration become a driver for change, government departments and agencies, through which the bulk of public funding for voluntary organizations flows, should change also. But voluntary organizations could be invited to help lead this change process by developing demonstration models of good practice which might then be ‘sold back’ into public administration agencies. Such opportunities might help to reinforce the necessary cultural shift within voluntary organizations themselves by providing further incentives for a model of good practice that would have equality of access and dealing with difference at its heart. A facilitative environment of this sort in these fields of voluntary action would help to create a context analogous to the stable local politics identified above as a condition for cross-community trust building based on community organizations.

Public policy can create a more facilitative context, but voluntary and community organizations, as independent actors in Northern Irish society, must also recognise their own profound responsibilities to make the shared civic space that they have created into something that counts for more in achieving reconciliation in a divided society. Operational habits and assumptions that seek to protect this ‘space’ by putting a firewall between it and politics need to be set aside and a culture developed where awareness of, and questions about, the impact of a divided society on the work of organizations, and the impact of those organizations on a divided society, are at its heart.

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<sup>15</sup> There is a fuller discussion of what such a framework might include in the appended literature review.

It is with the hope that this report may make a modest contribution to this conversation that we commend it to the sector and to government.

## **Appendix (A)**

### **Literature Review**

The aim of this literature review is to examine the extent to which current policy developments that hope to insert a community relations dimension as a core part of the reason for government funding for the voluntary and community sector rest on foundations that are supported by the academic literature and to suggest a reformulation of the conceptual framework that underpins current policy thinking.

The central research questions in this study concerned the contribution (direct and indirect) of voluntary action in Northern Ireland to mediating and resolving deep communal divisions between the Protestant and Catholic communities. There are several thousand voluntary and community organizations, most of which are neither 'community relations' specialists nor organizations like the Orange Order that exist to promote exclusive communal identities. The extent to which they actively involve people from both communities in their daily lives and the extent to which their participation in wider networks built on issues that transcend communal divisions and identities impacts on cross-community relations is unknown at present. And to the extent that they do so it is not known what impact this might have.

In the very large literature on Northern Ireland, very little has been written about the relationship between the dynamics of the conflict and civil society. In particular, there have been very few studies of the broad rôle of community-based organizations in relation to the dynamics of the core conflict in Northern Ireland, although there have been a number of specific studies that have looked at the contribution of what has become known as 'track two' diplomacy to the peace process of the 1990s (Lederach, 1997; Knox and Quirk, 2000; Cochrane and Dunn, 2002).

Lederach (1997) proposed a three tier model of peace making. At the top of his pyramid stands the elite leadership of the protagonists to the conflict that focuses on high level negotiations and where the emphasis is on visible leadership from identifiable individuals. At the second tier are middle range leaders representing leading NGOs, academics and ethnic/religious leaders. They focus on workshops, training in conflict resolution and peace commissions. At the third level are the grassroots leaders from community based organizations, and locally based government officials. At this level action focuses on local commissions, grassroots training and prejudice reduction and interventions to address post-war trauma. Lederach's thesis is that progress at all three levels is necessary in successful peace processes and that each level is dependent on developments at other levels.

Lederach's model is helpful in that it draws attention to the central rôle of both grassroots and middle range civic action in building peace in conflictual societies such as Northern Ireland. But what that rôle might actually be, is much less clear cut. In their comparative study of experiences in Northern Ireland, South Africa and in the Israeli/Palestinian conflicts, Knox and Quirk (2001) follow Rupert Taylor's (1999) analysis and suggest that the Northern Ireland experience indicates that civil society has the potential to transform the conflict but the authors do not specify how it might realise that potential, nor the nature of the properties that give it that potential.

Cochrane and Dunn (2002) consider the implications of the 'track two' activities of peace/conflict resolution organizations (P/CROs) in Northern Ireland in the context of the process that led to the 'Good Friday' agreement in 1998. They argue that at 'track two' level the emphasis tends to be process driven rather than outcome driven in that activities at this level cannot be said to lead directly to specific political deals. Nevertheless, they argue that "while the contribution of the P/CRO sector was not crucial to the eventual outcome of the political negotiations in 1998, it was nonetheless positive and significant" (Cochrane and Dunn, 2002: 5).

In this they concur with other commentators who have studied this period of Northern Irish history. But from the perspective of 2006, we can now see that whatever it is that mid range and grassroots community organizations do that may have been helpful in the 1990s, has failed to transform the dynamics of the conflict in any sustainable way. The question remains begged. Cochrane and Dunn (2002) offer a number of helpful observations. First, they note that all the organizations they studied were established in the face of various symptoms of the conflict and not on the basis of an analysis of what the conflict was about. Even within those voluntary agencies specialising in the conflict, there has been no shared analysis of either the nature of the problem or the necessary solution. This stands in stark contrast to the situation in South Africa where NGOs had a unified vision of a post-apartheid political settlement (Taylor, 1999). Second, they draw attention to the view that the actual drop off in the levels of violence in Northern Ireland since the early 1990s has been the result of a change in tactics by the Provisional IRA and the corresponding Protestant paramilitary ceasefires. Pointing out that it is difficult to point to cause and effect, and deploying what in the late 1990s became popular metaphor to describe the relationship between voluntary action and wider society, Cochrane and Dunn comment:

although its impact on the political process has been peripheral rather than central, it would be reasonable to conclude that Northern Ireland would have been a lot worse off without its contribution to peace and conflict resolution over the past 30 years...it was often the 'glue' that held society together during the worst days of the 'Troubles'. Had this 'stretcher-bearer' rôle not existed over the past 30 years, the social impact of the political conflict would have been much greater.  
(Cochrane and Dunn, 2002: 173).

These conclusions which leave open and undefined the nature and strength of the 'glue' holding society together and which do not specify the 'stretcher-bearer' rôle, suggest that a rather different approach might prove fruitful if we are to crack the central puzzle. First, it might be helpful to focus attention more on matters of conflict management rather than the rather more grandiose objectives of conflict transformation or resolution. Asking the question what aspects of civil society activity can be shown to have a bearing on the control of violence in situations of

endemic conflict, opens up the further question of what in general might give rise to the kind of civil society that engages in such activities. More specific questions can be asked about the kinds of opportunities that exist to promote these forms of voluntary action, or what barriers and constraints there are.

Underlying these questions is a set of further questions that can be made explicit and explored. An initial list of these might be as follows:

- How are voluntary and community organizations grounded in the communities from which they emerge; what is their sociological basis?
- What can voluntary action achieve and under what conditions?
- Is the conflict in Northern Ireland the kind of conflict that can be resolved (even in part) by the kinds of impacts that voluntary action can deliver? In other words, how relevant are the actions of voluntary and community organizations to conflict resolution?

#### The social capital debate

The government's 'Good Relations Strategy' published in 2005 reiterated in the passage quoted at the start of this review the view that community development is a means to investing in bridging social capital that would promote relationships within and between communities. The idea that social capital is a particularly valuable social resource whose availability is predictive of the social, economic and governmental success of a society and that it is generated through a bottom up process based on interactions among people meeting in voluntary associations has become an important theme in government policy. This is an international phenomenon and has been associated with government strategies in many developed welfare states to adjust policies in the face of globalization and post-industrial forms of economic production (Anheier, 2004).

The concept of social capital has become an important grounding for current developments in government policy towards the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. Work conducted on behalf of the Department for Social Development by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland [CENI] developed and proposed an evaluation framework for government funded voluntary sector programmes around the three aspects of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking (CENI, 2004). All voluntary sector activity could be assimilated into this framework and the recommendation, subsequently adopted by government, was that all evaluations of government funded voluntary sector programmes should be conducted within it. Since the publication of the CENI report, the DSD has now developed a toolkit of indicators that, it is recommended, should be adopted across all government departments.

In a recent paper for the Community Relations Council, Hughes and McCandless (2006) note that this framework presents an opportunity to conceptually link community relations work to community development work. These are two types of intervention that they note have often been seen to be in opposition to one another in the past. The government's 'Good Relations Strategy' (2005) makes clear its intention to use this framework as a way of driving forward its policies towards the sector as a whole.

Social capital has thus achieved a central policy importance as providing a readily grasped and accessible framework for linking community relations outcomes to all sorts of voluntary sector activity. However, in trying to elaborate what the voluntary and community sector's actual relationship with communal divisions might be, and hence its potential for addressing these, it is important to look in more detail at what social capital can and cannot tell us.

The basic idea is simply stated. First elaborated by Robert Putnam in his book on Italy, *Making democracy work : civic traditions in modern Italy* (Putnam, 1993) social capital in this view is defined as consisting in three dimensions, namely, networks, social norms of reciprocity and generalized trust. Social capital thus

encompasses social relationships, the rules governing those relationships and attitudinal factors contributing to generalized trust. The first two attributes are aspects of social structures and the third is a social attribute at the level of generalized trust, but is nevertheless a function of individual people's attitudes.

Putnam discovered a close association between a dense network of voluntary associations that encouraged horizontal ties among people from differing backgrounds and the relative economic success of northern Italy when compared to southern Italy where he found economic and social stagnation to be associated with weak associational life dominated by hierarchical social relations. Putnam draws a crucial distinction between what he terms 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Putnam, 1993, 2000). The former refers to social capital generated amongst like minded people and the latter to social capital that bridges other social divisions, for example, class, ethnic origin or age. Putnam argued that the trust that was generated in face to face interactions in the life of associations that drew people together from different backgrounds could be generalized to other situations and could be drawn on by people addressing collective problems. Hence, the policy proposition that investing in voluntary action to generate social capital is a key component in building and sustaining a successful society.

An important addition to Putnam's conceptualization was made by Woolcock (1998) who argued for 'linking' social capital referring to the vertical ties between networks and power élites and government. Social capital should thus be conceived as possessing three elements, social networks, norms of reciprocity and generalized trust, and coming in three types, bonding, bridging and linking.

Putnam's thesis is that social capital is an essential building block to good democratic governance, that it is most importantly generated in face to face interactions in voluntary associations and that it is in decline or under threat because of a decline in these associations. This became an important touchstone for policy

making in the later 1990s.<sup>16</sup> The thesis has often been accompanied by its corollary, the ‘crowding out’ hypothesis, which states that increased state intervention in welfare crowds out the space for the autonomous voluntary action, a view that has both its right leaning adherents (Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 2000) and its left leaning adherents (Offe, 1984; Habermas, 1984, 1989, 1992).

There is now a large body of evidence to link levels of generalized trust in societies and the density of voluntary associations (Anheier and Kendall, 2002; Anheier, 2004). However, this evidence does not amount to *proof* that the source of generalized trust lies in the face-to-face interactions that take place within these associations. It is equally possible that cause and effect flows in the opposite direction. Indeed, citing evidence that higher levels of trust are to be found in the most egalitarian societies than in those with greater levels of income inequality and greater reliance on means-testing of social security benefits, some have argued that redistributive welfare states are the main source of trust and that it is this that encourages people to join associations (Stolle, 2003; Rothstein and Stolle, 2003). Thus, the “state plays a fundamental rôle in shaping civic capacity” (Tarrow, 1996: 395). Similarly Hall (1999) argues that state led reform to the education system was decisive in maintaining high levels of social capital in Britain.

In contrast to the bottom up hypothesis, it is as plausible to argue that voluntary associations, with their particular interests and their tendency to draw like minded people together, should be the last place to look for the source of generalized trust and should instead be viewed as a particular outcome of trust generated elsewhere.

An important European literature has found that Putnam’s view that social capital is declining may not apply in Europe. Thus Hall (1999) found that there had been no noticeable decline in Britain in the propensity of people to form associations,

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<sup>16</sup> The story that an Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, keeps a copy of Putnam’s book on the USA beside his bed may be apocryphal, but is maybe an indication of the zeitgeist in which Putnam replaces the Bible as a guide to action for our leaders.

or of social capital since the Second World War. Van Oorshot and Arts (2005) find no evidence in Europe to support the crowding out hypothesis. Kumlin and Rothstein (2005) address what they term the Scandinavian problem – the most developed welfare states have the highest ratings of social capital. They conclude that the biggest determinant of social capital is the design of welfare state institutions. Wollebaek and Selle (2002) consider the case of Norway and question whether active participation in associations is necessary for social capital formation.

Putnam's approach has been criticized as depending on too narrow a range of voluntary associations (Anheier and Kendall, 2002), and as ignoring the political and economic circumstances within which voluntary associations operate (Edwards and Foley, 2001). Furthermore, as Stolle (2003) has also noted, so far there is no convincing theory to explain why trust generated in small group settings should generalize to other settings. She suggests that voluntary associations are consumers of social capital in that people with high levels of social capital self-select into associations. This is one explanation of why societies with highly interventionist and universal welfare states also have high levels of voluntary association.

As with other social and economic resources, both knowledge of the existence of social capital and access to it are differentiated by other factors such as class and membership of minority excluded groups (Foley and Edwards, 1999). Anheier and Kendall (2002: 355) query whether there is a straightforward relationship between networks, social norms and trust and conclude by noting:

The central point is that the relationship between social capital and trust is highly conditional, i.e., dependent on the structure of civil society and the legitimacy of the political system, and indirect, i.e., mediated by processes like social inclusion and participation

In other words the relationship between the three elements of social capital identified by Putnam is mediated by a number of intervening variables or factors, chief among them being the policies and actions of the state.

Reinforcing the argument that welfare states, underpinned by stable political settlements, play a central part in explanations of high levels of generalized trust, Anheier and Kendall note that the relationship between voluntary associations and trust breaks down in those cases “where the legitimacy of the social and political order is questioned in fundamental ways” (ibid: 355). These authors quote the example of Bosnia, but their remarks might just as readily be applied to Northern Ireland where the conflict might be said to be substantially about “the legitimacy of the social and political order”.

This literature leaves little room for ambiguity; there is little evidence to support the bottom up hypothesis unless it is shored up by paying attention to the actions and policies of the state and the politics which set the boundaries to what states can do. In the case of Northern Ireland these arguments suggest that the utility of voluntary associations as a source of social capital will be conditional on the extent to which the voluntary sector is segmented, the degree to which there is sufficient political stability and the extent to which welfare state policies and structures promote equality of access to social and economic resources.

The introduction of the concepts associated with social capital into debates about the value of voluntary action in Northern Ireland has helped to sharpen thinking. The distinction between bonding, bridging and linking social capital has provided a set of tools to begin addressing the extent to which organizational activities reach horizontally across the communal divide and vertically into the policy community. For this reason Hughes and McCandless (2006) note that they provide a conceptual framework to link community development and community relations, two approaches that have often appeared at loggerheads in the past. But the literature also makes clear that the aspect of social capital that makes the difference – the generalized trust that is associated with the norms and networks – cannot be properly understood without also including matters such as income inequality, the rôle of the state in equalizing opportunities and outcomes between groups of citizens and the structuring of civil society in wider social structures. Policies that look to the

voluntary sector as an alternative source of bridging of communal divisions without regard to the policies and practices of the state are unlikely to be successful.

### Ethnic violence and voluntary associations

Some of the limitations that arise from the application of too simple an understanding of social capital in the Northern Ireland context become apparent in the light of literature on social norms and conflict management. A useful starting point can be found in Darby (1986). He notes that a “strong underlying theme in the analysis of social conflict is its tendency towards unqualified violence between the participants” (Darby, 1986:167). He asks why in the case of Northern Ireland this has not occurred and notes that far from getting worse, the violence subsided after an initial intense period in the early 1970s. The first important point he notes is that by contrast with other areas of conflict in Northern Ireland the mutually hostile groups inhabit the same territory and are unwilling to either remove each other or to assimilate. As a result, the protagonists have gradually evolved relationships that regulate rather than resolve their antagonisms (Darby, 1986:169). He suggests three types of mechanism: avoidance, selective contact, and functional integration.

Avoidance is a well established mechanism exacerbated in the early 1970s and to a lesser extent since, by the strengthening of heartland single identity communities, often separated by physical barriers. But even in areas without physical barriers patterns of avoidance can be very deeply embedded. In his study of one rural area, Murtagh (2002) found that people went to considerable lengths to avoid unnecessary contact across the ethnic divide. However, as Darby (1986) points out, in many areas of Northern Ireland avoidance is not a practical option.

In such cases, Darby (1986) notes the importance of selective contact. Contact between the ethnic groups can be maintained in certain carefully controlled circumstances, but not in others. Workplace contact may not be seen as relevant to attitudes in other circumstances, for example. Murtagh (2003) provides another

example in noting that farmers socialise and do business at farm marts and share equipment and time without reference to communal identity, but that this did not prevent the operation of two separate markets in land. Land ownership almost never crossed the communal boundaries. These processes shade into the third type of mechanism, functional integration. In some circumstances, Darby suggests that there can be a considerable degree of functional integration. He notes the importance of shared business interests and shared leisure activities among some middle class people and he also suggests that there is evidence that common material or social interests can overcome sectarian suspicion (Darby, 1986:172). Such cross-community associations of people with shared interests are often more viable than are associations established with cross-community contact specifically in mind. Integration is, however, limited to the function in which people come together. Taken together, all three mechanisms have the effect of reducing levels of violence. However, their effect is not absolute and at times of greater tension (his research was carried out in the immediate aftermath of the hunger strikes in 1981) the magnetic pull of communal allegiances will become relatively stronger.

A great deal more is now known about the conditions that are necessary if contact between people from antagonistic groups can lead to more positive relationships, for example an amelioration of attitudes or cross-community friendships. The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) proposed that inter-group conflict can be reduced by bringing people together from opposing groups, subject to four conditions: equal status between groups, a requirement of cooperation between groups, competition between the groups should be avoided and lastly, that the context of inter-group contact should be legitimised through institutional support (Niens, Cairns and Hewstone, 2003). Brown and Hewstone (2005) note that Allport's formulation has stood the test of time well, but they have argued that for inter-group contact to be most effective in reducing inter-group anxiety, contact with one's social identity 'switched on' was necessary (Hewstone and Brown 1986; Niens, Cairns and Hewstone, 2003). This means that in the case of Northern Ireland, inter-group anxiety

will be most likely to be reduced in contact situations where Catholics and Protestants meet as such, rather than with other subsidiary identities to the fore.<sup>17</sup>

The deeply embedded mechanisms for managing the conflict may play their own part in handing down habits of association through the generations that lay the ground for further outbreaks of violence in the future. More recent research suggests that this may be the case. Murtagh (2003) notes that following the collapse of the old Stormont régime in 1972, a key instrument in the reinventing of the state as fair and objective was the adoption and promotion of technical/rational policy making. It was a ‘colour blind’ approach that pretended that public administration was administration for anywhere. Murtagh argues that this approach tended to reinforce communal divisions. Morrow, Eyben and Wilson (2003) suggest further that agencies in the public sector have focused on providing quantitatively equitable services to the whole community and removing themselves as far as possible from the wider social and political situation. They note that “usually this has involved adopting internal cultural practices which avoid, or forbid, open communication regarding communal divisions” (ibid: 177).

This literature suggests that everyday life is sustained in Northern Ireland through an important set of shared norms that promote avoidance, selective contact and functional integration and that operate both to manage and sustain the conflict at the same time. Recent research has tried to explicate how this process operates within public administration itself. The implication of this literature is that this aspect of social capital in the context of Northern Ireland may be a source of sustenance for the conflict as much as an emollient. There is now considerable evidence to suggest that shared norms may operate in such a way as to put limits on the levels of trust available for conflict resolution. Furthermore, the literature of contact theory now suggests how those limitations may work. Intergroup contact without reflexivity has

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to suggest that other social identities are not important in themselves; only that being a senior citizen, carer, or disabled person for example may have little bearing on levels of inter group anxiety between Protestants and Catholics, even if there is inter-group contact among people sharing that identity.

little impact on attitudes towards the out group. Shared norms that downplay open communication about divisions ensure that contacts have little consequence for levels of generalized trust across communal boundaries.

Darby's work in the 1980s was concerned with the relatively narrow question about the mechanisms that controlled the extent of the violence. The experience of the hunger strikes in the early 1980s and the reverberations of the Drumcree stand off in the 1990s suggest that the mechanisms of conflict management and control in Northern Ireland were sufficiently strong on both occasions to prevent these shocks drifting towards more generalised violence. The perception that greater and more general violence might have occurred and that there was a fear that it would indicate the importance of the question. Within this narrow territory, Darby remains neutral, however, as to which of the mechanisms he describes has the most purchase as a causal mechanism. But, a much stronger claim has recently been made that effective cross-community civic ties caused the avoidance of violence that might otherwise have happened (Varshney, 2001, 2002).

In his influential work on ethno-religious violence in India, Varshney (2001, 2002) shows that in India there was a strong negative correlation between the extent of Hindu / Muslim violence and the extent of civic associations that crossed sectarian barriers between the two religious groups in their associational activities. He argues for a size effect in that at the level of village life personal inter-communal ties are effective in dampening inter-communal violence. In cities, however, personal ties are not enough on their own. He argues that this accounts for the fact that while 80 per cent of Indians live in rural villages, most violence occurs in cities. In these cases, he suggests that the evidence convincingly shows that the existence or otherwise of inter-communal ties amongst civic associations is correlated with the extent and ferocity of violent incidents. Thus cross-community *organizational ties* rather than cross-community *interpersonal ties* are the important factor.

Varshney argues that conflict is a normal aspect of plural societies; his focus is on the propensity or otherwise for conflict to be expressed through violence. He argues that there is an integral link between the structure of civic life in multi-ethnic societies and the presence or absence of violence. What matters, in his view, are what he terms inter-ethnic networks of civic engagement, in particular associational forms of engagement rather than every day forms of engagement (Varshney, 2001: 363). On the other hand, “if communities are organized only along intra-ethnic lines and the interconnections with other communities are very weak or even non existent, then ethnic violence is quite likely” (ibid: 363).

The distinction between inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic corresponds closely to the distinction in the social capital literature between bridging and bonding social capital. However, Varshney’s arguments differ from Putnam’s in two very important respects. First, while he also values face to face contact in associations that cross communal divisions, he does not rely on generalized trust as the mechanism through which their positive influence occurs. Indeed he avoids the temptations of social capital altogether and, focuses on the narrower question of variations in the levels of sectarian violence in Indian cities, argues instead that what matters are inter-organizational ties that penetrate both the Muslim and Hindu communities. Secondly, he avoids some of the weaknesses in Putnam’s approach by emphasizing that the associations that cross communal boundaries or which have the potential to cross these boundaries, do not emerge in a vacuum. Their strength will depend upon a range of factors that may have only a tangential relationship to the core ethnic conflict. Varshney (2001) distinguishes between proximate and underlying causation.

The rôle of inter-communal civic networks has been crucial for peace at proximate level. Taking the long view, however, the causal factor was a transformative shift in national politics (Ibid: 364).

Civic associational life in India was an outcome of Gandhian nation-building in the 1920s and 1930s that specifically sought to create a civil society that embodied an Indian national identity rather than the exclusively communal identities that had

hitherto existed. They thus emerged as part of an explicitly political programme promulgated by the Congress Party as a tactic in its anti-colonial struggle. In this respect the Indian experience may be closer to that of South Africa than it is to Northern Ireland where we find voluntary and community organizations significantly embedded in communal divisions with no shared view either of the nature of Northern Irish society, nor of the path to be taken in the future.

This position is closer to that of some of Putnam's critics than to Putnam himself. The useable trust between Muslims and Hindus that is maintained in the organizational life of these associations, while sustained in associational life is an outcome, not of the associations themselves but of a political programme. The analogy, although it should not be pushed too far as the context is very different, is with social trust in egalitarian welfare states which has similarly been judged as the outcome of a political programme (Rothstein and Stolle, 2003).

The implications of Varshney's findings seem to be not that civil society per se is a source of inter-group cohesion, but only that certain kinds of civic associations in certain kinds of circumstances can fulfill this rôle. The source of these associations is not a concern. Although it may be a matter of historical record that those associational ties he found to be most effective were established 60 to 70 years ago as part of an anti-colonial movement, he also quotes the example of an effective associational network being established by the police in a suburb of Mumbai in recent years with the explicit purpose of reducing the propensity of local tensions erupting into violence (Varshney, 2002).

### Some conclusions

A number of conclusions relevant to the rôle of voluntary action in Northern Ireland may be summarized. Firstly, Varshney's conclusions suggest that in the right circumstances and with appropriate political and institutional support, it is possible to construct effective inter-group associational ties that reduce the propensity of conflict

to erupt into violence. The evidence presented in this report supports this, but emphasizes the importance of getting the context right which in Northern Ireland means stable local political settlements with sufficient 'buy-in' from communal politicians.

Secondly, bridging social capital is unlikely to be a sufficiently robust indicator of effective inter-group contact within and between associations. This is for two reasons. First, the production of social capital, in particular the levels of generalized trust, is as much a function of the state and the design of its institutions, as it is of the activities of voluntary associations. In this sense the latter are consumers of social capital rather than producers. Any measurable effects are unlikely to be the result of the activities of associations alone. Second, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the elements of social capital. In Northern Ireland the unresolved nature of the political conflict disrupts the relationship between social norms and trust. Social norms in most inter-group settings ensure that trust that addresses inter-group anxiety does not develop. In Northern Ireland this aspect of social capital can be dysfunctional to a shared society. This is because political considerations mediate the relationship between norms and trust. Voluntary and community organizations are as much subject to this as any other set of social institutions.

Empirical support for this view can be found in a recent large scale attitudinal study of participants in voluntary associations in the Flemish part of Belgium where an extreme right wing political party very hostile to ethnic minorities has taken a substantial share of the vote (Hooghe, 2003). This study was designed to test the hypothesis that participation in voluntary associations led to less ethnocentric attitudes, once a strong self-selection effect had been taken account of. Given that participants in voluntary association activity were likely to hold less ethnocentric views than Flemish people did as a whole, what if anything was the 'add on' value of participation? The study concluded that "only those organizations...that create

interaction environments that are hostile to the expression of ethnocentric stereotypes effectively reduce ethnocentrism levels” (Hooghe, 2003: 106).

This study reinforces the evidence presented here by showing that voluntarism only affects ethnocentric attitudes if it takes place in the context of norms that forbid the expression of ethnic stereotypes. The Northern Ireland evidence suggests that the lack of connection between the cross-community solidarity and identity developed within voluntary associations and ethno-sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland is likely to lie in the breakdown in connection between group norms and generalized trust. Of itself, inter-group contact may have no particular implications for reconciliation. As a result we suggest that a more robust evaluation framework should be developed that tests the extent to which the high levels of inter-group contact within voluntary and community associations that is reported here translates into generalized trust, once the fact that people who are involved in voluntary action are likely to be more trusting than the general population has been taken into account.

The literature reviewed here also makes clear that voluntary associations can only be a source for promulgating a shared future in the context of a political settlement and a set of state institutions that can underpin the generalized trust and that will enable people use the identities they share within the lives of associations as a jumping off point for addressing the harder questions. At present they may feel they have good reason not to, no matter how much inter-group contact there may be. The challenge is to move this situation forward.

## **Appendix (B)**

### **Main Survey Questionnaire**



6. Please indicate the number of committee members who fall into the following age ranges

18 -24

25 - 44

45 - 64

65 - 74

75 +

7. Please indicate the gender make-up of the management committee.

Male

Female

8. Does your organisation monitor the community background of your committee members?  
Yes  No

9. Please indicate the perceived religious affiliation of your management committee or board.  
(Numbers please)

Members of the Catholic community

Members of the Protestant Community

Members of neither community

10. Would you say that your organisation emerged mainly from within the Protestant or from within the Catholic community?

From within the Catholic community  From within the Protestant community   
Neither

Has there been any move away from that background? Yes  No   
If 'Yes', please explain briefly.

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How recently has that change taken place?

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11. In the eyes of the public, how do you think your organisation is perceived?

- Very Catholic
- Mostly Catholic
- Mixed
- Mostly Protestant
- Very Protestant

12. Does the question of Protestants and Catholics working together in your organisation ever come up in your discussions about your organisation's work?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', is it a contentious issue? Yes  No

If 'Yes', on a scale of one to five, how contentious would it be (1 = somewhat contentious, 5 = very contentious)

13. Do people in your organisation ever discuss how to make the services you offer equally available to people in the Protestant and Catholic communities?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', how divisive is it?

Very divisive  Quite divisive  Not at all divisive

14. Does your organisation experience any pressures to work in a more cross community way?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', where do the pressures come from?

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15. Does your organisation's management committee have any politicians as members (either local councillors or MLAs)?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', how many?

16. Does your organisation work with politicians other than those identified in Question 15?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', are these politicians from both sides of the community divide?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', how often are politicians involved?

Often  Sometimes  Rarely



17. In the area where your organisation works are there key people who support cross community initiatives?

If 'Yes', could you give some examples (List type of person)

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18. Can you think of any activities that your organisation undertakes that have community relations spinoffs?

Yes  No

19. Are there any obstacles that make it difficult for your organisation to engage in cross community initiatives?

Please list

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20. Do the activities of your organisation:

	Yes	No
a) provide any opportunities for people from the two main communities to do things together?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) provide any opportunities for people to co-operate on a common task?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) encourage people from the two main communities to work together on projects that are focused on community relations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21. Does your committee meet formally with other voluntary and / or community organisations from the other main community?

Yes  No  Not applicable, we are a mixed organisation

If 'Yes', how often?

Number of times per year

22. Do you know of examples of friendships across the divide that have developed as a result of the activities of your organisation?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', can you give one or two examples?

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23. What is the approximate Protestant - Catholic mix among the beneficiaries of the work of your organisation?

percentage Protestant

percentage Catholic



24. If your organisation engages in community relations initiatives do you consider that these might be harmful to the core activities of your organisation?

Yes  No  Not applicable (No community relations)

If 'No', could it ever be a threat?

Yes  No

If 'Yes', can you please indicate why they might be harmful.

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25. Are there people in your organisation at any level who "push or promote" cross community themes?

Yes  No

How influential are they?

Not very  Quite  Very

26. Are there people in your organisation at any level who oppose cross community themes?

Yes  No

How influential are they?

Not very  Quite  Very

27. This question explores how members of your organisation (by which we mean everyone involved) might feel about mixing with members of organisations from the other community?

Please respond to the following statement:

*"People in my organisation would feel anxious about mixing with people from the other community"*

Strongly agree  Agree  Don't know  Disagree  Strongly disagree

28. Do you think that most people in your organisation would consider that a political agreement is necessary before cross-community initiatives can be really effective?

Yes  No

29. Does your organisation undertake any community relations activities in an indirect way?

Yes  No

30. Does your organisation have a diversity policy or other process for addressing differences?

Yes  No



31. Do you expect that in the next 2 to 3 years your organisation will be working across the community divide
- to a greater extent than at present
- to a lesser extent than at present
- about the same

Any additional comments about this research may be included in this box:

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire*



## **Appendix (C)**

### **Senior Citizens' Questionnaire**

**Community Development and Community Relations in Northern Ireland  
A research project funded by the Community Relations Council and the Office  
of First Minister and Deputy First Minister**

#### **Questionnaire**

#### **CONFIDENTIAL**

- 1. Can you please state which of the following community backgrounds you are perceived to be from:**

*(please tick one)*

- [a] Protestant
- [b] Catholic
- [c] Minority ethnic community
- [d] Other

**2. Are you:**

- [a] Male
- [b] Female

**3. Please read the following descriptions of two imagined situations and indicate how you would feel and what you would most likely do. Try and be as honest as possible and tick the alternative that most closely describes your position.**

- (iii) *A member says that he or she and others from his or her community background are much worse off than people from the other main community in Northern Ireland and that the senior citizens forum should adopt this view as policy.*

How would you feel?

- [a] Embarrassed:
- [b] Annoyed:
- [c] Anxious:
- [d] Pleased:
- [e] Nothing in particular

What would you do?

- [a] Nothing at all:
- [b] Argue against the proposal in the meeting:
- [c] Agree with the proposal in the meeting:
- [d] Say nothing in the meeting but approach the person in private afterwards to tell that person you disagree and were upset:
- [e] Tell the person afterwards that you agreed with them, but the matter should not have been raised:
- [f] Decide not to come back to future meetings.

- (iv) *At one meeting, you discover that a member has been an active member of a paramilitary organization during the 'Troubles' although as far as you know he or she has not been convicted of a crime, but you can't be sure of what if anything they have done..*

How would you feel?

- [a] Embarrassed:
- [b] Annoyed:
- [c] Anxious:
- [d] Pleased:
- [e] Nothing in particular:

What would you do?

- [a] Nothing at all:
- [b] Try and find out more before deciding what to do:
- [c] Seek the advice of people you trust:
- [d] Try and get that person excluded from the group
- [e] Decide not to come back to future meetings

**The information you give in this questionnaire will not be seen by anyone other than the university researchers none of whom will know who has filled it in.**

**Thank you very much for letting me talk to you this morning and for completing the questionnaire.**

## Appendix (D)

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