Removing Peace Walls and Public Policy 2: The Challenge of Delivery

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Introduction

This policy brief explores the challenges of delivering on the target of removing all Peace Walls by 2023 by drawing on research conducted through an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant that looked at peace walls and public policy in Northern Ireland. The yearlong project, which concluded in September 2015, involved academics working in partnership with representatives from the Department of Justice on a range of issues, in leading delivery of the TBUC target of removing all peacewalls by 2023. The engagement included a number of discrete quantitative and qualitative research projects and several focused workshops designed to allow key stakeholders inside and beyond the Department to reflect on the requirements for delivery and to bring to light critical issues influencing a successful outcome.

What are the structures for delivering the TBUC strategy on Peace Walls?

POn 23 May 201, the Northern Ireland Executive published 'Together: Building a United Community.' (TBUC)[i] designed to ' improve community relations and continue the journey towards a more united and shared society.' [ii]

Under the umbrella of 'Our Safe Community' the Executive announced a 10-year Programme to "reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers" underpinned by the 'key objective' "to have no interface barriers by 2023." TBUC set a shared aim of creating "a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety" and "to build a culture where people feel comfortable to report when they have been the victim of intimidation or harassment."[iii] In the words of the strategy document: "Removing interface barriers and other structures of division will send out an important message that our society is continuing on its journey from conflict and segregation to peace and reconciliation, but more importantly will bring community benefits."

The strategy came with elaborate delivery structures. Political leadership and co-ordination was reflected in a Ministerial Panel "comprising all Ministers from the Executive in addition to senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies, including local government and community partners." From the outset, the Executive admitted that the Peace Walls target could only be achieved with "the full and active participation of all relevant Departments and statutory agencies" promising to ensure that there was "an appropriate level of support and engagement within relevant government Departments, within key statutory agencies, and in the police and other agencies responsible for safety and security". The Panel was to develop detailed action plans to include key aims, targets and milestones and assign resources and responsibilities to each target and to hold Ministers and agencies accountable for the actions and targets in their areas of responsibility.

Strategic consistency was to be matched with flexibility and engagement at local level. The Executive acknowledged that successful delivery would require local engagement "based on the need for inclusivity, involving community representatives and local residents, and recognising the need to take account of the local context" and committed to working actively with local representatives "to address the underlying issues, attitudes and mindsets that have the potential to perpetuate division."

Co-ordination was to be achieved through an Inter-agency Group (IAG) designed to create a "more strategic approach to how interventions are designed and resources allocated" and co-ordinated with work commissioned in relation to youth interventions. While reporting to the Ministerial Panel on progress, the IAG was tasked with:

- responding to requests for the transformation of an interface structure coming from engagement with the community;
- drawing together the separate strands of activity in different Departments, Agencies and community organisations; and
- looking for new opportunities and develop action plans for individual areas.

DoJ was designated as lead Department in relation to the Pace Walls target in 2013 supported by an IAG consisting of representatives of DoJ, OFMdFM, the Departments of Social Development (DSD), Employment and Learning (DEL), Regional Development (DRD), Education (DE) and Health and Social Services (DHSSPS), the Police Service (PSNI), Housing Executive (NIHE), Belfast City Council (BCC), Community Relations Council (CRC) and International Fund for Ireland (IFI). Community Engagement was addressed by giving formal recognition to the existing Interface Community Partners (ICP) group, co-ordinated by CRC and consisting of community representatives from interface communities across Northern Ireland, including some from areas outside Belfast.

How will this be resourced?

According to the TBUC strategy, "Local communities around the interface will be encouraged to come together and decide if they want to be part of this programme. If there is agreement to become part of the programme then the area immediately surrounding the barrier will be able to avail of a range of support and help over a 10 year period."[iv] The Executive committed to an Interface Barrier Support Package of unspecified size "designed to encourage communities to come together and agree to take action". Funding was promised for:

- Community capital and project grants;
- Employing community interface workers to put together plans, ensure implementation of key actions and support the local community to create the conditions to reduce and remove barriers over an agreed and specified time frame;
- Create funding resources for a community forum at each interface to ensure implementation and monitoring; and
- Establish a Capital improvement package to change and improve the barrier while developing a phased opening strategy.

The Executive also promised to identify assets within interface areas and at contested spaces "that can be transformed from places of division and separation to places of sharing and mutual enjoyment" and an approach which would 'design out crime' through community policing and inter-agency partnership.

In practice, the identification of resources has presented a considerable challenge. TBUC focuses much more on the efficient targetting of existing funding delivery than on additional resources. While there is a promise to ensure that Strategic Investment and Delivering Social Change strategies also address TBUC issues, there is no commitment to additional resources in a context of reducing public spending.

The most explicit funding commitments are to ensure that the EU PEACE IV programme reflects the priorities of the

programme. TBUC proposes a funding coordination group made up of representatives from government and external funders "to ensure the strategic targeting of good relations funding activity in line with the priorities outlined in this Strategy."[v]

To date, the primary vehicle for resources targeted at removing barriers has been the IFI Peace Walls Programme, funded by international donors. In January 2012, almost 18 months before TBUC was launched, IFI invested resources amounting by 2015 to over £3.2m in eight projects in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.

What are the challenges for delivery?

Two years since the launch of TBUC, Ulster University research allowed for critical reflection on progress and identified potential risk and success factors with direct impact on the potential for the delivery of the target:

1. **What effect has the declaration of a specific target for change had?**
   Our research suggests that the target is widely seen as the property of the Executive. Among other stakeholders, the announcement of the target to remove all walls by 2023 has had complex effects. While it continues to be regarded as 'ambitious' by some stakeholders, a target also appears to have created suspicion in some communities that the Executive has taken final decisions about the future of barriers out of local hands. While some see a specific target as a means to accelerate change at the interface, others regarded as an unhelpful intervention in local initiatives that will delay change.

2. **What milestones are to be achieved on the way?**
   Two years after the announcement of the Peace Walls target the number of barriers has not significantly reduced and there is no clear timetable for phased removal, raising fears that pressures will build towards the final deadline and/or less than optimal outcomes. Although the Executive was clear about the final 2023 target, there has been less detail on a phased programme to achieve this. The most significant investment in interface areas was made independently by the IFI Peacewalls Programme which was in operation before TBUC and which was not directly tied to Executive strategy. There appears to be a risk that the stated aims and vision are not matched by detailed action planning including interim milestones.

3. **What are the responsibilities of the Ministerial Panel, the Lead Department and the other members of the Inter-Agency Group and how are they to be evaluated and monitored?**
   Currently the Department of Justice has taken an energetic lead in establishing the Peace Walls programme in cooperation with the International Fund for Ireland, which provided the most significant dedicated resource,

and meeting other agencies. DoJ's lead role stems from the origins of peace walls in security and the Department's ownership of physical structures. Our research suggests that the removal of walls inevitably raises significant issues of economic regeneration, community development, cultural pluralism and infrastructural investment outside the vires of a Justice Department. This demands a swift and flexible response from a variety of responsible agencies and continuous engagement with the community. Failure to manage this flexibility at sufficiently senior level and speed runs the risk of delays in delivering change and loss of community confidence. Revisiting and monitoring the performance of delivery structures and the roles and responsibilities of each Department and Agency to ensure they are fit for purpose is crucial if success is to be measured by outcomes for communities.

4. **What is the scale of the Barrier Support Programme and how will it be funded and delivered?**
The TBUC strategy promises a considerable Barrier Support Programme with both capital and resource implications. While IFI has invested important resources in its Peace Walls Programme, and OFMDFM (including CRC support) has redirected limited support to a variety of programmes no ten-year strategy has yet emerged. While the PEACE IV Programme may provide opportunities, the details and priorities remain uncertain. Currently it appears that the TBUC strategy is highly dependent on external sources of support rather than a priority of domestic policy. Our research suggests that clarity about the scale and purposes of resources could have an important effect in shaping opportunities and expectations.

5. **How are the benefits of the 2023 Target articulated and monitored?**
While TBUC makes clear statements about the benefits of the plan for wider stability and attractiveness to investment, there is less clarity about the specific benefits that can be expected at local level. While it is obvious that these will vary according to local circumstances, our research suggests that the local consent for change will depend on measurable changes to local wellbeing, including economic, social, security, and educational and environmental benefits. Consent for change to physical structures is in part dependent on expectations about what might be possible following their removal. The delivery of these benefits as part of the removal process will require close co-operation from many agencies.

6. **How does uncertainty in the NI Executive affect the delivery of the 2023 Peace Walls target?** Since the announcement of TBUC the Northern Ireland Executive has appeared to be divided on many issues. Disputes over the route of a parade in North Belfast led to widespread rioting and the establishment of a protest encampment. Inter-party talks to address contentious issues chaired by Richard Haass and Megan O'Sullivan broke up in

acrimony and without agreement in late 2013. Additional disagreements over budgets led to further talks in 2014. Apparent success proved insufficient to prevent further polarisation during 2015. Parading disputes and allegations of renewed paramilitary activity led to further talks in Autumn 2015. Uncertainty in politics has been matched by greater tension in inter-community relations at local level. Our research found growing concerns around inter-community issues, evidence of increased suspicion particularly in loyalist communities and renewed questions about paramilitary activity. Engaging communities in a shared vision of safety has proved challenging with many suggesting that TBUC has lacked urgency and priority. Agreement around contentious issues and consistency around associated issues such as cultural disputes, the ending of paramilitarism and available resources would give considerable confidence to local dialogue on options for change.

7. **What are the responsibilities of local representatives of the Executive parties in supporting change at local level?** TBUC prioritises community consultation and consent. While the TBUC strategy and interface target was endorsed by all parties in the Executive, our research suggests that there is greater uncertainty and reservations about the target among some local party representatives who might be expected to act as brokers of practical intervention and champions of the aims of policy. In the context of an increased role for local government in planning, identifying clear expectations for local elected representatives would provide a clear link in establishing democratic consent for change.

8. **What are the responsibilities of residents, community leaders and interface projects in delivering the TBUC target and how are they to be engaged?** While the TBUC strategy identifies a central role for local communities, our research suggests that the boundaries of 'community' and the level of required consent are vague and confusing. The requirement for co-operation between statutory bodies and local communities in delivering this contentious target requires mechanisms for mutual accountability which are widely accepted and understood, including clear roles for funded interface projects and workers. At present, the question of how community consent is measured and at what point has not been fully articulated leaving potential for confusion and destructive interference.

Conclusion

Our research suggests that the current delivery structures should be reviewed as a matter of priority, to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of all partners are clear and to confirm that they are capable of delivering the target for Peace Walls set out in TBUC.

References

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