Communities in Transition

Area Research Report 2023

West Belfast

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Northern Ireland Executive

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

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The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime

CONTENTS

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

The Authors hope that the content of this Report offers a valuable insight into how people residing in West Belfast feel about a variety of issues associated with their local area.

INTRODUCTION

The Research Team involved in the development of this Report were tasked with developing Area Reports for each of the sites where the Communities in Transition programme is currently active. Communities in Transition is one strand of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime. The Executive Office NI leads the policy development of Communities in Transition, in partnership with Co-operation Ireland and Queen's University Belfast.

The programme aims to support areas where there has been a history of paramilitary activity and coercive control. The primary objective is to support the transition of these sites to a point where paramilitary groups no longer exercise influence, and their activity is no longer as prevalent. To achieve this ambition, Communities in Transition funds a range of over 30 innovative and community focused projects. These projects are designed to increase the capacity of each area and are categorised under the following headings: Area Regeneration; Capacity Building; Community Safety and Policing; Environment and Culture; Health and Wellbeing; Personal Transition; Restorative Practice; and Young People. Our Area Reports will identify the on-going challenges that exist throughout each Communities in Transition site. We will also point to the key work that is aimed at stimulating sustained change in the areas.

WEST BELFAST

West Belfast is an area that suffers from various types of deprivation. In 2018, The *End Child Poverty* campaign found that the area had the second highest level of child poverty in the UK, out of 650 parliamentary constituencies. The survey found that 43% of children grow up in poverty in West Belfast. Parents who responded to the *Save the Children* Report indicated that the outcomes included having to cut back on food and/or skipping meals (61% of parents indicated that they did this). Furthermore, nearly half the population of the area over the age of 16 are in receipt of some form of benefits. The site also has Northern Ireland's second highest level of unemployment. More than one-fifth of residents leave school with less than five GCSEs. Moreover, the area has the third highest crime levels and the third highest anti-social behaviour levels in Northern Ireland (NISRA).

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this Report is on presenting a 'bottom up' assessment of the key issues relevant to the residents of West Belfast. The focus is not on re-presenting the many very valuable pre-existing data sets that exist elsewhere. Such data sets provide important indications of the overall capacity of the area, but often fail to tease out the correlating lived experiences. In this Report, we wish to address this gap in our understanding of the Communities in Transition sites.

To appropriately engage with participants we designed a methodology that ensured their opinion was positioned at the centre of our work. We took a mixed methods approach that utilised PGIS Mapping Software, Qualitative Interviews and a Household Survey.

Participants were invited to identify and mark specific categories of place, such as where things are getting better, where things are getting worse, where they feel safe or unsafe using a 'spraycan' tool on a computerised map of the local area. The individual marked maps were then aggregated to generate a collective view of the site.

Recorded Qualitative Interviews were conducted in conjunction with the completion of the Spraycan exercise, allowing the Research Team to tease out the overall capacity of the area alongside correlating lived experiences, both positive and negative.

Participants in this qualitative element of our research were recruited with the assistance of Communities in Transition Delivery Partners. Interviews took place in local community settings in Spring 2022.

In this area, 19 people participated in our PGIS mapping exercise and accompanying qualitative interview – 15 of these individuals identified as Nationalist, 2 as Unionist and 2 as Other (neither Nationalist nor Unionist).

Household Survey – Overview

- 150 people from West Belfast and surrounding areas took part in the Household Survey survey, carried out by market research company, Perceptive Insight in Spring 2022.

- 130 identified themselves as Catholic, 16 as Protestant and 4 identified as Neither.

- 76 Participants were male and 74 participants were female.

- 128 participants were Nationalist, 12 were Unionist and 10 identified as 'other'.

- The participants were aged between 17 and 79.

Research Findings

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

In this section, we assess the ways in which participants feel attached to their local area.

Household Survey

Two key findings emerged from the Survey findings, which indicated that there was a strong sense of community attachment in this area.

- **62% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong sense of community throughout West Belfast.**
  The average response across all the CIT sites was 66%.

- **72% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to their local area.**
  The average response across all the CIT sites was 68%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **19 participants completed the Spraycan Mapping Tool.**

- **15 identified themselves as 'Nationalist', 2 as 'Unionist' and 2 as 'Other'.**

- **Figure 1 demonstrates the scale of West Belfast and the extent to which there are a number of small communities within the wider landscape of the area.**
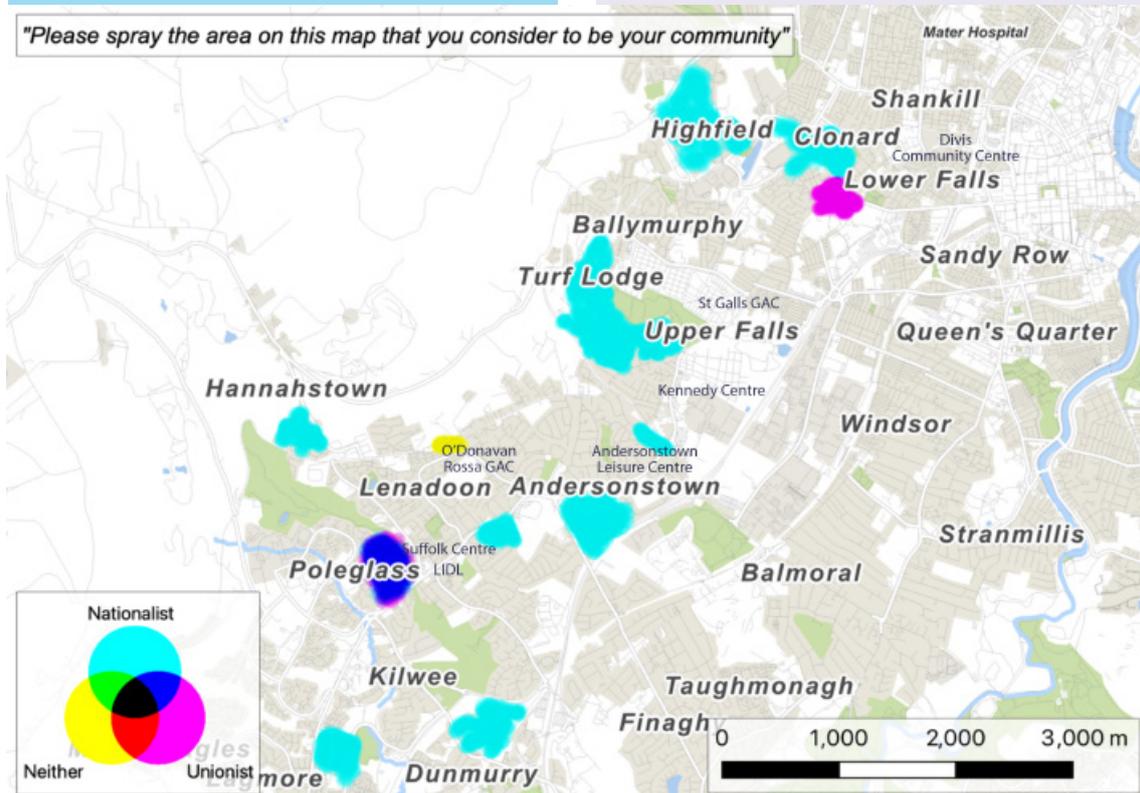

Figure 1: Community Attachment in West Belfast.

Qualitative Interviews

The majority of participants felt there was a strong sense of community throughout West Belfast.

Most noted that the area was best understood as a collection of 'mini communities', but they also felt that these small communities had similar attitudes to the key social and political issues that are evident throughout the area.

'Yes... very strong... sense of community. I think you can see that and feel that. Do all the different parts of West Belfast link together? I think so... I do, because you'll find that while you've some families who live right beside one another, a lot of others... have people right across the area.'

'I live here (Springfield Road), but we have family up and down the Falls (Road). My son lives there... my brother is up in Poleglass, one sister is up on the Glen Road and the other is near Ladybrook. So, if we took a Saturday to drive round visiting them... we'd near enough go to every part of West Belfast.'

Most participants indicated that although there are some variations across the site, it was suggested that there is significant social and political alignment across the other area.

'I think you have to remember what it was like to live in West Belfast during the Troubles... it was very hard... this is a big area, but we (the community) were alone... you know? It didn't feel like there was much support for us... or that there was much support coming. So, I think that what that produces is a sense... a collective will. Does

that make sense? It brings you together... so I think that's why when people have their own areas and their own issues in those areas, we all still want to be from West Belfast. it's part of our identity.'

'I don't think you'll find much difference (in political and social views across the area).'

In addition to believing that the area was socially and politically aligned, participants also felt that most residents of the area had similar concerns about a number of issues that exist in the site. These concerns included: high levels of unemployment, education outcomes and the scale of poor mental and physical health in the area.

'On the one hand... you have a community of people that is very together... and there's huge benefits of living in an area like this. On the other... you have all sorts of socio-economic deprivation and disadvantage throughout West Belfast. I think some of this is a hangover from the Troubles, but other aspects... they're just basically neglect of the area.'

'We have very poor education... and employment... and I think where someone gets themselves well educated and finds a job... they're going to leave.'

KEY FACILITIES

In this section we identify the key facilities that are important to participants. We probe how these spaces are utilised and ask whether there are places that people would like to use; but chose not to.

Household Survey

- **6% of our participants indicated they were involved with a Local Church.**

- **11% were associated with a Sports Club.**

- **5% were involved in a Local School.**

- **1% participated in Neighbourhood Associations.**

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Given the significant scale of West Belfast, participants marked a large number of spaces across the site. These included, a number of retail sites (especially the Kennedy Centre, the Lidl on the Andersonstown Road, the Lidl on the Stewartstown Road and the Westwood Centre), sports centres/clubs (particularly Andersonstown Leisure Centre, O'Donovan Rossa GAC, St Galls GAA and the Colin Glen Leisure Centre) and community centres (including Upper Andersonstown Community Forum, Suffolk Community Centre and Divis Community Centre).**
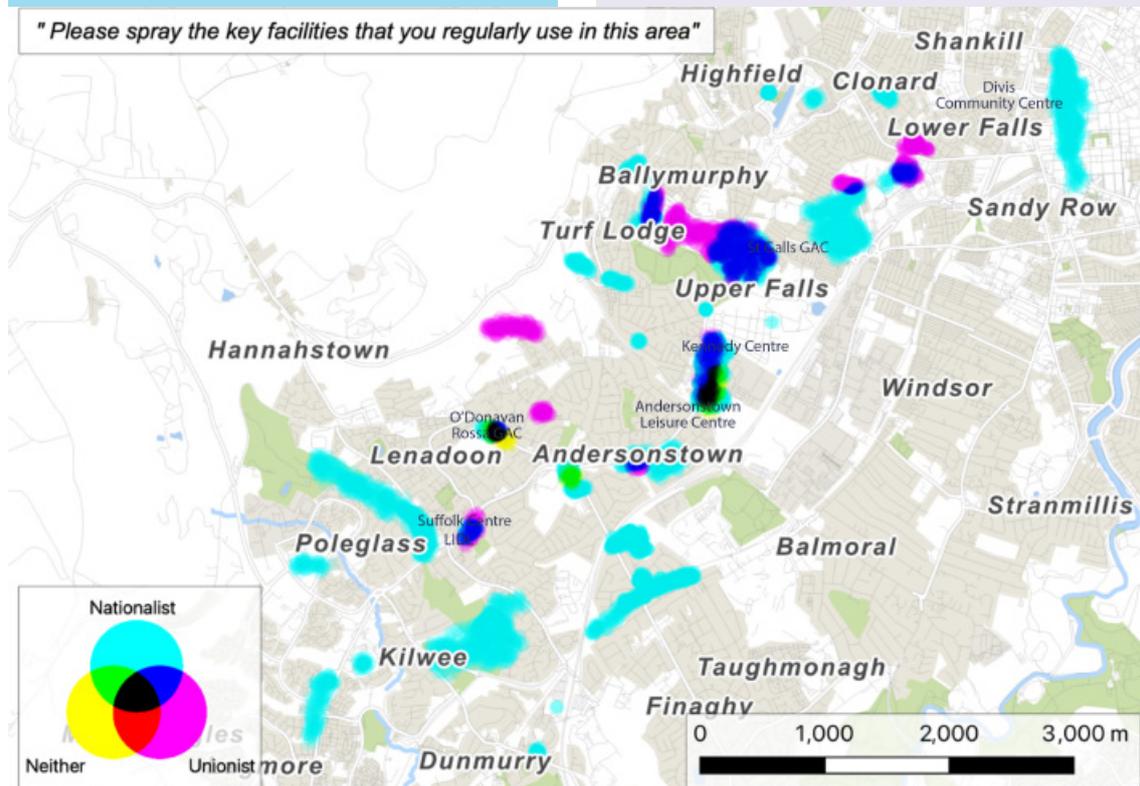

Figure 2: Key Facilities in West Belfast.

Qualitative Interviews

A large number of participants indicated that they shopped in the key retail sites marked in the Spraycan mapping tool. In addition to getting their shopping, eating out and going to the cinema, participants often explained that they enjoyed the social side of visiting these centres. This sentiment was particularly expressed by older participants.

> *'I go with my daughter in-law... and it's really the highlight of my week. She brings my grandkids and we'll go for breakfast and then do our shopping. I'll buy the wee ones something and it's so lovely. We'll also meet lots of people... whether it be friends, family or neighbours... and that's really nice. I don't think I'd see a lot of those people otherwise. Covid (and the related restrictions) was very hard... very hard not seeing people, but we're back in the routine now.'*

The majority of participants mentioned the importance of sport in the area and suggested that was a key method of networking the site. Most supported the role of the GAA clubs in the community and expressed their concern about the future of Casement Park – see Section 4 for more details.

> *'It's (local GAA club) very important to us as a family... very important. I play... my wife plays... and our two girls and my son. I think it's probably the one place that brings together all of our friends and family. Everyone is linked in... in some way.'*

> *'I think the club is our main social network, yeah. Both of my brothers are there... my dad used to play. I probably know most people in the men and women sides of the club. We're all in one big messaging group and there's where we found out most about what was happening during Covid... when the schools were opening and closing... what the shops were doing and how we could support those on their own. So, it's very important to me, but you can... it's pretty important to the community.'*

A number of participants welcomed the refurbishment of Andersonstown Leisure Centre and have been impressed by the way in which it has drawn visitors to the area.

> *'It's really wonderful... the job they've done. Excellent! I was amazed by the amount of people who are using it... who don't live locally and they were telling me that everyone knows about it and it's in tourist magazines and things like that. Pretty incredible. I know a lot of people from Unionist areas are also using it... and that's really brilliant. It allows people to see the area, even just in passing and realise that it's a nice... safe place.'*

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING BETTER

In this section, we identify the current community capacity that exists in West Belfast, with a specific focus on identifying things that have improved within the area.

Household Survey

- **65% of respondents indicated that they would know who to contact if they had a problem associated with their community.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 84%.

- **30% agreed or strongly agreed that they had the skills to help change their area for the better.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 50%.

- **17% of respondents felt the area would be in better condition in five years time.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 29%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Participants marked a number of the key facilities that had been identified in the previous section, as there was a belief that their standard/image had been improved (specifically Andersonstown Leisure Centre).**

- **Many participants also marked Cultúrlann and explained that the centre was important in promoting Irish language and drawing tourists to the area. The site was also popular for workshops, classes and events.**
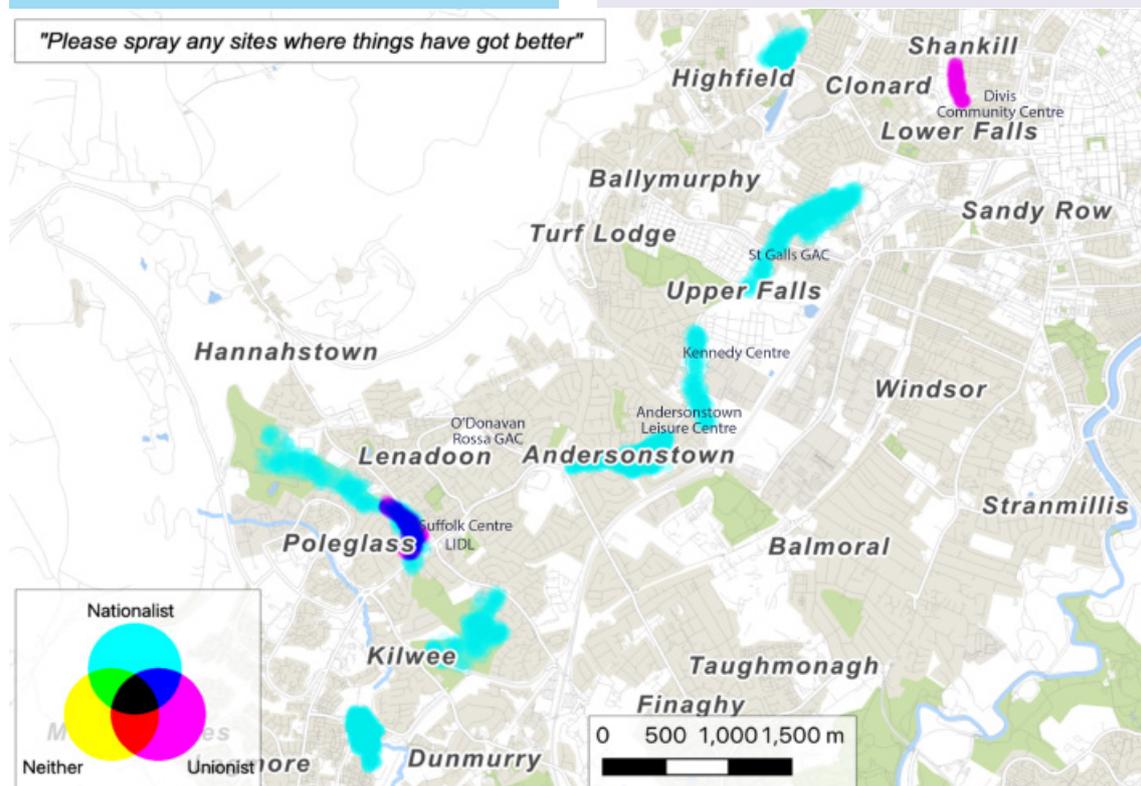

Figure 3: Locations in West Belfast where things have got better.

Qualitative Interviews

In addition to marking Cultúrlann in the Spraycan mapping tool, participants also explained how the ongoing local work to promote the Irish language was aligned with a broader vision of promoting the culture of the area more generally.

'I think promoting the (Irish) language is central to our vision, but it connects with a wider aspiration to promote the area… the culture of the area. We are proud of our culture… our heritage… and tourists want to experience it. I think they're not just drawn by the culture, but it's also the passion that exists locally to tell the stories of the past. We've had lots of visitors from the PUL (Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist) community come to see what we're doing, because I think they want to tap into that… tell their story… from their own perspective.'

Participants were somewhat split over the increased transport options provided by the Glider bus service – some welcomed additional options and liked the fact that they could travel through the city centre to other places without having to change buses. Others were less positive and explained that there was already too much traffic on the road.

Participants felt that local community groups were doing good work and indicated that some were now better networked and were working more closely together than they had done in the past. It was suggested that was likely a consequence of Covid. Some also felt emerging collaborations were created to support funding applications, with groups increasingly realising that they are competing with one another.

Some participants referenced the riots in April 2021 as an obvious example of a period of time when interface tension was high (see next Section for more details), but most felt that this was not reflective of current cross-community relationships, in general. Instead, it was suggested that current relationships are 'largely good', and the peace walls groups being funded by the International Fund for Ireland and the projects being funded by Communities in Transition deserve credit for that.

A collection of participants felt the current relationship with the PSNI was better than it had been in the past. Some suggested that the police have adopted a more visible presence in the area and are increasingly working with a wide range of community groups to try and 'better understand local priorities.'

A large number of participants felt that Sinn Féin deserve credit for the majority of improvements made in the area. It was explained that when a local resident or community group identifies an issue, the party are quick to respond. Participants suggested that the party are 'everywhere' and are 'networked' into every community structure that exists in West Belfast. A small number of participants felt that their presence was overwhelming, but most felt that their involvement in different community forums/panels expedited the rate at which a problem would be resolved.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING WORSE

In this section, we identify some key problems that have emerged in West Belfast, which undermines the community capacity of the site.

Household Survey

• **Only 34% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had an influence over decisions that are made about their area.**
The average response across all the CIT sites was 27%.

• **83% of participants indicated that in five years time, the area would be either in the same condition or worse.**
The average response across all the CIT sites was 71%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

• **Participants were most likely to mark Casement Park and noted that the ongoing uncertainty regarding the future of the site was a concern for many residents of West Belfast.**

• **Many participants also marked Lanark Way and explained that the interface violence that occurred in Easter 2021 had at least a temporary impact on tensions in the area.**

Figure 4: Locations in West Belfast where things have got worse.
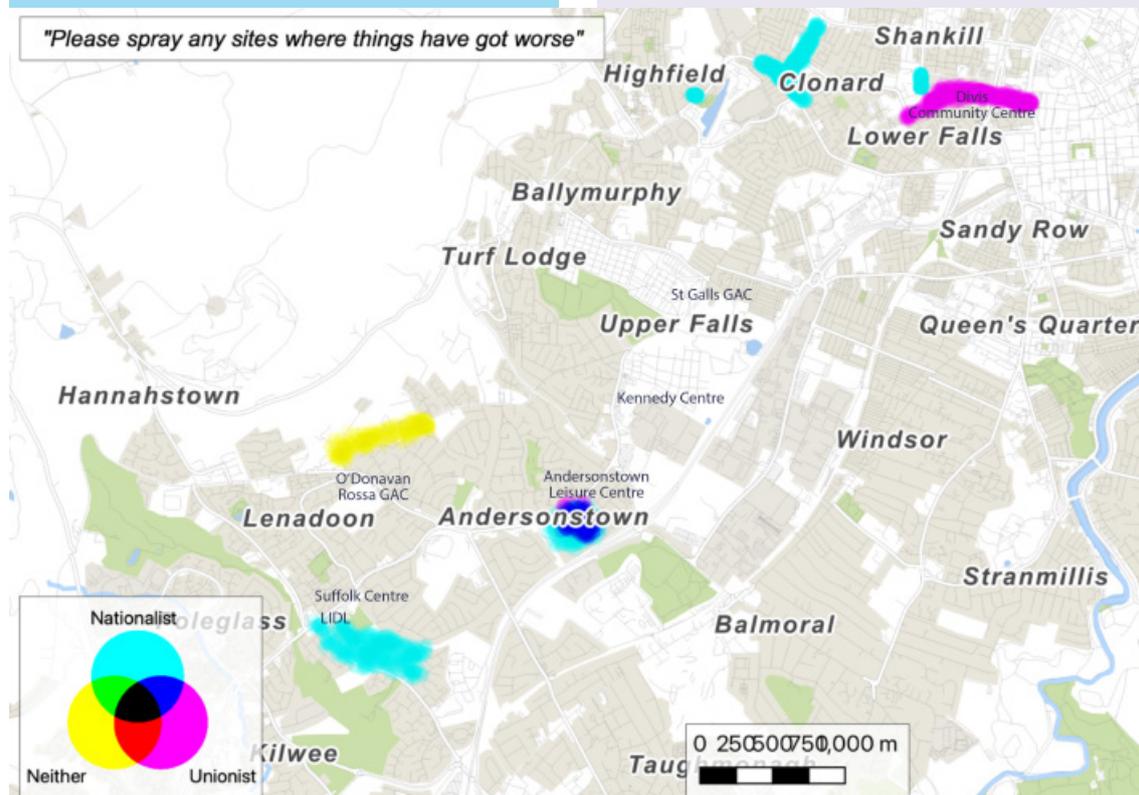
Qualitative Interviews

Almost every participant was frustrated with the current state of the redevelopment of Casement Park. Participants acknowledged the concerns of local residents who opposed the plans and stated that they need to be taken seriously, but they also wanted progress. It was suggested that the failure to make progress was a threat to the local culture of the area (as it restricted the full capacity of GAA in the area), and it also impeded the local economy (given the large amount of visitors that come to watch games).

'It's a big frustration for a lot of residents… it really is. Aside from taking away from the sport (GAA), it's taking away from the local economy… that's a big problem for bars and shops that are used to that revenue. It also just brings down the look of the area… do you know what I mean? It's all boarded up. It should be the centre of the community. If you look through the fences… you can see the weeds on the pitch and growing up through the stands.'

As stated in the last Section, most participants were generally positive about current cross-community relationships, but many remained concerned about the extent of the interface violence that occurred in Easter 2021. Participants were relieved that the 'violence peaked early' and commended the good work of local community groups in diffusing the matter, specifically CIT delivery partner, Falls Community Council.

'It was wild… it really was. It came from nowhere. We'd heard different things, but there was no real tension… then suddenly,

wham! It was awful, really bad… kids, the kids that were involved and the ages of the ones the police lifted. Crazy. It was obviously orchestrated… I'm not really sure. It didn't go anywhere… it didn't improve anything. It has left some tension in the area. I suppose… it was a reminder not to be complacent. It was also a reminder of how important local people are in getting it resolved… because the cops and the rest were flapping in the wind.'

Aside from these two most recent problems, most participants also referenced a number of other issues. These included: the large amount of drug and alcohol addiction across the area, lack of jobs in West Belfast, over-reliance of key community leaders (the related age of these individuals and the lack of emerging young leaders, as a consequence of 'youth flight') and the scale of inter-generational trauma across the site.

'Where do you start? We've great community spirit, but we need it… when you consider the scale of the challenges facing the area. I think drugs is a big one. Maybe that's the biggest we have. I'm not sure where we're going with that… can we actually stop it (sale and use of drugs)? Maybe it's just a case of damage limitation at this point.'

'You do worry about our young people – the lack of jobs is a big, big issue… but the inter-generational trauma is definitely a major, major problem. You have kids now… 17/18 talking about the Troubles like they were there. That must come from the parents.'

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF BELONGING

In this section, we identify how participants feel about the issue of community safety in West Belfast, with a specific focus on locations where people feel safe.

Household Survey

Respondents to the Survey were largely positive about the spirit of the community, regarding how it addressed incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour.

- **38% of respondents felt that local residents abided by the rule of law.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 61%.

- **36% felt that improved lighting and alleygating would make them feel safer, while 30% said improved relationships with the PSNI would also help.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 60% & 59%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Participants from a Nationalist perspective generally considered themselves safe throughout much of West Belfast. Most marked the arterial passage that leads from the Stewartstown Road, through Andersonstown on to the Falls Road.**

- **Unionist participants marked only a small number of locations – one was a housing development near Milltown and the lower end of the Falls Road, where there are Nationalist and Unionist housing interfaces at Northumberland Street.**
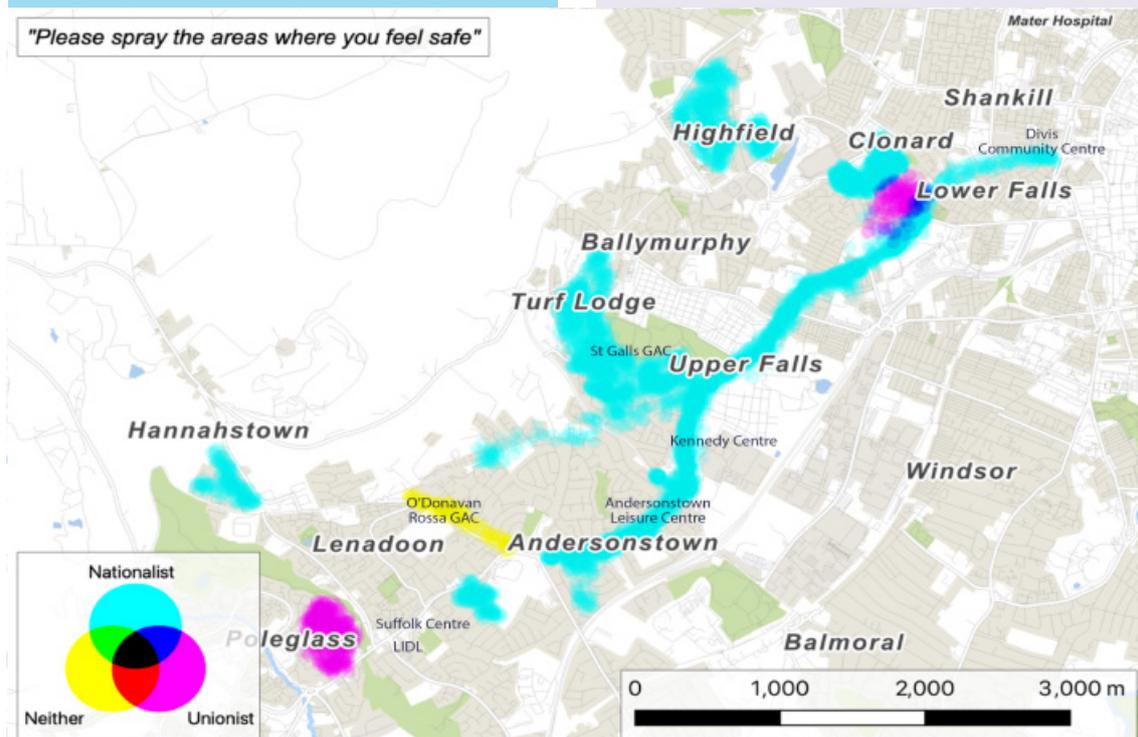

Figure 5: Locations in West Belfast where people feel safe.

Qualitative Interviews

While participants were conscious of a number of issues that could put their safety at risk, see next Section, they often felt safe throughout West Belfast.

Participants largely attributed their sense of safety to their familiarity of the area. Most participants indicated that they were long-term residents and explained that they were consequently familiar with most of the area. Many also stated that they knew a large number of people living throughout the site, as most of their friends and family also lived in the area.

'Yes... there are things... hmmm... things that make me feel unsafe and places that I'd keep the kids away from, but at the same time... I do feel very safe. It's hard to explain, because you (Researcher) are here because the statistics say that we have a lot of crime and that, but I'm ok... I think if it came to it... and issue came up, then I would have a lot of support from my family and friends who live close by... so I kind of think... I've a good support network and that's why I feel safe, even though you'll (Researcher) probably tell me, I shouldn't (laughter)'

'I think I would definitely know where is unsafe... and I think that makes me feel safe... does that make sense? But I think that's probably quite common in most areas... isn't it?'

'This probably sounds... well a bit big headed, but I'm well known in the area. I just mean...you know... people know the family name and some of my friends... through the club (local GAA club) and I suppose that makes you feel safe. It's a bit... sad or whatever, but someone like me... is probably much safer than someone who has just come to the area. You know... they wouldn't try anything on with me or try and scam me.'

Some participants stated that while they were concerned by the scale of anti-social behaviour that exists in the area and the degree of drug addiction that is also prevalent, they felt 'relieved' that there had been a decline in the overall level of violence associated with paramilitarism and a reduction in cross-community tension.

'I think we might have more problems, like with drugs and rubbish... terrible, but the problems might not be as severe... or as life threatening as they were... I suppose drugs is (life threatening), but we're miles away from people intentionally taking life from someone else... we're miles away from some of the interface rioting we had... I mean we used to have burnt out buses and cars all over the place. So it's not a safe environment, but it's safer.'

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF THREAT

In this section, we identify the feelings participants had about the issue of community safety in West Belfast, with a specific focus on locations that made them feel unsafe.

Household Survey

While the respondents to the Survey indicated a number of concerns about their local area throughout their responses, there were two significant issues identified by a significant number of respondents:

- **66% felt ASB was a problem in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 55%.

- **78% believed that drug related crime was also a problem in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 57%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Nationalist participants were most likely to mark the Twinbrook housing estate and the ring road that goes from Monagh By-Pass past Turf Lodge and over toward Highfield.**

- **Protestant participants were most likely to mark interface areas on the Lower Falls, specifically Lanark Way.**

- **While participants stated that there are a number of issues that make them feel unsafe in West Belfast, most were unwilling or unable to identify this on the map. Some stated that their sense of unease was not connected directly to a specific location and was to do with issues like drug addiction and crime that are prevalent throughout the site. In this instance, participants were**
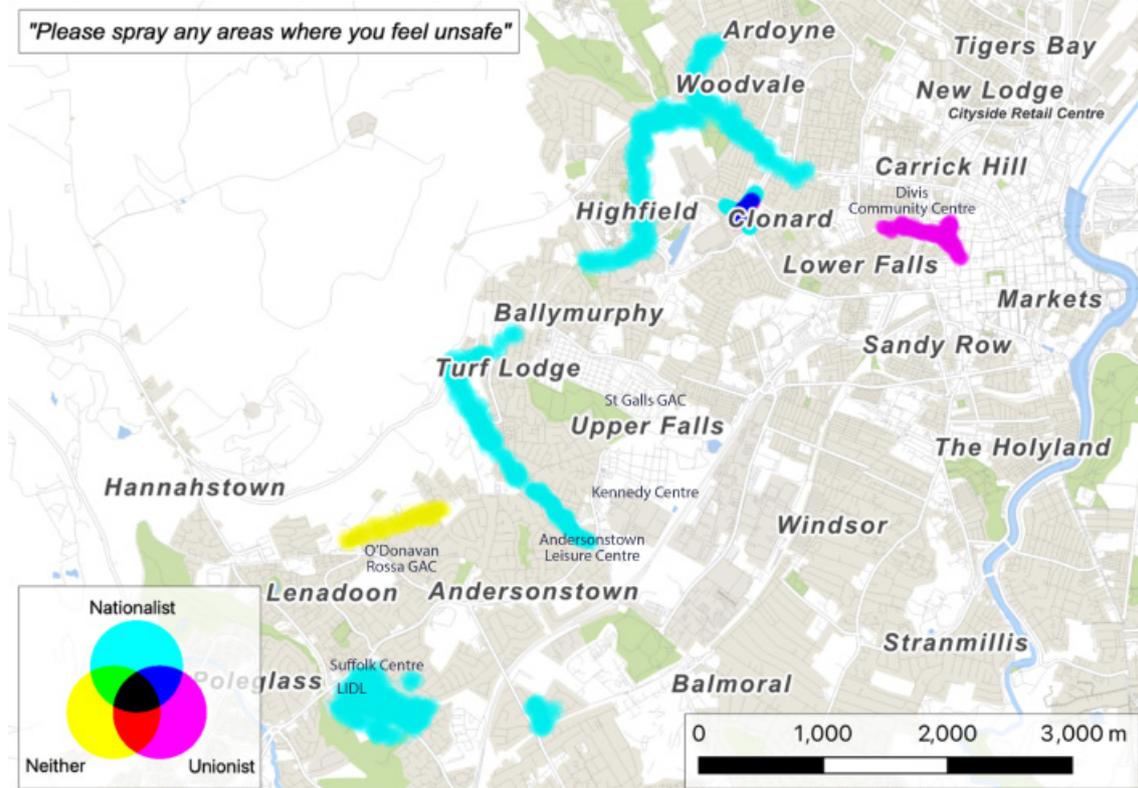

Figure 6: Locations in West Belfast where people feel unsafe.

unwilling to mark the entire area, as it would 'give the wrong perception of the area'.

Qualitative Interviews

A large number of participants explained that their concerns about their sense of safety had changed significantly since the peak of the Region's conflict – with participants more likely to be concerned about internal problems, rather than any type of 'external threat from outsiders'.

'I think if you had carried out this research 30 years ago and then come back and done it now… the responses would be quite different. In-fact for some… the answers might be the opposite. You know… I think (back) then all the threats… that we could see were from the outside. Everything was a threat – the violence was a clear threat, but every political announcement was a threat, because you didn't know what type of protest it would create. Even an incident happening somewhere else in Northern Ireland could lead to nights of rioting here. Now you ask someone locally what the threats are… probably no one says interface violence or the threat of paramilitary violence from the UVF or UFF. They're still issues, but I think even in the election campaign (Assembly Elections, May 2022), we're talking almost exclusively about this area… and the threats that we've created… or that were always there, but we were too busy to worry about.'

'When I worry about my kids on a Friday or Saturday night… it's so different to what I was doing or what my mum and dad were worrying about. Then (peak of the Region's conflict) they (participants parents') were always panicking we'd come up near the peace walls and have fights and what have you. Now… my two girls go across into the Shankill for all sorts of things… I'd be more worried about them going into Falls Park on a Saturday night and getting off their head. On Drugs? Yes, drugs… drugs are everywhere and so many people… so many families are traumatised by them.'

Participants generally felt there had been an improvement in how the police and the justice system are perceived in West Belfast, however most felt that there are still confidence issues amongst residents.

'I think, yes, there have been improvements. Yes. Like would someone call the police if they had a break-in or (if they) seen something that didn't look right? Yes. They would do that… but whether everyone feels completely confident doing this… I'm not sure. I think it's a mixed bag… there are improvements – them (PSNI) getting more involved at a community level in different (Community Safety) Forums that's very helpful, but there are still times when they over do or under do things. You know? Sometimes… for something small… there'll be five land rovers and they'll be up and down the road asking if people seen a car being stolen. Then… there's other times… when something's happening and they seem to pretend they can't see it… does that make sense? You know what I mean?'

INFLUENCE OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND/OR ORGANISED CRIME GANGS

In this section, we present the ways in which participants felt that paramilitary groups and/or Organised Crime Gangs have an influence in West Belfast.

Household Survey

- **18% of respondents felt that young people living throughout West Belfast were under too much influence from paramilitary groups.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 32%.

- **20% felt that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 34%.

- **15% felt that paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in their area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 27%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Participants only marked one particular place in West Belfast where paramilitary groups were perceived to have an influence – the interface at Lanark Way.**

- **This finding is out of sync with the majority of interviews that were carried out, within which the issue of paramilitary groups having an influence in West Belfast was discussed extensively.**

- **The author suggests the absence of relatable data is likely a consequence of two issues. One being that we have seen in other Area Reports that participants are often unwilling to acknowledge that paramilitary groups exist in their**
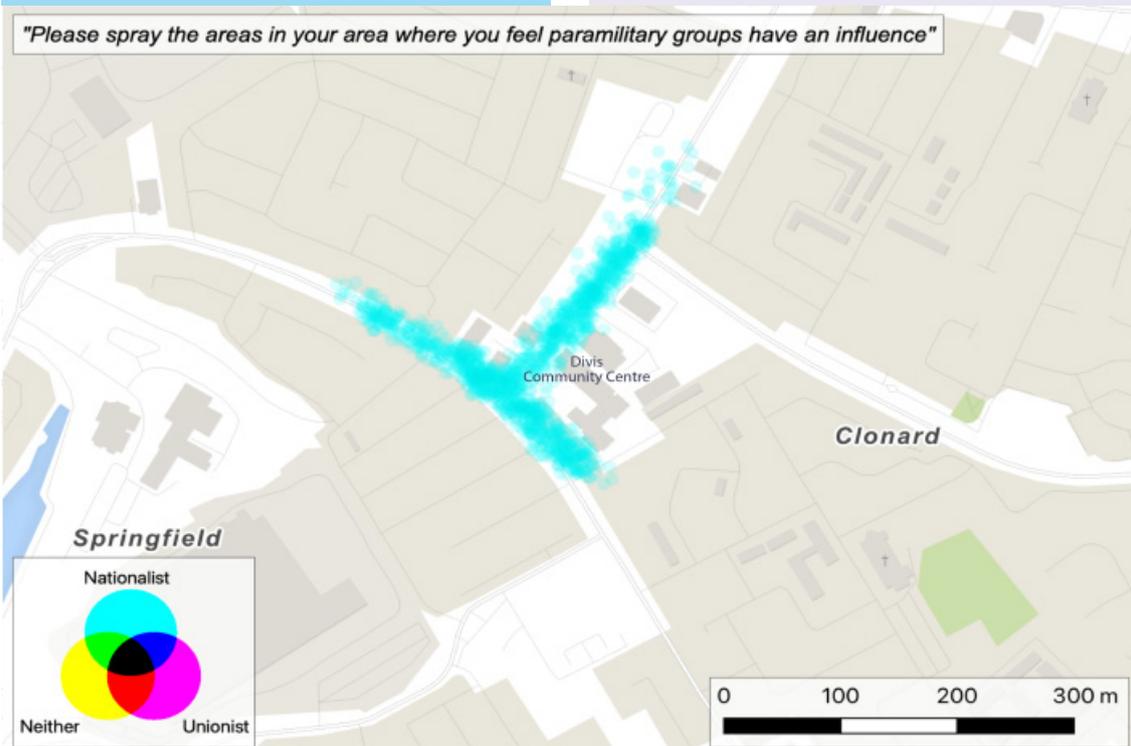

Figure 7: Influence of Paramilitary Groups and/or Organised Crime Gangs in West Belfast.

own areas. The other issue, which is likely more relevant in the context of West Belfast, is that the term 'paramilitary' provokes considerable debate in Nationalist and Republican areas. It is a contested term, given the decommissioning process that was undertaken by Republican paramilitaries. Consequently, participants in the Qualitative Interviews often stated 'we don't have paramilitaries, we just have organised crime gangs' – see below for more details.

Qualitative Interviews

The discussion related to the presence of paramilitary groups in West Belfast was complex. While some participants indicated the continued existence of the groups, others stated that any groups now currently active in the area are now best understood as being organised crime gangs.

When the term paramilitary was first referenced, a number of participants immediately asked the researcher what was meant by it.

'Do you mean organised crime gang or paramilitary? I think that's very risky language. I think you (Researcher) need to be more careful. I think if you want to talk about the existence of gangs carrying out crime then you have to say dissidents… or organised crime gangs. Does that make sense? I think you (Researcher) are confusing the issue. You should be looking to target crime… not a particular group, because then there's an issue of who you tackle or don't… tackle criminals… crime… don't worry about a label.'

'Yes, I think you can have a conversation about paramilitary groups in this area, but it's very sensitive. It's very specific, but also not specific at all. I know that doesn't make sense, but you are talking about two things. You're talking about the groups from the past… who were here… who did do certain things… who policed the area… who were violent… who attacked the other community, but that's gone. I think our ones (paramilitary groups) were always more… affiliated with the community than their's (Loyalist paramilitary organisations). They've always done (sold) drugs and what have you. So, when ours go away… it's different… what's left is just… something else… just crime… just people who are only criminals trying to justify their existence.'

'No, these groups… today… they're not paramilitary groups. It's just crime. I wouldn't… didn't agree with what we had… but they had credibility. I think a lot of people did want them… did need them, but these… modern versions… it's just crime. I think they'll use names, terms from the area's culture to try and invoke a loyalty or space for themselves, but people see through it. They've no support, no mandate for their actions… no structure. The (I)RA had a structure. If someone was being too aggressive, they would get reigned in. They'd deal with things… sometimes too much, but they were here because the police weren't. We're now supporting justice, the police, courts… so there's no place for anyone… and those groups know that. They're just crime gangs you'd get anywhere else.'

ENDNOTE 1: Household Survey

COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT

1. 66% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong sense of community throughout their area.
2. 68% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to their local area.

KEY FACILITIES

3. 13% indicated they were involved with a local church.
4. 14% were involved in a local sports club.
5. 9% were involved in a local school.
6. 5% were involved in a neighbourhood association.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING BETTER

7. 84% indicated that that they would know who to contact if they had a problem associated with their community.
8. 50% felt that they had the skills to help change their area for the better.
9. 29% felt that their area would be in a better condition in five years time.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING WORSE

10. 27% agreed or strongly agreed that they had an influence over decisions that are made about their area.
11. 71% indicated that their area would either be in the same condition or worse off, in five years time.

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF BELONGING

12. 61% of respondents felt that local residents in their area abided by the rule of law.
13. 60% indicated that changes to the local environment (including alley gating and/or extra street lighting) would help make people feel safer in their area.
14. 59% suggested that improved relationships with the PSNI would also help.

COMMUNITYY SAFETY – POINTS OF THREAT

15. 55% indicated that anti-social behaviour was a problem in their area.
16. 57% indicated that drug related crime was also a problem in the area.

INFLUENCE OF PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND/OR ORGANISED CRIME GANGS

17. 32% felt that locally based paramilitary groups had too much influence on young people living throughout their area.
18. 34% indicated that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in their area.
19. 27% noted that paramilitary groups had a controlling influence on their area.

ENDNOTE 2: SPRAYCAN MAPPING TOOL/PGIS SOFTWARE

The 'Spraycan' software constitutes a Participatory GIS (PGIS) interface that permits participants to answer spatial questions by drawing onto a Google map (or satellite image) using a 'spray can' (or 'airbrush') tool, as opposed to using traditional map-based drawing tools such as points and polygons.

The significance of this approach to participatory mapping relates to the way in which members of the public typically think about the world around them, and how this contrasts with the way in which we typically store these places in GIS software. People tend to think about the world in terms of places, which are typically vaguely defined, in that universally accepted and unequivocal boundaries cannot be determined for them. This is because places are defined by the individual perceptions, experiences and cognition of the participants, and so the extent of an area will necessarily vary between them.

Place-based models contrast with the space-based approaches that are used in typical GIS software, which require precision in the location and boundaries of these places. The use of such space-based representations for vague places enforces an 'artificial precision' (after Montello et al., 2003) onto them, resulting in a poor representation of the place in question – which will impact upon any subsequent interpretation and analysis. It has also been shown that people find it difficult to convert their place-based thoughts and feelings into spatial representations in this way, meaning that the imposition of this 'artificial precision' also acts to reduce the quality of the data.

In order to avoid these negative effects, and the resulting challenges from incorporating findings into policy, we can use alternative map interfaces that are designed 'for purpose', of which the 'Spraycan' is a prominent example. In this case, participants can add data to the map without consideration of precise boundaries, as well as allowing them to change the density of the 'paint' (denoting variation in strength of feeling, for example). This approach facilitates either qualitative (e.g. Huck et al., 2019) or quantitative (e.g. Huck et al., 2014) interpretation, and has been applied to a range of environmental and socio-cultural problems worldwide, by a variety of organisations, governments and universities.

FURTHER READING

More information about the software and its motivations can be found in the following publications:

Huck, J.J., Whyatt, J.D. Sturgeon, B., Hocking, B., Davies, G., Dixon, J., Jarman, N. and Bryan, D. (2018). Exploring Segregation and Sharing in a Divided City: a PGIS approach. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 109:1, 223-241

Huck, J.J., Whyatt, D. & Coulton, P. (2014). Spraycan: a PPGIS for capturing imprecise notions of place. *Applied Geography*. 55, p. 229-237

Evans, A. J., & Waters, T. (2007). Mapping vernacular geography: web-based GIS tools for capturing "fuzzy" or "vague" entities. International *Journal of Technology, Policy and Management*, 7(2), 134-150.

Montello, D. R., Goodchild, M. F., Gottsegen, J., & Fohl, P. (2003). Where's downtown?: Behavioral methods for determining referents of vague spatial queries. In *Spatial cognition and computation* (pp. 185-204). Psychology Press.

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End Child Poverty. (2018). *Compilation of child poverty local indicators* (London: End Child Poverty).

Ross, K. & Campbell, P. (2021). *Perceptions of Crime: Findings from the 2019/20 Northern Ireland Safe Community Survey* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency).

Communities in Transition

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