Communities in Transition

Area Research Report 2023

New Lodge

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The Executive Programme on Paramilitarism & Organised Crime

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ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

The Authors would like to thank all the individuals who participated in the different strands of our fieldwork. In addition, we wish to pass on our gratitude to the range of Delivery Partners working on the *Communities in Transition* (CIT) programme, who helped organise the interviews and focus groups that supported the development of this Report.

We would like to thank those who contributed to the research fieldwork: Dr Lisa Faulkner-Byrne; Dr John Bell; Dr Philip McCready; Lucy Geddes; Dr Dàire McGill and Claire Heaney-McKee. Also, Dr Jonny Huck for GPIS services and Danny Treacy and the team at Perceptive Insight for undertaking the Household Survey.

Special thanks go to Co-operation Ireland and the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute For Global Peace, Security and Justice at Queen's University Belfast for their continued support, to The Executive Office NI (TEO) and key staff working on the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) for their advice and observations during the production of this document.

The Authors hope that the content of this Report offers a valuable insight into how people residing in the New Lodge area of North 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.

NEW LODGE

The New Lodge forms part of the North Belfast Communities in Transition site, along with Ardoyne, but during our fieldwork, we discovered that the New Lodge and Ardoyne are locally interpreted as two very distinct sites. Consequently, we will submit two separate reports for this single Communities in Transition area.

The area experienced 105 deaths that were directly linked to the armed conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969-2001 (CAIN, 2010). This violence and its legacy have subsequently impacted on unlawful behaviour and for some has led to the steady erosion of civic values … poor mental health, high levels of drug and substance abuse, as well as addiction rates' (Co-operation Ireland, 2018), and in-fact there is a perception that drug supply and usage has got worse, including prevalence and class of drugs (Sturgeon & Bryan, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this Report is on presenting a 'bottom up' assessment of the key issues relevant to the residents of the New Lodge area. The focus is not on representing 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 along-side 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, 27 people participated in our PGIS mapping exercise and accompanying qualitative interview – 15 of these individuals identified as Nationalist, 10 as Unionist and 2 as Other (neither Nationalist nor Unionist).

Household Survey – Overview

- 78 people from across New Lodge and surrounding areas took part in the Household Survey survey, carried out by market research company, Perceptive Insight in Spring 2022.

- 48 identified themselves as Catholic, 28 as Protestant and 2 identified as Neither.

- 40 Participants were male and 38 participants were female.

- 48 participants were Nationalist, 24 were Unionist and 6 identified as 'other'.

- The participants were aged between 17 and 76.

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.

- **67% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong sense of community throughout New Lodge.**
  The average response across all the CIT sties was 66%.

- **66% 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

- **Figure 1 indicates the degree to which community space is segregated in the New Lodge area, and nearby Tigers Bay, on the basis of community identity.**

- **Nationalist participants clearly identified that their 'community' spans the space that is commonly considered to be within the boundaries of the New Lodge area. Unionist respondents marked space in Tigers Bay in the same way.**

- **The map indicates that the local sense of community is not 'shared' in any meaningful way. Instead, we can identify two distinct communities living in close proximity to one another.**
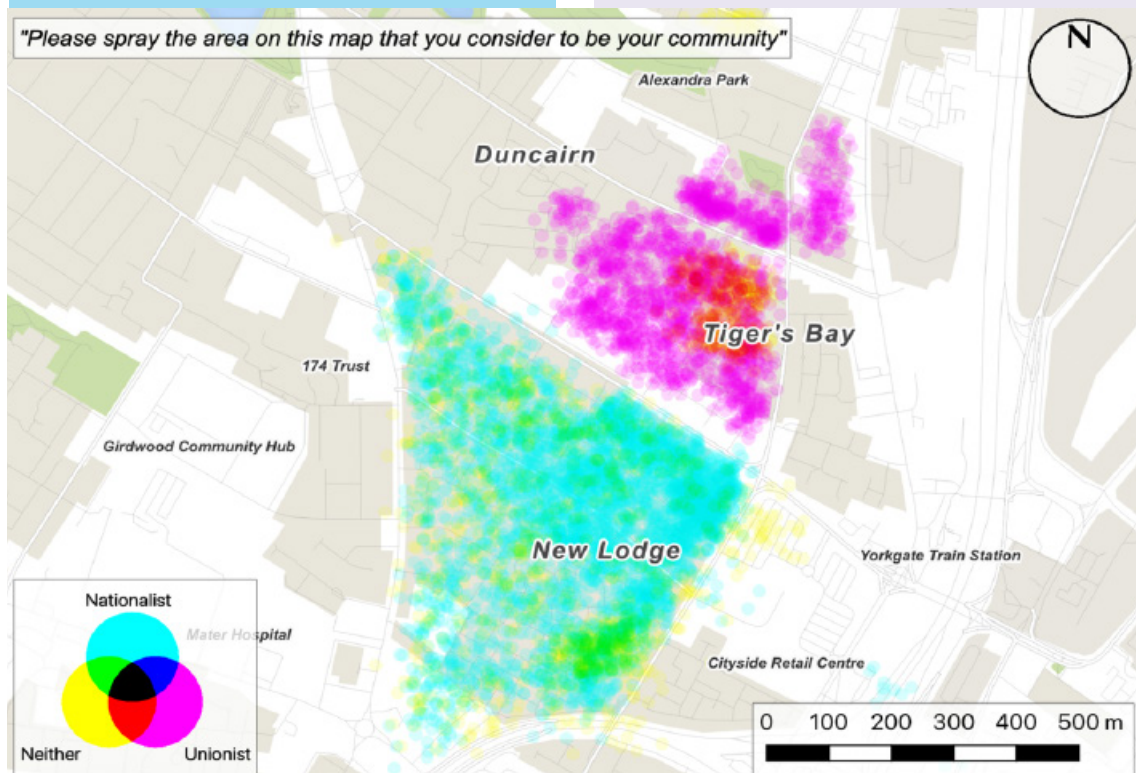

Figure 1: Community Attachment in the New Lodge area..

- **No participant indicated any sense of attachment to the Ardoyne area, which is paired with New Lodge in the CIT programme.**

Qualitative Interviews

In the Household Survey, a very clear sense of community association is identified. Moreover, in the Spraycan Mapping Tool, not only is a strong community attachment obvious, a clear sense of how this relates to the local geographic landscape is also provided. Both indicate that not only is the concept of community important to participants, they also have a precise knowledge of their spatial environment and an understanding of how the two matters relate to one another.

The Qualitative Interviews re-emphasized both the strong sense of community and the related understanding of space. Most participants explained that they and their families are long-term residents of the area. Consequently, most of their friends and families live nearby. A number of respondents also worked in the area, and many were volunteers in local community associations and sports clubs.

'I've lived here my whole live... it's very important to me. We had a chance to move... a couple of chances, through my husband's work, but I couldn't leave. My mum and sister are close by... my friends are near and I work... just up at the school, so I suppose we're completely 'plugged' into the area and to leave all that and start somewhere else... even if it was Belfast, it would take a long time to build up a new network.'

As suggested in the Spraycan Mapping Tool, a number of participants were uncertain why the area had been paired with Ardoyne in the CIT programme. They indicated that the areas were distinct communities that had different needs and separate community leaders acting to address these needs.

Some participants felt that Tigers Bay, rather than Ardoyne, should have been selected.

While the majority of the participants pointed to the differences between the New Lodge and Ardoyne, some felt that there were a number of ways in which they could seek to support one another – they may be distinct communities, but here are similarities between the sites. Participants of this mindset felt that CIT was doing a good job of joining the areas together, which could help facilitate communication and collaboration moving forward.

The vast majority of participants indicated that the New Lodge itself was best understood as a collection of small areas that came together to form the wider community network of the area – e.g. Henry Street and Little George Street, on the other side of North Queen Street form the bulk of residential space, and likely had a different dynamic than some of the streets in the Upper New Lodge area.

Participants suggested that the symbolic landscape of the area was important to local residents. It was felt that murals and flags that are used to mark space facilitate a sense of belonging and emphasize the togetherness of those within the site to outsiders.

Participants were concerned about the lack of organised community capacity that exists throughout Tigers Bay, especially in comparison to the New Lodge (where many cited the good work being done by the Ashton Community Trust).

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

- **22% of participants indicated they were involved with a Local Church.**

- **15% were associated with a Sports Club.**

- **12% were involved in a Local School.**

- **2% participated in Neighbourhood Associations.**

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Cityside Retail Park was considered to be the only majored 'shared' space in the area.**

- **Segregation in the use of leisure spaces can be identified – Nationalist participants used Girdwood Community Hub, while Unionist participants are more likely to use the Grove Health and Wellbeing Centre.**

- **There was also a sectarianized use of space within a local park, where Unionist participants suggested that although Alexandra Park was a key facility, they only considered the space on one of side of the park's Peace Wall as being important.**
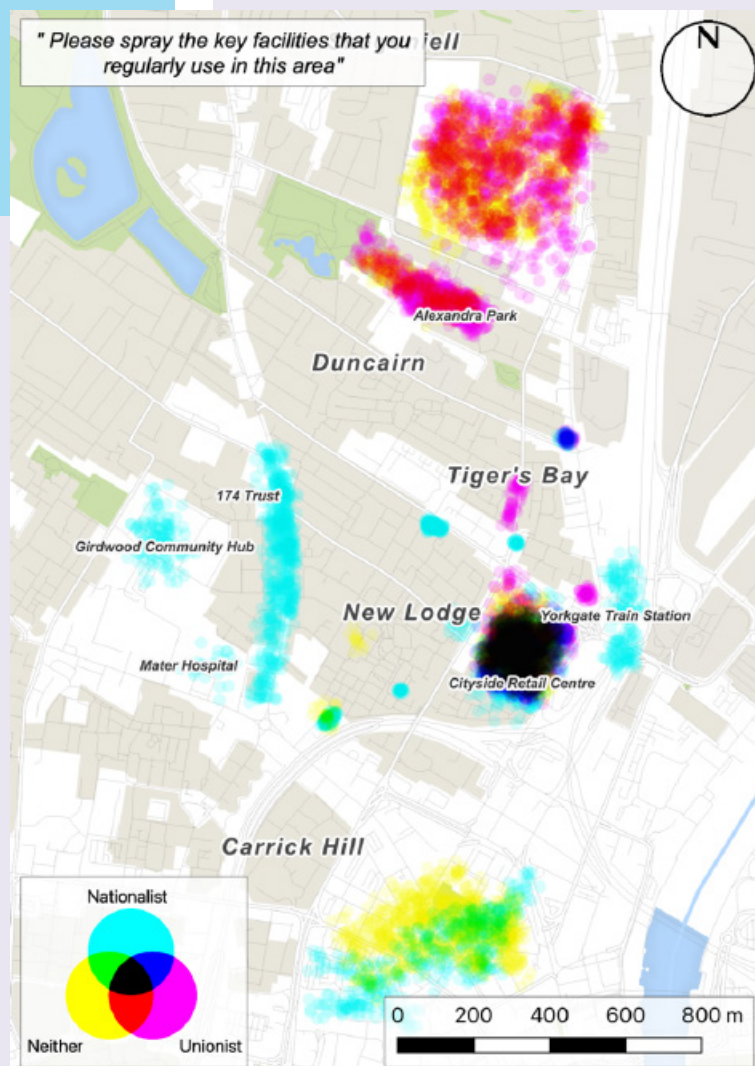

Figure 2: Key Facilities in the New Lodge area.

Qualitative Interviews

The Cityside Retail Park was seen as being important to the majority of participants in the Spraycan Mapping Tool and Qualitative Interviews. It was noted that while this is a 'shared' space that residents from the New Lodge and Tigers Bay both visit, there were distinct pathways and separate entry points that the two communities tended to use (e.g. New Lodge residents tended to use the pedestrian entrance near New Lodge Road and people coming from Tigers Bay often used the main access point on Brougham Street). Moreover, when visiting the space, participants noted they rarely wore clothes that would identify their community background. In this sense, while the space can be considered to be 'shared' on a basic level, the quality of this sharing is quite low.

Some participants explained that they regularly shopped, worked and socialized in neighbouring Belfast City Centre. Others stated that they never went into the centre of Belfast due to the cost of dining and shopping in the area. They also pointed out that the fractured pedestrian pathways from New Lodge into the city centre were also problematic for people looking to walk with young children. There were also frequent points of dereliction along the route that made people feel 'uneasy'.

A large number of participants stressed the importance of the Ashton Community Trust and the different spaces owned and operated by the group. It was noted that these facilities had been important to the development of CIT – as they had provided the opportunity for people to engage on sensitive issues in spaces where they felt safe.

The Housing Forum, where another CIT partner, Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI), are based, was also seen as an important space that provided a key service to the area. It was suggested that there was a lack of comparable support in Tigers Bay, so residents of that area regularly visited the Forum in the New Lodge instead.

Some participants explained that there was a lack of quality green spaces nearby. Even where participants stated that they regularly used spaces like Alexandra Park and the Waterworks, it was explained that these sites lack some basic amenities necessary for visiting families (e.g. there are no public restrooms available in either park).

Many felt that the area was fortunate to have a well developed and supported system for young people, but it was noted that some of the youth clubs were 'old' and needed to be 'modernised'.

The new Ulster University site was viewed as offering opportunities for the area, particularly in terms of investment and development opportunities, but there were also concerns that the area could witness scenes of anti-social behaviour, recurrent in the Holylands area near Queen's University, if housing was not managed appropriately.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING BETTER

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

Household Survey

- **90% 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%.

- **70% 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%.

- **32% 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

- **The majority of participants felt that the revamp of housing in Hillman Street and neighbouring streets had been important to the local area.**

- **The development of Girdwood Community Hub had also been important to Nationalist participants, while those from a Unionist background highlighted the significance of the Grove Health and Wellbeing Centre.**
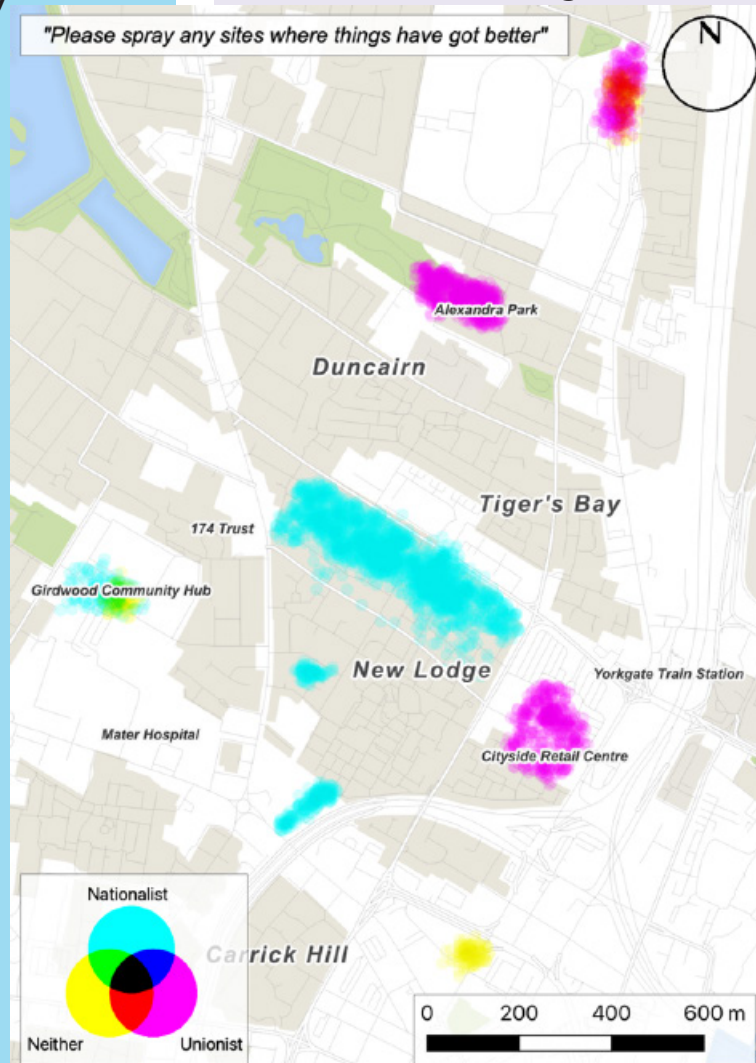

Figure 3: Locations in the New Lodge area where things have got better.

Qualitative Interviews

As indicated in the Spraycan Mapping tool, almost every participant noted the value of the new housing being installed in upper New Lodge – designed to replace some of the old lines of declining terrace housing.

'I think the new housing is really important to an ordinary resident – it's a very visual reminder that the area is not falling apart. I think sometimes there's a sense that the area is in complete decline and nothing is being done to address it, but the housing gives everyone a boost of confidence and a feeling that the area can get better and that residents deserve more... they're not being left behind.'

Participants also explained the value of newly developed community spaces, such as the McSweeney Centre.

'Spaces like the McSweeney Centre give the community places to meet, to engage with one another. It was also provides us the opportunity to host events – bring people into the area to see the community. I think that's important – people probably think they know the area, but having them come in and engage with the community is important to us all.'

While participants were often concerned about the lack of organisational capacity in Tigers Bay, they were positive about the current level of cross community cooperation.

'While I don't see the same level of community infrastructure in Tigers Bay as we have here, there are definitely very good individuals in that area who are trying to make a difference. We work well with them and look for opportunities where we can help one another.'

Participants were very positive about some of the upcoming young leaders in the area, many of whom regularly interact with the different CIT projects active in the area, but noted that retention is a problem.

'We have, and have had, some brilliantly talented young people in this area. One of the challenges we all face, is how to keep them... they are so talented that they can quickly outgrow the area. You put someone at 18, 19, 20 years of age on £15k or £20k and they immediately want to move out from their parents. Then they start to think well I might as well live closer to the nightlife or where they socialise... then maybe they end up taking a job in that area. We have to build around our young people – but it comes with risks.'

Although there is a complex range of problems evident in the site, this section of the Report indicates that residents are somewhat hopeful for the future – only 15% felt the area would be in worse condition in five years time. The swathe of new housing appears particularly important to participants. It appears that a key issue for programmes such as CIT, is ensuring there are suitable spaces and jobs for the many talented young individuals in the area to move into.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING WORSE

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

Household Survey

- **Only 11% 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%.

- **68% 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

- **A large number of participants who identify as Nationalist noted concerns about Duncairn Gardens and New Lodge Road.**

- **Participants who identified as Unionist were most concerned about the pathways around Belfast city centre, specifically near Carrick Hill.**
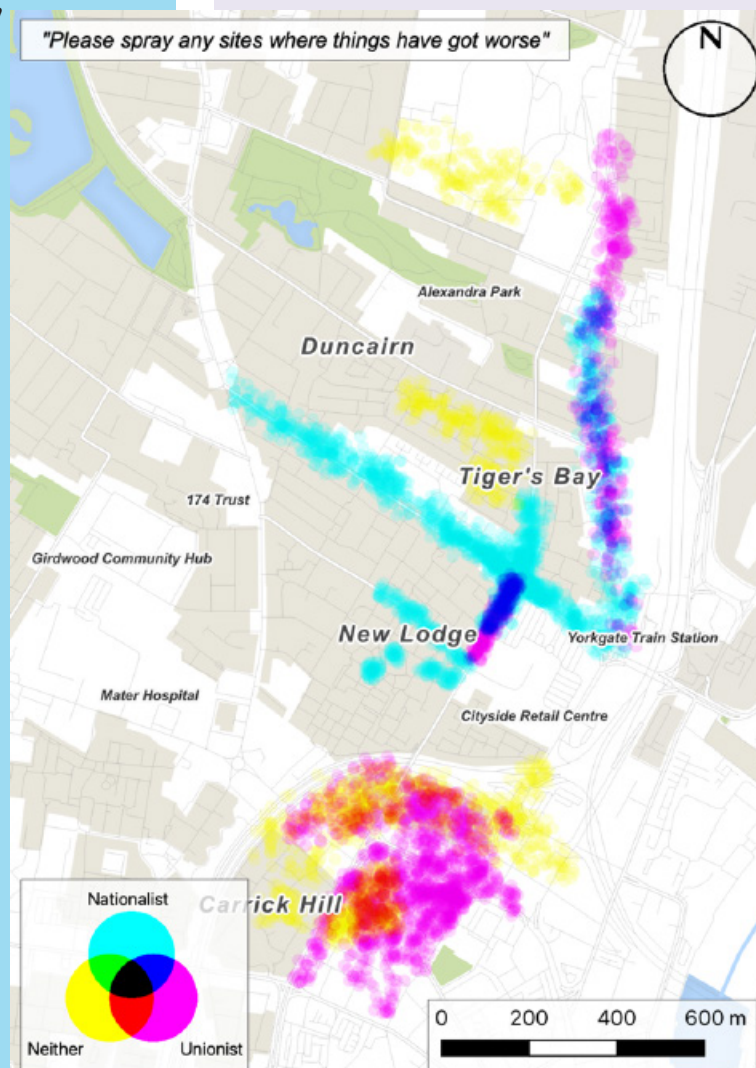

Figure 4: Locations in the New Lodge area where things have got worse.

Qualitative Interviews

All participants spoke about the poor socio-economic condition of the area, which included lack of jobs, poor educational outcomes, high levels of unemployment and the concerning health predictions for those living throughout the area. Drug addiction and alcohol abuse were universally identified as enormous problems in the area.

'We have a wide number of problems in this area, the majority of them associated with different forms of poverty, but the biggest problem we face is the poverty of hope and aspiration that this creates.'

'We're right up against it (regarding the amount of drug addiction in the area). it's so bad right now that I would say we've gone beyond the point of being able to solve the matter – all I think we can do, is commit to damage limitation. We can help those who are addicted as best we can and try and stop any further growth… but even keeping things the same, as bad as it is, would be a major success.'

Participants explained that drug dealers were well known and dominated certain spaces in the area e.g. New Lodge Road.

A large number of participants were concerned about the level of intergenerational trauma evident throughout the area. It was explained that individuals who had struggled with their mental and physical health during the peak of the region's conflict, largely remain in this condition now. It was suggested that many have related addictions and further mental and physical health challenges that puts a strain on their ability to act as a consistent guardian.

In addition to being concerned about talented young people leaving the area, as identified in the last section, participants noted the associated pressure this placed on ageing community workers. It was explained that there was an 'over reliance' on these individuals. While participants stressed the respect these individuals are held in, there is a lack of depth to support them and no real contingency for their absence in the future.

Some participants noted that while this issue is directly connected to talented young people leaving the area, it was also associated with a general decline in volunteering throughout the community. It was suggested that there is considerable support for local sports clubs, but less so for community organisations and traditional church groups.

It was largely agreed that Duncairn Gardens is in poor condition – there are frequent points of dereliction that make local residents feel uneasy and a general lack of amenities that would create footfall along the road.

Participants noted concerns about the physical infrastructure of the area – as discussed earlier, the road network causes a sense of apprehension for parents with small children. The York Street Interchange proposals are also a concern.

Some participants noted their frustration at the lack of development in the area, in comparison to other parts of Belfast – specifically, the neighbouring city centre.

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF BELONGING

In this section, we identify how participants feel about the issue of community safety in the New Lodge area, 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.

- **67% of respondents felt that local residents abided by the rule of law.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 61%.

- **76% felt that improved lighting and alleygating would make them feel safer, while 55% said improved relationships with the PSNI would also help.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 60% & 59%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Most participants indicated that their sense of safety was largely aligned with the community identity of their surroundings.**

- **Nationalist participants identified the entire New Lodge area and much of the lower Antrim Road as being 'safe'.**

- **Unionist participants were more likely to feel safe throughout Tigers Bay and along the lower part of the Shore Road.**

- **There were no spaces where all participants felt completely 'safe'.**
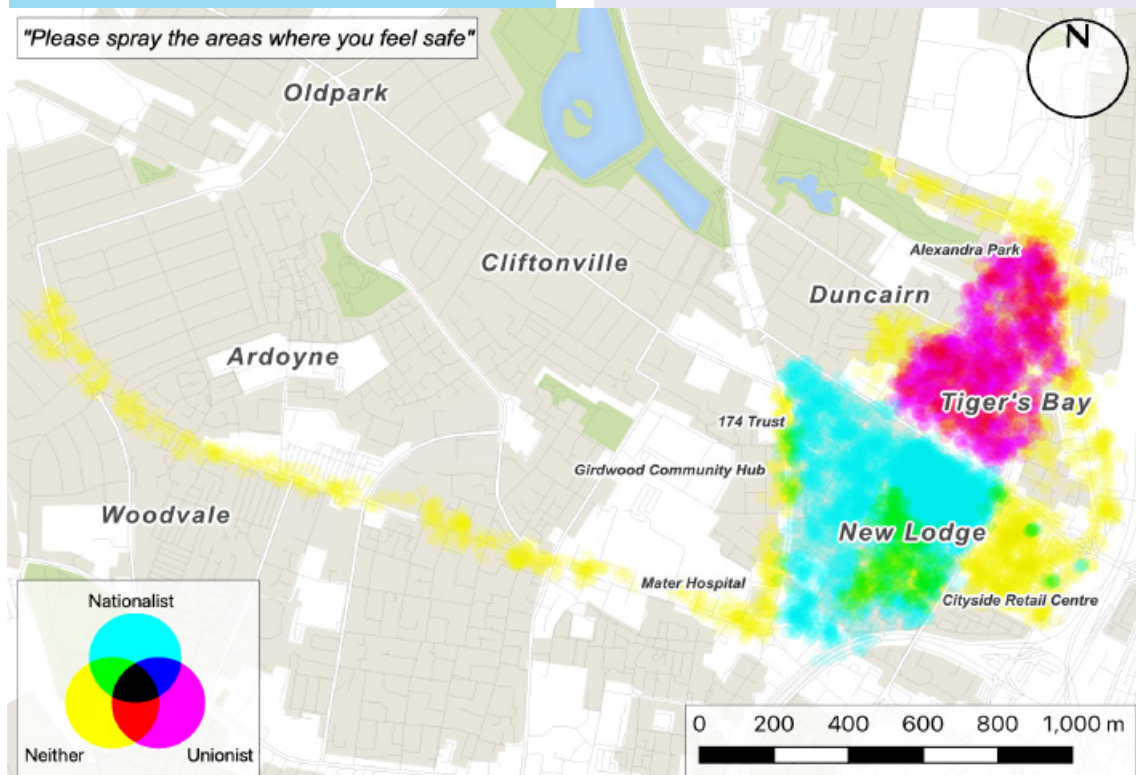

Figure 5: Locations in New Lodge area where people feel safe.

Qualitative Interviews

The Spraycan Mapping Tool identifies that participants had a significant understanding of the space around them. They subsequently organised their way of life around supposed spaces of threat to ensure their safety.

While over half indicated that improved relationships with the PSNI would likely make residents feel safer, there was a large number of key findings that indicated that participants supported the rule of law and felt their fellow residents did the same.

All participants stressed their desire for residents to feel safe throughout their area.

'Everyone has the right to feel safe.'

While participants noted they felt 'safe' in a number of key facilities, such as the Cityside shopping and leisure complex, they were conscious about how they entered and exited the site. They also stated that they would be aware of what they were wearing – e.g. certain sports (football/GAA) shirts.

Moreover, respondents' sense of safety was also based on how they arrived and departed sites.

Participants were content to use facilities in the 'other' community, but their mode of transport was key – e.g. when people from the New Lodge were asked if they would use the Grove Health Wellbeing Centre, they said they would consider it, but only if they drove.

Respondents also stated that while they were comfortable using certain parks and other green spaces in the area, they tended to use specific entry and exit points – this was particularly notable when discussing Alexandra Park. Nationalist respondents tended to indicate they felt safe in the area of the park near the Antrim Road, while Unionist participants were 'safe' in the lower end of the park.

Participants noted that they felt safe using certain bus stops throughout the area, but there were others (based on Duncairn Gardens and in the 'other' community) that they would be unwilling to use. This often resulted in people walking further to get a bus or staying on a bus longer than what was necessary, so they would not have to walk through 'territory' belonging to the 'other' community.

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF THREAT

In this section, we identify the feelings participants had about the issue of community safety in the New Lodge area, 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:

- **72% felt ASB was a problem in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 55%.

- **76% 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

- **Like the previous section, participants understanding of threat appears to be largely linked to community identity, with respondents often stating they would be 'unsafe' in the territory of the 'other' community.**

- **There were additional sites marked as 'unsafe' that appears to be less to do with perceived community ownership. As discussed elsewhere, the pathways from the New Lodge area into Belfast city centre are considered to be of a poor standard and the complicated road network nearby regularly made people with young families feel unsafe.**
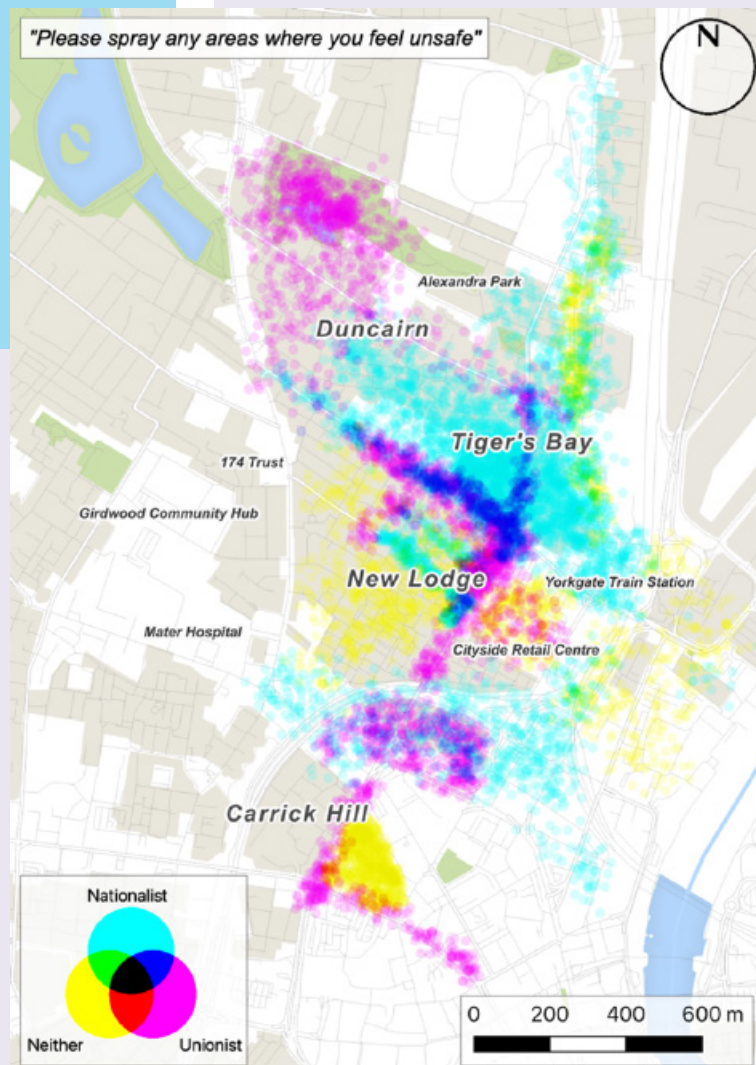

Figure 6: Locations in the New Lodge area where people feel unsafe.

Qualitative Interviews

Participants in the New Lodge generally felt the PSNI lacked 'presence' in the area.

> *'You don't see them (PSNI). They have very little role in the area (New Lodge). I think that's a serious issue for all sorts of reasons, but particularly when they arrive during the high point of a riot – there's no relationship'*

There were on-going concerns about bonfire management and interface rioting. It was suggested that the problems with both were generally time specific. During the height of this tension, there was concern that some of the hostility is manufactured and managed by certain individuals, who 'encourage' younger members of their community to riot and cause problems.

> *'I think we can definitely see that some of this (bonfire management/interface violence) is being managed – they can turn it on and off like a tap. They have these young lads in the palm of their hand. They can offer them kudos... drugs... they can impress them or intimidate... whatever it takes... to get these young lads to fight their battles.'*

Participants from Tigers Bay indicated that walking to and from Belfast city centre is problematic in two ways: if they go via the Shore Road, it is a barren pathway with poor pedestrian pathways, but if they go along North Queens Street, they need to walk through the New Lodge and the neighbouring Carrick Hill. Participants noted that a history of tension provokes a sense of threat, as they move through these spaces.

> *'I couldn't walk there (through New Lodge and near Carrick Hill)... no chance. I never do. They could see me coming across Duncairn... in that case where else could I be coming from? I have to be coming from Tigers Bay. I'll drive it, but I'd never walk it.'*

While participants often based their sense of safety on issues associated with criminality, there were additional reasons why they often felt unsafe – spaces of dereliction in locations such as Duncairn Gardens and the lower end of the Shore Road, made people feel uncomfortable in other ways. This type of unease was also connected to poor lighting and rows of empty shops.

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 on the New Lodge area.

Household Survey

- **24% of respondents felt that young people living throughout the New Lodge were under too much influence from paramilitary groups.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 32%.

- **34% felt that paramilitary groups contribute to crime, drug dealing and ASB in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 34%.

- **40% felt that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 27%.

- **26% felt that paramilitary groups had a controlling influence in their area.**

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Within the mapping exercise, there was a sectarianized analysis of the type of influence paramilitary groups have throughout the local area.**

- **Nationalist participants were unlikely to mark areas that would be traditionally understood as 'their' spaces. They were much more likely to mark areas belonging to the 'other' community.**
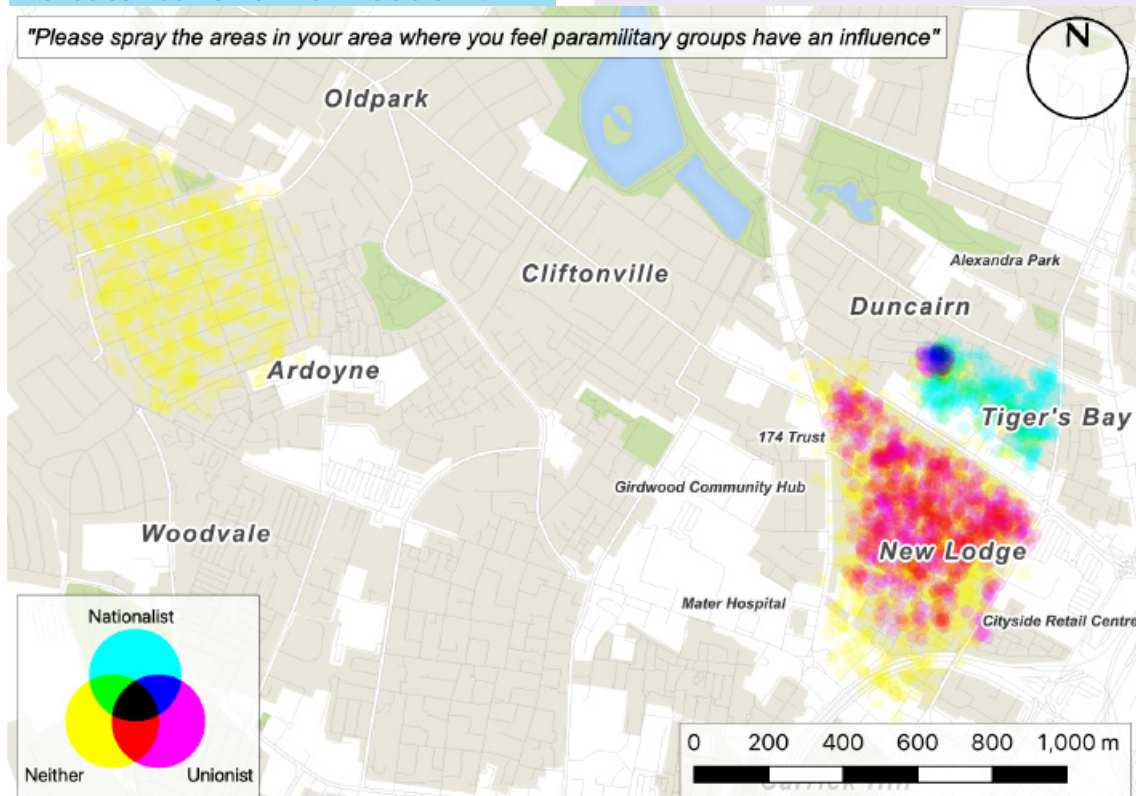

Figure 7: Influence of Paramilitary Groups and/or Organised Crime Gangs in New Lodge area.

- **Unionist participants marked space in the same format.**

- **These findings suggest that while each community accuse the other of having paramilitary groups in their respective area, they are less likely to make this accusation about their own area.**

Qualitative Interviews

The majority of participants across all three strands of our methodology, felt that paramilitary groups had at least some level of influence throughout the New Lodge area.

There are some varying perspectives regarding the exact extent of this influence and the ways in which it is manifested.

Some participants felt that paramilitary groups had a powerful and controlling influence – this was symbolised by the way in which they controlled and orchestrated bonfire management and interface violence.

Other respondents felt that their behaviour and influence was limited to particular spaces and occasions – many individuals felt that the lower end of the New Lodge Road was becoming an increasingly unsafe and unsettling location.

Some participants noted they knew such groups were active in the area, but they could not be precise about the form their influence took. A smaller number of respondents did not have any knowledge of their activity at all.

It was noted that the term 'paramilitary' is actually quite problematic. It was suggested that the ways in which residents would typically or traditionally understand paramilitary groups is different now to other points of time, particularly during the peak of the region's conflict.

'I'm not sure about that term (paramilitarism). I'm not sure that fairly represents what they (local groups) actually are – I think saying they're paramilitaries affords them credibility... more legitimacy than they actually deserve. I think given the way we've traditionally used that term (locally), it gives the groups some type of mandate to be active... but these groups are absolutely not acting on behalf of the community... they're just doing what they can to extort people... make money and control people.'

'I think you need to be careful about how you use that term (paramilitary), because in my mind, that's not what they are. They're actually just criminal gangs... the type of gangs you have in London, Dublin... there's nothing more... they're nothing more than that.'

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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Co-operation Ireland. (2018). *Building Capacity to support transition in North Belfast* (Belfast: Co-operation Ireland).

Sturgeon, B. & Bryan, D. (2021). *Communities in Transition: Mid-term Review* (Belfast: The Executive Office NI).

Communities
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