

**Communities
in Transition**

Area Research
Report 2023

North Down

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Northern Ireland
Executive



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The Authors hope that the content of this Report offers a valuable insight into how people residing in the Kilcooley and Rathgill areas of North Down 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. The 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.

NORTH DOWN

Communities in Transition activity in North Down focuses on The Kilcooley and Rathgill areas of Bangor. Previous research (Sturgeon & Bryan, 2021) has indicated that multiple problems exist in the Communities in Transition areas situated in North Down, these include: a cycle of deprivation affecting consecutive generations; high levels of drug and alcohol abuse; complex mental health needs and a lack of corresponding support services; a perceived class divide between the sites and central Bangor; and a lack of trust in the justice system (Cooperation Ireland, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this Report is on presenting a 'bottom up' assessment of the key issues relevant to the residents of Kilcooley and Rathgill in North Down. 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 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, 18 people participated in our PGIS mapping exercise and accompanying qualitative interview – 16 of these individuals identified as Unionist and 2 as Other (neither Nationalist nor Unionist).

Household Survey – Overview

- 150 people from Kilcooley and Rathgill and surrounding areas took part in the door to door survey, carried out by market research company, Perceptive Insight in Spring 2022.
- 130 as Unionist, 10 as Nationalist and 10 identified as Neither.
- 75 participants were male and 75 participants were female.
- 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.

- **61% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there was a strong sense of community throughout the CIT area in North Down.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 66%.
- **82% 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

- **18 participants completed the Spraycan Mapping Tool.**
- **16 identified themselves as 'as Unionist' and 2 as 'Other'.**
- **Figure 1 demonstrates the extent to participants identified that they lived in either the Kilcooley or Rathgill areas of North Down.**

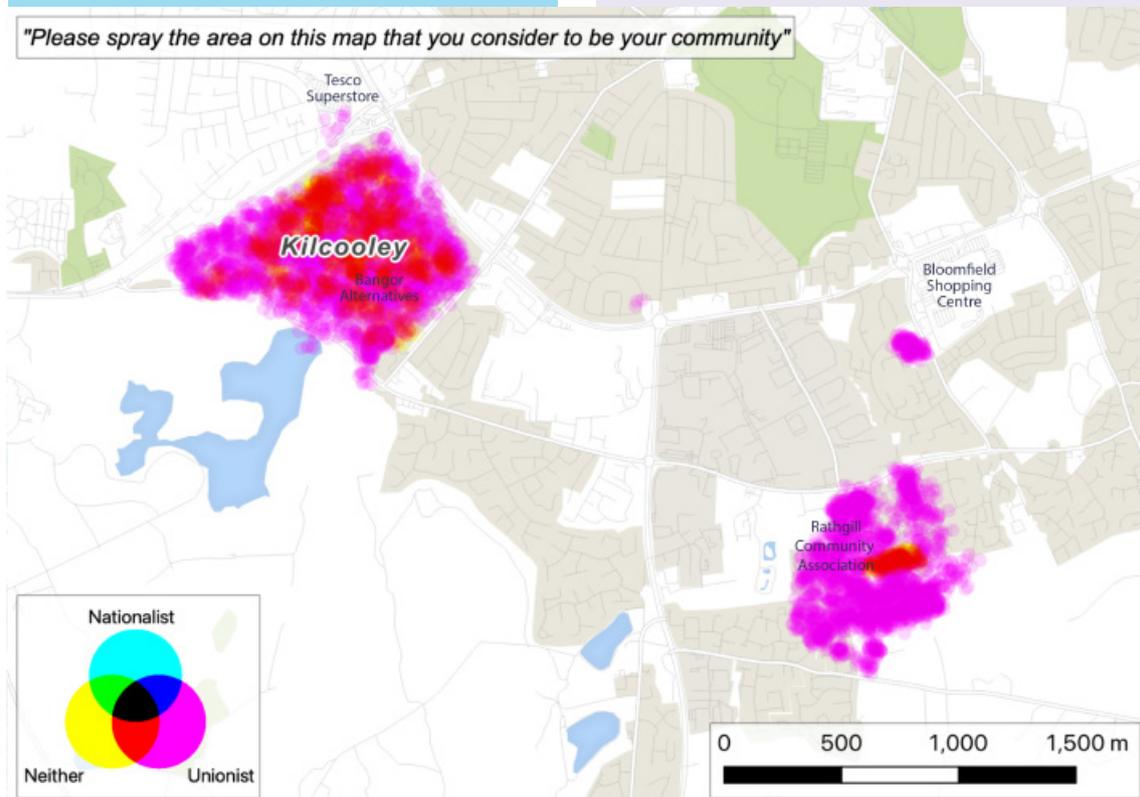


Figure 1: Community Attachment in the CIT area in North Down.

Qualitative Interviews

As indicated by the mapping tool, participants either lived in Kilcooley or Rathgill.

Despite the areas being in close proximity to one another, participants explained that there were significant differences between the two sites.

It was suggested that paramilitary groups were much more likely to have a visible presence in Kilcooley, but participants were more likely to feel less safe in Rathgill.

'it's really odd, I think people are more likely to 'behave' themselves in Kilcooley... probably because there's a fear factor there... then in Rathgill there's probably more problems, but if there was to be a shooting, which probably only happens every three years or so... that's more likely to happen in Kilcooley.'

Participants explained that Kilcooley itself was a complex area, within which there was significant community tension and division. It was explained that the tension can be partly connected to the presence of five competing paramilitary factions.

'There's a lot of division based on the allegiances of different families (to paramilitary groups)... some families would fully support them and have probably been involved with them for some time... others would be indifferent and then you've families that would be completely against them.'

Although it was suggested that paramilitary groups had less influence in Rathgill than some other locations in North Down, it was noted that their presence was still visible and problematic.

'Yeah, like... there's not the same level (of activity)... as you would get there (Kilcooley), but that's such an extreme comparison... there's still activity here... it's just that there's so much in Kilcooley.'

Given the perceived difference in the scale of activity across the two sites, some participants were unclear why they were selected by the CIT programme.

'I think if you were putting together a league table (of where paramilitary groups are most active) then I think you have West Winds as Number 1... then Kilcooley, but Rathgill would probably be 7th, 8th or 9th within the North Down area.'

Unlike other CIT sites where there is significant cross-community tension, participants in this area explained that the biggest external point of tension is associated with class. It was noted that both Rathgill and Kilcooley are largely cut off from central Bangor and have significantly less capacity, as a consequence – see next Section for more details.

In relation to the geographical framing of CIT, some participants felt that including Rathgill and excluding the Bloomfield Estate made little logistical sense.

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

- 16% of our participants indicated they were involved with a Local Church.
- 7% were associated with a Sports Club.
- 9% were involved in a Local School.
- 14% participated in Neighbourhood Associations.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- The majority of participants marked the Rathgill Community Association and Bangor Alternatives as key spaces that they would use if they had a concern about a local issue, though it was also suggested that there were a number of community centres/spaces where there was a perceived lack of community ownership of council facilities.

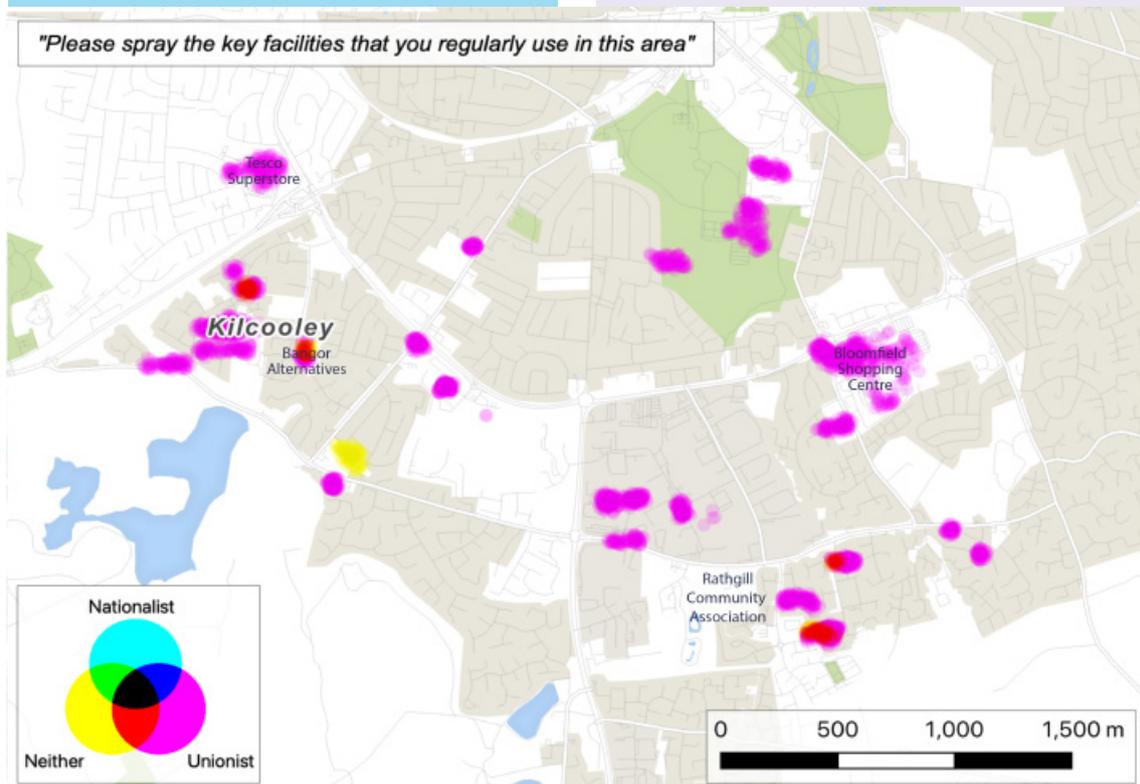


Figure 2: Key Facilities in the CIT area in North Down.

Qualitative Interviews

As indicated in the previous Section, which examined Community Attachment, a large number of participants felt that the overall physical condition of Kilcooley and Rathgill was significantly poorer than other parts of North Down, specifically central Bangor.

Participants explained that in addition to the area having higher levels of poverty, unemployment and poor health outcomes, they also had less community infrastructure to address these issues. It was noted that although groups like Bangor Alternatives and Rathgill Community Association are doing enormous amounts of good work in the areas, further statutory support is required.

'I think if the people of Bangor had a choice, they'd put wheels on Kilcooley and kick it down the road to Belfast.'

'We don't have peace walls... not like you would get elsewhere... we don't have interfaces, but we do have a class interface with Bangor... the difference in scale... in jobs... and just wellbeing is absolutely enormous.'

'I don't think anyone locally feels like they live on the 'Gold Coast' (laughter)... I also don't think that anyone in Bangor would want other people to know we're here... like no one is giving directions to fancy big house via Kilcooley... they'd rather take them a half hour further way to avoid us (laughter), but there's obviously a serious issue there... that we're so close, but have no benefits from that... I think that causes pressure... it

causes frustration (for residents of Kilcooley and Rathgill).'

The sense of frustration of the gap in capacity between Kilcooley and Rathgill and other parts of North Down, was emphasized by the absence of some basic amenities in both areas.

'We don't have a shop in the estate (Kilcooley) anymore... I mean... Jesus... look at the size of the estate and we don't have one shop... and a lot of people are old or don't drive... or both. It's like someone is sending the area a message.'

'I think the biggest gap in provision that there is (in Rathgill) the lack of things for young people... we've absolutely nothing for them to do... so they just hang around, which makes people feel uneasy. We were supposed to get a football pitch a few years back, but that went nowhere.'

As indicated in the Mapping tool, the lack of overall capacity of the areas means that there is enormous pressure on the existing community network. Participants were very supportive of the work of Bangor Alternatives and Rathgill Community Association. However, some participants were concerned that the groups may suffer 'burn out', as they had been 'abandoned' by relevant statutory bodies.



COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING BETTER

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

Household Survey

- **82% 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%.
- **51% 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%.
- **18% 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

- **A large number of participants indicated that they felt Kilcooley had improved in recent years, but this was less to do with any structural improvements and was most likely to be attributed to improving local relationships (specifically after the paramilitary feud that existed in the area).**
- **In relation to Rathgill, participants were most likely to indicate that the key improvement in the area was associated with the new housing that had been installed in the area.**

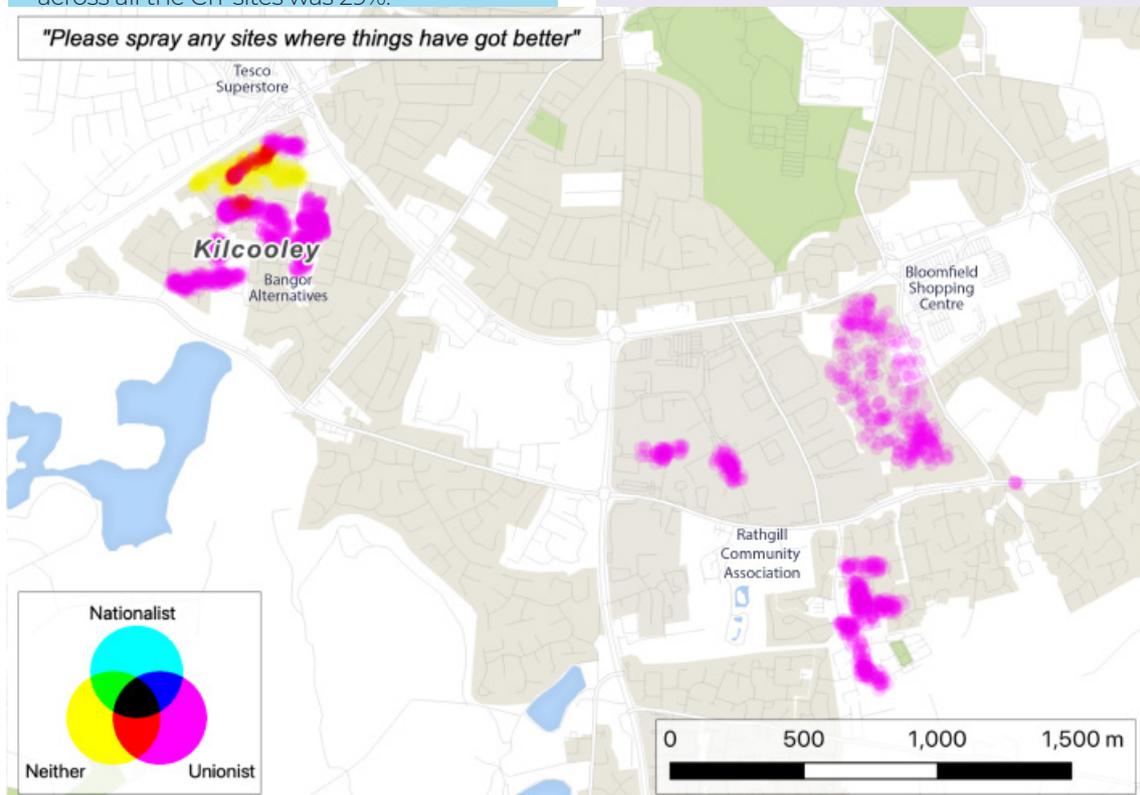


Figure 3: Locations in North Down where things have got better.

Qualitative Interviews

The majority of participants did not feel as though there had been any significant improvements in either Rathgill or Kilcooley.

Participants felt that the only real structural improvements had happened in Rathgill – where new housing had been erected in the area. Participants felt the homes had improved the living conditions for existing residents, as it upgraded the overall image of the area. Moreover, it attracted new residents into the site.

Most participants indicated that there were no significant differences in attitudes between those in the new homes and pre-existing residents, but it was noted that it was common to speak about the areas as two separate spaces – e.g. ‘Old Rathgill’ and ‘New Rathgill’.

‘I think the new housing has added some extra... some extra strength to the area... it’s good to have that.’

‘I don’t think there would be (any significant differences in attitude between pre-existing residents and those who moved into the new housing development)... not really... it’s not a massive space and I think we’re all dealing with similar problems.’

In relation to Kilcooley, participants struggled to identify any significant improvements that had occurred in the area, though a small number indicated that they were hoping that the women’s group active in the site would soon take up a full-time residency in the area.

‘That’s really important (the women’s group having a full-time premises)... they’ve done some really great work over the last few years... not just for women, but for the whole community. So, them having a space for themselves, within the community makes sense... and it just seems appropriate... given what they’ve been able to do in the area.’

Although participants struggled to identify many structural improvements in either Kilcooley or Rathgill, most indicated that there was a significant amount of positive community work occurring in most areas. In this regard, the majority of participants cited Bangor Alternatives for their work in Kilcooley; and the Rathgill Community Association for their work within Rathgill. It was suggested that both groups filled gaps where there had been a failure in statutory provision. Moreover, both could be relied upon to show leadership during periods of tension.

‘I think (North Down) Alternatives have taken on a number of roles where the stats (statutory bodies) have failed to deliver... or abdicated their responsibility. Through that they have the respect of the area, but I think they (local paramilitaries) also feel... well they think they’re legitimate. So, they have a lot of support in the area.’

‘The (Rathgill) Community Association does really great work... there’s not much for the people in this area, but they try and push for the area to get more... to get us more respect.’

COMMUNITY CAPACITY – GETTING WORSE

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

Household Survey

- **Only 37% 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%.

- **81% 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 77%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Despite identifying a wide range of problems throughout this Report, participants were unwilling to mark many spaces where things had got ‘worse’. It was largely suggested that they were responding in this way, as they were not new problems – they were long-term issues that had gone unaddressed.**



Figure 4: Locations in CIT area of North Down where things have got worse.

Qualitative Interviews

Every participant indicated that both Rathgill and Kilcooley suffer from various forms of inequality and deprivation. Participants were most concerned about the scale of unemployment across the sites, related socio-economic issues and the level of alcohol and drug addiction.

'Especially if you're wages are rubbish, which they probably will be, as so many people have no real qualifications (in this area)... I mean you might as well stay home.'

'I think most people... they hear you're from Kilcooley... even in terms of the schools... it's not a religious thing... not a community thing... it's a class thing.'

'We have all sorts of problems here... and we don't have close... ah... we're not close to having a response. I think we need relevant (statutory bodies) working together... better... to say: right, there's a problem in Kilcooley... it's to do with... drugs... or whatever... let's make a list of the groups we need to sort this out.' Instead, an agency will come to the area with a pre-existing idea and basically ask us to tell them in our own words why we need it. So, it's not real consultation at all. You don't consult after you've had the idea... you should be co-creating programmes together.'

Participants explained that the scale of the socio-economic problems in both Rathgill and Kilcooley could be seen in the increasing over-reliance that residents had on food banks, which are being organised by local churches. It was suggested that there had been a

surge in the use of food banks during the Coronavirus pandemic.

'Awful... really awful. The (local) churches have always had food banks, but I think if people were using them (before the pandemic), nobody really knew... you could be quite discreet... you know, if you were having a bad month or whatever... you could slip in and out, but now there's almost always a queue. These people are absolutely mortified to be there... to be seen there. They're there holding their kids by the hands asking for people to help them, because they can't provide for them... can you imagine that? Imagine being that parent. My sister volunteered to work one (food bank) a few weeks back and she said the biggest thing you notice... silence. No one speaks... no one queuing... no one working... these are the type of people full of life, but the ones queuing are ashamed and the ones working just don't want to make it worse for them.'

In addition to the perceived lack of capacity that exists in the site, participants also explained that some facilities are also 'under-utilised'. This was a significant issue in Rathgill where participants noted that few residents of the area used the George Green Community Centre. It was suggested that people did not feel connected to the space due to a poor consultation period, while statutory led activities were not in line with what residents were interested in.

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF BELONGING

In this section, we identify how residents feel about the issue of community safety in CIT area of North Down, 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.

- **62% of respondents felt that local residents abided by the rule of law.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 61%.
- **57% felt that improved lighting and alleygating would make them feel safer, while 52% said improved relationships with the PSNI would also help.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 60% and 59%.

Spraycan Mapping Tool

- **Despite identifying a range of problems in their area, the majority of participants indicated that they felt safe in ‘their’ area (whether they lived in Kilcooley or Rathgill).**
- **A small number of participants felt safe in both areas, and one indicated that they felt safe in much of the wider area surrounding the two estates.**

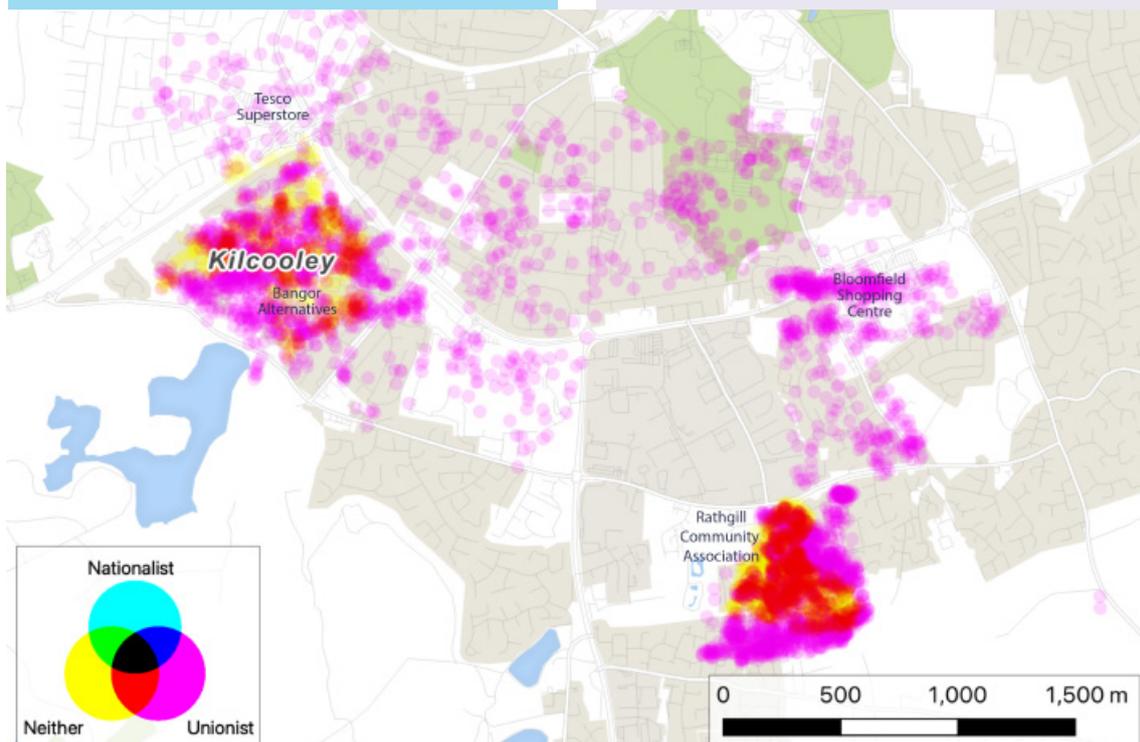


Figure 5: Locations in CIT area of North Down where people feel safe.

Qualitative Interviews

As outlined by the Spraycan mapping tool, participants felt safe in their respective areas, despite the range of local issues that have been identified elsewhere in this Report.

Participants noted that there were two key reasons for this: 1. Their familiarity of those living in the area and 2. They felt as though 'they knew how to keep themselves safe'.

'I think I do feel safe in most of Kilcooley... yeah. I mean... I know that sounds odd, given what we've been discussing, but I think... (be) cause I've been here for a long time... I'm well known to people... and I also know a lot of people... so I'm well connected... I don't mean with paramilitary groups or anything... just with the local church and community group. So, I think if I had an issue then I think I'd know how to get support.'

'Yep, yep, yep... I know... we've talked about crime and the problems in the area, but I think most people (living in the area) know to keep themselves safe. What do I mean by that? Ah, in very basic terms... everyone knows who's connected to where... do you know what I mean? Ah, you'd know who not to get on the wrong side of... you'd know who not to annoy. Normally when my son has an issue with someone... I'll take him up to the house to try and get it sorted... then there's other times... when I know what way the family is 'sided'... I'll just leave it and warn him to stay clear.'

'I think you just learn how to deal with it (the problems identified elsewhere in this Report)... you know not to go out at night... when to go to the shops... who to avoid.'

Some participants indicated that there were specific things happening in Rathgill and Kilcooley, which had also helped to make them feel safer, these included: improvements to the look of Kilcooley, the community spirit that was evident throughout the Coronavirus pandemic and better lighting and speed bumps in Rathgill.

Again, almost every participant indicated that Bangor Alternatives and Rathgill Community Association were doing important work across the sites to ensure that people felt safe. Participants suggested that if they had a concern about a local issue, they would most likely go to one of the two organisations before contacting the police or any other statutory body. Participants indicated that they had more trust in the two organisations, than the police or the justice system more generally, and would prefer to get their advice in the first instance about how to proceed with a concern. Participants felt residents were likely too reliant on the organisations and their respective personnel. It was noted that some residents wanted more support for the groups and many would be 'lost without them.'

COMMUNITY SAFETY – POINTS OF THREAT

In this section, we identify the feelings participants had about the issue of community safety in the CIT area of North Down, 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:

- **47% felt ASB was a problem in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 55%.
- **42% 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

- **Participants indicated that they felt unsafe in much of Kilcooley and Rathgill, as well as other locations near Bloomfield Park (where it was suggested there was a lot of anti-social behaviour).**

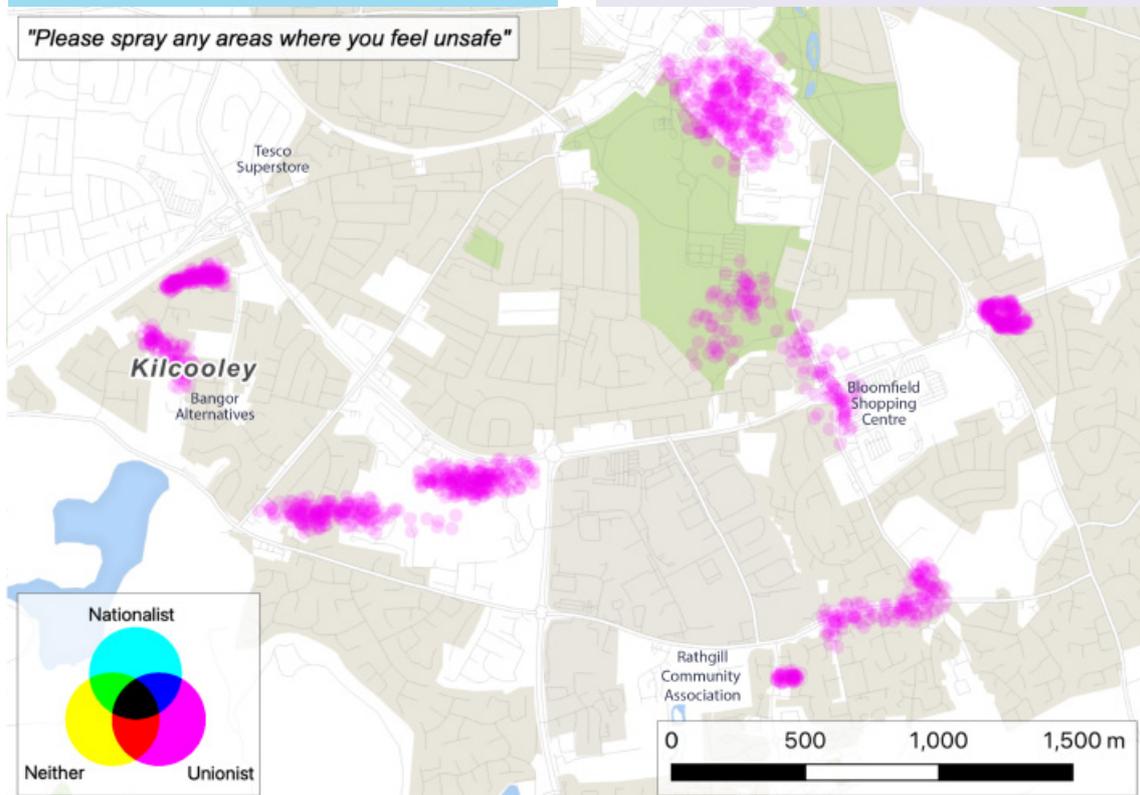


Figure 6: Locations in the CIT area of North Down where people feel unsafe.

Qualitative Interviews

Participants indicated that they felt unsafe throughout Kilcooley and Rathgill for a variety of reasons. Most indicated that there was an enduring tension throughout the sites that had been caused by the presence of paramilitary organisations. In addition to participants feeling unsafe due to the perceived presence of these groups, their sense of concern was emphasized by the feeling that relevant statutory bodies had 'abandoned' the sites (this included a perceived lack of presence by the police in the area).

'Very uneasy... yeah, you just feel as though there's a 'chill' in the air... do you know what I mean? I've family who live in other parts of Bangor... if we go to visit them... there'll be people out walking, working in their garden or chatting to each other across the fences (of their homes)... here... ah, there's just no one about. People run up to the shop and back, but they don't hang about. It's actually quite creepy... even during the day... there's just silence. You don't feel as though there's anybody about... you know, if something happened to you.'

'No, I wouldn't really let my kids out and about... we'd take them places at weekends... they go to the local football team, but I wouldn't want them just hanging about the estate. Why? You just be afraid of what they'd get into... who'd be watching them or trying to speak to them. We've got them quite sheltered, which I don't know is a good thing... so they wouldn't see the risk that's there.'

'We've everything here... every criminal offence on the list... but we don't get the police anywhere near us. Why do I think that happens? Cause they're afraid of them. Who? Of the paramilitary groups... they don't want to wind them up... so they just leave them be. They leave us here with them... like we're prisoners in our own area... but they don't care... there's no evidence they do... there's no one coming over the hill to back us up.'

Some participants made specific reference to certain areas, where they may feel unsafe. These locations included the back of the old shop front in Kilcooley (where it was suggested that paramilitary beatings were most likely to happen) and the Castlepark Medical Practice (near which a number of young people gathered in the evenings).

Participants also explained that living in estates near to busy main roads (Rathgael Road and Balloo Road) made them feel unsafe, particularly if they had young children.

'It stresses me out a bit being near a main road as well. Ah... you've got a lot of problems in and around the area, so you kind of want the kids to get out, but the cars absolutely fly up and down that road (Balloo Road)... so there's nowhere to go. We're kind of penned in here.'

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 the CIT area of North Down.

Household Survey

- **27% of respondents felt that young people living throughout the CIT area of North Down were under too much influence from paramilitary groups.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 32%.
- **19% felt that paramilitary groups create fear and intimidation in the area.** The average response across all the CIT sites was 34%.
- **7% 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 indicated that paramilitary groups had a considerable influence across Kilcooley, Rathgill and much of the surrounding area.**

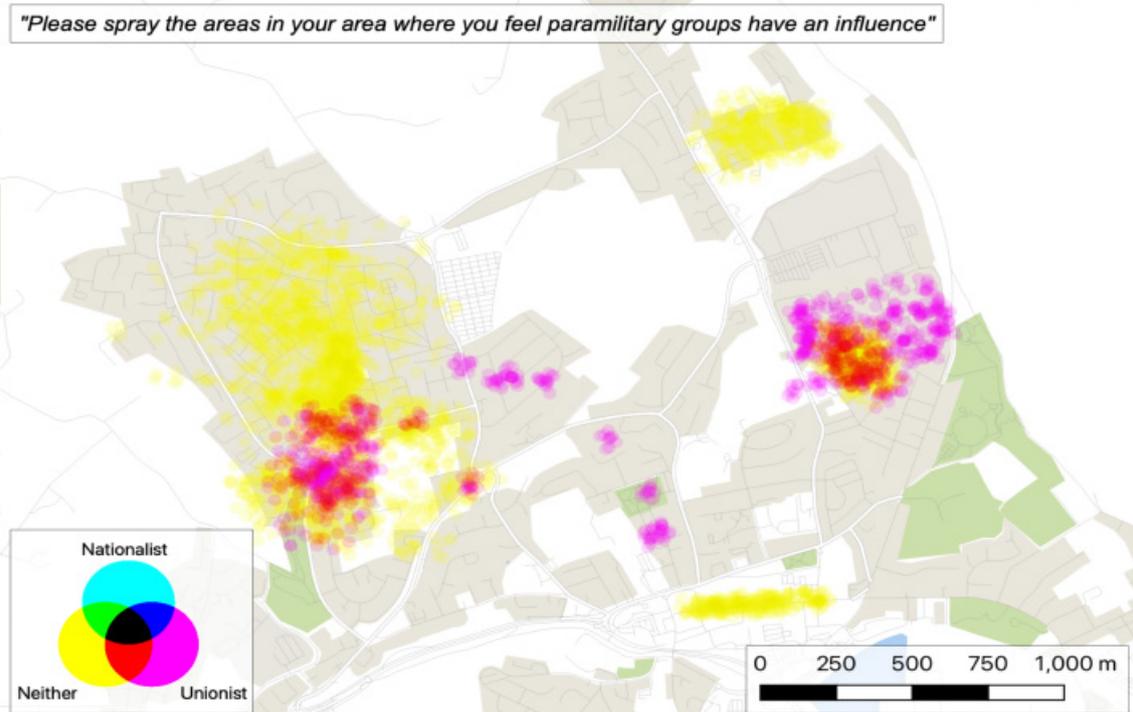


Figure 7: Influence of Paramilitary Groups and/or Organised Crime Gangs in the CIT area of North Down.

Qualitative Interviews

A large number of participants did not feel as though the influence of the paramilitary groups was limited to specific spaces in the site. Instead, it was routinely suggested that the groups had an influence 'everywhere'. One participant in the Spraycan exercise wanted to mark the whole of Northern Ireland and suggested there was nowhere where the paramilitary groups did not have some form of influence.

In this sense, participants were keen to stress the severity of the problem in their local area, but many also wanted to ensure that the issue was not considered a 'site-specific issue'. In this regard, participants noted that if there was tension/violence in other parts of Northern Ireland, this would likely cause the groups to become more active and visible in their area.

'They're everywhere in this area... they really are. What type of influence do they have? Well... they put my family member out of Kilcooley... with their children. Why? Well... They were with a Catholic and that annoyed them, but there was (were) other things as well. Like, there is a big group of us in this area... we have a lot of family ties... I suppose I thought that would count for something, but no... they had to go and that was it. We still see them, but they'll never visit and won't even talk about Kilcooley... they would never ask how their old neighbours are. I think for them... everyone who wasn't family and visibly trying to stop it happening... I think for them... everyone else was in some way was complicit. Even if they

weren't the ones forcing them out... no one else came to say 'this is awful' or 'what can we do?' Everyone else just kept their head down.'

Some participants indicated that while there is significant opposition to the groups in both Kilcooley and Rathgill, it is largely 'silent opposition'. It was stated while residents do not feel comfortable taking a visible stance against them, they will choose not to attend certain events/commemorations organised or funded by the groups.

Participants explained that many residents were frustrated by the role of such groups in the area, especially as it impacted on their sense of freedom to move around the area and the for the way in which it impacted on the perceived value of their home.

Moreover, while there was opposition to the presence of the groups, participants also suggested that there was still significant local support for their presence. It was noted that this support could be linked to long-term family ties, their 'ability to keep young people in order' and the fact that a number of residents bought their drugs from them.

Participants explained that the division in local sentiment caused tension between residents.

'I think most people don't want them in the area, but you have to be very careful who you say that to... sometimes you have to whisper it... and even then be careful that you whisper it to the right person.'



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.

COMMUNITY 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 Down* (Belfast: Co-operation Ireland).

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



Communities in Transition

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