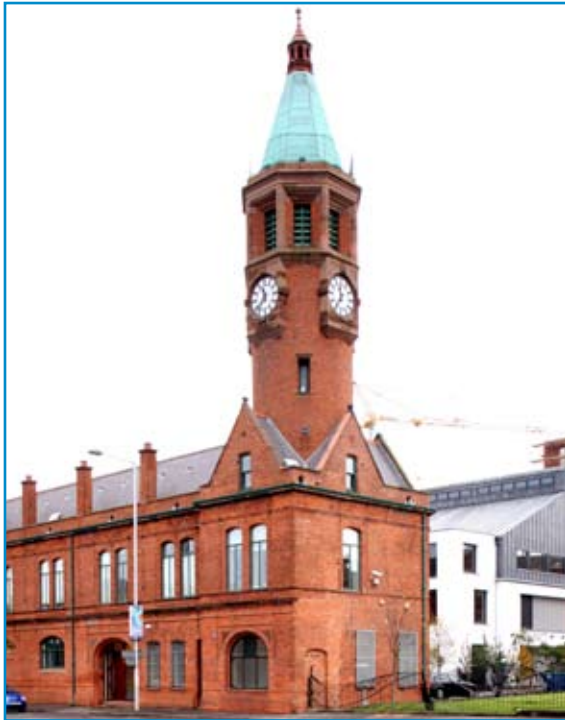


LEARNING FROM BELFAST

Worklessness and Community Cohesion



PARTICIPANTS

TEN

TEN is a small group of senior local government officers in London who have met regularly over four years to share ideas and exchange knowledge on how to achieve urban renaissance. Using the principle of *looking and learning* they visit pioneering projects to draw out lessons that can be applied in their own authorities. In the process the members develop their skills as urban impresarios and place-makers, and are able to build up the capacity of their authorities to tackle major projects. The study tour to Belfast involved the following:

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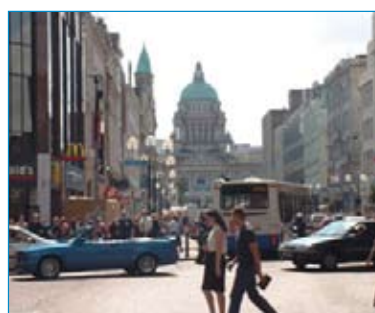
INTRODUCTION

In October 2008, members of the TEN Group spent two days in Belfast. The general theme was how to tackle worklessness and social cohesion in areas undergoing development. A small number also visited Dublin, which provided a useful contrast. The study tour drew heavily on assistance from Stanley McGrael, Professor of Property Research at the University of Ulster, and his colleagues. We are also very grateful to the many staff at government departments and community organisations who made our tour so valuable and memorable, and brought the lessons alive.

This report summarises the background and context, describes the main places we saw, and the lessons that emerged, before presenting some conclusions under three main themes: opening up jobs, building community cohesion, and promoting sustainable regeneration. An appendix from Pat Hayes sets out his short history of the conflicts.

I. WHAT WE LEARNED

Belfast is one of Britain's great industrial cities, and compares itself with Glasgow and Manchester. It is built on a grid, like an American city, and it experienced its fastest rate of growth in the late 19th century. It now has a population of 350,000 in the city proper, and 900,000 in the travel to work area. The centre contains some particularly fine Victorian public buildings, many inspired by the European classical tradition. Figures in a survey printed in the Observer suggests it is now rated third among tourist destinations in the UK, and in so far as the city centre is enjoying a renaissance, it could offer lessons for other places that have lost their original role.



Belfast's peripheral location and troubled history have created special challenges, but the Group found there was much more to see and learn than most imagine. There are some important messages for former industrial areas in London that now contain distinct communities that may feel excluded. Riots in London in the past, for example in Brixton, show how quickly places can explode. The rise of the British National Party in white working class areas in places like Barking and Dagenham also shows how a backlash can easily arise when competition for jobs and resources intensifies.

History of divides

Northern Ireland was and is an extreme example of polarisation, where a significant part of the population felt excluded (see Appendix A). The roots of what the Irish often call the 'troubles', but that was also referred to as the 'war', lay in the bitter scars caused by relations between the provinces and the British government. Events like the Battle of the Boyne, Cromwell's attempts to hold down rebellion, and the consequences of armies of occupation have never been forgotten. When the South finally secured independence after the First World War, the Northern Counties fought to maintain the Union. It was argued that the North at that time had much better social services and infrastructure. Many saw their task as getting the most they could out of the British government. A culture of 'dependency' evolved, with for example

'an abysmally low rate of business start-ups generally'.

In part the grievances stemmed from being run from the UK by civil servants, with little local autonomy. The divides between Protestants and Catholics intensified when the military were brought in to restore order. Eventually a wall was built to keep the two sides apart in West Belfast, now referred to as the 'Peace Line'.



Mural's along the Falls Road

'The problem was not just about two communities – the gripe was with the British government'.

The violence intensified the historic conflicts between Protestant and Catholics so

‘when word gets out that a Chinese family is moving into the area, the question is whether they are Protestant Chinese or Catholic Chinese.’

Legacy of industrial decline

The divides were at root economic. So long as Northern Ireland retained its strong industries of ship-building, textiles and aircraft manufacture, it had an innate advantage over the predominantly rural South. The main firms relied on recruiting local labour, and all the best jobs went to the Protestants. A similar process was said to have applied to housing allocation. Inner city or working class Belfast divided along sectarian lines, with the Catholics predominantly living in West Belfast, and the Protestants in what is known as the Shankill Road area, with the Falls Road marking the divide.

The decline of the major firms (Harland and Wolff now employs some 170 compared with the 20,000 it once did) added up to an overall loss of 70,000 manufacturing jobs. As in many parts of London, the consequence was not just a loss of a way of life, but also spreading dereliction and loss of a sense of purpose. This provided the ideal conditions for ‘idealist’ attacks aimed at getting the British government to withdraw, and equally violent counter-attacks. In an environment that in some areas resembled what we see in parts of Iraq, investment broke down, and there was an ‘urban exodus’.

Central Belfast 30 years ago looked like a war zone under military control. Buildings like the Europa Hotel where we stayed were repeatedly bombed. People who wanted to visit Belfast city centre had to go through a security cordon. Not surprisingly the main shops closed and moved out to follow where those with money to spend had gone. Education, not religious affiliation, became the key to getting a good job and the money to live on.



Shankill Road mural



Belfast's skyline is still dominated today by Harland and Wolff's famous twin gantry cranes, Samson and Goliath, built in 1974 and 1969



Aerial view of the Titanic Quarter

Changing governance and the peace process

We were told that the regeneration started 20 years ago in 1989 with the creation of a weir on the River Lagan, and the setting up of the Lagan Development Corporation. *'Laganside redefined the sense of what is possible in Belfast'*. However the transformation that has been achieved over the last decade can be attributed to a number of other factors. First simply catching and locking up terrorists had not worked (and there had been some 30,000 political prisoners). While some made money from the troubles, the majority suffered.

The great breakthroughs came when the Blair government started to negotiate with the other side, (and violence largely stopped in 1992). The threat of takeover from the South was no longer so bad as feared, due to the enormous economic growth that the Republic of Ireland experienced after joining the European Union and subsequently the Euro Zone. Determined efforts to break down discrimination, for example by setting up the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and the devolution of power to Northern Ireland, including faltering attempts to revive the parliament at Stormont, and local government, must have helped remove some of the sense of injustice. Local government has also started to make a comeback, having previously been responsible only for *'bins, bogs and burials'*. The redevelopment of the Gasworks area provided its first chance to be seen to be doing something tangible and helped to rebuild the role of the local authorities and unite the politicians behind delivering something.



Work began on a gas making industry in 1822 on a site near Cromac dock, on ground owned by the Marquis of Donegall



Quality conservation and reuse of buildings along side attractive new offices in the Gasworks Quarter

Belfast and the public sector

The legacy of the political divisions and the period of direct rule mean that Northern Ireland and Belfast have a very complex public administrative structure but also one that is very generously funded compared to the rest of the UK. The principal effect of this is that there is far more public and local government than the rest of the UK. For example there are 26 local authorities covering a population of 1.75 million whereas in London there is one authority for each 250,000 of population. On this basis Northern Ireland would have something closer 7 local authorities - if a unitary model was adopted. This over provision extends to other services and there were at least three times the number of job centres compared to a London equivalent. The net effect of this is that Belfast is very reliant on public sector employment with 40% of jobs being public sector. By comparison London as a capital city has about 29% of employment being public sector. What this suggests is that the economy of the city is still relatively weak and certainly the schemes we saw focused on the service and retail sectors through creating hotels and retail.

Need for upfront infrastructure

Walking around the centre, which now feels safe and quite welcoming, created some good impressions. Attractive, and replicable features included:

- A host of new buildings, many of them occupied by government offices or firms of accountants, and built to quite high standards.
- Some distinctive hangovers of Irish culture, like the pubs across from the hotel, one of which had been acquired by the National Trust on the recommendation of John Betjeman.
- A few great conversions of old buildings into restaurants, such as the Merchants Hotel, and the George Street market.
- Large amounts of high street multiples, including the superb new Victoria Square shopping centre, which certainly has the 'wow' factor.
- Attempts to make the streets legible, with excellent signs and the start of work on improving streetscape.
- A strategy of promoting distinctive quarters, such as the Cathedral Quarter where the University of Ulster has been expanding or the Gasworks Quarter, which the local authority has led.

Members of the Group also had concerns, which were very evident to those who went on to visit Dublin briefly:

- A weak public transport system means more people rely on cars or taxis. In contrast Dublin has invested in a superb new tram system the LARIS (backed by the European Union), which stretches out five miles to new suburbs in the West, and which is being further extended with developers' contributions to provide a green link through to the suburbs. Local shops along



The Crown Inn acquired by the National Trust



The thriving George Street Market



Public realm redevelopment linking the waterside with Victoria Square and the city centre



the main roads into the city centre may be closing down, as people use their cars to shop elsewhere. In contrast the LARIS seems to be unlocking development along the route.

- Very little new quality housing, due apparently to concerns over who they would go to, even along the River Lagan, where a £14 million weir has been built to control the water level. In contrast going into Dublin we saw much more high density housing.

- Narrowly based economy, for example, the 20,000 jobs promised in the redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter (the old shipyard) were expected to be in financial services, which seems highly unlikely. In contrast there is a much wider range of foreign investment in Dublin both around the Custom House area, and also on the edges of the city.

- This results in relatively quiet streets on week nights, reflecting the very low numbers of people living in the centre.

'Belfast sets itself with a strong internal vibrant economy and as a European destination, competing with Dublin, Glasgow and Manchester.'



The Belfast campus of the University of Ulster on York Street is part of the city's vibrant Cathedral Quarter



A new gallery is being built as part of Belfast's Cathedral Quarter next to St Anne's Cathedral

'There is not much to do when it starts to rain'

2. WHERE WE WENT

The Merchant Hotel and the evening economy

Stanley McGrae, Professor of Property Research at the University of Ulster welcomed the group, and over dinner in the old Ulster Banking Hall we appreciated the scale of the transformation. This superbly converted banking hall forms part of a major hotel, and tourism has certainly taken off. People living in the suburbs are being attracted back into the city centre by a range of excellent facilities, such as the refurbished Opera House, and the new shops. Interestingly the British government has tended to use selective grants to lever



The Gasworks Quarter

private investment, whereas the Republic has used Special Development Zones with tax incentives, such as in Dublin's cultural quarter in Temple Bar. There is a large area of old 18th and 19th century buildings that it is hoped will turn into something similar, with specialist shops and bars. Ulster University has had an extensive research programme into regeneration, but is now focussing on the impact of the Credit Crunch.

Gasworks Quarter and employment

This 25 acre regeneration area has rightly received a lot of awards, and Gerry Millar, Director of the Improvement Unit at Belfast City Council explained the background and achievements. Significantly this was the first major project that the City Council has been able to pursue, as physical development had previously been managed by the Department of the Environment, who also controlled planning decisions. Reclamation was a huge task, and led eventually to treating contaminated ground on site (€7.5 million of European funding was used to clean up the site and fund infrastructure). A forum was set up to involve different interests, through the Gasworks Trust, which examined a range of options. However neither building a new river crossing or community uses of the buildings and land proved feasible. The City therefore went for a simple masterplan that conserved some key buildings, like the offices along the main road, and focussed on attracting new jobs to the area. The area formed a crucial link with the River Lagan, and an emerging waterfront said to have been inspired by visits to Baltimore in the US.

Not only is the design quality high, but the GEMS (Gasworks Employment Matching Service) employment programme reached some 700 local people and half got jobs. The City Council turned down an application from Queens University for a science park because it would not fulfil the need for jobs for local people. The Halifax



'A planned decision to rebuild the role of local authorities'
The Gasworks Quarter



Many of Halifax's employees have been found through the Gasworks Employment Matching Service

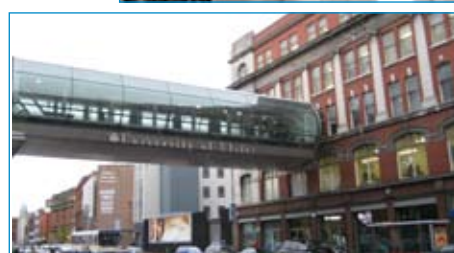
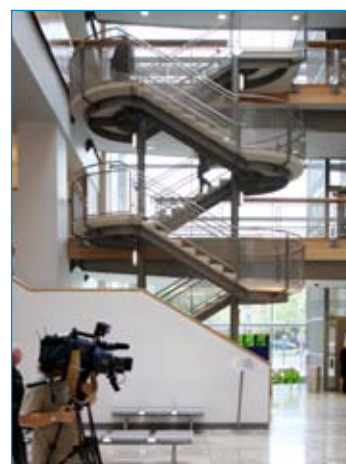
Building Society took a large speculative office building as a call centre, and training was linked to potential jobs in the Call Centre, hotel and shopping centre. Another major achievement was the involvement of a local architectural practice in refurbishing the old buildings, and creating some excellent modern offices alongside. Their main office employing 80 people is now based in the area, and there is also a major managed workspace facility. The largest buildings are an impressive Radisson Hotel, and an adjoining office building, which is occupied by the Department of Social Development, who needed to be relocated from the centre. The Chinese community bought land next to the Gasworks site for a community centre. This caused some controversy so a small amount of land was made available for housing, whereas previously housing had been avoided due to land contamination. The success of the scheme has given the Council confidence to do more, though this is the only major site it owns. The Employment Matching Scheme has been extended to the Victoria Square development.



The Gasworks Quarter hosts a wide range of enterprises including a 132 Radisson SAS hotel, the Halifax Centre, shops, small enterprise workshops, own-door offices, purpose-built business units. Currently, some 2,500 people work there.

University of Ulster's Faculty of Art, Design and the Built Environment

On what was once known as Murder Mile, a transformation has been secured with the development of a superb new university building for the Faculty of Art, Design and the Built Environment. Just across the road from a converted Coop department store, the two buildings are linked by the Airbridge, which provides a great venue for events. After experiencing the public space which runs through the building and links up to the Cathedral Quarter, and an art gallery that is being built next to it, we had a superb lunch. This was hosted by Professor Alastair Adair, Pro Vice Chancellor and Campus Provost, in the university's training restaurant, where students both cook and serve. With education still divided along religious lines, the former polytechnic provides a good place



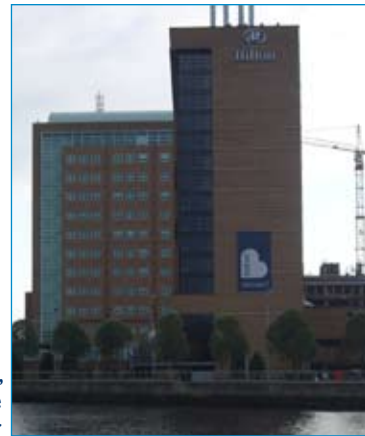
The University of Ulster's new Faculty of Art, Design and the Built Environment

where young people can meet and discover common interests. One innovation has been bringing the former art and design and built environment doctoral programmes together, which is raising challenging questions for students' theses.

Lagan Lookout and recruitment programmes

The Lagan had been one of the most polluted and neglected rivers in the UK, and its restoration has been one of the key elements in the regeneration of Belfast. With a leverage ratio of 5:1, the public sector appears to have secured a good return from investment in the environment. One of the first developments after the Peace Process started in 1992 was a major conference and concert hall, along with a large Hilton hotel, and this symbolised the changes that were taking place. The river was cleaned and opened up with a new walkway, though funding is not yet available for a new pedestrian bridge to link both sides. An excellent interpretative exhibition and signs throughout the centre help the visitor understand the area's past, and how it is changing.

Despite the physical changes, the successes in opening up employment through recruitment and training programmes seemed disappointingly small. Great efforts had been made, once the building programme on Victoria Square was underway, to interest local people in training programmes in both dry-lining, where there was a skills shortage, and also retailing, where new jobs were being created. Many job fairs were put on, but they attracted mainly people who already had jobs. The truth was that leaving state benefits was not seen as worthwhile for the long term unemployed. A culture of dependence was hard to break. Community groups acted as advocates and critics, but did not, we were told, play an active part in making programmes work.



Hilton hotel,
on the
Lagan River



Belfast Waterfront conference centre
and performance venue



Right: Lagan Weir
Below: Laganside
development



The focus on numerical targets, perhaps at the expense of dealing with the roots of the problem, along with a bewildering host of training programmes run often by private consultants, were simply not getting through to people who had grown up with very different mindsets. The new facilities were *'not for the likes of them'*. Staff in new restaurants tend to come from abroad, as jobs in the hospitality sector are still regarded as being *'servile'*. There has been a lack of new housing in the city centre, in part because of the question of which *'side'* would occupy it. However they are learning *'you need more of a residential mix'* and they intend to allocate more space to housing in the Royal Exchange development.

Victoria Square and retail led regeneration

The redevelopment of the central shopping area as Victoria Square is rightly seen as an iconic and flagship development, and its *'wow factor'* sets new standards for a 21st century shopping centre. It is relatively open, with the idea that the public space should be a community asset. It is multi-storey, and incorporates a grand public space under a domed roof that can be seen from far away. It also incorporates a major cinema and restaurant complex on the top floor. The development was aided by the Department of Social Development assembling the 70 or so sites that were required, and then appointing a development partnership of a Dutch and Irish company. It involved some 3,000 construction jobs, and employs a further 3,000 in retailing. Hence it provides a major boost to the economy, particularly in making Belfast a more attractive place to work for people coming from outside, and encouraging residents to use the city centre more.

There is an unresolved question of whether Victoria Square will act as the catalyst that is expected in attracting better shops to



'Victoria Square has the wow factor'

Belfast or simply drain activity from other areas, and, for example, the nearby Spires Centre seems in difficulty. The Department is now planning a £60 million programme to upgrade the public realm, and there appear to be enough old buildings lying under-used or empty to benefit from activity spreading through the wider area. The Royal Exchange, a fully privately funded, mixed use scheme in the Historic Quarter is due to open in 2014 (which seems unlikely in the current climate). It should include two high end anchor stores (for example Harvey Nichols), 200 apartments and 450,000 sq ft of premium brand shopping. In contrast Dublin has made much greater strides in bringing existing buildings back into use, for example with upgrading the public realm in Connolly Street with its symbolic Millennium Spire, or developing the cultural quarter in Temple Bar. Belfast's future may depend on whether the city centre can be diversified and people attracted to live there on a major scale.

Millennium Centre Springfield Road and the Employment Services Board

The recognition that the base of the 'troubles' lay in overcoming social exclusion led to the setting up of two employment task forces for the communities on either side of the Falls Road. Even in 2002 after a period of relative growth and stability there were 13,000 people without a job in West Belfast and Greater Shankill, representing 47% of Belfast's male unemployment. The unemployment rates are made worse by the much larger number of people registered on Incapacity Benefits.

'People are reluctant to be weaned off benefits'...

The seven recommendations from the Task Forces, which included measures to promote new jobs and self-employment, were apparently largely disregarded, but the Employment Services Board was set up to



The Millennium Outreach Centre
Springfield Road



Jobs and Benefits centre in West
Belfast

'We should invest more in keeping people moving up the ladder from no skills to some skills'

help people access the jobs that did exist along with an Employers Forum (backed by businesses in the community), and a network of Job Assist Centres. The programme has been relatively successful and cost-effective (about £3,500 per job secured). Out of 2,400 people that have been engaged 460 people have entered employment. Once it was realised that the key lay in providing individual advice and support geared to meeting employer requirements, locally based Job Assist centres were set up to provide assistance, with 16 'mentors' (though there has been a major problem in engaging with young males). Training needs to be seen as just a link in a chain, not an aim in itself, with a model that involves working with individuals, engaging their interests, and intervening through a range of programmes, which are linked to employer needs, and hence real jobs.

The Employers Forum has helped break down prejudice, and is made up of eight 'clusters' in health, construction, public sector, call centres, utilities, IT, retail, and engineering. The starting point was building connections with the huge Royal Hospitals complex that adjoined the area. Though there is an impressive board drawing together representatives of all different organisations, it has no real power over what happens, and there are still problems in changing mindsets, and getting people out of the 'grey economy'. However, if you can get people 'moving up the ladder' as they have done with the Health Employment Programme, it then opens up opportunities for the unemployed in securing 'entry level' jobs. The levels of economic inactivity in Northern Ireland in March 2008 are now 26.9% compared with a UK average of 20.9% (though the figure in London is rather higher).

'Better than being seen as a cost to society, some employers could see them (the unemployed) as an untapped labour pool'

Falls Community Council and reconciliation

The most stimulating session involved community activists in the Springfield Road area. Much of the task for regeneration involves changing people's minds so they no longer feel excluded.

'People are emotional and easily stirred up.... they see the worst in other people'.

The division is still evident in the Peace Line, a high wall that runs through the area. However, the atmosphere appears to be becoming more relaxed, with the city centre providing important common ground. We were told this is because of the Catholic community's recognition of the importance of education in overcoming barriers, and the Protestant community's recognition that the Catholics were basically the same as them, and that their leaders were out for themselves!

Change is very difficult as many of the people living in the city have members of their family who have been affected, while many have spent time inside prison, and, for example, could not get the insurance to start their own business. Perhaps the most powerful messages from the visit came from hearing from a leading member of the ex-prisoners association, learning about the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, and seeing Protestants and Catholics sharing the same platform (including a young boy on work experience). For a long time, many in the Catholic area felt excluded from the state, and there was a resulting breakdown of order. Reconciliation is hard but

'the first step is to recognise differences and accept diversity'. 'To engage people have to have confidence, a handle on their own destiny'.

Clearly a lot has been achieved. A massive amount of restoration and new building work has made the areas look attractive,

and there has been success in bringing empty housing back into use. However unemployment and deprivation is still twice as high as the rest of Belfast. The Employment Task Forces were an early result of community efforts, and there is now a Strategic Regeneration Framework which breaks Belfast down into six quarters. However there are still major problems of the areas being cut-off both physically by the poor public transport system, and mentally, by the image they present for employers (sometimes known as 'post code discrimination'). Catholics have tended to stay within West Belfast when their situation improves (and it was said have always believed in education as the way forward). But Protestants too are seeing education as critical. Abuses of the benefit system such as 'doing the double' now get criticised rather than tolerated or praised. There is also a recognition of 'Youth at Risk' with a Respect programme aimed at helping young people to take responsibility for their own lives.

'The war's over - get an education.. if we become respectable we become desirable' as a former political prisoner commented.

We learned how measures like the use of art (visible in all the murals) had helped bring people together (though it also marked the troubled areas out). The communities now took on responsibility for self-policing, though *'the Police Force is not yet ready to move on'*. Drug dealing, which had become a major threat to community life, had led to setting up the Safer Neighbourhood Forum. *'People are now in the same room talking about hard issues'*. The Community Council is trying to influence the building of new housing in spare land to the north of the city to provide more high quality family housing, and avoid developers buying up houses to redevelop their gardens. The Peace Line may come down some day, but remains a tangible symbol of the area's

history *'The wall needs to come down but not now'*. An unresolved issue that also applies to London is how to connect the inner city areas with growth in the rest of Belfast to avoid the gaps widening as the best jobs are taken by people who have moved out to the suburbs.

'We need to start empowering our community so they can make choices'.

3. LESSONS FOR LONDON

Despite a unique history Belfast has suffered from similar problems to other parts of the UK in finding new roles for inner city areas. The project manager for the Gasworks Quarter aptly summarised the lessons as

'political leadership, agreed masterplan, quality infrastructure, right developer, good project management and employment initiatives'.



The Gasworks Quarter

Despite the obvious differences, a number of clear messages emerged from the study tour around the issues of opening up jobs, building community cohesion, and promoting sustainable regeneration. However we also saw the dangers of politicians grasping at unrealistic plans, such as perhaps for the Titanic Quarter where 20,000 jobs are proposed, largely in the financial sector, and going for big projects to the possible neglect of the main smaller scale opportunities and the city centre. Backing winners is hard and a previous Labour government backed projects to build the De Lorean car and the Lear Jet in Northern Ireland.

Opening up jobs

Belfast is a long way from having a balanced and viable economy, but it is now in much stronger shape than it was a decade ago, with a number of lessons:

a. Take a long-term perspective

Regeneration takes at least a generation, and it may take several to forget the scars caused by the 'troubles'. This is hard to square with politicians and businesses wanting quick returns. It argues for properly resourced local authorities that benefit from success, not failure, but also for Local Delivery Vehicles like the Gasworks Trust that can engage the wider stakeholders.

b. Work with employers The real successes of employment programmes have come from building trust with major employers, through an Employers Forum organised around clusters. And in turn the starting point was working with the main local employer, the general hospital, to show some early results. The Employment Services should be involved in development projects early on.

c. Break down walls The Peace Line symbolises the divide, but just as important are the mental barriers to entering the labour market. Local centres that focus on each individual's needs produce better



Victoria Square shopping centre



The Gasworks Quarter



The Belfast Wheel and City Hall

results than conventional training programmes and job fairs. The prospect of securing a real job provides the motive for people on benefit to get involved with training, provided they do not lose out financially in the process.

d. Upgrade skills and aspirations By working with existing employees, and developing respect for education as a means of improving your prospects, more can be achieved than simply targeting the long-term unemployed. Indeed stopping people becoming workless, and beefing up skills may produce a much better pay-off.

Building community cohesion

Changing attitudes is hard when people live in tight neighbourhoods defined by the history of their families as well as their religion. The 'peace process' involves recognising differences, and securing reconciliation through working to common ends. Despite setbacks, 'power sharing' seems to be working, and the evidence is the extent of private investment as a result of the so-called 'peace dividend', with four messages:

a. Devolve power to communities

Without the move towards devolution from London, it is unlikely that any progress could have been made. Intensive policing simply aggravated disputes. Once communities start to '*get a handle on their own destinies*' and feel empowered, there is a chance of changing attitudes.

b. Set up community councils However limited their funding, the creation of local centres is a visible sign of change, and enabled communities not only to act as advocates but to set up positive programmes to involve local people.

c. Unite around common threats

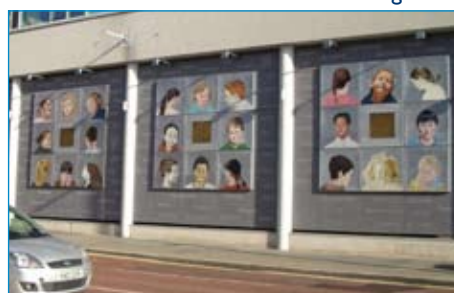
Concerns like the growth of drug dealing, or the need to allocate sites for larger family housing can bring people together in a common cause.

d. Support 'peace brokers' The attempts to build links and enter into discussions around the table are fundamental to securing reconciliation. But this depends on trusting members of the community, and not relying on civil servants or outside consultants to deliver results.

Promoting sustainable regeneration

Belfast has followed the classic model of going for iconic flagship projects like the Waterfront Centre and Victoria Square shopping centre. Undoubtedly tackling the physical legacy of a poisoned river was crucial, but equally important can be the small projects that lift people's hearts like St George's Market or the big wheel that

Over 30 pieces of high quality art have been commissioned and installed throughout Laganside



stands alongside City Hall. With the collapse in the property and financial markets in the UK, there is a real need for financial innovation, and four priorities stood out:

a. Plan for the city region While the city centre has been divided into quarters, the links between transport, employment and housing growth are still weak, and like the rest of the UK government does not appear to be 'joined-up'. This is partly because little seems to have been invested in public transport. Without a clear economic and spatial vision, there is a danger of a retail led regeneration running out of steam, particularly if the roads are clogged up with traffic. The inflation in land prices could lead to a situation, like the 1970s, where nothing looks viable because of excessive uncertainty. Hence a strong plan will be needed to avoid investment being spread too thin (as could happen if current plans for the Titanic Quarter were to proceed).

b. Restore order in the environment Efforts to clear dereliction and open up the river have begun to work, which helps inspire confidence. But there is a long way to go in creating truly walkable streets or waterfronts that serve as both a destination and a good place to live and work. A wider mix of land uses would greatly help, along with sufficient density of development to support good public transport, as in Dublin. So too could a greater use of local architects acting as entrepreneurs, as we saw in the Gasworks. There also may be scope for community trusts taking on property assets, such as old buildings, and generating an income from them. Improving the environment can create both useful work, and tangible results, as well as opportunities for volunteering.

c. Build balanced communities The final lesson is the crucial importance of building the right kinds of housing in the right places. The original troubles were caused or aggravated by the mono-cultural character

of a number of inner city areas, abetted by the government, who did not recognise how discriminatory they were. Very little new housing has been built compared with Dublin, and there are few urban neighbourhoods that can compete with the surrounding suburbs in the quality of life they offer. New housing can be a great way of reclaiming old industrial areas, but needs to be coupled with carefully planned urban extensions that are designed as neighbourhoods, not housing estates. The range of housing now available in and around Dublin points to both the range of possible products, and also the skills of local architectural practices which go far beyond recreating copies of Victorian terraced houses.

d. Retain skilled residents More homes and better neighbourhoods are also needed to stop the exodus to the suburbs and places such as Lisburn. This may produce a better return than trying to create jobs directly.

In conclusion the University of Ulster, with its popular graduate programmes and research programme, should be in a key position to act as a catalyst for change. It would be worth funding research to assess the cost effectiveness of different approaches. This could include evaluating the impact of investing in a high quality public realm on confidence, vitality and private investment. It could also assess the effect of tax incentives versus grants on development.

APPENDIX A

BELFAST STUCK IN THE PAST OR RIDING INTO THE FUTURE

A short history of the conflict

Belfast is a city where people still live apart. Despite the army having withdrawn, huge fences remain to separate the nationalist/ catholic and loyalist/ protestant communities, pointing to the fragility of the current peace. There has been massive public spending on physical and economic regeneration by the UK government and an increasingly healthy tourist trade. However, many people clearly do not feel comfortable outside their own areas or indeed on the streets after dark.

It is hard to describe the Northern Irish problem briefly, such is its complexity, but it can be summarised as follows. In the early part of the 20th Century the British Government became concerned that what was then a very important industrial centre (with potential strategic locational significance in a European war, whether with France or Germany) would be swept up by the resurgent independence movement in the South of Ireland. To help prevent this, the UK and some local politicians tapped into latent anti secessionist feelings in working class Protestants. This community, who numerically and economically dominated most of the six counties of Ulster, were eventually to be separated from the Irish Republic at partition. This becoming known at the time as 'playing the Orange card' and involved the creation of the main loyalist para-military organisations, which exist to this day. This act was a direct foil to existing republican organisations, chief of which was the IRA. A full blown civil war, Balkan style, was only avoided by the outbreak of a global war in which both factions engaged, on the same side.

After the First World War and partition, the South of Ireland (Eire) developed as a theocratic Catholic state presided over by a succession of effectively centrist Christian democratic/ social democratic governments. It stagnated economically with a population only a third of what it was in the mid nineteenth century. Meanwhile the industrialised north enjoyed relatively good prosperity both before and after the Second World War. This was in spite of Belfast being badly bombed with some probably more symbolic than effective help from some in the Republican camp. This did not help relationships between the two communities in the North.

This wealth was not, however, experienced by the growing Catholic population, due to their exclusion from employment in the core industrial sectors on which Ulster's success was based. After years of economic disadvantage and blatant discrimination by Unionist run public bodies, tensions finally erupted in the late sixties when, inspired by events in the US and France, a civil rights movement took to the streets. This prompted a disproportionately violent response from the Unionist local regional government and loyalist community. Consequently, the British army was deployed ostensibly to protect the Catholic/Nationalist community.

In reality, reasons for military deployment were likely to be partially motivated by a desire to ensure that a highly vulnerable location (in the context of the Cold War) did not drift into anarchy as the Republican movement capitalised on the grievances of ordinary Catholics. In a very short period of time the British Army was engaged in a fairly dirty war alongside the exclusively loyalist Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) with the Provisional IRA. The UK officially or unofficially used the services of Loyalist paramilitaries as well as the newly constituted but entirely sectarian Ulster Defence Regiment.

This low level war, or the Troubles as it was euphemistically known, went on for the best part of 30 years. It effectively destroyed an already weakening economy which suffered the deindustrialisation of the 1970s and 80s without any of the counterbalancing retail and financial services growth experienced in the UK and later in the Irish Republic.

Ulster's current peace came about for a number of reasons. The end of the Cold War removed a source of moral and at times physical support for the Republican movement (plus US interest in Northern Ireland staying within NATO control). US policy on the province had always been quixotic, never really pressuring the UK Government to find a political settlement or cede to Republican demands. Yet US citizens were allowed to bankroll the IRA with impunity, presumably as a quid pro quo to the Catholic vote.

1997's newly elected Labour Government not in hock to the Ulster Unionist party (which was organisationally tied to the UK Conservative Party) and the growth of the Irish Republic's economy in the late nineties were key factors in weakening the resolve to fight. In turn the Blair Government clearly wanted to reduce the burden of the ongoing conflict on UK tax payers and free up the military for other tasks. As Northern Ireland's economy declined, whilst both the rest of the UK and Ireland's economies boomed, there was a creeping suspicion that neither Westminster nor Dublin wanted control of the failing province.

The psyche of both sides remains extremely complex. The nationalist tradition manages to combine Marxist liberation socialism, with conservative Catholicism and almost mystic and rather artificial Gallicism. While the Unionist side combines working class collective trade union socialism with extreme Calvinist Protestantism and thuggish football terrace type patriotism. The fact that one side was supported in the UK by extreme left wingers with no possible affection for the Catholic Church in any form and the other by extreme right wingers with no love for labour activism illustrates the complex ideological dichotomy in action.

The recent development of dialogue between former IRA and UDA combatants points to a more promising future for Ulster. A class-based analysis of past events means accepting both sides as victims to the British backed state and bourgeois Unionist politicians. This approach allows each community the right to assert their identity but not to discriminate against others. Of course, this may not be acceptable to more church orientated republicans or more right wing unionists, but does offer a glimmer of hope.

The irony of course is that both sides' unique identity is very different from the state they relate to. Gallicism and support for Sinn Fein has declined sharply in Southern Ireland, which has largely become a modern European state and even the most patriotic person elsewhere in the UK would struggle to identify with drum-banging Orange Lodges.

As we now enter another period of economic turbulence it will be interesting to see if Ulster, and Belfast in particular, can continue on the path of economic and political normalisation. An economy effectively underpinned by massive government spending, with 60% of jobs in government or related sectors, is actually proofed against recession and may get some benefit from a slowing down of the Irish Republic's economy. However, on the political front it is hard to see real change in the current polarisation unless the thorny issue of segregated education is tackled. This will involve both sides taking on their respective churches. People from the paramilitary heartlands of the Shankill and West Belfast will need to integrate effectively into the wider labour market. The province still seems years away from having integrated social housing provision.

The electoral demise of both the Ulster Unionists and the Social Democratic & Labour Party (SDLP) is a worry as there is no middle ground in Northern Irish politics. It is hard to see how a process can be fruitful when it is based on people who insist on speaking an effectively dead language as a political statement, who play sports run by a segregationist governing body yet also base their cultural identity on aggressive celebration of a 17th century battle and paint curb stones red, white and blue. However, this combination may well lead to more diverse political groupings emerging on both side of the current divide.

The later being necessary if local government is to be reconstituted in a way which gives it control over issues such as housing and planning. The current three tier system of Central Direct Rule Government, Regional Northern Ireland civil service and local authorities is costly and cumbersome, though surprisingly effective (due to the amount of money and human resource at the disposal of the various bodies).

Belfast's government led regeneration would be unimaginable elsewhere in the UK or Ireland and is more reminiscent of an old style Eastern European planned economy. The picture is however not all bad. Belfast is starting to regenerate itself with a vibrant new university, new city centre airport and a high quality shopping centre as well as a growing number of tourist attractions and visitor facilities. This all shows what can be done with money and commitment. The quality of many of its civil servants, local government officers and community leaders is higher than in many other parts of the UK probably because of the challenges of adversity and distance from the dead hand of Whitehall.

Pat Hayes
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