

Shared Space

*A research journal on peace, conflict and community
relations in Northern Ireland*

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Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

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Any views expressed in *Shared Space* are those of the authors of the articles and do not necessarily represent those of the Community Relations Council.

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Notes on Contributors

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Deena Haydon is a postgraduate researcher with the Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative at Queen's University, Belfast. She has acted as an independent consultant and researcher in Northern Ireland with *Save The Children*, *Children's Law Centre* and *Include Youth*.

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Paul Nolan was until recently Director of Lifelong Learning programmes at Queen's University. He is currently completing doctoral research on community relations and adult learning in Northern Ireland.

Phil Scraton is Director of the Childhood, Transition and Social Justice Initiative and a Professor of Criminology in the School of Law, Queen's University, Belfast.

Introduction

The Challenge of Change

The changes that have happened in Northern Ireland since the development of the peace process, and in particular since the re-establishment of devolved government, have left some people feeling uneasy and others impatient for faster progress. But although few people want to return to the violence and conflict of the Troubles it is clear that change presents challenges to all of us.

In this issue of Shared Space we look at some of the challenges identified in recent research. The first, explored by Paul Nolan in research supported by CRC, examines the role and nature of leadership in local peacebuilding activity at a time when the external environment is changing rapidly. The threat of reducing or disappearing funding offers a particular challenge at the present time. In reality leadership is a mix of different styles, some of it visionary, some of it practical management, some of it entrepreneurial skill, which need to re-balance depending on the challenges presented. Nolan concludes that opportunities for training in leadership in the community relations sector are limited and need to be developed.

Nolan also warns that funding organisations have tended to take ownership of the strategic direction of peacebuilding activity with the result that the space for visionary local leadership is constrained. There is no shortage of good projects, he argues, but more needs to be done to discuss the nature of a distinctive leadership style for community relations and nurture it within local organisations.

Another example of an organisation facing the challenge of change over the last ten years and more has been the police. Following the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement the Patten Report set about changing the RUC into the PSNI as part of the post-conflict Northern Ireland. But as Joanne Murphy shows in her article the RUC had already begun its own internal process of fundamental review in 1996 and the recommendations of the Patten Report, apart from the name, badge and uniform change, were very similar to those of the RUC's own internal review. Carrying out this organisational change

however was a real challenge, particularly since the pace of change was externally driven and a fundamental part of the political transformation in Northern Ireland.

How the police themselves engaged with the process of change and whether the change strategy was appropriate are questions which Murphy addresses. The reform of policing within societies under transition is a core component of institutional change. The RUC's journey to become the PSNI was radical and risky, but although it is still a continuing process for many the transformation has been seen as successful. The police experience in facing up to the challenge of change offers valuable lessons for others.

The Good Friday Agreement introduced other changes also. The inclusion of a robust equality agenda pointed towards some radical changes for public policy on diversity. This had implications not only for Protestants and Catholics but also ethnic minorities. Although race equality legislation had come into effect in Northern Ireland in 1997, the year before the Agreement, the promise of the Agreement was for a more far-reaching change in public policy to promote a culture of equality.

The challenge of turning this into reality has been made more urgent by the increasing ethnic diversity in Northern Ireland as a result of expanding EU membership and the attraction of migrants towards a Troubles-free environment. But, as Peter Geoghegan argues in his article, the promise of the new Northern Ireland is as yet unfulfilled. The policy documents of *A Shared Future* and *A Racial Equality Strategy* have been victims of bad working relationships within the political Executive and effective public policy is often stymied by the high level of confusion and fragmentation within the new institutions. Since the article was written, however, there are hopes that agreed proposals from OFMdFM for a Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategy might at last appear.

The challenge of dealing with diversity is also examined in an article by Gladys Ganiel. In preliminary research as part of a continuing project Ganiel surveys attitudes among clergy and faith communities to issues of reconciliation, immigration and diversity, and ecumenism. Even allowing for the limitations of the sample the picture that emerges is one in which most lay people and clergy within the churches and faith communities do not feel adequately prepared to promote social reconciliation or address issues presented by increasing religious and ethnic diversity. This raises questions about the ability of the churches to respond to the call by the 2009 Report of

the Consultative Group on the Past to make a unique contribution to dealing with Northern Ireland's troubled past. Future research, however, plans to examine examples of good practice on these issues within a number of faith communities.

Finally, researchers from Queen's University remind us that despite the achievements of the peace process for many people physical segregation between the two main ethno-religious groups remains the reality and therefore for them cross-community contact remains limited. Siobhan McAlister, Phil Scraton and Deena Haydon draw from their Childhood in Transition project to show that among the young people in the disadvantaged and highly segregated communities in their survey there is a strong sense of territoriality and resentment towards 'the other side' and 'new cultures'. This is at the very heart of the challenge faced by those planning for a shared future and shows the scale of the mountain still left to climb.

Ray Mullan

Editor

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