Analysing Baseline Data Around Peace Walls (4):
Who are the people?

Cathy Gormley-Heenan, Duncan Morrow, Jonny Byrne, Michael Rosato and Sally Cook

Introduction

In 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive's *Together: Building a United Community* (TBUC) strategy committed the Executive to a 10-year programme to 'reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers' and to creating an Interface Barrier Support Package to enable this. Through TBUC, the Executive set out its view that the elimination of barriers was 'necessary in progressing as a community and facilitating the reconciliation that has been prevented for so long through division.' Removing interface barriers was established as a central element in underpinning peace.

The Executive promised that action would take place at governmental level "to ensure that there is an appropriate level of support and engagement within relevant government Departments, within key statutory agencies, and in the police and other agencies responsible for safety and security" and through bespoke local approaches "based on the need for inclusivity, involving community representatives and local residents, and recognising the need to take account of the local context."   According to the strategy, "Local communities around the interface will be encouraged to come together and decide if they want to be part of this pro-gramme. If there is agreement to become part

of the programme then the area immediately surrounding the barrier will be able to avail of a range of support and help over a 10-year period, provided agreed targets are met throughout the period."

However, 'local communities' has been a term used to cover a cohort of people living in close proximity to peace walls as a *single unitary group* **when the reality is unlikely to be the case.** Because of this, it is important to highlight the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the areas designated as proximate to the peace walls. In addition, although interventions on the peace walls, by way of various programmes and activity, was initiated in the absence of an interrogation of any baseline data (drawn from the 2011 Census), the use of such data now is essential in order to develop bespoke programmes of work and to be able to monitor and track any changes which might occur and so a project was developed through the Administrative Data Research Net-work (ADRN) to do this.

What does the Last Census Tell Us About Belfast's Changing Demographics?

We already know some things about the broader demographics of Belfast from the last Census

undertaken in 2011. This Census indicated that in the capital city Belfast, the city in which almost all of Northern Ireland's various peace walls and barrier are located, the Catholic population increased from 47% in 2001 to 49% in 2011, while at the same time the Protestant population fell from 49% to 42%. In short, the 2011 Census showed that the Catholic population in Belfast is now moving towards becoming the overall majority population in a relatively short time. This shifting landscape was reinforced in the March 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly elections when the Unionist voting bloc in the Assembly lost its majority status for the first time in Northern Ireland's history.

In the more medium term, this broader demographic shift may then contribute to changing patterns in the levels of segregation and division. At one end, we might see the movement of different population groups to parts of the city previously identified as 'single identity' spaces. At the other end, we might see attempts to further reinforce 'single identity' spaces as a way of protecting the cultural identity of those living there. This was a concern already evident in the public attitudes of some residents as expressed in both the 2012 and the 2015 public attitudes surveys on peace walls (Byrne et al., 2015; Byrne et al., 2012).

We know that the Census findings are used by government, and others, to plan and prepare for the provision of services in future years, but in some instances more granular detail might be necessary to allow for adequate planning. For example, given the various strategies and interventions that have been undertaken over the last few years in particular communities within Belfast, specifically in response to the TBUC objective of removing all peace walls by 2023, it is now important to understand not just the broader demographic profile of the city itself, but how that specifically relates to the make-up and composition of the population relative to their proximity to these peace walls.

It was not produced in such a way that allows for the concentration of more bespoke areas, such as those areas which are near peace walls.

In order to do this, it was necessary to develop a different methodology which would allow us to look at the Census data using the peace walls as the point of reference and cascading back from the walls in 100m increments to a maximum distance of 400m from a peace wall.

Critcally, this shows that 86% of those living within 400m of a peace wall are also living in areas within the most deprived quintile of the Northern Ireland Mulitple Deprivation (NI-MDM). The considerable overlap here between areas of most deprivation and areas in which peace walls are located means that there is a need to consider peace walls not just in the context of a particular strategy on peace walls per se but also in terms of how such strategies on peace walls connect to other strategies on tackling social inequality and disadvantage, something which has not been a feature of peace wall programme interventions to date.

Who Lives Beside the Peace Walls?

This new methodology allows us to better understand more about the people who live closest to the peace walls, including the composition of the households and the stability of the population in relation to their proximity to the peace walls. Several key findings are presented here for further consideration:

1. **More Catholics live in close proximity to peace walls than Protestants:** 65% of those at closest proximity (0-99m) to peace walls are Catholic, while 27% are Protestant. This is a higher figure than that which is reflected in all of Quintile 1 - 55% Catholic, 34% Protestant.   When considered at the household level as opposed to the population level, the pattern remains – the number of Catholic Households within 100m of peace walls is almost double that of Protestant Households. This disparity decreases the further you move away from peace walls and Protestant households become more common at 400+m from peace walls.

2. **The Catholic age structure is considerably**

younger than the Protestant age structure for those living near to peace walls: There is a 3:1 ratio of Catholics to Protestants for the 0-4 age group, demonstrating a potential for higher birth rates for those at closest proximity (0-99m) to peace walls. This reduces to a 2:1 ratio thereafter.

3. **The Catholic age structure is also older than the Protestant age structure for those living near to peace walls:** There is a 1.5:1 ratio of Catholics to Protestants for the 65 and over age group. This ratio continues up to a distance of 300m from the peace wall. There is a Protestant majority of older people after this distance.

4. **There are more Catholic single person households that live in close proximity to peace walls than Protestant single person households**: The number of such Catholic households is higher than the average elsewhere in Belfast.

5. **Country of birth(born outside Northern Ireland) is below the average of the wider greater Belfast area** at distances of less than 200m from a wall (to include Great Britain/Republic of Ireland/Other Europe/Rest of world).

6. **The population is not particularly transient:** It is the same social demographic of people who live in closest proximity to the peace walls, on both sides. This is not a transient, nor mobile cohort.

What Does This Mean for Policy-Makers?

7. The demographic difference needs to become an acceptable topic of conversation in the context of the peace walls. To date, there has been a degree of unease in discussing the changing demographic profile of the city in general and around the peace walls in particular. This is because a considerably largely Catholic population in closest proximity to the peace walls has led to the articulation of concerns in Protestant communities that

if the peace walls come down then Catholic mobility will begin to extend beyond the boundary of the former peace walls into these Protestant communities, further diluting the diminishing Protestant population and leading to its eventual disappearance. While geographic mobility itself is considered a good thing, the sensitives around this in very segregated areas cannot be underestimated. **This demographic difference discussion could be considered by the Department for Communities given their responsibilities for housing, urban regeneration and social inclusion**.

8. Those at the older end of the 0-4 category in the 2011 Census will be no older than 16 in 2023, when the removal of peace walls should be complete. While young people's perspectives on the peace walls has already been considered in previous research (Leonard & McKnight, 2011), which has emphasized the necessity of incorporating young people's views of peacewalls in Belfast, it will be important for policy makers to develop a suite of sustained programmes of activity targeted specifically at young people through their schools, youth clubs and centres, local churches, such as the more bespoke provision delivered by Peace Players International and the Big Lottery Fund.

At the heart of these programmes is the physical movement of children through the gates in the peace walls to join children from another school on the 'other side' or to come together in a formerly segregated park. **Mainstreaming these peace walls programmes for all primary schools located near to the peace walls through CRED (Community Relations, Equality and Diversity) policy for schools and youth organizations could be considered as a possible intervention by the Department of Education in terms of its commitment to improving relations between communities through the education of children and young people.**

9. As part of its Active Aging Strategy 2016-2021, the Department of Communities has made a commitment to lead in the improvement of services for older people. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (now Executive Office), as a lead department, was tasked with the programme area of 'Engagement' – 'to enable older people to inform policies that affect them through their engagement in the development, delivery and review of the Active Aging Strategy'. Given this focus, an opportunity exists to engage with older residents in a range of tailored and discreet programmes about the peace wall strategies and proposed interventions. **This could be progressed through the Commission for Older People for Northern Ireland given their priority area of focus on social inclusion and ensuring older people feel a sense of connection to place and people**.

10. The percentage of single person households in Northern Ireland has steadily increased from 1981 (19%) to 2011 (28%). This, coupled with the fact that there are more Catholic single person households that live in close proximity to peace walls, means that consideration needs to be given to the housing stock for the future in any assessment of housing needs, both social and private. **This has already been explored in some detail by the Housing Executive for Northern Ireland (Paris et al., 2014), but could be reconsidered in terms of housing stock in proximity to walls.**

11. With a more stable population cohort, it is likely that most of those living in closest proximity to the walls now, will be the same cohort of people living there in 2021 (the date of the next Census) and 2023 (the end point of the 10 years strategy around peace walls removal articulated in TBUC). Therefore, their specific views on what happens next is important. To date, much of the engagement with those living in closest proximity to the walls has been conducted through the already established network such as the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) funded Peace Wall Programme partnerships

including the Duncairn Community Partnership; Greater Whitewell Community Surgery; TASCIT; Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group; St Columbs Park House; Triax; Lower Oldpark/Cliftonville Regeneration and Black Mountain Shared Space. **Going forward, direct engagement with those residents living in closest proximity to the walls should be considered using the same cascading methodology applied by Ulster University by working back from the walls in 100m increments to identify whether attitudes to proposed departmental interventions differ depending on proximity to a wall.** This could be considered as a discreet action by the Department of Justice.

Conclusion

In sum, the research has shown that of the people who live in closest proximity to the peace walls (at distances of 0-400m), the Protestant population is increasingly both older and smaller while the Catholic population is younger and bigger. This key demographic disparity would suggest that the proposed removal of peace walls may require different policy interventions in neighboring Catholic and Protestant areas. A one size fits all policy approach to engagement with these communities may not work because of the extent of the demographic differences.

The overall stability in the population means that both sides have a vested interest in their community, beyond that which might be expected in other communities. Because of this policy-makers will need to invest greater time and resources consulting **directly** with local residents.

References

Byrne, Jonny, Gormley-Heenan, Cathy, Morrow, Duncan and Sturgeon, Brendan (2015) *Public Attitudes to Peace Walls (2015) Survey Report*. Department of Justice. Ulster University. 60 pp.

Byrne, Jonny, Gormley-Heenan, Cathy and Robinson, Gillian (2012) A*ttitudes to Peace Walls.* OFMDFM - Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. 32 pp.

Leonard, Madeleine and McKnight, Martina (2011) *"Bringing down the walls: young people's perspectives on peacewalls in Belfast"*, International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, Vol. 31 Issue: 9/10, pp.569-582, https://doi.org/10.1108/01443331111164151

Paris, Chris, Palmer, John, and Williams, Peter (2014) *Demographic Change and Future Housing Need in Northern Ireland.* Belfast, Housing Executive and RSM McClure Watters.