

**SPECIAL ISSUE** on Monitoring Peace  
in partnership with World Leadership Alliance – Club de Madrid

Issue 18  
November 2014

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

Published by  
Community Relations Council



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Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

Series Editor:  
Ray Mullan  
Community Relations Council  
6 Murray Street  
Belfast BT1 6DN  
Northern Ireland  
Email: [rmullan@nicrc.org.uk](mailto:rmullan@nicrc.org.uk)

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Email: [info@nicrc.org.uk](mailto:info@nicrc.org.uk)  
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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

**Friedrich W. Affolter** is Peacebuilding Programme Manager, United Nations Children's Fund.

**John Bruton** was Taoiseach of Ireland from 1994 to 1997 and is a Member of the Club de Madrid.

**Paula Devine** is Deputy Director of ARK (Action, Research, Knowledge) and is based in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast.

**Fanie du Toit** is Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, CapeTown.

**Pamina Firchow** is Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution at the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (S-CAR) George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.

**Adrian Guelke** is Emeritus Professor of Politics at Queen's University Belfast and is a member of the advisory board for the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report.

**Corinna Hauswedell** is Director of Conflict Analysis and Dialogue, Bonn, was co-editor of the German peace report *Friedensgutachten* and is Senior Fellow at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research, Heidelberg.

**Kat Healy** is Policy, Research and Evaluation Officer at the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

**Sally Holt** is Research Fellow at the Centre on Human Rights in Conflict, University of East London.

**Colin Irwin** is Research Fellow in the Department of Politics at the University of Liverpool.

**Jacqueline Irwin** is Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

**Clem McCartney** is Policy and Content Coordinator of the Shared Societies Project of the Club de Madrid.

**Roger Mac Ginty** is Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute and the Department of Politics at University of Manchester.

**Thomas Morgan** is Research Fellow at the Institute for Economics and Peace.

**Paul Nolan** was Director of the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Reports (2012-14) and is a freelance consultant.

## *Foreword*

# Monitoring Change in Diverse Societies

**John Bruton**

I was delighted to attend part of the seminar, “Monitoring Change in Diverse Societies” in November 2013 and I am equally pleased to contribute to this compilation of the proceedings of that meeting. But I speak not only in my personal capacity, but as a Member of the Club de Madrid. My participation is an indication of the commitment of the Club de Madrid and its Members to the issue of monitoring and tracking progress in building peaceful and inclusive societies.

The Members of the Club de Madrid, former presidents and prime ministers elected to office through a democratic process, offer our expertise and experience to assist current leaders at local, national and global level to respond to the challenges of today. Often we undertake missions to countries facing social division and tension between identity groups, and this issue is one of our key priorities – hence the Shared Societies Project.

In our visits to countries it is important to be able to discuss with the current leaders the challenges they face in relation to inclusion of all sections of society and building harmonious relationships. But it is difficult to have a meaningful conversation with current leaders if we do not have solid information at hand. We realise that surface appearances may give a false positive or negative impression of the real situation. The “presenting” issue is not necessarily the real problem, which is often to do with feelings, perceptions and expectations. Expectations colour perceptions. Of these, one of the most powerful is the feeling of lack of respect for oneself and for one’s community.

Northern Ireland is an example of that. The Peace Process dealt with issues of territory and administration, but it did not, and perhaps could not, resolve the issue of how to build mutual respect. So it did not deal with the issues as they are experienced on the ground, issues like the needs of victims and dealing with the past, or the flying of national flags and the management of contentious parades.

Can monitoring systems really measure such things? Can one really explain identity politics: questions like who am I and am I respected? We need to be able to move beyond rational analysis of interests and look at values. Can we do that? The role of researchers is to go behind perceptions and assumptions. We want them to fact test the assumptions and come up with an explanation which ensures we understand and deal with all aspects of the conflicts that exist - emotional, psychological and rational. The Peace Monitoring Reports in Northern Ireland show how careful analysis of data from many sources allows one to look below surface impressions and understand the undercurrents that are at work.

What kind of information do we need? When we talk to current leaders we not only want to have a static picture of the current situation. We also want to know if it is improving, deteriorating or staying the same. We then have a basis for thinking about and discussing what needs to be done for the future. Such information also alerts us to the need to address problems before they deteriorate further and inter-group tensions become uncontrollable. By following shifts over time we are also better able to see what approaches are working and could be replicated elsewhere. So we need time series data sets that allow such comparisons to be made.

Many of the organisations that implement monitoring studies often consolidate their findings into a single score for each country or other pertinent unit. This allows the creation of an index in which each country can be ranked against others. From the point of view of Members of the Club de Madrid, we recognise that it is convenient to be able to encapsulate all the information about the situation in a single figure. But scoring states or cities against each other is a rather vexed question for us. We are not particularly concerned about giving states or cities a score and ranking them against each other. It is more important to use the score to see how performance has changed over time than to know that Bhutan has a higher score for happiness than Ireland.

We also want to make the case that inclusion matters: that a shared society is not just intrinsically right and desirable but that it has many benefits, not just for those who might be marginalised but for everyone. A powerful way to support that case is to be able to correlate performance in terms of social cohesion or shared societies with, for example, economic performance or sustainability. To do that we need a shared societies index which can be matched with performance on economic or other dimensions.

We are keen to see researchers talking to policy makers but also to each other. We are sometimes perplexed with the many indices which seem to be

measuring similar things. How do inclusion, peace, wellbeing and happiness relate to each other? Do they capture what we need to know? Are they complementary? How do they decide what to measure and do those things really capture the important features of the situation? I worry about the tyranny of mathematics – do we put a disproportionate value on what we can measure by a number, and use the data that is available rather than ensuring that we are measuring what is significant? We need to find consensus on these matters.

Therefore we welcome the Belfast initiative to discuss what to monitor, how to monitor and, particularly important for the Club de Madrid, how to make the results relevant and accessible in a usable form. There are many difficult challenges and questions to ask, some of which I have mentioned. Meeting and discussing them is the way to resolve them.

I believe the meeting and the publication of the papers has been an important first step and that it has begun a conversation that will need to continue and deepen and widen. We in the Club de Madrid want to encourage it and be part of it and I hope we will all be together again in the not too distant future.

## *Editorial*

# Tracking Progress in Building Peaceful and Shared Societies

**Clem McCartney and Paul Nolan**

The papers in this edition of *Shared Space* come from a seminar which was held at Queen's University Belfast in November 2013. The joint sponsors of the event were the Community Relations Council and the Club de Madrid, and the idea for the seminar arose out of a dialogue about how peace-building is measured. A flagship initiative of the Club de Madrid is the Shared Societies project which looks at how sustainable and successful communities are built; the CRC's Peace Monitoring Report has looked at progress (or lack of it) in building peace in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement.

So we had common interests and shared questions. What can you measure that indicates progress in peacebuilding and shared futures? What can be done with the data to help to identify underlying processes and dynamics which help or hinder that goal? Are there lessons we can learn from other people's approaches to monitoring? And why are there so many people and organisations working on this but so little engagement between them?

As we approached the completion of the third Peace Monitoring Report, which signalled the end of the first phase of the Project, it seemed that a good way to mark the occasion would be to bring together researchers from across the world in a seminar to address some of these questions.

We felt it was the right moment as there is a growing interest in these issues around the world. At the time of the seminar the Global Center for Pluralism in Canada listed 14 indexes on issues related to diversity on its website, and during the seminar Thomas Morgan from the Global Peace Index referred to a study which lists 172 indexes on peace. There are quantitative studies and qualitative studies and sometimes a mixture of both. There are approaches which look at performance at the level of individual states and some consider the situation at sub-regional or community levels. Some are comparative in the sense that they score their unit of study with an overall figure and so a rank or table can be generated with "winners" and "losers". Some have a policy



focus assessing the impact of specific interventions while others are concerned to assess the overall situation in relevant dimensions such as peacefulness or inter-community relations.

The different studies do not claim to be studying the same thing or at any rate they give different names to the focus of their study: peace, social cohesion, good relations, inter-cultural understanding and respect, wellbeing, happiness and so on. But how different are these concepts and how do they inter-relate? Sometimes they are using the same indicators. The Global Peace Index has looked at the correlation between the different indexes. At one level each team of researchers have made their decisions about what approach will provide the best information for their needs but can their work benefit if it is more closely related to the work of others? We need to not only look at the work being done but the spaces between.

It is also an important moment because recently there has been a big concern about measurement within the process through which the United Nations is developing a new set of Sustainable Development Goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is understood that there is little point in including goals if a means to measure them has not also been agreed as otherwise there will be no way of assessing what progress is being made in meeting those goals. But there is the concern that this might result in some of the more intangible, less easily quantifiable goals being excluded.

There is an understanding that the new SDGs should include goals related to social attitudes and relationships on which there is less consensus on what would be a positive outcome - for example respect for human rights, levels of empowerment of disadvantaged groups, access to government, social trust and absence of violence. They are at the heart of individual and community wellbeing which leads to development and it is important that they are not left out on the grounds that progress is difficult to measure. Therefore organisations like the UNDP and OECD and some of the organisations represented in the seminar are intensively involved in considering how these more nuanced concepts can be measured. The seminar and the publication are therefore timely and we hope they can make a modest contribution to that process.

Participants included researchers from Australia, Germany, Israel, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States, and of course there was good local participation from Ireland. Some participants were working in their own country while others were working abroad or on global projects. Therefore a broad range of experience was represented by the participants.

It was a working seminar with most participants contributing papers. The intention was that they would not just describe their current work but discuss the challenges of which they had become aware and their own approaches to dealing with them. Most of the participants took that approach and so it seemed that the papers had a wider relevance than simply as documentation of current activities. They were therefore edited for publication, together with contributions from the few participants who are not currently involved in a project and who acted as discussants at the seminar. The Community Relations Council, who had financed the bulk of the cost of the seminar, readily agreed to create a special edition of *Shared Space* and the result is the present volume. The efforts of all concerned were much appreciated.

In our pre-publicity we said that the purpose of the seminar was as “to bring together those interested in the ways in which the following social goals can be given empirical measurement: peace, social cohesion, respect for difference and diversity, social justice” We argued that in view of the growth in global observatories that “ the next stage in peace monitoring will be to move from those which specialise in pulling together data in order to make international comparisons to a closer focus on country specific studies and greater understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between relevant phenomena.

The seminar therefore was intended to:

- Provide an opportunity to take stock of who is doing what
- Compare and contrast methodologies
- Examine the link between researchers involved in monitoring and policymakers
- Allow the opportunity for learning exchanges
- Plan areas for future co-operation.

We wanted to provide an opportunity to explore developments in the field, looking at how indicator frameworks have been set up in particular countries and consider if these country-specific initiatives could help improve international comparative studies.

Our particular interest was efforts to measure the rather intangible features of social relations which are not so amenable to the use of hard data and we

wanted to consider innovative techniques such as, for example, “Everyday Peace Indicators”.

As can be seen from this volume a number of very important and challenging issues were indeed discussed: what is the concept that we are trying to measure? How can it be measured? How can we be sure it is relevant to policy needs?

## **KEY THEMES**

### ***Selection of indicators***

The requirements of a good monitoring system is that it is independent but responsive; effective; accurate; and measuring the right things. A recurring theme is how we decide what to measure. Peace and social relations are slippery subjects to conceptualise. The participants are acutely aware of what John Bruton calls the “Tyranny of Mathematics”. Do we measure something because we can measure it or because it tells us something relevant? Kat Healy, from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, states that “the bigger questions, such as how much development has actually taken place or whether the community has changed for the better, tend to be ignored because of the measurement problems”. Fanie du Toit, from the Institute for Justice and Peace in South Africa, reminds us that we know what we don’t like more clearly than we know what we do like. He also pointed out that “having” (what one has in material terms) is easier to measure than “belonging” (one’s sense of being accepted by those around) but not necessarily more important. And, as Roger Mac Ginty and Adrian Guelke both point out, we can be seduced by the apparent objective certainty of numbers, and Adrian Guelke stresses the importance of recognising the normative assumptions that influence the selection of indicators to measure.

Consideration was also given to the kinds of data that are missing, often because they are harder to measure. Pauline Donnan, involved in the assessment of the Good Relations Strategy in Northern Ireland, noted that initially most of their indicators were negative, measuring the absence of undesirable phenomena, rather than positive. Roger Mac Ginty noted that it is easier to measure outputs than outcomes, even though the outcomes of interventions are more revealing.

Sally Holt notes that data is often not disaggregated in terms of different sections of society so the figures mask the uneven pace of development in different communities. This is starkly demonstrated by the reporting on progress on the Millennium Development Goals, which showed marked reduction in the numbers in absolute poverty and reductions in overall inequality. However

progress has been very uneven and much of that progress is explained by changes in China and the size of that population is such that it has an impact on the global figures. If the changes in China were not included, overall progress has been much less and some identity groups had shown no progress. Therefore it is important to ensure that the data collected is disaggregated in terms of identity groups and locations.

The way that questions are asked will also impact on the conclusions that can be drawn. One small example was given by Paula Devine from the Northern Ireland Life and Times study, which provides respondents with a “don’t know” option but not a “don’t care” option.

While many of the participants are involved in statistical research, there was a strong plea for the inclusion of qualitative information. It was pointed out that the search for evidence of specific phenomena may lead to other important dimensions being overlooked. There will often be unintended consequences of initiatives which may undermine the original intentions, and by definition they will be unexpected and a conscious effort needs to be made to identify them. Grainne Kelly from INCORE argued that quantitative research misses out on the silences – the issues about which people don’t talk. She has been using an approach that only asks three open-ended questions which ensures that the interview is not tied to an existing agenda. Roger Mac Ginty called for the use of indicators which were meaningful for those in the situation and noted that our information seems less scientific if it is called anecdotal. He queried whether supposedly scientific methods should be privileged over journalism or story-telling.

The meaning and weight that are given to specific indicators is also not without problems. For example, Corinna Hauswedell asks what value we should place on stability. Does stability indicate or lead to greater levels of sharing and social cohesion? Not necessarily, is her answer, as an authoritarian state may be stable but oppressive. She also makes the wider point that we need to prioritise some phenomena as more important than others and we need to be clearer about how we do that. Ranking different societies or states in order to make comparison involves giving numerical values to specific indicators and adding them together. But often we do not make explicit the basis on which those values are chosen, even though they determine the final scores. Once again it is important to remember that numbers can be deceptively authoritative.

The criteria for selecting indicators and attaching values to them is closely associated with our conceptual assumptions.

### ***Conceptual Frameworks***

Many studies are intended to assess the impact of programmes, but examples were given of the absence of a conceptual framework for such interventions, which makes it difficult to know what measures are salient. Kat Healy pointed out that in the fields of community development and peace building “some conceptual distinction needs to be preserved, otherwise peacebuilding becomes ‘any good thing’ or, conversely, all development can be justified as necessary for peace.”

Pauline Donnan noted that when they began to design the assessment of the Good Relations Strategy there was no conceptual model to help them to know what they were looking for. Corinna Hauswedell argued that there is no conceptual framework in the European Union about sharing and diversity.

At the same time it was recognised that over-rigid frameworks are not helpful as they focus our understanding too narrowly or they may create a bias in particular directions. As Roger Mac Ginty pointed out, we want to give order to social phenomena which are complex rather than orderly. He went on to say that that the emphasis on standard conceptual models suggests that we are more likely to come up with standard explanations. Friedrich Affolter from UNICEF felt that existing indicators create a straitjacket which limits country work plan.

Nor is measurement value free. There is a tendency to assume that our conceptual frameworks are rational and objective but Friedrich Affolter cautions that it often has an ideological basis and this determines the choice of indicators. Alan Smith, consultant to UNICEF, considers that the draft of the Post 2015 goal related to peacebuilding is dominated by a security analysis and therefore could exclude the contribution of social development to peacebuilding and ignore the relevance of related indicators. Fanie du Toit wonders if we are dealing with the measurement of politics or the politics of measurement and asks how our conceptual frameworks are tested. One way to answer that question is by considering how it provides explanatory power and helps us understand social phenomena.

The process of research itself helps to define our concepts. Thomas Morgan emphasized that our concepts are multi-dimensional and the dimensions are conceptually related and one of the challenges is to understand the dynamics of those relationships. If we could do this we would then see how the different studies with their different foci are in fact interrelated.

Friedrich Affolter describes how the work of the Peacebuilding Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme was based on the interaction of analysis, action and evaluation. It starts with participative conflict analysis, involving all stake holders. An important focus is the drivers of conflict the reverse side of which is the drivers of peace. Roger Mac Ginty argued for the involvement of those directly affected and wondered where is the space for creativity and local participation in making sense of the world.

How far can we apply the same concepts and make meaningful comparison between different situations? Corinna Hauswedell questioned if there are common denominators between the experience of people living in developed and developing countries, or in countries with serious challenges to peace and security and those where human security is high. Also the relevance of specific indicators changes over time and their appropriateness must be constantly reassessed. At the same time for longitudinal studies there needs to be consistency in the indicators used.

### ***The power of narrative***

The discussion used the concept of “narrative” on a number of occasions. In presenting the results of studies, we add a narrative, a perspective on the phenomena being studied. These narratives may or may not reflect the experience or narrative of those in the situation. We may be able to show progress towards a Shared Society but for some the progress is too slow and for others too fast. It is one form of the dichotomy between the perceptions of a glass being half full or half empty.

We might argue that hard data does not need a narrative, but Friedrich Affolter talks about the importance of not just describing outcomes but telling stories. Colin Irwin asserts that researchers are in the business of truth telling, and draws from his own polling work to show how democratic decision-making can be enhanced if more attention is paid to *vox populi*. Adrian Guelke concludes that it makes more sense for researchers to present their results in a narrative that makes reference to the data that has been collected in a quantifiable form, but does not rely wholly on numbers.

Tamar Hermann, lead researcher on the Peace Index of the Israel Democracy Institute, described how they freely provide their data and the users can do their own analysis, rather than imposing an analysis on the data. The team working on the Sustainable Governance Indicators at the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany are beginning to make their raw data available so that users can focus on the specific elements that seem most pertinent to their needs and their

own assessment of critical factors. The Life and Times Study adds and omits some topic areas depending on their relevance at the time. This seems a more flexible approach than depending on the particular configuration of indicators and the weighting given to them that has been chosen by the creators of the index.

### ***Relationship between policy and research***

Jacqueline Irwin from the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council gave three answers to her own question as to why we are interested in monitoring: to understand the processes that are happening; to bear witness; and to provide evidence for the policy cycle. Other participants confirmed that they are not only involved in pure research. Thomas Morgan said that one reason for carrying out the Global Peace Index is to interest the public in the issues. Similarly, Friedrich Affolter said that the PBEA are trying to influence the public discourse through their practice and monitoring of that practice. We have noted already that the Life and Times Study adds and omits topics depending on their policy relevance at the time.

Corinna Hauswedell noted that we need new forms of dialogue with policy makers if monitoring is going to make an effective contribution to policy making and especially if it is going to close the gap between policy making and relevant conceptual frameworks. In her reflections on the seminar, Sally Holt gives examples of how data can be used (and abused) by policy makers and the need for policy concerns to be taken into account in designing instruments and selecting indicators.

On the other hand Fanie du Toit questions the expectation of donors that the Africa Barometer should be able to demonstrate an impact on policy makers. He asks if research is an end in itself or is it required to be a change agent.

We have noted already that Pauline Donnan pointed out that when they started monitoring the Good Relations Strategy that the policy makers did not have a definition of good relations. However through consultation they developed an outcome-focused approach captured in the phrase “towards building a united community”.

### ***Relationship between researchers?***

It is important that there is continuing engagement between researchers and policymakers to ensure that policy makers are informed in making policy choices and to ensure that researchers understand the needs of policy makers.

Is it not also important that there is dialogue between researchers? Monitoring systems are work in progress and would benefit from a collegiate approach of ongoing review and discussion with peer researchers.

But is this possible? It is a competitive arena. Most researchers do not have secured funding and are often seeking funding from the same sources, which may discourage co-operation. And researchers may be happy with their choice of indicators and their methods and would prefer not to expose them to challenges. It is natural and human to defend our own work.

But if we do work in separate silos, we lose the opportunity to share data and reinforce each other's work and present a common view to policy makers. Researchers working together can provide a kind of supportive peer process and inform each other's work.

There is every reason to explore ways to maximise the benefits of co-operation and minimise the disadvantages and the seminar and this compilation of papers contributes to that process. And there is the will to continue. While some researchers and institutions were not able to take part in the seminar, the invitation provoked a very enthusiastic response to the idea and encouragement to do another follow up seminar in which they could be involved. We hope you also will be able to join us in any future discussions and activities.