Belfast, Northern Ireland
The URBAN II Renewal Program and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Problem to resolve
Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland experienced a long history of urban violence. The worst years, locally referred to as ‘The Troubles’, were the period 1969-98, during which over 1,900 citizens were killed while sporadic violent events continued up to 2014. The conflict is said to have evolved between protestants and Catholics – but the thriving interests were rather political than religious.

APPROACH for resolution:

After ‘the troubles’ were settled in a peace treaty 1998, the ‘URBAN II Community Initiative Programme’ was launched for 2000-2006. A different and complementary program Neighbourhood Renewal Programme “People and Place”, was added in 2003. Neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% of wards across Northern Ireland were identified to possibly being included in the program using a Multiple Deprivation Measure. Following extensive consultation, a total of 36 areas have been included finally in the program, representing a population of approximately 280,000 – or one person in 6 in the country. ➔Tool URR 3
The Troubles in Belfast 1970s: Left: The peace lines were a series of high border barriers in Northern Ireland that separate Irish nationalist and the rest of the country. Center: A mural depicting the march that broke through the curfew. Right: Confrontation between British soldiers and the IRA in Belfast in 1971.
After ‘the troubles’ were settled in a peace treaty 1998, the ‘URBAN II Community Initiative Programme’ was launched for 2000-2006. A different and complementary program Neighbourhood Renewal Programme “People and Place”, was added in 2003. Neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% of wards across Northern Ireland were identified to possibly being included in the program using a Multiple Deprivation Measure. Following extensive consultation, a total of 36 areas have been included finally in the program, representing a population of approximately 280,000 – or one person in 6 in the country. ➔ Tool URR 3

The URBAN II Renewal Program must be interpreted in a post-conflict context. The emergence of peace, after nearly three decades of conflict, opens new possibilities especially in areas blighted by fear and violence. Rigid patterns of segregation, increasing territoriality and the growth in the number of interfaces represent the brutal scars of division and mistrust especially in inner North Belfast. The area contains a range of ethno-religious, economic and inner-city problems that characterise its distinctiveness as a place of fear stratified by six peace lines, with the highest rates of deaths during the Troubles and high rates of neighbourhood conflict and intimidation. The area’s problems can be traced back to the mass-movement of the civilian population that followed the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in 1969. This left ‘jagged’ edges to ethnic territory, some communities trapped in enclaves and a landscape blighted by rising segregation. Intervening to regenerate and renovate this landscape is one of the key priorities in this operational Programme.

Program activities aimed at combining inner-city change with issues of de-segregation of formerly hostile territories. The URBAN II Programme allowed for visionary responses to: interface areas, contested land blighted by fear and violence, community participation in deeply divided areas, the opportunity to construct cross-community approaches to shared environmental problems, how to rescue and redirect part of the urban economy drifting further and inexorably away from the city fabric, building hope and opportunity for the youth. A priority for URBAN II will be the renewal of the physical environment blighted by economic decline and the legacy of violence. This will include actions to remove the worst environmental eyesores, improve the quality of arterial routes and attractiveness of access points to the area. Specific problems to be addressed include:

- Pervasive sense of fear, danger and direct violence to people and property
- Death and injury, high rates of death and violence
- Land and housing near interface areas blighted by fear, violence and lack of investment confidence
- The Lower North area of Belfast experiences some of the highest rates of physical dereliction, neglect and vandalism. It is fractured by a number of interfaces that have been the scene of recent paramilitary violence and inter-community disturbances.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy “People and Place” was launched in June 2003 and managed through North Belfast Partnership who had been contracted as facilitators the 36 Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRAs). Its strategy set out 4 interlinking objectives:

- Community Renewal – to develop confident communities that are able and committed to improving the quality of life in the most deprived neighbourhoods;
- Economic Renewal – to develop economic activity in the most deprived neighbourhoods and connect them to the wider urban economy;
- Social Renewal – to improve the lives of people in the most deprived neighbourhoods through better coordinated services and the creation of safer districts;
- Physical Renewal – to help create attractive, safe, sustainable environments in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

It is interesting to note that two of the seven success indicators were related to violence:

- Number of recorded crimes and offences per 1,000 population.
- Percentage of residents who are afraid to go out alone after dark.

The program is also focusing on delivering Domestic Violence training in the area and has built a link with the local Domestic Violence Unit to look into a more structured Local Community Safety plan. The coordinator has worked in collaboration with local organisations to deliver ‘One Stop Shops’ that run twice a month. These promote education, training services and job opportunities in Belfast to the local residents.

As a concluding remark it should be highlighted that the specific character neither of public violence nor of domestic violence can be resolved through police intervention. Conflict resolution is only conceivable through dialogue and joint personal experiences.

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Credentials
Authors: Kosta Mathey and Florian Steinberg

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Loyalist Mural, Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2012 South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership

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