CASE STUDY

Communities in Transition Model

OVERVIEW

This case study illustrates the value of methodologies that analyse local capacities and which establish frameworks to guide development in neighbourhoods where community organisation is weak or non-existent. The Communities in Transition Model (CIT) was developed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) based on a programme of work designed to address 'weak community infrastructure'. The notion of 'soft infrastructure' emerged in the context of EU PEACE funding in Northern Ireland and considerable Structural Funds investment in the 'hard' infrastructure of roads, railways and industrial development. The shift in programme delivery toward a stronger engagement with local people and reshaping of local governance exposed weaknesses in the competence and organisational capacity of some parts of the community and voluntary sector in particular:

> Weak community infrastructure exists in communities where social need and disadvantage sit alongside the absence of locally organized, locally managed, accountable and participative community development activity. It is evident by the lack of self-help approaches to tackling local social, educational, health, cultural, environmental and economic issues
>
> (CFNI, 2007, p. 6).

Community infrastructure in this context is strongly linked to ideas around Social Capital and capacities that mobilise local interest, create cross-community alliances and help empower groups to build stronger relationships with government departments and agencies. Neighbourhoods that may not exhibit the worst conditions nevertheless need early intervention where there is evidence of deterioration in their social, economic, demographic or physical fabric.

BACKGROUND

The CIT model is a useful framework for analysing weak infrastructure, especially in ethnically divided and highly territorialised areas. In particular, it shows how the pace of local development can be determined by: inter-community conflict; intra-community divisions (especially between rival paramilitaries); community leadership, organisational capacity and relations with government. The table overleaf provides a checklist to assess baseline conditions in areas experiencing transitional processes.

Community tensions in areas of weak community infrastructure

Category	Type	Description
Inter-community	Traditional	Territoriality and segregation between Protestant and Catholic areas.
	Demography	Demographic restructuring whereby some Catholic neighbourhoods grow and pressurise declining Protestant communities.
	Latent	Each community develops and occupies mutually exclusive engagement spaces, such as the Orange Order and the Gaelic Athletics Association.
Intra-community	Paramilitary	Paramilitary feuding for 'turf', legitimacy or criminality implodes some neighbourhoods.
	Political	Political interests use and abuse local people, often for narrow sectarian purposes.
	Socio-economic	This is especially manifest in tenurial differences between social renting and owner occupiers.
Community	Gatekeepers	This occurs when an individual or group prohibits information, resources or other forms of support from reaching an area.
	Anti-social behaviour	Underage drinking, drug abuse, vandalism, graffiti, intimidation, and verbal or physical abuse.
	External interference	Government funding criteria and externally delivered programmes can dictate the development agenda without being sensitive to local conditions.

Source: Based on CFNI, 2007, pp. 10-14.

THE PROJECT

The CIT model was developed after experimental work in 20 neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland. These were selected because they experienced high rates of social disadvantage, low numbers of community groups and problems of community polarization and ethno-religious segregation. The work in these areas initiated a process of local development often for the first time, which aimed to both challenge sectarianism and to build positive leadership outside localised paramilitary structures and influence. The resulting model is shown in the diagram below.

Step 1: Area profiling and setting out a baseline of local conditions using GIS data, public consultations and an analysis of policies and programmes affecting the area.

Step 2: Development of local relationships, especially in a way that addresses the intra-community tensions between groups and interests. This can be intensive and demanding in terms of skills, time and human resources. An evaluation of the level of support for a local community development project is conducted in Step 3.

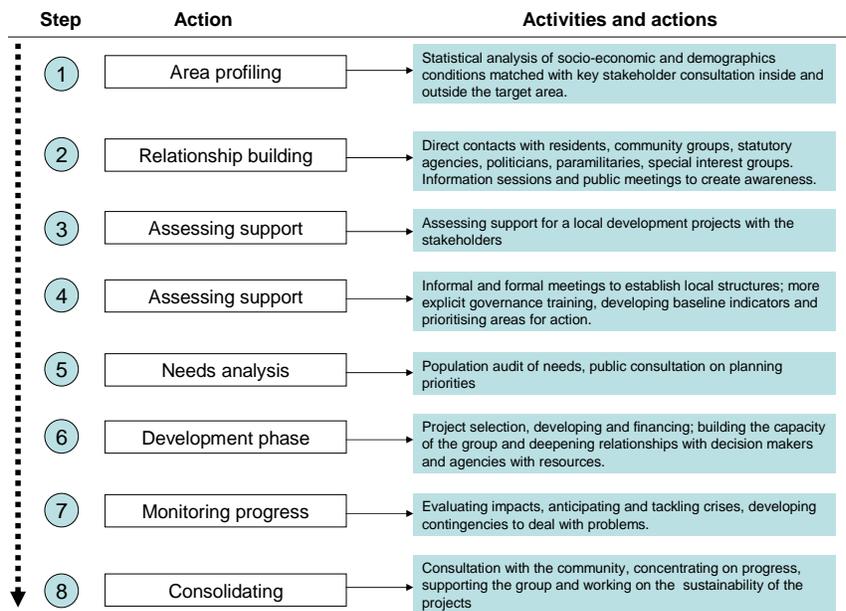*Step 3*: In a sense this involves a process of negotiation and bargaining to set the terms of reference for a neighbourhood plan. An outcome from this process of mediation is the establishment of an initial group.

Step 4: This 'forming' process includes practical tasks such as setting up a committee, appointing staff, developing requisite policies and ensuring members reflect wider collective interests.

Step 5: Preparation of a Needs Assessment and development of indicators to help articulate organisational aims and objectives.

Step 6: The group is assisted to develop an Action Plan which identifies the projects to be delivered and how relationships are formalised, especially to draw down resources over a longer term and on a more secure basis.

Step 7: Formulation of monitoring and evaluation systems and the articulation of lessons and practices that help to consolidate and sustain the intervention

Step	Action	Activities and actions
1	Area profiling	Statistical analysis of socio-economic and demographics conditions matched with key stakeholder consultation inside and outside the target area.
2	Relationship building	Direct contacts with residents, community groups, statutory agencies, politicians, paramilitaries, special interest groups. Information sessions and public meetings to create awareness.
3	Assessing support	Assessing support for a local development projects with the stakeholders
4	Assessing support	Informal and formal meetings to establish local structures; more explicit governance training, developing baseline indicators and prioritising areas for action.
5	Needs analysis	Population audit of needs, public consultation on planning priorities
6	Development phase	Project selection, developing and financing; building the capacity of the group and deepening relationships with decision makers and agencies with resources.
7	Monitoring progress	Evaluating impacts, anticipating and tackling crises, developing contingencies to deal with problems.
8	Consolidating	Consultation with the community, concentrating on progress, supporting the group and working on the sustainability of the projects

THE IMPACT

A crucial skill emerging from the experiences of the CIT programme was the ability to overcome obstacles especially those generated by the ethno-religious tensions within and between segregated neighbourhoods. The approach calls for an explicit interrogation of the local and wider problems:

> Developing risk management strategies is often crucial to success, but it is equally important that they are given ample time and space to learn from such setbacks through frank and honest analysis of the causes and outcomes (CFNI, 2007, p. 2).

The approach adopts, at its core, a rational model of problem identification, evaluation and plan making. It also identifies the politically charged conditions of divided areas and seeks an explicit engagement of the way in which inter- and intra-community initiatives hamper local development. An independent evaluation of the programme identified the way in which it engaged paramilitaries in mainstream positive expressions of community development as a key outcome (CENI, 2008). The evaluation also highlighted the role of the model in identifying areas with a high degree of community tension as important targets for mainstream policies and programmes. Here, the argument is that formal statistical definitions of social deprivation are insufficient to account for the complex interplay between ethnicity and poverty in deepening the exclusion of some communities. The government recently launched a programme called *Renewing Communities* that targets transitional areas that may not appear to have the worst socio-economic conditions but where stronger capacity may help prevent their slide into deeper and more complex spatial problems. In this sense early, preventative intervention can create cost savings, more sustainable places and better community relations with even modest amounts of investment.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The CIT model highlights the need to have a clear understanding of baseline conditions and local problems. In many community intervention approaches these tend to involve standard descriptions of local conditions rather than a more critical evaluation of the problems and obstacles that need to be addressed. Based on ideas of social capital the CIT approach starts with a more diagnostic approach that highlights: how sectarianism reproduces suspicion and division; how gatekeepers, especially from paramilitaries can dictate what happens locally; and how civic leadership is important where organisational capacities are weak.

- This more incisive evaluative approach then helps to identify activities that address the causes of lagging development. In this instance, it has meant high risk work with paramilitaries, to both challenge and cooperate with them in area regeneration. The failure of many interventions in the past in these areas was caused by a lack of community infrastructure to engage positively with mainstream development programmes and the resources they offer.

- The identification of this pre-development work has implications in racially segregated areas were elites control the agenda, act as gatekeepers and can block cross-community work that can open opportunities for minority groups.

- CIT is a framework that recognises the limits of detailed prescription; acting as a guide or set of rules to follow but which is ultimately dictated by the circumstances of each situation. In this way it is flexible, offering analysis and ideas, signposting the way forward and accepting that one size does not fit all communities.

- The approach relies on highly skilled development workers. Mediation, negotiation, trust building and challenging powerful elites are competencies that underpin effective work. These core skills in the creation of sustainable communities are especially applicable to communities where racial and ethnic division deepen social and spatial exclusion.

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REFERENCES

Shirlow, P. and Murtagh, B. (2006) *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*, London, Pluto.

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Other relevant contacts:

NICVA is the umbrella body for the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland and has extensive resources and research publications on conflict management.

Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action, 61 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast, BT15, 2GB. Tel 02890977777.

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Project publications:

CENI (2008) *Evaluation of the Communities in Transition Programme*, Belfast, CENI.

Community Foundation Northern Ireland (CFNI) (2007) *The Communities in Transition Model*, Belfast, Belfast, CFNI.