

5: East Belfast

It is difficult, to accurately identify the exact impact that £14 million of funding has had in an area that has over recent years had its traditional employment base severely reduced, coupled with an increase in the influence wielded by loyalist paramilitary groups. However, this section aims to present an overall view of the impact that PEACE II funding has had in East Belfast.

5.1 PEACE II funding in East Belfast

East Belfast received approximately £14 million (£14,017,643) of PEACE II funding. A total of 74 projects have been funded by PEACE II in East Belfast. The focus of these projects reflects the priorities of PEACE II, with the majority of the funding, in financial terms, having an economic renewal focus.

Before embarking upon examining the comments made by recipients and non-recipients of PEACE II funding in East Belfast, a more detailed analysis of where the funding has been distributed is required. This will then be followed by a discussion surrounding the wider socio-economic and cultural issues that exist in this area and which have directly and indirectly affected the implementation of PEACE II funded projects.

This research set out to examine how projects within a specific geographic area interact and ultimately what factors within that community have facilitated or impeded the development of PEACE II objectives. Nowhere has this been more pronounced than in East Belfast where events on the ground have shaped dramatically the impact that PEACE II funding has had. That is not to say that the paramilitary feuds, the interface violence in the Short Strand and Lower Newtownards Road area and the rise of paramilitary control in communities has lessened the impact of PEACE II. It has meant however that the implementation of projects and ultimately their long-term success has been somewhat curtailed.

Later in this section there is a long and detailed discussion about the relative weakness of community infrastructure in Protestant working class areas in East Belfast and many of the respondents cited this as a reason why more organisations did not avail of PEACE II funding. This point becomes highly politicised with representatives from both ends of the political spectrum stating that Protestant community groups lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively draw down PEACE II funding. Indeed some Unionist politicians felt that groups in Nationalist areas were given more support during PEACE I which then allowed them to build the capacity and knowledge to engage more fully in the PEACE II funding programme. This is a highly contentious point which this research, other than examining where the funding has actually gone, will not attempt to substantiate.

Nevertheless when the figures for the distribution of PEACE II are examined, some interesting features emerge. As is shown in Table 2, just over £14 million went into East Belfast from PEACE II funding programmes. However on looking at these figures in a little more depth it is clear that investment has been concentrated in a limited number of areas, which has in turn contributed to a series of views and perceptions about the programme and its efficacy in East Belfast.

For example, projects in the Short Strand area of East Belfast, which is predominately Catholic, received just over £718,812 (Short Strand Community Forum and the Short Strand Partnership being the main recipients) under a number of PEACE II Measures. This funding, which equates to 5% of the total funding received by East Belfast, went into a very defined geographic area. As is described throughout this section, the violence at the interface during 2002 had a detrimental impact on cross-community activity which is such a key part of PEACE II. On the other hand the emphasis of this £718,812 on tourism, economic development and training has meant that the Short Strand now has a place at the table in terms of engaging with government and statutory agencies as they have a proven record in delivering successful projects.

That leaves £13,298,830 under projects funded in PEACE II that will have gone to Protestant areas and groups. On the surface this appears to be a very sizeable sum given the concerns expressed later in this section relating to the lack of community infrastructure and capacity in East Belfast. Again there appears to be something of a contradiction between what the respondents to this research state and what the actual reality is in terms of the funding that has gone into the area.

A closer examination of the funding and where it has gone is required. Under Measure 1.8 Technical Support for the Knowledge Base, £8,024,810 went into funding the Northern Ireland Science Park, the Genomics Centre for Excellence and Thales Air Defence. Added to this, a further £1,250,000 went into the East Belfast Enterprise Park under Measure 1.1A Business Competitiveness and Development. All these projects are in the Harbour Estate area of East Belfast and there is no doubt that they have generated increased employment, research and development, and inward investment, but to suggest that 66% (£9,274,810) of the total funding that went to East Belfast directly impacted upon individuals living in the most deprived areas East Belfast would given the remit of this research be difficult to make.

This leaves £4,024,020 of PEACE II funding which went directly into the Protestant working class areas of East Belfast. However a sizeable amount of this went to organisations which although based in East Belfast, have a Northern Ireland wide remit as well as to a number of schools and the Belfast Education and Library Board. This funding totalled £943,197 (7% of total funding) and again the value and contribution of these projects to individuals and groups in East Belfast cannot be underestimated. In many cases the funding has helped supplement and develop activities that would otherwise have not been funded.

Not including the funding received by groups operating in the Short Strand area (£718,812) and the money used to revitalise the economy of East Belfast (£9,274,810), £3,080,823 (22%) of the £14 million received under PEACE II, therefore, went to community organisations operating specifically in inner East Belfast.

The above analysis is in no way intended to undermine or devalue the contribution that these projects have made in either addressing the legacy of the conflict or providing opportunities that have arisen from peace. The intention is purely to provide a more rounded view of where the funding has gone and to provide a context against which the comments made by respondents during this research can be measured.

Table 2: Funded Projects in East Belfast³

Priority	Projects	Total Award
1. Economic Renewal		
1.1A Business Competitiveness and Development - Economic Revitalisation	1	£1,250,000
1.3 New Skills and New Opportunities	4	£489,827
1.5 Positive Action for Women	6	£768,902
1.8A Technology Support for the Knowledge-based Economy (NI) - Innovative Technology and Networking	3	£8,024,810
2. Social Integration, Inclusion and Reconciliation		
2.1 Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace	1	£75,456
2.11 Area-based Regeneration - Belfast, Londonderry and Regional Towns (NI)	6	£172,930
2.2 Developing Children and Young People	7	£604,508
2.3 Skilling and Building the Social Economy (NI)	3	£239,736
2.4A Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation of Victims - Pathways to Inclusion	5	£626,153
2.5 Investing in Childcare	4	£128,396
2.6 Promoting Active Citizenship	4	£274,808
2.7 Developing Weak Community Infrastructure	1	£9,500
2.8 Accompanying Infrastructure and Equipment Support	15	£189,558
3. Locally Based Regeneration and Development Strategies		
3.1 Local Economic Initiatives for Developing the Social Economy (NI)	7	£566,882
3.2 Locally-based Human Resource, Training and Development Strategy (NI)	4	£321,156
4. Outward and Forward Looking Region		
4.2B Outward and Forward Looking Tourism - Enhancing the Region as a Tourism Destination	1	£30,000
5. Cross-Border Co-operation		
5.3 Developing Cross-Border Reconciliation and Understanding	1	£140,385
5.5 Education, Cross-border School and Youth Co-operation	1	£104,636
Total	74	£14,017,643

³ The selection of projects for East Belfast is based upon the project address only as given in the CSF Central Database.

5.2 Background to East Belfast

East Belfast incorporates the area which runs from the River Lagan going east as far as Dundonald and Ballybeen, and from Belfast Lough to the Braniel estate. The main arterial routes in this area include the Newtownards Road, Woodstock Road, Albertbridge Road and the lower Ravenhill Road. The population of this part of the city is 79,261 (Census, 2001). People living in East Belfast predominately define their religion as Protestant, with the exception of the Short Strand and some small areas around Ballyhackamore and Willowfield where the dominant religion is Catholic. In the 2001 Census a total of 10% of people in East Belfast defined their community background as Catholic, compared to 85% of the population who defined their community background as Protestant (Census 2001, NISRA).

5.3 Community background

During the thirty years of the Troubles East Belfast was the least affected part of the city, sometimes referred to by locals as 'the quiet East'. In this time 117 residents in East Belfast were killed, compared to 139 in the south of the city, 378 in the west of the city and 491 in the north of the city. Ironically since the ceasefires and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, East Belfast has been more affected by community tensions. In particular in the summer of 2002 there was violence at the interface of the Protestant Cluan Place and the Catholic Short Strand. During this time public disorder between the two communities led to a virtual breakdown in any contact between them. Despite their obvious differences, both communities experience similar multi-dimensional problems in their everyday lives.

Research based on a number of case studies illustrated the extent of the problem in peaceline zones: people in these areas tend to have much lower earning rates; the unemployment rate tends to be nearly three times higher than the Northern Ireland average; there are high benefit dependency rates and generally low educational standards (Smyth and Hamilton, 2003).

The combination of the decline of heavy industry, high dependency rates, low educational standards and deprivation have partially resulted in the growth of paramilitary activity and anti-social behaviour in this area. There are different factions of loyalist paramilitaries in East Belfast, and in recent years there have been increasing intra-paramilitary feuds. Many young people growing up in this area are finding themselves with little life chances.

"If you ask a lot of kids in this area what they want to be, they say in the UDA or UVF or LVF. This is because of the money that surrounds paramilitaries. Paramilitaries in this area are being given credibility without being elected... There are little options for kids besides paramilitaries. If you don't become the hunter you become the hunted." (R)

"I was recently speaking to a young lad, who said his ambition was to leave school and eventually become an early released prisoner, that is the reality of what we are dealing with in this area." (R)

Disaffected young people in this area suffer from feelings of being left behind and because of this, a number of them turn to anti-social behaviour. In this vicious circle there also exists an extensive drugs trade.

"The dope and coke [cocaine] industry has set up a black economy in this area - there are 1,000s of children and adults involved, and addicted to this industry." (R)

These wider socio-economic and cultural issues will have impacted upon each of the projects funded under PEACE II, and therefore should be borne in mind with any analysis of the impact of this funding. There is something of an ironic symmetry to this situation.

"What impact does a project have on a conflict situation, but also what impact does conflict have on a project?" (R)

5.4 The local economy

Much of East Belfast developed in the early part of the twentieth century to meet the needs of the shipbuilders, Harland & Wolfe. The growth of the shipbuilding industry in this area acted as a catalyst to encourage various other types of heavy industry to set up. The employment opportunities available encouraged masses of people to come into the area. Rows of terraced housing were built to accommodate these people, and for many years the east was considered to be the industrial power house of the city. In the last part of the twentieth century heavy industry in the western world was in decline, and East Belfast has been a casualty of this decline. The two massive cranes of Harland & Wolfe still stand as a daily reminder of the east of the past.

Much of the housing developed in the industrial revolution is now in decline, and recently 600 terraced houses around the shipyard were knocked down to make way for redevelopment. Deprivation is a major issue in the east of the city, with two out of the ten most deprived wards in Northern Ireland being in this area (Ballymacarrett and The Mount) and another three wards (Tullycarnet, Woodstock and Island) within the 10% most deprived places in Northern Ireland (East Belfast Statement of Need, 2003). However in East Belfast some of these deprived areas are situated alongside some of the most affluent areas in Belfast.

5.5 The impact of PEACE II

The following sections will examine the impact of PEACE II funding in East Belfast, as well as exploring any lessons which can be drawn from the experiences of respondents who participated in this research.

5.5.1 Addressing the legacy of the conflict

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, since the ceasefires and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, East Belfast has been affected by increased interface violence and intra-community tensions (between opposing loyalist paramilitary groups). Given this backdrop, how has PEACE II impacted in terms of addressing the legacy of a conflict that is still very real for people living in the area?

Peace building

A commonly held perception of PEACE II and its impact in East Belfast is that the funding has facilitated contact between the two communities but has produced little in the way of reconciliation. This is perhaps understandable as much of the peace and reconciliation work has been seriously hampered by the interface violence of 2002, and the intra-community feuds. Against this backdrop there is a reluctance to be seen to be involved in peace and reconciliation work that seeks to address the legacy of conflict, because of a fear of possible repercussions in one's own community.

"When PEACE II kicked in during 2001/02, East Belfast suffered the worst violence it had seen. That whole episode really affected organisational and personal relationships and as a consequence cross-community work. People have been more guarded about this type of work." (NR)

Although this comment was made by an individual whose organisation was not in receipt of PEACE II the respondent works for a strategic development organisation and has a good overview of the entire situation in East Belfast. The same point was reiterated by an individual whose organisation was in receipt of PEACE II and which was very much on the front line during the interface violence that characterised 2002 in East Belfast.

"In 2002, the community violence at the interfaces had a massive impact on community development in this area. Prior to this, 90% of projects in East Belfast would have had a cross-community element with other groups in East Belfast, but after 2002 that went down to nil... but it is slowly rebuilding." (R)

Unfortunately this view seems to be something of a baseline from which all engagement between and within communities has been subsequently measured.

Despite this rather pessimistic view there have been, in the opinion of many of the recipients of PEACE II interviewed during this research, small but significant changes in relation to peace and reconciliation in the wider area. These changes have come from the creation of an environment where organisations applying for PEACE II funding have had to consider the needs of other communities when making an application. This is a theme common across all three areas where the needs of the other communities have had to be taken into consideration during the application process. What we did not get however during the interviews for this research was a sense of how far this understanding of the needs of the other community actually permutated the day to day work of the projects. Perhaps this is understandable given the very fragile conditions that exist between both Catholic and Protestant communities and within Protestant communities themselves. It is genuinely difficult to assess how effective the development of reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between the two traditions and within communities has been.

Despite this rather unfortunate backdrop against which PEACE II has tried to operate there is a strong emphasis by recipient organisations of PEACE II that it has created an environment where organisations have had to consider the development of reconciliation and mutual understanding.

"Despite the problems it did bring together lots of different communities to get involved and it allowed them to see regardless of where they came from the issues and problems they faced were the same." (R)

"PEACE has allowed people to build linkages between streets and local community groups... groups which get the money help build sustainable relationships... helps start thinking about greater involvement with the community at large." (R)

The above quotations are just a snapshot of how many recipient organisations felt about the impact PEACE II has had in starting the process of developing new relationships and finding new ways of taking into account the needs of the other community. A number of projects in East Belfast were funded under Measures 5.3 and 5.5 which helped encourage cross border engagement and provided young people in the area, through cultural learning partnerships between community and youth groups and schools in East Belfast and the six border counties, to develop an understanding of different traditions and cultures.

“Most of our work is cross-community and cross-border - we have a partner in Donegal. The project I’m involved with is working with young people aged 14-18. We encourage young people to come together to try to understand-and to do things they normally wouldn’t do. For example I get children from this area to go to GAA matches and St Patrick’s Day parades.” (R)

Although the development of reconciliation and mutual understanding is elemental in terms of the overall objective of PEACE II there were some concerns expressed, primarily by non-recipients of PEACE II funding, that this objective was sometimes obscured.

“If there was a stronger emphasis on the reconciliation theme you would see some excellent programmes - there is a thirst in East Belfast for finding ways of working together - but it will only happen if groups are pushed into a corner to do this.” (NR)

As is shown above, this view, which was not an isolated one, is that there was insufficient focus on reconciliation in PEACE II projects. It is therefore worthwhile attempting to examine why this opinion exists in East Belfast and why a ‘strong social economy focus’ and the absence of the term ‘peace and reconciliation’ in the distinctiveness criteria have resulted in the perception that peace and reconciliation has become less of a priority.

“In relation to reconciliation PEACE II has had much less of an impact than PEACE I. PEACE II has less of an emphasis on reconciliation and it was very secondary in terms of what organisations wanted to do in terms of their applications to PEACE II.” (NR)

To date under PEACE II in East Belfast, only one programme was funded under Measure 2.1 ‘Reconciliation for Sustainable Peace’⁴, whereas just over 70% of funding received by organisations based in East Belfast had an economic renewal or social economy focus. Specific projects funded under Measures 2.3 Skilling and Building the Social Economy and 3.1 Local Initiatives for Developing the Social Economy received £806,617. This is of course a very rudimentary analysis of the funding and it is understood that addressing the legacy of the conflict takes many forms but it is not too difficult to see where misinterpretations about the focus of the funding programmes may arise. It does at the very least however provide a context for statements made by recipients of PEACE II funding in relation to the difficulties of undertaking cross-community work in East Belfast.

“To try and get funding now without a cross-community function is difficult.” (R)

Of course it would be incorrect to assume that peace and reconciliation work is confined to cross-community or cross-border activities and this is particularly true in East Belfast where some Protestant communities themselves do not engage on a meaningful level. At one level there is a need to address the level of influence paramilitaries on the ground in East Belfast are having. This is not necessarily within the remit of PEACE II but this influence does impede many of the key community activists from taking the initiative to pursue peace and reconciliation work. This particular issue was well summed up by one respondent working in Protestant inner East Belfast.

“We are coming out of a political situation that requires confidence building. In order to move away from the past people need to be able to see changes - otherwise paramilitaries will gain legitimacy.” (R)

At another level is the fact that the Protestant community itself is not a cohesive entity and there remains a challenge in attempting to reconcile differences within that community before any meaningful cross-community work can occur.

“People from the Newtownards Road don't necessarily speak to people from the Beersbridge Road... why should people from the Short Strand feel compelled to speak to everyone?” (R)

PEACE II funding has been and can be used to reconcile differences within the Protestant community, so long as it is addressing the strategic objectives of the programme and not reinforcing interests which are opposed to those objectives. There are very definite signs of some early progress being made.

“The PEACE II money has helped us in the [named estate] ...there has been little things done in this area to improve relations within the Protestant community. In the past few months the paramilitary slogans have gone and this year the bonfire was moved.” (R)

The reality on the ground as described throughout this section bears testament to this fact that for an area such as East Belfast it will be difficult to make the transition beyond sectarianism without confronting the wider socio-economic issues surrounding it. This wider impact of PEACE II will be discussed in later sections. This sentiment is best summed up by an individual whose organisation had received PEACE II funding.

“The problems in our area cannot be solved by a weekend solution - we need real commitment and a time frame of 2-3 years is not long enough to make any real impact. For example we have a cross-community group of women in the East with Short Strand and it took them two years to be relaxed enough to talk and have a laugh together.” (R)

This is not to say that amongst PEACE II funded projects that the inclusion of distinctiveness criteria, etc, has not created the conditions for organisations and communities to work together or at the very least take into consideration the needs of the other communities. It is just that the complexities on the ground in East Belfast have meant that the process is a very slow one and is highly susceptible to the impact of external factors.

⁴ The project received £75,456 to provide a fresh new web-based resource for all those who work in community relations, conflict transformation and community development in Northern Ireland.

Developing the economy

It would be fair to say that East Belfast, in terms of economic development and inward investment, has not suffered to the same extent as Cavan or Strabane as a direct consequence of the conflict. To be sure, East Belfast has suffered considerably from the decline in its heavy industry base but this is more attributable to changes in global markets than a direct impact of the conflict. Nevertheless, within East Belfast there is a general feeling that despite the focus of PEACE II on economic renewal and development, the economic impact has been difficult to assess. Of course the significant investment made under Measure 1.8 Technical Support for the Knowledge Base and Measure 1.1A Business Competitiveness and Development have undoubtedly had an economic impact. However it is difficult to attribute any impact in East Belfast and in particular in those communities which have suffered most since the decline of heavy industry.

As mentioned in the previous section it is important to create a stable and normal society before the issues of sectarianism and joint working can be fully addressed. During the interviews there was a general consensus amongst all the respondents that the community sector in East Belfast was not ready for the strong economic focus of PEACE II. This predates PEACE II funding and can be traced back to a relatively small uptake within the community of PEACE I funding through which infrastructure could have been developed.

“There is a real void left from the closure of the heavy industry. PEACE II was a measure that helped, but the decline of the heavy industry in this area is devastating, especially because of the lack of education and skills. ..[And] they have not been able to take advantage of funding, mainly because of the ‘individualism’ that exists; community spirit is starting but very slowly.” (R)

As mentioned above the decline of the heavy industry has been a massive blow to this area and as yet in the opinion of this individual whose organisation was not in receipt of PEACE II there has been no real major investment to fill the void.

“There has not been as much economic impact as there could have been. There have been little jobs created. The economy in this area is disappearing, so we really need to get investment. This is the only way that pride will be increased in this area and along will come further investment.” (NR)

Outside of changes in the global economy and as was articulated by a number of respondents to this research, it is perhaps too early to clearly state the tangible impact of PEACE II funding, in terms of kick-starting economic development. Nevertheless there are signs that with PEACE II funding, particularly under Measures which have provided training and development opportunities for individuals, is preparing the ground for future economic development. Through addressing the needs of the more marginalised groups in East Belfast the funding is providing opportunities that will allow individuals to participate in the labour market. Just a couple of examples of this are given below by organisations which received PEACE II funding.

“We have an ex-prisoners group supported by PEACE II funding [which has been] very successful. It is encouraging people to take up training apprenticeships and there is a group of ten going through them now.” (R)

"In the first year we registered 143 people on training courses, in our own building and also in our outreach centres in the surrounding estates. These courses provide basic skills (no qualifications obtained from them). They have been very successful in that few people leave the courses. Many have gone on to further courses where they have obtained qualifications. These courses have also assisted people to get back into the work environment, particularly middle-aged and older people who would have worked in the heavy industries - this project assists re-skilling." (R)

Nevertheless the fact remains that in terms of an economic impact it is difficult to assess at this stage how the funding has enhanced or added to the economic development of East Belfast. In fact one recipient of PEACE II encapsulated the role the funding has played in the economic renewal of East Belfast.

"If there was no PEACE funding all the external economic impacts which have blighted East Belfast would have happened regardless. Without PEACE the community won't have moved on and although the political will was there the money to translate this desire would not have been found to the same extent." (R)

This issue of creating a tangible and visible link between the funding and the actual impact on communities was perhaps best articulated by one respondent who suggested that this is only a small step in a wider process which is by no means straightforward.

"There have been some ripples in the pond with PEACE II, but at this stage of the game we should be aiming to make a bigger difference." (R)

5.5.2 Opportunities arising from peace

The following sections will attempt to uncover the impact that PEACE II funding has had in relation to providing organisations and the beneficiaries of those organisations with the opportunity to develop and promote a stable and normal society.

Developing capacity

As is well documented, co-ordinated community activity has a relatively short history in East Belfast, particularly in Protestant working class areas, and many voluntary and community groups are still in the process of establishing themselves.

For a number of respondents this lack of infrastructure and community cohesion has meant that East Belfast has been unable to take full advantage of the opportunities presented under PEACE II. Despite the low uptake of PEACE I there was a recognition that it did have an effect on how thinking changed and it did lay the groundwork for future developments.

"PEACE I started the evolution of strategic development in East Belfast in terms of collaboration and organisations thinking in the round about things." (R)

On the other hand many respondents, primarily those who were not in receipt of PEACE II funding, felt that East Belfast was not ready for PEACE II and substantial assistance was needed to help organisations to avail fully of the funding.

"Many of the community groups in East Belfast only became interested in community development in the late stages of PEACE I. In many respects they were not prepared for the 'social economy' focus of PEACE II. For this reason a number of community groups did not qualify for the PEACE II funding." (NR)

"I can understand the change in focus to social economy, but in this area there is still a real need for capacity building." (NR)

As has already been shown in this section the gap between the perception of non-funded PEACE II organisations and the reality of the focus of the funding that went into East Belfast is not so great. However, there is provision under 2.7 Developing Weak Community Infrastructure to address this particular issue. However, only one project in East Belfast was funded under this Measure. This organisation received £9,500 to develop relationships between parents and young people while encouraging them to spend time together. Despite this a significant number of organisations which did receive PEACE II funding felt that the support allowed them to develop greater capacities within their organisations to help their beneficiaries.

It is in this area that many respondents felt that capacity building within organisations was a strong and positive feature of PEACE II. Indeed the general perception was that PEACE II funded projects are enabling organisations to develop and ultimately have a bigger stake in their communities.

"The PEACE II funding has given people the opportunity to come out and get involved in the community - there is not much in this area so this offers real opportunity." (R)

"PEACE II acted as a catalyst for further development in the area... although for this area it will take a long time." (R)

However, this increase in capacity also relates to community infrastructure in East Belfast in so far as that PEACE II money has enabled a number of groups to increase the capacity of the organisation and how it interacts with the wider community.

"Without the PEACE II funding we could not have run our project to the capacity we have. The money gave us a bigger capacity." (R)

"Through the money [PEACE II] we developed a forum. This helps bring together organisations in this area. This is something very positive." (R)

This has been a common theme, not only in East Belfast but across all three areas, whereby PEACE II funding has acted as a catalyst for developing greater capacity within organisations.

Providing opportunity

In a direct correlation with the increase of capacity there is a general understanding that PEACE II has impacted in terms of community spirit and engendered a greater sense of confidence amongst participants in training courses and activities. Below is just a selection of comments from respondents whose organisations have received PEACE II funding and where they believe the funding has impacted most.

“One of the things we tried to do is build confidence. We put in for a small grants programme, this benefited a number of small groups particularly in [named estate]. At the beginning these groups were nervous but now their confidence has grown.” (R)

“The PEACE II money allowed me to engage with working class kids, irrespective of religion and chances, because in the past statutory organisations have often neglected these individuals.” (R)

“We applied for PEACE II funding and successfully received it for a pre-school programme for children with autism. This is an area of real need in Northern Ireland. By obtaining this money we were able to reach more families [and] it gave us a bigger capacity.” (R)

“[Peace II funding] already is helping women in other areas of their life, both personal and work. In this programme there is an opportunity to visit other centres outside Belfast. Many of these women rarely venture beyond their own area.” (R)

The sentiments expressed above are indicative of the view held by many in East Belfast that the funding has provided an opportunity outside the scope of mainstream funding programmes. Again the notion of PEACE II acting as a catalyst and providing an impetus to address issues and problems that may have otherwise not been a priority is a common theme.

“In terms of tangible impacts the strong economic focus on the provision of more training is certainly one. The training on offer is much better as it is accredited... you don't see the long list of non-accredited training that you used to see all the time. The main impact is the contribution to having a better skilled workforce.” (NR)

However this view is tempered with a note of caution about the potential this funding has now unlocked in some organisations in terms of tackling social exclusion and raising confidence.

“Expectations have been raised in the community and now it is essential we find ways to sustain this confidence... most people who came into this field came in to help people and their community.” (R)

One respondent demonstrated the need for co-ordination and greater communication amongst organisations which are attempting to address unemployment, low educational achievement and skills.

“Perhaps there is some duplication as training organisations are all looking for the same person... these people [unemployed, under-skilled, etc] are not an exhaustible supply of people. There needs to be more negotiation between groups about what they want to achieve but this co-ordination needs to happen and this is the only way in which the community sector will survive through sharing resources and ideas... in a lot of ways PEACE II has made it worse because organisations can fence off their own stuff.” (NR)

This closing statement, by an individual who has a very keen strategic overview of East Belfast, shows that the idea of co-ordination or synergy between organisations (particularly across different sectors) is still a challenge.

5.6 Conclusion

In trying to sum up or provide an overview of the impact PEACE II has had in East Belfast, the best place to start is to ask the question, what would it be like if PEACE II funding had not existed? Without a doubt the violence at the interfaces would have continued, the role and influence of the paramilitaries would be the same if not greater and the decline of the traditional employment base in East Belfast would have continued unabated. So what has PEACE II really achieved in East Belfast and has the investment of £14 million been money well spent?

It is a difficult question to answer and is perhaps beyond the scope and remit of this research but it does throw up some interesting points for discussion.

There is no escaping the fact that interface violence and paramilitary feuds have blighted East Belfast over recent years and have impeded the development of key PEACE II objectives. This is most notable in the ability of organisations to work together and interact. Without doubt the process of ensuring that projects fulfil the distinctiveness criteria has created a positive change in how the other communities and their needs and traditions are viewed. But as stated throughout this section of the report, PEACE II funded projects have been unable to claim to have had a substantive impact on reinforcing progress towards the creation of a more stable and peaceful society. This is not a criticism of PEACE II or the projects funded under the programme but it is a stark reminder of the impact that events on the ground can have on funding programmes. In the objectives for this research the question was posed concerning synergy between projects and their interaction and what factors have facilitated or impeded development. The answer is quite clear; PEACE II facilitated a process where an environment and structure existed that meant organisations had to address how their particular project or development may promote reconciliation. However the manifestation of these activities on the ground was reduced because that synergy on a cross-community and intra-community basis was not feasible and meant a lot of development and trust built up over the years essentially faded away.

This interaction was at a horizontal level between organisations working on the ground but it was clear during this research that PEACE II funding had meant organisations (in particularly those involved in economic development and training) have established much stronger links with government and the private sector. This appears to be as much a consequence of a historical development of capacity and expertise in dealing in the social economy and economic renewal as the direct financial input through PEACE II. The financial input under PEACE II has provided further impetus and direction to a number of projects and has meant that developments have happened faster than would have otherwise been the case.

In conclusion the interviews in East Belfast revealed that PEACE II has in the main made a positive impact. This is a predominantly Protestant area that traditionally has had little community activity. However in recent times with the decline of heavy industry there has been an increased desire to become involved in community activity. PEACE II has acted as a catalyst for community capacity building in this area by building and enhancing the recipient organisations' ability to engage more fully with their beneficiaries. Across East Belfast, in the funded projects, the dedication of project workers is enabling small but positive steps to be made. These positive steps are not always measurable on monitoring forms, particularly the raised expectations and hopes of individuals in this community.

In interface areas there are many inter-related socio-economic problems, and East Belfast is no exception. The low educational standards, limited employment opportunities and high dependency rates create a vicious cycle of poverty where paramilitary influence can grow. In this environment low community morale is often widespread. Within East Belfast these factors, coupled with weak community infrastructure, have been a huge challenge to PEACE II funded projects. These macro issues require a co-ordinated approach from all sections of government, the private sector and the voluntary and community sector.

Case Studies

THE BEAT INITIATIVE

PEACE II provided £21,150 under Measure 2.11 Area-based Regeneration - Belfast, Londonderry and Regional Towns for The Beat Initiative in East Belfast.

This programme set out to get local people involved in organising a carnival in their own area, in the form of a lantern parade. The aim of this carnival was to increase pride in their local area and to portray a positive image of the area “as opposed to the many negative images that come from the area in the media”. As part of the distinctiveness criteria, The Beat Initiative set out to also include groups from the Catholic Short Strand in East Belfast.

The preparations for this carnival ran from the summer of 2003 to December 2003. These included:

■ A Leadership Training Programme

- local people took part in this programme which aimed to develop leadership skills, to be used in the co-ordination of the lantern parade. The development of leadership skills within the local community of East Belfast has had a positive impact on this community because “for so long there has been no real community focus, we need much more, and projects such as this one assist in building community ethos.”

■ Outreach Programme

- in East Belfast there has not been a long history of community activity, and those who do get involved often do not like to go beyond their “immediate streets”. Recognising this issue, this programme used PEACE II funding to devise an outreach programme. The success of this outreach programme can be measured in the fact that over forty local groups participated throughout East Belfast, including a group from the Short Strand.

The Lantern Parade was advertised throughout the city and on the night of the parade (5 December 2003) over 650 people took part on the route from the Belmont area, along the Holywood Road and the Newtownards Road. Unfortunately on the night the Short Strand group did not feel they could take part, because of “problems on the ground”. Therefore while The Beat Initiative tried to address the legacy of conflict in East Belfast, outside events⁵ resulted in the minority Catholic community not taking part in this parade. Because of the politics associated with the parade a group from Dundalk also decided to pull out. This highlights very vividly the politics of community development but despite this being an obvious blow to the parade the decision was taken to proceed. Nevertheless workshops to make the lanterns were held across all sections of the communities in East Belfast.

The impact of this parade went beyond an evening of wonderful light; a number of individuals who were involved in this programme have subsequently moved on to further and higher arts and cultural programmes.

“A young lad who came from a disadvantaged community got involved in The Beat Initiative. He used the skills gained here to move on to Performing Arts in BIFHE. He is now a self-employed, full-time arts performer, and as part of his work he is just back from Korea.”

The Lantern Parade could become an annual event with private sector and Arts Council sponsorship. Despite the problems the parade did bring lots of different communities together to get involved and it allowed them to see that regardless of where they came from, the issues and problems they faced were the same.

⁵ This occurred after a series of misunderstandings surrounding violence and the threat of potential violence at the interface between the Short Strand and Lower Newtownards Road.

MERSEY STREET RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION (MARA)

The Mersey Street Residents Association stands in the immediate area surrounding Harland & Wolfe and has had “difficulties with the closure of the shipyard”.

in terms of the impact on local employment and the local economy. The two massive yellow cranes stand in view of this residents association as a reminder of the industrial past. This is an area characterised by decline, and recently 600 social houses were pulled down to enable the area to be redeveloped. To date, 33 new social houses have been built and 175 private houses, although by the end of the development in this area it is anticipated that the numbers of private and social housing will be broadly comparable.

All the houses next to the MARA have been demolished. However within this building there is much activity that has been made possible by PEACE II funding. This residents association applied for PEACE II funding for ICT courses and was successfully awarded £90,016 under Measures 2.4A Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation of Victims - Pathways to Inclusion and 2.8 Accompanying Infrastructure and Equipment Support.

This project provides IT training at various levels for local people:

“The PEACE II funding has given people an opportunity to come out and get involved in the community - there is not much in this area so this offers real opportunities.”

The majority of this PEACE II funding was secured under Measure 2.4a Pathways to Inclusion, Integration and Reconciliation of Victims. This funding is important in this area as:

“We had all the trouble in 2002 and people in here would be drawn into that... Traditionally people around here have focused only on their own areas, so IT allows us to find out about the world. PEACE II has opened the doors of the world to us.”

Despite the distinctiveness criteria of PEACE II, the project co-ordinator believes that the project has been involved in limited co-ordinated activity with the minority community to address the legacy of conflict in East Belfast.

The skills the project co-ordinators have developed using PEACE II funding have enabled certain elements of this IT project to become sustainable, but there is a note of caution.

“It won't allow us to grow or build on what we are doing. I feel that overall it has been rushed. There is not enough time to allow for real investment in the programme.”

Case Studies

THE OASIS CENTRE

The Oasis Centre is located in the heart of East Belfast, on the Castlereagh Road. As an organisation it was funded under PEACE I to convert an old public house.

The project co-ordinators were then successful under PEACE II in securing £441,675 under a number of Measures to fund the following programmes and so build their capacity:

■ First Steps Programme

- for people to get back into life long learning or employment. For a lot of people the thought of formal education would be a complete turn off. Learning is on a one to one basis looking at a holistic level (Measure 1.3 New Skills and New Opportunities).

■ Kids' Club

- provision of quality childcare for 24 4-11 year olds within a structured environment. Activities offered will include computers, arts & crafts, cookery, drama, games, puzzles, music, circle time, structured play etc (Measure 1.5 Positive Action for Women).

■ Women into Technology

- this project takes local unemployed women and trains them in ICT to a level where they are able to perform a variety of computer related office duties (Measure 1.5 Positive Action for Women).

■ IT Express

- this project will train 20 unemployed people who have little or no computer skills up to MCP level. This would involve classroom tuition followed by work placement. This qualification is recognised and required within the IT industry (Measure 1.3 New Skills and New Opportunities).

The Oasis Centre also offers a number of diverse programmes that meet the wide range of academic ability in this area and the PEACE II funded projects form an integral part of the projects offered in the centre. In this centre there is a café open to the community and crèche facilities, to encourage people to become involved in their local community. This centre has the potential to become a place where the Castlereagh Road community can come together, mirroring the role the Short Strand Partnership plays in the centre of the Catholic Short Strand. This will take time as "there has been a lot of individualism in the city - but in the last five years a bit of community spirit has started to develop". The Oasis Centre recognises the importance of sustainability. In the Centre a wood-working programme is offered, and there is a potential to sell local wood-work. However under the current PEACE II regulations "if we sell anything we have to take it off our grant - how can we become sustainable?"

The project co-ordinator of the Oasis Centre is of the opinion that there have been a number of difficulties in striving to address the legacy of conflict in this area:

"We are looking for a quick fix, but there is no quick fix. When the feud broke out in 2002 it broke down trust. Now we are only ready to begin to build trust again, but much of this work is determined by forces on the ground."

SHORT STRAND PARTNERSHIP

The Short Strand Partnership is a community centre that has in many ways become the heart of this area” we have a very close knit community everything happens through this centre.”

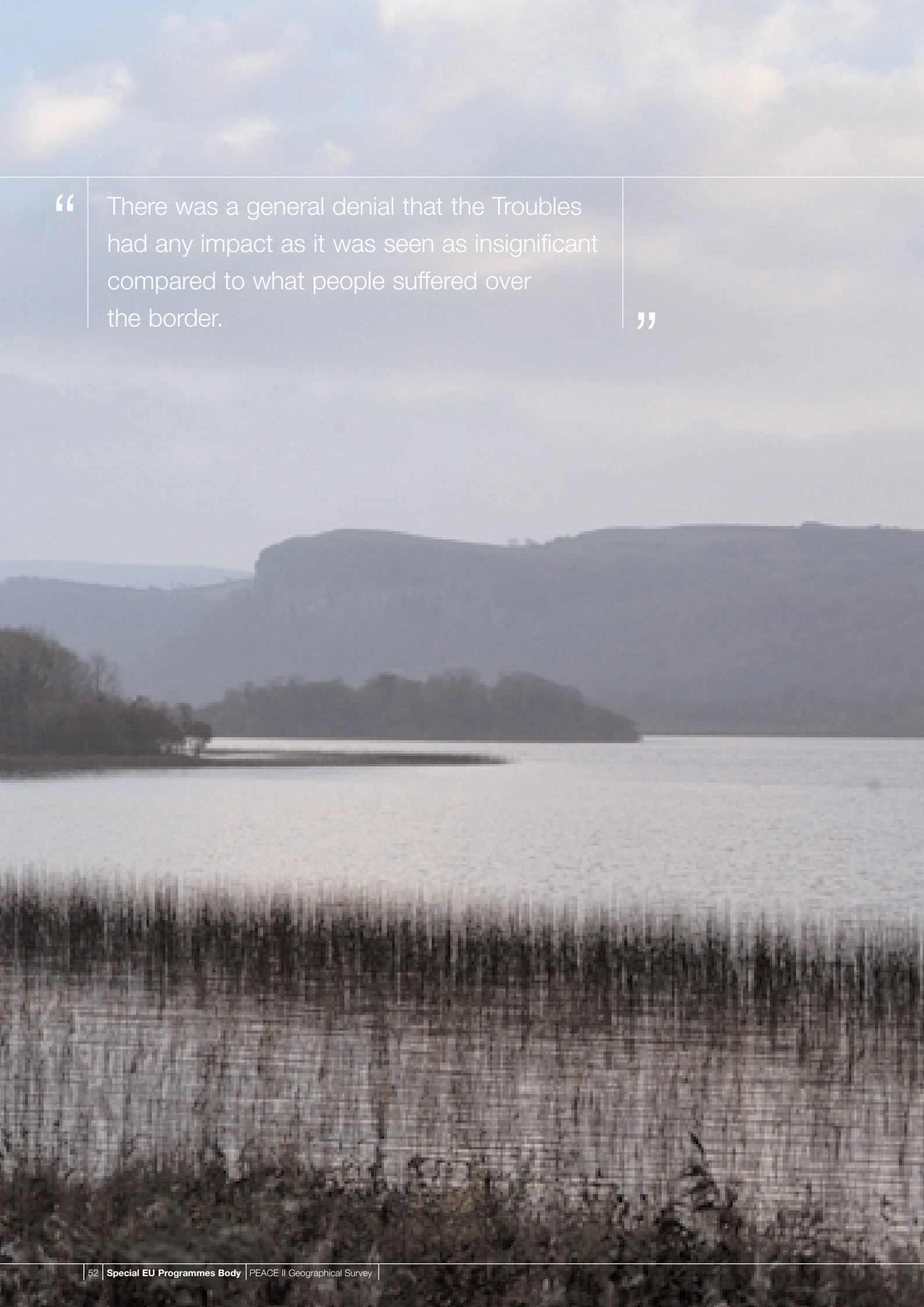
The PEACE II money totalled £590,262 and it has significantly increased the capacity of this project enabling them to continue a number of existing programmes and to begin new programmes. The programmes available include:

- A Youth Victim Support Programme
- Short Strand After School Club
- Ex-prisoners Programme
- Community Economic Regeneration Programme
- Tourism Project
- IT Training Project

The community centre employs forty members of staff and makes a significant positive impact on the lives of people in the area. The sophistication of this centre has been built up over many years of community work, and those involved worked with an ethos of “with PEACE II we know it is important to be creative”. The social economy aspects of PEACE II have been fully captured by the Short Strand Partnership. They want to create employment and bring inward investment into the Short Strand. They currently are involved with running a car park at the Sirocco Works in Belfast.

Through the PEACE II funding, Short Strand also established a partnership with Leitrim Enterprise in County Leitrim. By working with this group they became aware of an outdoor pursuit centre available, and in August 2004 they successfully secured the site. The partnership was also given land at Pottinger’s Quay by Laganside, and is currently in negotiations to enable them to manage twelve apartments that are to be built on this site. If this is successful, the project co-ordinators believe they “could be completely sustainable”. The expertise and dedication within this partnership have enabled the PEACE II funding to make a significant positive impact in this area.

“We have been doing this [peace and reconciliation] for a long time. During 2002, in one week I thought we had lost everything we had built up over twenty years. But thankfully the links did not completely perish and we are beginning to rebuild these links.”



“ There was a general denial that the Troubles had any impact as it was seen as insignificant compared to what people suffered over the border.

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