Removing Peace Walls and Public Policy Brief (1): the challenge of definition and design

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Introduction

The policy 'problem' of segregation and separation in Northern Ireland is self-evident. The majority of children are still educated in religiously segregated schools and the majority of people still live in segregated housing and communities (Nolan, 2014). Such segregation is at its most visually stark when viewed from the high hills surrounding Belfast, with sections of the city physically separated by high walls, metal barriers and concrete blocks. Communities are also divided and separated in less obvious ways, where motorways, shopping centers, dense foliage and/or vacant and derelict landscapes are used define the edge of particular communities. Such conflict related architecture serves as a physical reminder that despite the international acclaim of Northern Ireland as a model for conflict resolution, the region remains profoundly divided. This policy brief critically evaluates the policy formulation, to include the underpinning rationale and definitions, associated with the planned policy objective of the 'removal of all peace walls by 20203' by drawing on research conducted through an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant that looked at peace walls and public policy in Northern Ireland. The yearlong project, which concluded in September 2015, involved academics working in partnership with representatives from the Department of Justice on a range of issues, in leading delivery of the TBUC target of removing all peace walls by 2023. The engagement included a number of discrete quantitative and qualitative research projects and several focused workshops designed to allow key stakeholders inside and beyond the Department to reflect on the requirements for delivery and to bring to light critical issues influencing a successful outcome.

The Social Construction of the Peace Wall Problem

Policy problems are often 'socially constructed' and this means that they reflect either social, ideological or moral values about what is considered right or wrong with a society. As Peter Dorey points out: 'A change in certain societal values can result in a previously accepted phenomenon, or one whose scale was not fully acknowledged, subsequently being identified or defined as a problem, and this attracting the attention of policy makers' (2005: 8). The building of peace walls from 1969 until the 1990s was regarded as a legitimate response to incidents of violence and disorder within Northern Ireland but by 2013, it had been identified as a problem. The Northern Ireland Executive's *Together: Building a United Community Strategy* (2013) set out a policy objective for the complete removal of all peace walls and barriers by 2023. Their rationale for such a policy priority was that: 'Removing interface barriers and other structures of division will send out an important message that our society is continuing on its journey to peace and reconciliation, but more importantly will bring community benefits. The elimination of these physical reminders is necessary in progressing as a community and facilitating the reconciliation that has been prevented for so long through division'. However, an uncomfortable statistic from the OFMDFM 2012 peace walls survey indicated that 69% of those living closest to the walls believe that the walls must remain (for now) because of the potential for violence (Gormley-Heenan et al, 2013) suggesting that residents believed that walls remained the most viable form of protection from the other community. The removal of the peace walls may, at least in a normative sense, be seen as the ultimate act of reconciliation between two communities who have traditionally prioritized separation over sharing but the current framing of the peace walls policy lags far behind this sentiment and has been unable to convincingly answer the question of exactly *why* the walls should come down. *This is the first problem policy-makers face: articulating a clearer rationale for why the walls need to come down.*

What Does the Policy Objective Mean - 'Removal of All Peace Walls by 2023'?

The policy objective' seems simple: 'the removal of all peace walls by 2023'. However, upon closer interrogation almost every word is subject to interpretation by all interested stakeholders. Firstly, what does 'removal mean'? A generally assumed interpretation might be 'to take something away'. It is different from what we understand by words such replacing, changing, substituting which goes beyond the simple act of taking something away to another act of doing something else beyond this. This begs an important question for policy makers: can any alternations, enhancements, and modifications made to existing peace walls structure constitute a policy 'success' or is actual 'removal' the only measure of success according to the policy objective? Secondly, what does 'all' mean? In other words, how may peace walls make up the total of 'all'? Thirdly, and relatedly, what exactly is a 'peace wall'? The TBUC strategy uses the terminology of peace walls, interface barriers and other structures of division

interchangeably. Only by addressing this third question, can the second question be answered. *This is the second problem that policy-makers face: the lack of clarity in the phrase 'removal of all peace walls'.*

What is definition of a peace wall?

In our 2012 public attitudes survey, and in the absence of any agreed definition elsewhere, we used the terms 'peace walls' and 'peace lines' to cover all kinds of interface barriers that kept communities apart including walls, gates and security fences. Since then it has become clear that conversations need to take place through which an agreed definition of what a 'peace wall' is can emerge. The following questions should frame the discussions with policy-makers. Does the understanding of 'peace walls' include:

- any physical structure which territorially divides distinct communities?
- any vacant space which territorially divides distinct communities?
- any physical structure, originally created by the state in response to perceived and/or violence and disorder?
- any physical structure, originally created by communities, and then reinforced by the state, established in response to perceived and/or violence and disorder?
- any physical structure originally created by communities, and then reinforced by the state, established in response to a specific and evidenced-based security concern?
- any physical structure originally created communities, and then reinforced by the state, that has since been adapted to address and accommodate cultural exclusivity?
- anything physical or otherwise that has the <u>effect </u>of territorially dividing distinct communities?

These questions are important because, in a sense, they help calculate the 'total' number of peace walls that the TBUC strategy seeks to target and create a baseline for the monitoring and evaluation of progress. *This is the third problem that policy-makers face: in the absence of a agreed definition of peace walls which will, by extension, allow the policy objective to have a numeric value placed upon it, it is likely that those tasked with policy implementation will, by necessity, work to their own interpretations of how many walls and barriers there are at present and such an approach may not align with the intentions underpinning the TBUC strategy.*

How many peace walls are there and who owns them?

Clearly, the answer to this question will depend on the agreed definition. The Belfast Interface Project concluded that there were 99 peace walls and other such structures back in 2011. The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, using some other measurement, suggested that there were 48 in his address to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2012. The Community Relations

Council's Peace Monitoring Report (2013) have explained the difference as one whereby 'the Department of Justice (DoJ) only recognises as a peace wall a structure erected by statutory bodies for the purpose of preventing violent hostilities between antagonistic communities' while the Belfast Interface Project defines an interface as 'any boundary line between a predominantly Protestant/unionist area and a Catholic area' (CRC, 2013: 80). The ownership of the various structures is divided primarily between the Department of Justice (58) and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (17) though a range of other agencies and actors also have ownership of particular structures. There appears to have been no discussion around the creation of a more centralized system to manage the policy objective of the removal of all peace walls by giving authority and ultimate responsibility to one department. Policy makers might need to reflect on the benefit of the current fragmented system and why it has been sustained rather than reformed. *This is the fourth problem that policy-makers face, particularly those policy-makers located within DOJ: are they responsible for the removal of 'all' peace walls, or only those erected by statutory bodies? If it is the former and not the latter, how do they propose to deal with those owned by private landlords (7) and those whose ownership is unknown (4)? How do they propose to deal with those by other government departments and do they have the remit to instruct other government departments on issues of removal (e.g. Department of Regional Development (3) and Department of Social Development (1).*

What function do peace walls serve?

A review of the various walls, barrier and other structures identified by the DOJ, NIHE and BIP raises some questions about the function which they serve in 2015. Over time, the function of some peace walls has changed due to demographic changes, planning decisions and urban redevelopment. It is only in understanding their <u>current</u> function that a holistic policy can be designed to address the possibility of their removal. Indeed, it is possible, that despite any accepted definition of a peace wall, they may have much greater functionality than their original purpose. It is this additional functionality that will complicate any policy design process. The most commonly cited function of a peace wall is to prevent or reduce a risk of inter community violence. However, they might also serve to prevents or reduce anti-social behaviour from elements within the community. Alternatively, they might reflect a social policy objective other than that of security and/or safety – for example, some may serve as an additional traffic calming measure in an area or a boundary wall that is locally accepted. In some instances, listed structures might simply have become part of the urban architecture and are no longer even recognized as a peace wall. If the peace walls serve functions beyond the separation and segregation of the two main communities in Northern Ireland, can these be considered in any hierarchical sense (primary and secondary function)? How would such functionality be ascertained? If its primary function is NOT safety/security related, should responsibility for its removal lie with the current lead department (DOJ)? This may require some rethinking of what constitutes a 'peace wall' and then, by extension, who should be responsible for it. A peace walls, barriers and structures typology should be created and all existing structures classified within this typology. *This is the fifth problem that policy-makers*

face: any attempt at reclassifying walls, structures and barriers to align more clearly to their current function, rather than the purpose for which they were originally designed could be interpreted as a cynical attempt to massage government targets rather than a necessary root and branch reflection on the nature and scale of the policy problem.

What are the implications for the TBUC Programme Board?

It is clear that the TBUC Strategy, as it relates to the issues of peace walls, needs some policy redesign though not necessarily dramatic change. This is because the roots of policy success or failure can often be traced back to the design phase. In identifying some problems with the design and the articulation of the policy objectives regarding Northern Ireland's peace walls, there is an opportunity for the TBUC Programme Board to give further clarification to the objectives. Without such clarification, we will have designed this aspect of the TBUC strategy to fail. This can be reduced to three main areas for consideration:

A need for linguistic precision. There is a need for greater clarity in the terminology used to discuss peace walls, particularly as it relates to government strategy. We suggest that the Programme Board may wish to consider the TBUC phrase 'the removal of all peace walls' as an example of this - What does 'removal' mean? Is an environmental redesign of a wall the same as removal? What does 'all' mean – how many are all? Who will determine the list/numbers? What does 'peace wall' mean – does it include contested space and vacant/derelict land or does it not?

A recognition of scale. There is a need for greater clarification on the scale of the issue as well as the development of an AGREED list of peace walls which all engaged stakeholders recognise. There remains inconsistency between various sectors and agencies when reporting the scale of the problem which can lead to inaccurate stories promoted by the media (for example, that there have been more peace walls built since the Good Friday Agreement than before). It is recommended that a detailed list of peace walls is circulated between all stakeholder until an agreed and definitive list is developed with lead responsibilities identified;

A decision on ownership. There is a need for a conversation and decisions to be taken around the ownership of these peace walls, once identified and agreed. Should they, for example, be located within and owned by one department rather than spread across a range of different stakeholders? Would this make for a simpler implementation process? If so, how could this be actioned?

Conclusion

Successful policy implementation can only occur when policy-makers have been clear about the nature of the problem. In its simplest form, the government strategy suggests that peace walls are the problem and removal is the solution. However, for 69% of those living closest to

the walls, the potential for violence is the problem and the maintenance of peace walls (at least for now) is the solution (Gormley-Heenan et al, 2013). Reconciling these positions needs to begin at the design stage.

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Removing Peace Walls and Public Policy Brief (2): the challenge of delivery

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Introduction

This policy brief explores the challenges of delivering on the target of removing all Peace Walls by 2023 by drawing on research conducted through an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant that looked at peace walls and public policy in Northern Ireland. The yearlong project, which concluded in September 2015, involved academics working in partnership with representatives from the Department of Justice on a range of issues, in leading delivery of the TBUC target of removing all peace walls by 2023. The engagement included a number of discrete quantitative and qualitative research projects and several focused workshops designed to allow key stakeholders inside and beyond the Department to reflect on the requirements for delivery and to bring to light critical issues influencing a successful outcome.

What are the structures for delivering the TBUC strategy on Peace Walls?

On 23 May 201, the Northern Ireland Executive published 'Together: Building a United Community.' (TBUC)[1] designed to ' improve community relations and continue the journey towards a more united and shared society.'[2] Under the umbrella of 'Our Safe Community' the Executive announced a 10-year Programme to "reduce, and remove by 2023, all interface barriers" underpinned by the 'key objective' "to have no interface barriers by 2023." TBUC

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[1] http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community
[2] http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/executive-statements/statement-090513-together-building.htm

set a shared aim of creating "a community where everyone feels safe in moving around and where life choices are not inhibited by fears around safety" and "to build a culture where people feel comfortable to report when they have been the victim of intimidation or harassment."[3] In the words of the strategy document: "Removing interface barriers and other structures of division will send out an important message that our society is continuing on its journey from conflict and segregation to peace and reconciliation, but more importantly will bring community benefits."

The strategy came with elaborate delivery structures. Political leadership and co-ordination was reflected in a Ministerial Panel "comprising all Ministers from the Executive in addition to senior representatives from a range of statutory agencies, including local government and community partners." From the outset, the Executive admitted that the Peace Walls target could only be achieved with "the full and active participation of all relevant Departments and statutory agencies" promising to ensure that there was "an appropriate level of support and engagement within relevant government Departments, within key statutory agencies, and in the police and other agencies responsible for safety and security". The Panel was to develop detailed action plans to include key aims, targets and milestones and assign resources and responsibilities to each target and to hold Ministers and agencies accountable for the actions and targets in their areas of responsibility.

Strategic consistency was to be matched with flexibility and engagement at local level. The Executive acknowledged that successful delivery would require local engagement "based on the need for inclusivity, involving community representatives and local residents, and recognising the need to take account of the local context" and committed to working actively with local representatives "to address the underlying issues, attitudes and mindsets that have the potential to perpetuate division."

Co-ordination was to be achieved through an Inter-agency Group (IAG) designed to create a "more strategic approach to how interventions are designed and resources allocated" and co-ordinated with work commissioned in relation to youth interventions. While reporting to the Ministerial Panel on progress, the IAG was tasked with:

- responding to requests for the transformation of an interface structure coming from engagement with the community;
- drawing together the separate strands of activity in different Departments, Agencies and community organisations; and
- looking for new opportunities and develop action plans for individual areas.

DoJ was designated as lead Department in relation to the Pace Walls target in 2013 supported by an IAG consisting of representatives of DoJ, OFMdFM, the Departments of Social

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[3] http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf

Development (DSD), Employment and Learning (DEL), Regional Development (DRD), Education (DE) and Health and Social Services (DHSSPS), the Police Service (PSNI), Housing Executive (NIHE), Belfast City Council (BCC), Community Relations Council (CRC) and International Fund for Ireland (IFI). Community Engagement was addressed by giving formal recognition to the existing Interface Community Partners (ICP) group, co-ordinated by CRC and consisting of community representatives from interface communities across Northern Ireland, including some from areas outside Belfast.

How will this be resourced?

According to the TBUC strategy, "Local communities around the interface will be encouraged to come together and decide if they want to be part of this programme. If there is agreement to become part of the programme then the area immediately surrounding the barrier will be able to avail of a range of support and help over a 10 year period." [4] The Executive committed to an Interface Barrier Support Package of unspecified size "designed to encourage communities to come together and agree to take action". Funding was promised for:

- Community capital and project grants;
- Employing community interface workers to put together plans, ensure implementation of key actions and support the local community to create the conditions to reduce and remove barriers over an agreed and specified time frame;
- Create funding resources for a community forum at each interface to ensure implementation and monitoring; and
- Establish a Capital improvement package to change and improve the barrier while developing a phased opening strategy.

The Executive also promised to identify assets within interface areas and at contested spaces "that can be transformed from places of division and separation to places of sharing and mutual enjoyment" and an approach which would 'design out crime' through community policing and inter-agency partnership.

In practice, the identification of resources has presented a considerable challenge. TBUC focuses much more on the efficient targeting of existing funding delivery than on additional resources. While there is a promise to ensure that Strategic Investment and Delivering Social Change strategies also address TBUC issues, there is no commitment to additional resources in a context of reducing public spending.

The most explicit funding commitments are to ensure that the EU PEACE IV programme reflects the priorities of the programme. TBUC proposes a funding coordination group made

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[4] http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf p7

up of representatives from government and external funders "to ensure the strategic targeting of good relations funding activity in line with the priorities outlined in this Strategy." [5]

To date, the primary vehicle for resources targeted at removing barriers has been the IFI Peace Walls Programme, funded by international donors. In January 2012, almost 18 months before TBUC was launched, IFI invested resources amounting by 2015 to over £3.2m in eight projects in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry.

What are the challenges for delivery?

Two years since the launch of TBUC, Ulster University research allowed for critical reflection on progress and identified potential risk and success factors with direct impact on the potential for the delivery of the target:

1. **What effect has the declaration of a specific target for change had?**
Our research suggests that the target is widely seen as the property of the Executive. Among other stakeholders, the announcement of the target to remove all walls by 2023 has had complex effects. While it continues to be regarded as 'ambitious' by some stakeholders, a target also appears to have created suspicion in some communities that the Executive has taken final decisions about the future of barriers out of local hands. While some see a specific target as a means to *accelerate* change at the interface, others regarded as an unhelpful intervention in local initiatives that will delay change.

2. **What milestones are to be achieved on the way?**
Two years after the announcement of the Peace Walls target the number of barriers has not significantly reduced and there is no clear timetable for phased removal, raising fears that pressures will build towards the final deadline and/or less than optimal outcomes. Although the Executive was clear about the final 2023 target, there has been less detail on a phased programme to achieve this. The most significant investment in interface areas was made independently by the IFI Peacewalls Programme which was in operation before TBUC and which was not directly tied to Executive strategy. There appears to be a risk that the stated aims and vision are not matched by detailed action planning including interim milestones.

3. **What are the responsibilities of the Ministerial Panel, the Lead Department and the other members of the Inter-Agency Group and how are they to be evaluated and monitored?**
Currently the Department of Justice has taken an energetic lead in establishing the Peace Walls programme in cooperation with the International Fund for Ireland, which provided the most significant dedicated resource, and meeting other agencies. DoJ's lead role stems from

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[5] http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf p109

the origins of peace walls in security and the Department's ownership of physical structures. Our research suggests that the *removal* of walls inevitably raises significant issues of economic regeneration, community development, cultural pluralism and infrastructural investment outside the vires of a Justice Department. This demands a swift and flexible response from a variety of responsible agencies and continuous engagement with the community. Failure to manage this flexibility at sufficiently senior level and speed runs the risk of delays in delivering change and loss of community confidence. Revisiting and monitoring the performance of delivery structures and the roles and responsibilities of each Department and Agency to ensure they are fit for purpose is crucial if success is to be measured by outcomes for communities.

4. What is the scale of the Barrier Support Programme and how will it be funded and delivered?

The TBUC strategy promises a considerable Barrier Support Programme with both capital and resource implications. While IFI has invested important resources in its Peace Walls Programme, and OFMDFM (including CRC support) has redirected limited support to a variety of programmes no ten-year strategy has yet emerged. While the PEACE IV Programme may provide opportunities, the details and priorities remain uncertain. Currently it appears that the TBUC strategy is highly dependent on external sources of support rather than a priority of domestic policy. Our research suggests that clarity about the scale and purposes of resources could have an important effect in shaping opportunities and expectations.

5. How are the benefits of the 2023 Target articulated and monitored?

While TBUC makes clear statements about the benefits of the plan for wider stability and attractiveness to investment, there is less clarity about the specific benefits that can be expected at local level. While it is obvious that these will vary according to local circumstances, our research suggests that the local consent for change will depend on measurable changes to local wellbeing, including economic, social, security, and educational and environmental benefits. Consent for change to physical structures is in part dependent on expectations about what might be possible following their removal. The delivery of these benefits as part of the removal process will require close co-operation from many agencies.

6. How does uncertainty in the NI Executive affect the delivery of the 2023 Peace Walls target?

Since the announcement of TBUC the Northern Ireland Executive has appeared to be divided on many issues. Disputes over the route of a parade in North Belfast led to widespread rioting and the establishment of a protest encampment. Inter-party talks to address contentious issues chaired by Richard Haass and Megan O'Sullivan broke up in acrimony and without agreement in late 2013. Additional disagreements over budgets led to further talks in 2014. Apparent success proved insufficient to prevent further polarisation

during 2015. Parading disputes and allegations of renewed paramilitary activity led to further talks in Autumn 2015. Uncertainty in politics has been matched by greater tension in inter-community relations at local level. Our research found growing concerns around inter-community issues, evidence of increased suspicion particularly in loyalist communities and renewed questions about paramilitary activity. Engaging communities in a shared vision of safety has proved challenging with many suggesting that TBUC has lacked urgency and priority. Agreement around contentious issues and consistency around associated issues such as cultural disputes, the ending of paramilitarism and available resources would give considerable confidence to local dialogue on options for change.

7. What are the responsibilities of local representatives of the Executive parties in supporting change at local level?

TBUC prioritises community consultation and consent. While the TBUC strategy and interface target was endorsed by all parties in the Executive, our research suggests that there is greater uncertainty and reservations about the target among some local party representatives who might be expected to act as brokers of practical intervention and champions of the aims of policy. In the context of an increased role for local government in planning, identifying clear expectations for local elected representatives would provide a clear link in establishing democratic consent for change.

8. What are the responsibilities of residents, community leaders and interface projects in delivering the TBUC target and how are they to be engaged?

While the TBUC strategy identifies a central role for local communities, our research suggests that the boundaries of 'community' and the level of required consent are vague and confusing. The requirement for co-operation between statutory bodies and local communities in delivering this contentious target requires mechanisms for mutual accountability which are widely accepted and understood, including clear roles for funded interface projects and workers. At present, the question of how community consent is measured and at what point has not been fully articulated leaving potential for confusion and destructive interference.

Conclusions

Our research suggests that the current delivery structures should be reviewed as a matter of priority, to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of all partners are clear and to confirm that they are capable of delivering the Walls set out in TBUC.

Removing Peace Walls and Public Policy Brief (3): the challenge of engaging communities

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Introduction

The NI Executive's current response to peace walls has been shaped by two key documents, which set out their dedication to addressing the issue of physical segregation across Northern Ireland. Firstly, the Programme for Government (2011-2015) has a key commitment to 'actively seek local agreement to reduce the number of peace walls'. Secondly, in 2013 the NI Executive launched its Together Building United Community strategy which put in place a ten year programme to reduce, and remove by 2023 all interface barriers. Furthermore, the document stated that 'Taking down interface barriers is not something that can be achieved without engagement with, consent and support of the people who live there. We must be sensitive to the views and perceptions of residents and balance this against the responsibility on us to create the conditions within which division and segregation can become resigned to the past' (TBUC, 2013).

Underpinning the Executive's approaches to dismantling the physical barriers is the importance of the community. There is a clear and coherent message that no decisions will be taken without the supportive mandate of local residents, and that they are integral to any processes that may result in the removal of the peace walls. More specifically, the policies and strategies refer to community consent and consultation, but provide no guidance as to what these terms mean, or how they can be assessed or measured. Furthermore, the language and rhetoric surrounding the policy recognises the importance of community confidence in any decision-making process, but does not articulate how this should be expressed or ascertained.

This policy brief explores the concept of 'community' by drawing on research conducted through an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) grant that looked at peace walls and public policy in Northern Ireland. The yearlong project, which concluded in September 2015, involved academics working in partnership with representatives from the Department of Justice on a range of issues, in leading delivery of the TBUC target of removing all peace walls by 2023. The engagement included a number of discrete quantitative and qualitative research projects and several focused workshops designed to allow key stakeholders inside and beyond the Department to reflect on the requirements for delivery and to bring to light critical issues influencing a successful outcome.

What do we mean by community confidence?

The emphasis from the NI Executive has always been one, which emphasises the need for community confidence in any process that aims to remove the peace walls. However, there is an absence of understanding around what constitutes 'community confidence' and more importantly, how do you know when it has been reached? What is clear is that the peace walls have come to represent more than simply physical barriers that divide two communities. They have become entangled within wider societal challenges such as the legacy of the past, expressions of culture and identity, along with developing a shared future. Although the walls are located within small geographical areas, local public confidence that might equate to support for any process to remove the walls is potentially shaped by macro political events.

Furthermore, safety and security continue to be two variables (Byrne, et al 2012) that influence how local residents view processes to remove peace walls. Those that reside closest to the walls want to be assured that their homes and families will not be at risk, and that in the absence of a barrier, they will remain safe and not vulnerable. However, the 2014 NI Peace Monitoring report noted that sectarian violence was problematic and that 'in working class communities: paramilitaries are still very much part of today's reality' (Nolan, 2014). Furthermore, the recent announcement from the PSNI Chief Constable, that cuts to the PSNI would 'fundamentally change how and where policing is delivered' (NIPB, 2014) could have a detrimental affect on the communities confidence in formal policing structures addressing community fears around safety in the absence of the peace walls.

Therefore, questions remain from a policy perspective as to what is required to build and maintain community confidence in any process aimed at removing the peace walls. The NI Executive have failed to produce a series of indicators that might provide a framework, in which those tasked with implementing the TBUC strategy can determine whether a community is ready to see the peace walls removed. And from the community's perspective, there is a lack of direction around what variables (micro and macro) specifically link confidence with policy attempts to deliver on the 2023 target.

How is community consent understood?

A key tenant of the Executive's approach to removing the peace walls is the assurance that decisions will only be taken 'with the consent and support of those that live there' (beside the peace walls). However, this position, although well meaning, raises a number of challenges for those responsible in implementing the strategy (Figure 1). Firstly, what exactly does community consent equate to? Does this require the full consensus from everyone that is consulted, or is a simple majority enough? Secondly, who should be included and excluded within any process that is attempting to ascertain levels of community consent? Thirdly, should there be a hierarchy of consent within communities depending on proximity to the peace walls, previous personal experiences of violence and intimidation, and length of time residing in the community. Finally, how can one ensure that any consent given or not given, has been achieved fairly and legitimately, in the absence of threats and intimidation?

**Figure 1: Exploring the meaning of community consent**
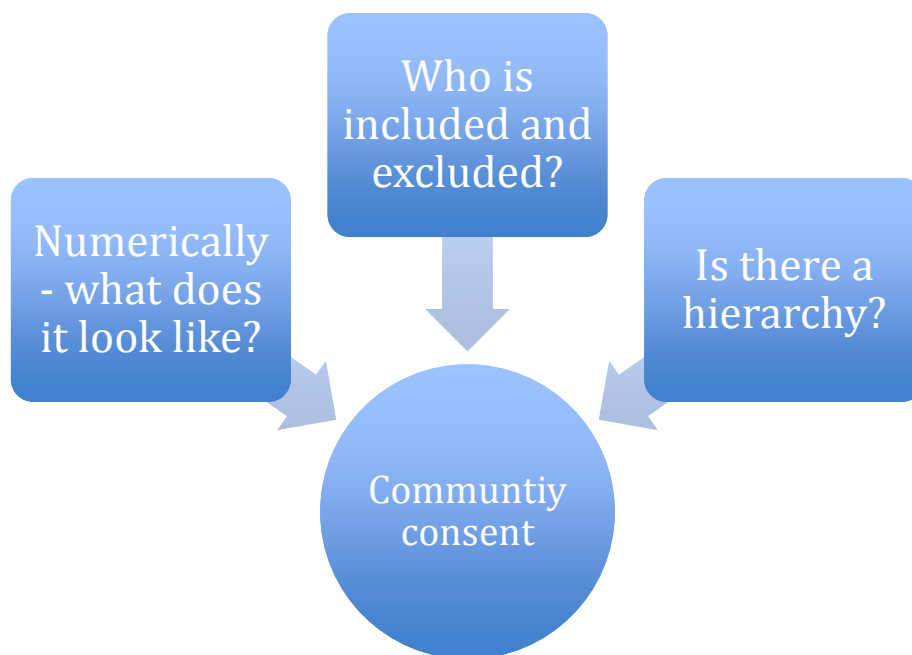
These questions reveal the challenges for those tasked with delivering the 2023 target. The strategy provides no guidance or template that might support departments and community organisations build, sustain, and measure local community consent for the transformation of peace walls. Furthermore, in the absence of any clarification as to what constitutes consent, policy implementers remain unable to provide guarantees that the decision making process has been positively endorsed by the required number of residents.

How does TBUC foresee consultation with communities?

The NI Executive is very clear that any decision-making processes associated with the removal of peace walls must include a consultation with local residents. There is recognition that the 2023 target for the removal of all peace walls will only be achieved through the support of local communities. This will require residents having the opportunity to participate in any process, and contribute views on proposed changes to their local environment. However, there remains a degree of ambiguity as to what is meant by consultation. Recent research by Bell and Young (2013) highlights the complexities that surround developing a model of consultation and reinforces the idea that one aspect of effective consultation is to develop local knowledge to increase levels of engagement and create more informed decisions around options for regenerating or transforming interface communities. The challenge for those tasked with meeting the 2023 target is to ensure that local residents feel included in any process, have been consulted on proposed changes, and are aware of the implications of the policy. However, there is a distinct lack of clarity about what a consultation should incorporate, in the context of engaging with local residents about removing peace walls. The absence of official guidelines raises a series of questions critical to understanding the nature of consultation (figure two).

Figure 2: What to consider prior to commencing a consultation
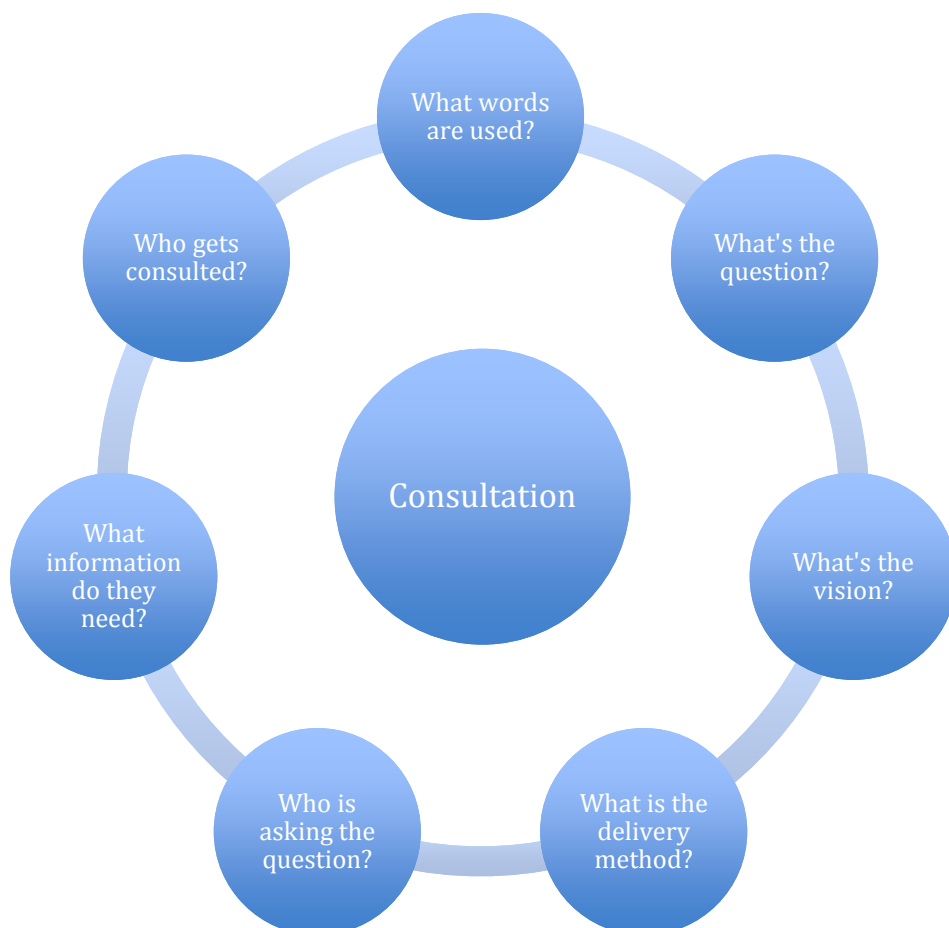
What are we asking people their views on? What is the vision that the Executive is trying to promote that is aligned to the removal of peace walls? What is the most appropriate method of engaging and consulting with local communities to ensure the maximum level of participation? Who is best placed to deliver the consultation, and not be associated with particular agendas? How does one ensure that residents have been well informed to make a series of judgements on complex and emotive issues? What geographical remit should any consultation? And finally, what terms and words should be used to ensure that residents both understand the extent of the consultation, but are not influenced by the structure of the questions?

The ambiguity around consultations simply raises more concerns about the implementation process surrounding the TBUC strategy. Without proper consideration, the consultation process is open to manipulation and could potentially become a tick box exercise, yet it also has the ability to empower communities and place then at the centre of the decision-making process.

What are the implications for the 2023 target?

The TBUC strategy appears to set out a clear and unambiguous target for the removal of all peace walls by 2023. However as policy brief one and two also indicate there appears to be a significant lack of clarity or direction around how exactly this target can be met. This policy brief recognises the importance of 'community' but argues that there is also no understanding or direction about how these community contributions may fit within the overall policy process.

Because of this the NI Executive may wish to reassess their commitment to meeting the 2023 target. In doing so, there needs to be a new policy focus on what consent, confidence and consultation means within the context of having communities central to any process surrounding the removal of peace walls. In light of this the NI Executive should consider developing:

- An official model of consultation (that allows for bespoke approaches) that has been endorsed by the NI Executive and can be adopted by community representatives to ascertain local residents views and positions towards removing peace walls. This will enable maximum participation and ensure that those associated with the process have both the legitimacy and credibility to deliver it.

- A series of indicators to ascertain the relationship between community confidence and the removal of peace walls. Without understanding the different social, political, cultural and economic variables that affect people's views on the future of peace walls, the policy implementers will be unable to seek solutions to address their concerns.

- A clear definition as to what 'community consent' means. In the absence of such clarity, bespoke processes aimed at removing peace walls run the risk of being restricted because of community vetos. There needs to be some form of directive that guides communities around this complex and divisive issue. Furthermore, there is an onus on the NI Executive to put in place appropriate mechanisms to support communities manage incidents where the level of 'consent' is unclear.

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