The Skills Agenda and the Competencies for Managing Diversity and Space


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Brendan Murtagh and Geraint Ellis

The skills agenda and the competencies for managing diversity and space

This paper evaluates skills for managing ethno-religious diversity in the context of regeneration, spatial planning and the pursuit of sustainable communities. It draws on experiences in Northern Ireland to explore the type and range of skills required in a society emerging from prolonged conflict and residential segregation. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for a more direct political engagement with agnostic practice that challenges the technical reductionism implied in generic skills frameworks. Here, the implications for practice outside the region are identified.

Global circuits of capital and knowledge, technology and flexible economies have made spatial change harder to predict and manage. Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) argued that spatial planning, new forms of governance and ‘fuzzy territories’ reveal the complexity of place restructuring and the challenges this sets for planners and urban managers. This is further evidenced by the shift away from the narrow regulatory tradition of land use planning to the more coordinated process of spatial planning, aimed at generating innovative policies and joined-up action at multi-scalar levels (UCL and Deloitte, 2007; Vigar, 2009). Spatial planning was especially important to New Labour’s integrative vision of ‘sustainable communities’, but this challenged the skills mix of the range of professions implicated in its delivery. These were articulated by Sir John Egan (2004), who set out the generic and technical skills that more than a hundred professions should acquire, deepen or transfer in order to create economically, socially and environmentally sustainable places.

The Egan Review acknowledged the need for ‘social cohesion and inclusion’, but did not indicate whether specific skills and practices were required to bring together race, identity and place-making. Moreover, there are inherent policy tensions about how ethnic communities are best sustained, with the State highlighting the need to challenge segregation and parallel lives (Home Office, 2001), a view reinforced in the recent Conservative Party General Election Manifesto, which commits to ‘strategies for national integration to build a stronger more united society’ (Conservative Party, 2010). Others are critical of the cohesion agenda as it relegates ethnic identities...
Robinson, 2005) and fails to acknowledge the advantage of clustering for marginal communities (Sivanandan, 2006).

This paper explores the problems and potential of ethnic space and the particular skills set that might more effectively address the challenge of territory and deepening patterns of segregation. Drawing on the experiences of Northern Ireland, it identifies transferable skills, knowledge and learning that might be applied to other sites where poverty and segregation intersect to produce especially ‘wicked problems’. The next section sets the context by examining the nature of ethnic segregation and contested cities and how the social construction of territory presents distinctive skills challenges. There have been a number of critical accounts of the connection between skills, practice and ethnicity and this article highlights their relevance to Northern Ireland. Three case studies explore various dimensions to practice in order to identify workable and transferable ideas as well as explaining the limits of place contingent interventions. The final section introduces an initial attempt at describing the skills that might better articulate the linkages between segregation, sustainable communities and spatial planning.

Managing contested cities

Ethnic division and especially the intersection between poverty and racial minorities in concentrated urban geographies is an increasingly important feature of global urbanism (Ireland, 2008). Moreover, these processes have attracted attention from planners and urban managers, especially about how to ‘steer’ through the multiple and often unpredictable crises they engender. The instability of the banlieue, race riots in Britain and the ‘fractal neighbourhoods’ of inner-city America underscore the transnational quality of these patterns and the dangers they present to community cohesion and urban sustainability (Squires and Kurbin, 2006). The disconnected nature of these places creates inefficiencies in the use of land and assets, reproduces cycles of exclusion and strengthens the prospects for racism and suspicion (Soja, 2000).

However, these patterns are not fixed and as new populations assimilate, via labour and housing markets, the nature of urban segregation also changes. Musterd and De Vos (2007) noted that between 1994 and 2004 Moroccan and Turkish segregation decreased in Amsterdam as they assimilated and made progress economically as well as socially. Indeed, in their work on Dutch segregation, Gijasberts and Dagevos (2007) pointed out that contact between non-Dutch migrants and the indigenous population in new high-value housing markets had a strong positive impact on community attitudes and social closure.

In Scandinavian countries, this type of integrative process is expressed in formal planning documents and city strategies. For example, the Metropolitan Development Initiative (MDI) in Sweden is an urban regeneration policy that aims to promote
economic growth and to break socio-economic, ethnic and discriminatory segregation. The key elements of the approach include: a spatial focus on deprived neighbourhoods; integrated management across the public and private sectors; a dedicated programme budget; a strategy endorsed by signed contracts between actors; and a commitment to community consultation (Andersson, 2006).

The Fair Housing Act (1999) in the United States aimed to outlaw discrimination in housing and at the same time produce racially diverse neighbourhoods. While progress on this agenda has been slow, the investment in policy instruments provides valuable lessons for local practice (Farrell, 2008). ‘Moving To Opportunity’ (MTO) was established in five cities as an explicit desegregation initiative, especially in African-American inner-city housing projects. MTO involved the use of Section 8 Vouchers, coupled with advice and personal counselling to support movers into mixed, often suburban neighbourhoods. Section 8 Vouchers allowed participants to find and lease accommodation in the private rented market but at a rate subsidised by Federal government. Varady and Walker (2000) found that where the initiative had been implemented, it improved living conditions, personal satisfaction levels, employment prospects and educational performance. Nyden et al. (1998) made an important distinction between initiatives that promote ‘diversity by direction’ and market-driven ‘diversity by circumstance’ outcomes. In the latter, mixing is a product of middle-class gentrification that creates new forms of social segregation, although this is often characterised by a stronger ethnic mix. The point about these initiatives is that they question the inevitability of ethnic clustering and enclaving via housing management processes that create different spatial outcomes. These can be positive or negative, but in the context of sustainable communities the capacity to intervene and the skills required to produce balanced places turns attention on the role of professionals and the ontologies that inform their practice (Yiftachel, 2009).

There has been a series of reviews of the implications of race for British planning policy and professional ethics (CRE/RTPI, 1983; Krishnarayan and Thomas, 1993) and a regular academic engagement with the issue (Thomas, 2008). These have established a close relationship between cultural identity, ethnicity, place and land use regulation and they highlighted how insensitive policies in planning, regeneration and related fields can compound discrimination. Despite this, there has been comparatively limited engagement with ethnicity in mainstream development planning and development control practices, leading Thomas to conclude that:

There is every reason to suppose that among planners in general there is a poor understanding of the link between race, equality and planning and often very little incentive to improve matters. For all of the worthy statements about diversity (and indeed sustainability) in planning policy at most governmental levels, there is no doubt that in most locales planning remains centrally wedded to supporting the economy. (Thomas, 2008, 14)
Thomas noted how the State’s focus on social cohesion and shared British values, made in response to heightened inter-community tensions, is discordant with the more established goals of race equality and multiculturalism. Fenster and Yacobi (2005) suggested that planners interpret space technically, in a detached, unemotional way, represented in mapping, measuring and statistical description. This tends to sideline alternative ways of reading place, so that some areas described by planners ‘at the margins of the city’ may actually be valued by ethnic communities because they contain central services and the kinship networks that offer welfare and communal support (Fenster and Yacobi, 2005, 197).

A number of writers (Hillier, 2007; Reeves, 2005; Sandercock 2000) argued that planning skills in a multi-cultural society should aim to value and understand difference and embrace the claims that ‘others’ make within policy systems. For Hillier this means explicitly challenging notions of ‘true and false’, ‘them and us’ and ‘order and chaos’ as ‘such a binary “Eurocentric” view of “fact” and “knowledge” is imperalist, self-legitimating rather than self-reflexive, thus displacing and hystericising “other” minority ethnic knowledges’ (Hillier, 2007, 83). In this context, Pløger (2004) persuasively argued that planners need to reject the problematisation of ethnic claims via collaborative planning methods that are aimed at order and consensus when, in reality, neither exist. Here, he draws a distinction between ‘antagonism’ and ‘agonism’ using the concept of strife. Strife is the ‘expressive form of agonism, and essential to disputes about words said and written and therefore to meaning, schemes of significance, interpretations and discourses in play’ (Pløger, 2004, 75). The problems created by agonism cannot be made to disappear by laws and judicial interpretation, but should instead provoke new ways of thinking about power, conflicts and ‘how to make strife the constitutive centre of planning’ (Pløger, 2004, 75). According to Flyvbjerg (2004, 295), this will involve a number of components, including:

- focus on values;
- place power at the core of analysis;
- get close to reality;
- emphasise ‘little things’;
- look at practice before discourse;
- study cases and contexts;
- ask ‘how to?’ narrative;
- move beyond agency and structure – look at the key actors in the planning system and what they do in practice; and
- do dialogue with a polyphony of voices.

Those involved in sustainable communities, therefore, need to appreciate the distinctive claims of black and ethnic minorities and ensure that their needs are acknowledged beyond the predicable tokenism of mainstream planning systems (Bollens,
2008; Booth et al., 2004; Ellis and McWhirter, 2008). However, there is evidence that some of these issues are being detected in skills and practice especially in response to the riots in northern British cities in 2001. The Home Office (2001) identified and analysed the factors that work together to create place based tensions, which include:

- weak political leadership, resulting in an absence of an agreed vision and lack of trust in public institutions solving local problems;
- poor joint working between community, faith and business leaders and ineffective representation of the communities they serve;
- lack of adequate social, recreational, leisure, sporting and cultural activities for the young can breed frustration and anti-social behaviour;
- inter-community resentments stemming from competing for regeneration resources – winners and losers;
- regeneration funding not meeting black and ethnic minority (BME) communities’ needs and BME communities being under-represented in regeneration;
- decline in traditional employment opportunities and obstacles preventing some BME communities from successfully engaging in the labour market;
- situations where communities exist in isolation one from another and in ignorance of one another’s culture and values; and discrimination and fear of racist victimisation.

This list emphasises the importance of an integrated response that cuts across physical development, economics and culture and the claim is made that spatial planning provides a framework for connecting these in pursuit of sustainable communities (ASC, 2006; COMEDIA and ASC, 2006). Booth (2006) argued that spatial planning has created a new energy around equality by explicitly identifying communities of exclusion as a target for intervention. He pointed out that success depends on the attitudes and culture operating within planning organisations, which in turn needs to move beyond the procedural basis of theory and practice.

Practice in England on ‘Community Cohesion’ highlights the methodologies for preparing neighbourhood strategies that involve: the need for baseline research and participatory consultation; integrated government service delivery; and developing inter- and intra-community contacts. The suggested elements of the approach include:

- appoint a senior champion to lead on Community Cohesion;
- promote the principles of Community Cohesion through workshops and seminars;
- use public authorities’ race equalities schemes to help achieve Community Cohesion through their positive promotion of race equality;
- involve the whole community – BME and White communities – at the outset;
- establish a baseline of the communities and Community Cohesion in your areas;
- agree and publish a Community Cohesion Vision;
• provide time and resources to enable effective community engagement to take place;
• develop projects and programmes that are likely to promote Community Cohesion rather than to reinforce community separation and tensions, e.g. through competitive bidding;
• engage mainstream service providers in reviewing services and pursuing Community Cohesion, e.g. the take-up of services, relevance, barriers to take-up;
• ensure housing policies and processes do not support discriminatory practices; and
• review employment and unemployment for all sections of the community in order to establish a baseline and to introduce targeted interventions. (Community Cohesion and Race, www.renewal.net, originally accessed in 2007)

Lownsborough and Beunderman (2007) pointed out that the sustainable communities agenda invites such complexity that the linkages between regulatory planning, urban regeneration and community development are difficult to unravel. They suggested that there needs to be a focus on the creation of actual integrated spaces that will create opportunities for reciprocity between a mix of identities. These include, for instance:

• exchange spaces: places where people exchange ideas, information and goods;
• productive spaces: used by people engaged in activities to grow or create goods;
• spaces of services provision: support services are run from these spaces, either by statutory or voluntary providers;
• activity spaces: where people gather for leisure, such as for play, sport or informal events;
• democratic/participative spaces: for shared decision-making or governance;
• staged spaces: ‘one-off’ special occasions where people are brought together for a specific purpose;
• in-between spaces: places which are located between communities; and
• virtual spaces: non-physical spaces, such as those created online by social networking sites. (Lownsborough and Beunderman, 2007, 52–53)

The essence of sustainable communities is to see their production as an integrated effort with planners, urban managers and cohesion experts working in reinforcing ways to tackle segregation and its corrosive effects (COMEDIA, 2007). Much of this centres on our capacity to legitimise less powerful interests and to interpret their knowledge in more democratic and accountable ways (Beebeejaun, 2004). The skills to manage difference, translate weakly articulated claims to policy producers and to elevate the everyday experience to the formal world of decision-making are critical dimensions in this endeavour.
Rydin et al. (2007) identified a difference between empirical, process, predictive and normative knowledge reflecting a range of epistemologies and methods. The problem for planners is that normative knowledge is favoured in professional routines and thus, technical skills are promoted in planning education and practice. Bailey (2005) is similarly critical of the skills–knowledge nexus and how and where learning is practiced by planners:

The theory of situated learning suggests that the learning process needs to be grounded in a thorough understanding of the social, cultural and political context and that more effective learning takes place informally through knowledge transfer, learning by example and informal mechanism such as work shadowing and mentoring. (Bailey, 2005, 251)

Like Bailey, Peel (2005) called for a more learner-centred approach, arguing that it is the interplay between education, meaningful work and personal development that are essential for achieving the full potential of individuals. Citizens need to be seen as active co-producers rather than the products of practice. Here, knowledge becomes a resource which planners (and others) use to challenge powerful interests, especially in the property economy in order to democratise decision-making in more effective and inclusive ways (Rydin et al., 2007). They draw on Wenger’s (1998) idea of ‘Communities of Practice’ to highlight the connection between skills, knowledge and learning. Crucial to making these relationships work effectively are ‘knowledge brokers’ whose job is to translate and transform different types of information to the wider practice community:

Translation is important because it enables communicative interaction between members of a network or networks over a knowledge claim. In particular, it enables co-construction both within networks involving heterogeneous actors and at the boundaries between different networks. The process of translating knowledge ensures that it is understandable in different contexts. (Rydin et al., 2007, 368)

Translation is not neutral and the transformation of knowledge from, for example, the context of the technical-professional arena into wider public debate is itself a political exercise (Rydin, 2007). The interplay between ethnicity, place and sustainable communities is characterised by tensions between: the legitimisation of difference and the desire to avoid the injustices of separation; the skills of planners and the priorities of community activists; the knowledge set of the policy community and how they value local claims; and between planners and partner professions involved in spatial planning (Carling, 2008). The next section explores these issues by examining responses to ethno-religious diversity and managed attempts to address a range of spatial circumstances from: single identity paramilitarised communities; interface areas; and finally, state-led attempts to construct integrated social housing estates.
Reflecting on practice: case study analysis

The case studies were selected to reflect on practices in three areas led by: (i) an NGO (Communities in Transition), (ii) the community sector (Suffolk Interface) and (iii) a statutory body (Carran Crescent). This choice involved embedded case studies within a single case study design, whereby selection was based on different sites reflecting alternative dimensions to the same area of inquiry (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As noted above, this involved a continuum from segregated single identity communities, through to an interface area and finally to a mixed religion neighbourhood. Each case involved: an analysis of secondary data; an interrogation of relevant policies and programmes; and a structured programme of in-depth interviews with community, statutory and private sector representatives. In total, 19 interviews were completed across the three studies and a questionnaire census was undertaken with the 20 residents of Carran Crescent.

Case study 1: Communities in Transition

The Communities in Transition Model (CIT) was developed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) based on their understanding of ‘weak community infrastructure’. The notion of soft infrastructure emerged in the context of EU Peace and Reconciliation funding and considerable Structural Funds investment in the ‘hard’ infrastructure of transport, IT hardware and industrial development. The shift in programme delivery toward a stronger engagement with communities and reshaping of local governance exposed weaknesses in the competence and organisational capacity of the voluntary sector in particular:

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

This is essentially what the Scottish Skills Framework (SCR, 2004) categorised as process competencies and the CIT programme involved work with 10 neighbourhoods where community capacities were weak or were linked with high rates of paramilitarism. Here, the empirical emphasis was placed on mapping and defining the tensions that formed strife conditions and reduced prospects for regeneration and collaborative working. The baseline analysis involved: interviews with community activists, politicians and paramilitaries; household surveys that captured voices behind local elites; and small area statistics on deprivation and religious segregation. Table 1 shows that the analysis moved beyond contextual descriptions to analyse the ‘agonistic’ character
Table 1 Community tensions in areas of weak community infrastructure

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intercommunity</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Territoriality and segregation between Protestant and Catholic areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>Demographic restructuring whereby some Catholic neighbourhoods grow and pressurise declining Protestant communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latent</td>
<td>Each community develops and occupies mutually exclusive inter-engagement spaces, such as the Orange Order and the Gaelic Athletics Association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intracommunity</td>
<td>Paramilitary</td>
<td>Paramilitary feuding for ‘turf’, legitimacy or criminality implodes some neighbourhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Political interests use and abuse local people, often for narrow sectarian purposes.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>This is especially manifest in tenurial differences between social renting and owner occupiers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Gatekeepers</td>
<td>This occurs when an individual or group prohibits information, resources or other forms of support from reaching an area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-social</td>
<td>Underage drinking, drug abuse, vandalism, graffiti, intimidation, and verbal or physical abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External interference</td>
<td>Government funding criteria and externally delivered programmes can dictate the development agenda without being sensitive to local conditions.</td>
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Source: Authors analysis based on CFNI (2007).

of local dynamics, which form development obstacles. These relate to demographics and resource competition over territory and the role of extant paramilitaries who regulate the type and quality of contacts within but crucially out-with the community.

The model developed a rationally based, eight-stage framework that is potentially portable to different areas and issues (see Figure 1). Step 1 involved area profiling and a description of baseline conditions using GIS data, public consultations and an analysis of policies and programmes affecting the neighbourhood. Step 2 concentrated on developing local relationships especially in a way that addressed the intra-community tensions between groups and interests. An evaluation of the level of support for a local community development project was conducted in Step 3, which involved a process of negotiation and bargaining to set the terms of reference for an Action Plan. An outcome from this process of mediation was the establishment of an initial group, which is Step 4. This forming process involved practical tasks such as setting up a committee, staffing and ensuring members reflect the wider collective of interests. Step 5 involved the preparation of a needs assessment and developed indicators to help articulate organisational aims and objectives. In Step 6, the group was assisted to develop the Action Plan which identified the projects to be delivered and resources to be drawn down on a longer and more secure basis. Step 7 described monitoring and
evaluation systems and how practice is shared with similar communities and finally arrangements for the longer term delivery of the Action Plan are described in Step 8.

The strength of this process is its capacity to better clarify the legitimacy of different stakeholders and identify community views of local development needs. Mapping the structures of power within the local community also facilitated a deeper understanding of the way in which gatekeeping is practiced by paramilitaries, community development workers and government officials. Identifying how resources and activities are controlled by elites is clearly only part of the problem and fundamentally, the 10 estates are as poor as they were at the start of the process 5 years ago. The value of the CIT approach is the way in which it used knowledge, not as a description of fairly obvious conditions of social disadvantage but to expose and name sectarian practices, especially where it reduced the potential for transformation and cross-community engagement.

Figure 1 Communities in Transition model
Source: Based on CFNI (2007, 19–22)
Case study 2: Suffolk–Lenadoon Interface, West Belfast

Suffolk is a small Protestant housing estate surrounded by the greater west Belfast Catholic housing market, formed as the massive population shifts of the 1970s left residualised pockets of minority enclaves bounded by protective ‘peace lines’. Against this backdrop, a community group in Suffolk and another in Catholic Lenadoon agreed a Peace-building Plan for the interface zone in 2007, supported by the US based Atlantic Philanthropies. The Plan built upon decades of patient, high-risk micro-contacts which slowly developed to deepen the sense of trust between community activists. Initial contacts started in the late 1980s over the need for traffic lights on the main Stewartstown Road, which is the effective dividing line between Suffolk and Lenadoon. An existing Lower Lenadoon Housing Group and its full-time development worker suggested a joint approach in which both the Suffolk and Lenadoon residents staged a sit-down protest to block the road. The meetings also helped to identify common-cause issues and a realisation in the minority Protestant community that the larger Catholic community was neither threatening nor predatory. Relationships however remained delicate with inter-community conflict flaring up at times of heightened political tension, such as during the dispute over Orange Order marches in the 1990s. The impact of this wider context was explained by a Protestant community worker:

Even though things eventually did die down it looked as if the whole interface initiative was finished. People were interviewed in the media, saying that after what they went through how could they ever be expected to trust the other side. So it did look as though the whole thing was near to collapse. (Quoted in Hall, 2007, 21)

After a period of ‘cooling off’, tentative meetings were resumed but with the risk that issues such as parading had the potential to destabilise relationships. As a result, a mobile telephone network was established among community workers. Here, any signs of violence were identified and dealt with by activists on both sides of the interface, which consolidated trust building between a wider group of community workers. A joint statement helped to prepare both sides to handle disputes and laid the foundation for further cross-community dialogue. This re-engagement led to the formation of the Suffolk–Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG) to deal with two very specific issues: the need to address the physical environment of the Stewartstown Road interface; and the development of durable cross-community governance structures.

A company was formed called the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project, managed by four members of the Lenadoon Community Forum, four from the Suffolk Community Forum and four independent members recruited for their expertise in urban regeneration. The company focused on a single project to rebuild a two-storey block of shops and offices on the Stewartstown Road: retailing on the ground floor generated commercial rent, while the upper storey was allocated for offices for the
community groups. The development of the project was supported by an external facilitator to help address the legal, financial and constitutional aspects of the project, which also set out rules on the use of symbols, flags and emblems and processes for dealing with inter-community conflict.

The next challenge involved bringing the wider communities on board using public presentations of the plans on both sides of the divide. The SLIG group highlighted the role of women in this activity, especially in Suffolk, where they negotiated with Loyalist paramilitaries and a fairly fatalistic community, often at considerable personal risk:

These women were all very vocal and made themselves very unpopular with some of the things that they said and some of the things they did, but they were prepared to step out and try something. (Protestant community worker in Suffolk, quoted in Hall, 2007, 26)

Despite these reservations, a public meeting produced almost unanimous support for the project as a win–win solution to local development needs. Funding for the project came from the government and the International Fund for Ireland and when implemented, the new centre completely reshaped the interface, physically and socially. The police reported a significant drop in interface violence, the rental units were fully occupied and commercial confidence was reflected in the construction of a new retail store on an adjacent site on the Stewartstown Road. The project gained additional momentum with a new 50 place childcare centre supported by EU PEACE funding. This lead to the Peace-building Plan as a physical statement agreeing the use of contested spaces and development priorities:

The Plan will respect the positions and values of each community while specifically seeking to:
• identify shared spaces that can be accessed by both communities;
• identify activities that are required to provide security and build confidence within and between communities; and
• identify and respect that some activities, services and spaces will not be addressed in the short term but may form part of future options.

Yet, the physicality of the plan and the way in which it weaves territory, identity and regeneration within a single integrated framework has had little resonance with the Northern Ireland Planning Service. One planning official commented that it ‘is unlikely that this [the Peace-building Plan] would matter much to BMAP’ (the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015, currently at preparation stage). Dealing with problems ‘that there are no answers to’ and which ‘go beyond the capacity of planning to deal with’ explains part of the resistance. Devaluing alternative experiences, with all their strengths and limitations, exposes a wider problem of read-across and learning
within professional planning. The peace line in Suffolk is still there and the Protestant community is still especially vulnerable, but the shortcomings and successes of the intervention have wider educational implications. Closed learning circuits that simply recycle practice among professionals who share similar values and standards are unlikely to create an interdependent understanding about how to act in the face of spatial complexity.

Case study 3: Carran Crescent mixed housing scheme in Enniskillen

The final case study looks at a project to construct a mixed religion social housing estate in Enniskillen in the south west of Northern Ireland. The Housing Executive’s Community Cohesion Strategy aimed to address the problems of the interface, sectarian graffiti on estates and strengthen the stock of integrated housing. Carran Crescent in Enniskillen was designed as the first of a series of shared housing schemes built by a partnership between the Housing Executive and a local housing association. The estate, which is small with 20 units providing a mix of accommodation, was opened in October 2006. The Housing Executive attempted to attain derogation from waiting list procedures in order to micro-manage the balance between Catholics and Protestants in a system not dissimilar to the quota allocations for new recruits to the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The body responsible for equality legislation and compliance, the Equality Commission, refused the derogation, insisting that the points systems based on objective need should be maintained for all housing allocations and transfers. Here, there is an inherent contradiction between systems designed to prevent discrimination and those aimed at promoting better community relations. The Equality Commission insisted that the primacy attached to anti-discriminatory procedures (not least in housing) should not be altered, but this restricted the capacity of the Housing Executive to achieve mixed housing outcomes. Waiting list applicants were allocated on a point basis, but had to actively choose to live in a mixed estate and, as such, voluntarily commit to a Neighbourhood Charter on Good Relations. The Charter contained the following elements:

- respecting neighbours and their property;
- caring for the vulnerable and less fortunate;
- treating everyone in the area as equal regardless of religious, political, cultural or ethnic background;
- responsibility for children and their actions remaining with their parents;
- respecting children’s right to play in a safe and happy environment;
- respecting the environment and striving to keep it clean and tidy with no dumping, no vandalism and no anti-social behaviour; and
• a belief that problems can be resolved in a friendly manner to the satisfaction of everyone.

Demand was exceptionally high, with more than 300 households registering for the scheme. Turnovers have been low, there is an absence of sectarian graffiti or territorial symbols and tenants report high satisfaction with their property, the environment and housing management procedures. The survey of residents showed that 4 out of 5 were satisfied with life in the estate and two-fifths cited its status as a mixed community as the main reason that attracted them to the area. No one intended to leave and two-fifths said that they were planning to buy their property under right to buy legislation. The scheme and in particular the Charter, has attracted wider attention and now three Housing Executive estates, consisting of 150 properties, have adopted it, creating a wider mixed housing market in this part of Enniskillen.

The scheme is, however, vulnerable to transfers, house sales and re-lets and as the Equality Commission made clear, any deviation from waiting list allocation will require legislative change. The experience of the scheme helped to generate wider interest in the concept of integrated housing and in 2007 the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the Housing Executive developed Shared Neighbourhood Programmes in 30 estates to extend the Charter across the public-sector stock. In addition, the scheme has attracted political attention with Margaret Ritchie, MLA, the Social Development Minister responsible for housing in Northern Ireland stating that:

The people of Northern Ireland want it. Eight out of ten people in the recent Life and Times Survey highlighted that they would like to live in mixed areas. It is a very ambitious Programme and the key to it for me, is that it will be community led. When I launched my New Housing Agenda earlier this year, I made it clear that I wanted to provide housing that would bring people together, not keep them apart. This remains a central theme in all my endeavours for Housing and that is why I am delighted to help launch this Programme, starting the first of many schemes. (Ritchie, 2010)

However, as with the Suffolk interface initiative, there is little application or even awareness of these interventions outside housing policy and defining and using the right skills is, as we noted, partially muted by weak learning cultures and systems.

**Implications for skills for ethnic diversity**

These case studies represent only a partial insight into the management of contested space and local development, but they highlight a number of issues relevant to skills, practice and learning. In each case, an appreciation of the landscape of power and resource allocation helped to embed the planning approach in a more engaged and pragmatic response. Descriptions of baseline conditions relied upon formal statistical
Table 2 Transferable lessons for skills-based practice

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<th>Communities in Transition</th>
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<td>• Analysis of the contours of power and the identification of the rules of access, engagement, sites of decision making and how agreements are enforced</td>
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<td>• Getting past gatekeepers, especially within community elites</td>
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<td>• Rational argumentation using evidence to support proposals and challenge vested interests</td>
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<td>• Engineer and value everyday encounters as a basis for reciprocity</td>
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<td>• Questioning the representative capacities motivations and practices of community groups</td>
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<th>Suffolk Interface Strategy</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Leadership and gender politics as a resource in local development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The importance of a physical plan to map and agree decision and make explicit resource allocation decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Confidence building as a prerequisite to action</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Value multiple forms of dialogue to keep communication open within communities and between communities and government</td>
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<td>• Investment matters but endorsement from state, NGOs and even the private sector is vital to build a broadly based consensus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mixed Housing Scheme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How allocative mechanisms such as housing management intersect with equality and rights based legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The value of a Charter that makes explicit agreed codes of behaviour, relationships and sanctions in highly sensitive communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Manage outside influences and events for their capacity to destabilise localised community relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning from experience and transferring practice to other places and problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the relationship between demography and land use zoning in determining and directing mixed housing solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

profiles of social and economic life, but they were accompanied by explicit depictions of tensions, objections and gatekeepers who influenced the pace and quality of development. A more realistic engagement with the sites and practices of power and how strife is resolved to achieve durable local agreements is a central component of skills development. The case studies noted weak understandings of practice-based learning, limited skills transfer and a virtual absence of systems capable of capturing and sharing knowledge. This even affects practices generated within the statutory sector where the mixed housing scheme and interface plans faced obstacles from the Equality Commission and indifference from the planners.

Table 2 sets out the lessons from each case study that are generic and potentially transferable to other sites of contestation nationally and perhaps internationally. It shows that an emphasis is placed on evaluating power structures, often apparently petty in character but which matter to the pace and quality of local development, especially in connecting marginal ethnic communities to their neighbours, labour markets and employment sites. The regulation of these connections by paramilitaries, community groups and even government indifference is important to name and
explain in gaining an understanding of local problems. As the Suffolk case study showed, more democratic forms of participatory planning involved working around sectarians in order to gain some momentum in local development.

Creating multiple forms of dialogue, a capacity to rescue relationships when things go wrong and building reciprocity are critical in maintaining momentum. Cross-community work involves different ways of knowing and speaking in which the everyday encounter, mobile phone networks and formal group meetings are all part of discursive based, collaborative practice. However, the analysis shows that skills to externalise problem solving are also important. Treating ethnic territory in highly internalised ways can reproduce a parochialism, which encourages end-gameing and marginalises a deeper understanding of how government works, how resources are allocated or how housing systems operate in practice.

Table 3 sets out a preliminary attempt to capture what this might mean for skills, knowledge and learning. The Suffolk–Lenadoon Peace-building Plan, the CIT model and the mixed housing scheme followed a broadly rational approach relying on empirical methods to understand what is possible and then developing a programme of action constrained by resources, time, skills and the behaviours of paramilitaries. The framework suggests a tripartite division of skills, essentially concerned with normative rationality but with distinctive competencies required at each stage of the process to facilitate a more pluralist understanding of situated power in ethnic space.

- **Analytical skills** refer to the need to understand the relationship between spatial and ethno-religious change and to map out how various forms of power influence community dynamics. In particular, this aims to locate pressure points, tensions or strife that might inform a more engaged process of local development. Here, the emphasis is on making transparent the value base, motivations and strategies of local actors. The aim is to reveal more objectively what is hidden in, what one local activist called, ‘the shadows of sectarianism’ and the behaviours of extant paramilitaries.

- **Planning skills** are concerned with the treatment of multiple forms of knowledge to map out choices and re-present them in the context of costs and benefits to stakeholders and to authenticate the evidence that claimants offer to support their case.

- **Delivery skills** are concerned with implementation and ensuring that identity, segregation and place are factored into regeneration programmes and local plans. Establishing durable governance structures that cut across identities and create new alliances have the potential to produce different understandings which in turn requires different types of skills.
### Table 3 Skills areas for the development of diversity planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical skills</th>
<th>Planning skills</th>
<th>Delivery skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding the ethno-religious drivers of spatial change</td>
<td>• Understanding the ethno-religious drivers of spatial change</td>
<td>• Understanding the ethno-religious drivers of spatial change</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identifying the locus of power and how power is point to work by economic, paramilitary, political community and state actors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identifying strife pressure points</td>
<td>• Identifying strife pressure points</td>
<td>• Identifying strife pressure points</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Mapping the landscapes of stakeholder power</td>
<td>• Mapping the landscapes of stakeholder power</td>
<td>• Mapping the landscapes of stakeholder power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Territorial mapping including hard and soft boundaries</td>
<td>• Territorial mapping including hard and soft boundaries</td>
<td>• Territorial mapping including hard and soft boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding demographic structure, housing markets, labour markets and the interplay between them</td>
<td>• Understanding demographic structure, housing markets, labour markets and the interplay between them</td>
<td>• Understanding demographic structure, housing markets, labour markets and the interplay between them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participatory processes; giving access to polyphony of voices</td>
<td>• Participatory processes; giving access to polyphony of voices</td>
<td>• Participatory processes; giving access to polyphony of voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Structures and networks; what is possible and where are the gaps?</td>
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<td>• Structures and networks; what is possible and where are the gaps?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying success – building on ‘little things’ and valuing micro-gains</td>
<td>• Identifying success – building on ‘little things’ and valuing micro-gains</td>
<td>• Identifying success – building on ‘little things’ and valuing micro-gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mapping disconnections from labour markets and housing markets</td>
<td>• Mapping disconnections from labour markets and housing markets</td>
<td>• Mapping disconnections from labour markets and housing markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk analysis and contingency planning</td>
<td>• Risk analysis and contingency planning</td>
<td>• Risk analysis and contingency planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Authenticating and validating claims and the strategies, structures and systems for establishing stakeholder legitimacy</td>
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</table>
Conclusions

The skills agenda and indeed, the approach to community capacity-building more generally have created an important debate about how to cope with the complexity of globalisation, macro-economic shifts and demographic restructuring. However, it has also generated toolkits, resources and models that propose a ‘fix’ for a myriad of even the most complex problems. Clearly, solutions are harder to come by, but it is important not to dismiss the conceptual value of frameworks for understanding action and directing the management of more inclusive communities. While Suffolk, Carran Crescent and the CIT model provided interesting insights into different ways of knowing and developing common methods of achieving progress, the experiences have been largely self-contained. Moreover, this is unlikely to change as long as the skills agenda is viewed as an essentially personal task concerned with job related competence. How organisations learn and how ideas around social learning might help to affect a cultural shift towards a co-production of knowledge also needs to be addressed.

Two broad sets of implications emerge from this analysis. First, there a range of substantive skills that might be applied in areas and societies where ethnic space shapes local development. Crucially, these centre on understanding and mapping local power circuits, capitalising on everyday encounters as a basis for collaborative action and understanding how laws, regulation and resource allocation systems impact on the most divided places. While these are patterned by the distinctive politics of Northern Ireland, they are common to a range of sites of contestation and segregation. Secondly, there is a set of generic lessons about knowledge transfer, translational skills and assembling communities of practice to share experience and learning. These modes of skills development are especially important where the practices concerned with ethnicised space find it hard to penetrate the techno-rational professionalism of planners and urban managers.

In a practical sense, the concept of knowledge brokers provides a useful starting point. It is important that those involved in the built environment understand the complexity of community tensions and value the type of knowledge that local activists may offer. The generation and application of data where lay understandings of conflict sit alongside formal descriptions of spatial problems could be further encouraged. The establishment and maintenance of a practice community that tackle disconnects within and between organisations, professionals and geographic areas need to be resourced in order to produce effective social learning outcomes. Here, the universities might provide one source of expertise to develop praxis, collect experiences, deepen learning and create a co-joined approach to knowledge planning. Ultimately a centre comparable with the regional skills centres dedicated to ethno-religious diversity might help to capitalise the experiences of conflict analysis and transformation in Northern Ireland on a more global scale.
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