

# **What are the Factors that Support Sustainable Communities?**

## **A Case Study of an Inner-City Flats Complex.**

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## **Introduction:**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine an inner-city complex with a view to finding out what are the factors that support sustainable communities. To find out to what extent do people in a social housing complex have a sense of agency and identify positively with the complex. These flats have just been rejuvenated and appear to be very stable and settled. However as this is the object of investigation and not a prior given this criterion can only be applied in advance in a rough fashion. Some issues in particular emerge from the literature as being crucial in establishing a basis for investigation, a sense of place or place attachment, the social composition, the physical configuration, the nature and type of interactions that take place there, the networks of support/social and economic, collective mobilisation and the effects of urban renewal on the flats. My endeavour is to further understanding of the way individuals living in social housing construct a personal identity tied to place and to contest alternative meanings, degradations, and the stigma of social housing. Whether by conscious political design or institutional discrimination, social housing represents according to Massey and Kanaiaupuni (1993,p120), a “key institutional mechanism for concentrating large numbers of people within a small geographical space”, intensifying the problems of social isolation and disadvantage. The perception of social housing in Ireland is seen as inferior and generally negative, often stigmatising residents with pejorative labels. In the public eye, inner-city social housing is for people going nowhere characterized by social political and economic marginality. Yet public and scholarly accounts that focus almost exclusively on the social pathologies within social housing often overshadow and direct attention away from

residents efforts to create a meaningful place and community. My aim is to examine if there is a positive side to social housing that challenges the perception of local Authority tenants as no hopers and to see if residents in this flat complex have a sense of themselves as agents and as members of a community bound up with a sense of identity and place.

This research is part of an M.A. degree with the faculty of sociology at NUI Maynooth. The basic task is to acquire an appreciation for the nature of life in social housing and the way residents manage life both experientially and cognitively. My reason for selecting this inner-city flat complex to study is the flats are a high demand complex with a low turnover of residents, reasonably settled social conditions and a long waiting list to get in. In contrast to other flats in the city such as 'Fatima Mansions', which could be thought of as the opposite extreme, a troubled difficult to let estate with great social problems in which almost half the tenants have applied for a transfer elsewhere. Given the small size of the research it cannot claim representativeness in a statistical sense. Dublin Corporation for example, has a large number of small flat complexes (Lord Mayor's Commission on housing, 1993) and a substantial number of these estates would be required to give a proportionate representation of flat complexes in the inner city. Alas this was not possible due to time and resource constraints.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Generally speaking the inner city is the core from which the city expanded. The fact that most of the housing stock was old and in poor condition, was not the only problem. They were built several stories high, to achieve the necessary densities and were multi-occupied, often rented privately, and almost always overcrowded. As housing was undesirable because of its condition, and because of other disadvantages associated with the inner-city area such as noise, pollution and old-fashioned school buildings, those who could afford to do so moved elsewhere.

According to Fahey (288), housing policy in Ireland developed in urban areas only during the 1930s, primarily in the form of a slum clearance programme. Even at this early stage in the state's development, the practice of providing either direct or indirect subsidies to those purchasing houses had been established. The state support for private housing still persists today and has been a key factor in Ireland's internationally high (80%) rate of home ownership. Given the centrality of the principle of home ownership in Irish society, social housing is generally viewed by homeowners and tenants alike as an inferior option. If private ownership is for the upwardly mobile, social housing tenancy is for those going nowhere.

In Dublin in the 1960s there was an outflow from the inner city to the suburbs, jobs such as manufacturing, retail and entry data were leaving the city centre and moving to the urban periphery. Economic inequalities were further exacerbated by industries being spatially dispersed and globally integrated

leading to geographical mismatches between where people lived and where they worked and shopped. Core areas of the city were losing both population and employment in absolute terms and, in the absence of specific steps being taken to prevent it, it was expected to continue. The role of the state took the form of massive social housing estates on green field sites on the periphery and the concentration of low-income groups in particular areas of the city where land values were low because no one else wanted to live there. The stage where some decline in population was necessary to reduce densities in the inner city had long been passed in most areas.

In 1986 the then government introduced the “Urban Renewal Scheme”, which was subsequently updated in 1990 and 1994. It had become apparent that proactive measures were required if urban population centres were to be revitalised and the decline in their social fabric halted. It was concluded that private sector investment in the inner city was essential and in 1986 “The Urban Renewal Act” provided the statutory basis for a range of financial incentives introduced by the government in the Finance Act 1986, in order to reduce the risk to investors, investing in the inner city areas. This took the form of tax incentives to developers to build in specific areas usually strategically inner city working class locations that had been devastated by unemployment and poor social housing. Dublin city began a process of intense re-generation and expansion.

In the 1990s Ireland, and specifically Dublin entered an unprecedented period of growth characterised by falling unemployment, rising income levels and

property prices, a dramatic increase in the number of cars on the road, and greater levels of consumer spending (Corcoran: 41). This was particularly reflected in the amount of construction that was completed and ongoing around the city centre. For many Dublin has become an information city that caters to the tastes of the 'new middle classes'. There is considerable evidence, however that the benefits of economic growth are unevenly distributed across the population (O'Hearn: 117-146). The unprecedented boom referred to as the 'Celtic Tiger' did not lift all boats. The deepening inequalities characterising our society have become inscribed in the socio-cultural domain, creating what Zukin has termed "Landscapes of consummation" and "Landscapes of devastation" (1991:5). According to the Combat Poverty Agency (1999:31) more than half the population of Ireland live in Urban areas that are spatially and socially structured according to the divisions in Irish society. Social segregation ensures that neighbourhoods are divided according to social class and status. The effect of this pattern of segregation is to divide, isolate and exclude rather than integrate urban communities. One of the clearest demarcations occurs between private and local authority complexes.

Recently there has been a move in some areas notably Dublin Docklands and Dublin 2 towards gentrification. This has created many social problems such as the decline of the extended family as an operating unit and has resulted in many old people living isolated lives, either independently or surrounded only by their peers in old people's homes. Now one third of the population live in Dublin. This movement has the beneficial effect of creating a vocal pressure to improve local services and renovate the environment, but the damaging effect

of increasing housing shortages for those who cannot afford prices in the improvement area, perhaps creates a greater feeling of relative deprivation for the working-class neighbours of the middle-class residents.

The aim of this study is as follows:

**To explore whether existing family friendships and neighbourhood networks can sustain the concept of community in an inner-city complex in a way that affirms and enhances diversity in the face of urban change?**

To achieve this I will focus on networks used by residents to gain an understanding of how residents of a rapidly changing community think about their attachments to their current community of residence.

**To examine if there is a positive side to social housing that challenges the external stigma of the supposed deviance of residents and the sub-normality of everyday life in an inner-city social housing complex?** I will explore the experiences of people living in the social rental sector in an inner city flat complex and examine how they perceive themselves in relation to other flat complexes.

**To examine if it is possible to develop a concept of neighbourhood as an un-oppressive place where the interest of all the residents, including old-timers and newcomers, are embraced?** I will highlight the internal dynamics of the residents of the flats, and focus on the differences among them and the role of human agency in understanding the residents of the flats.



## **Literature Review:**

In this chapter the relevant literature relating to the role and development of urban communities and social housing in Ireland will be discussed. The primary objective of this chapter is to project and illustrate through the literature, the various dimensions of social housing, to explore the experiences of people living in the social rental sector and to investigate the extent of the influence that restructuring has on the traditional fabric of urban neighbourhoods. At the centre of this literature review is the wish to bring to the fore the dynamics of Government policies and to link the processes championed by schemes such as “The Urban Renewal” with the characteristics of an inner-city housing complex.

David Byrne in his book ‘Understanding the Urban’ deals with the way people experience space in their everyday lives. He explores two key social and scientific concepts used for organizing our understanding of such experiences. He focuses on ‘community’ a term which in this usage originates in the intersection of social anthropology and sociology, and ‘locality’ in this sense a term originating in social and economic geography and ‘locality studies’ of the 1980s which examined processes of ‘restructuring’ as places underwent the transformation from industrial to post-industrial status. He examined the contemporary significance of the two concepts by means of a case study of “Upper Silesia” in Poland and looked at the dual meanings of the word interaction a meaning to do with the way causes work together and a meaning which deals with the way people relate to each other in everyday life. David Byrne defines the genesis of community as the formation of collective social

relations based on spatial association. He acknowledges that people do create 'communities' in urban contexts. These have their origins in complex mixtures of ethnic and other identities and, above all else, in class positions. However in contemporary societies communities need not be based on spatial proximity as relations can also be maintained across space and may also exist in the virtual world. However, spatial proximity still matters and much urban social politics have their foundation in communal identities and communal interests.

Atkinson and Kintrea research focuses on the nature and extent of area effects on two different types of neighbourhood, a socially mixed neighbourhood and a deprived neighbourhood, in two different parts of Scotland, in order to understand better the linkages between place and life chances. They draw from the experience of those who work and live in deprived areas and contrast their views with similarly placed individuals in socially mixed areas. They examine the perception the impact 'area effects' have on people's everyday lives. They argue that negative influences on social inclusion and life chances occur where social worlds consist of people who are almost universally disadvantaged. They see "neighbourhood effects" as socially isolating the urban poor from education and employment opportunities, restricting avenues for pursuing upward mobility, and reinforcing antisocial behaviour. They maintain three main mechanisms are at work in isolated deprived areas. One, isolation may lead to resources been used to help people 'get by' in difficult material circumstances rather than to 'get on' (Portes 2000;1-12). The isolation of deprived people in their own neighbourhood shapes the external and internal image of the area, often stigmatising inhabitants with pejorative labels. They

see the socialisation processes in deprived areas as lacking ambition. In other words if nothing is expected from you, you will not amount to much. For young people there are few role models of people who have been successful in their own education and employment, and who have remained in the neighbourhood (Wilson, 1987;19). This more controversial element of the model connects isolation to the production of inward looking values in deprived neighbourhoods, which the U.S. literature sometimes calls 'ghetto behaviours'. Also residents may not have the resources available to them that provide links to relatively affluent people who live elsewhere they also lack the weak ties that are said to be key circuits of information about jobs and other opportunities. That would help them escape their current situation.

It is important to delineate an area effect analysis of poor areas from one inspired by a belief that there is an underclass, or culture of poverty that afflicts areas of deprivation. It is also important to separate approaches that use cultural arguments to blame the poor for their own situation (Murray1996;23-52) from those that see a culture of area based deprivation as a response both to poverty and to exclusion from the patterns of social life of mass society (Galster:2000;32-701). That there are links between social and geographical positions is a longstanding theme of sociology. The research is concerned with the social forces transmitted within neighbourhoods to their residents and which may affect opportunities to engage with wider social processes and activities. It is well known that housing and labour market processes concentrate disadvantaged people in less advantaged residential areas. Some would see such outcomes as a consequence of competition

between social groups for urban space; those without power occupy the least advantaged neighbourhoods. But it remains an important question whether their area of residence accentuates the disadvantages faced by deprived people. For example are people from social housing held back because of where they live, or because of their individual characteristics such as their lack of education, skills and experience? They caution against an element of 'reading false consciousness' into debates about area effects. The view being that residents of deprived areas do not know that they are deprived and disenfranchised because they are not aware of the opportunities they would have if they lived elsewhere. A recurrent theme was that problems in the deprived area were the same as anywhere else. However the alternative to that are many residents in the deprived areas are content with the familiarity and support found in their locality and it would be unwise to suggest that their social relations are impaired or deficient. Four main findings came from this research, one, life chances are in part locally determined and the 'area effects' thesis has invigorated long-standing questions about how place and society are linked. Second the evidence on area effects is strengthened by a qualitative approach. It is important to understand area effects and entrenched social problems as reactions to perceptions as well as to objective situations. Third, respondents living in both deprived and socially mixed areas have fragmented and contradictory understandings about the links between where they live and their life chances. Outsiders can see deprived areas as offering a poor quality of life but people may remain in these areas for the support they offer. Being poor in a poor area can have its advantages as well as its disadvantages. Fourth if theories of deprivation and the reproduction of social exclusion are to be

made more sophisticated it is important to acknowledge cultural factors as part of the explanation for the persistence of poverty. While sociologists in the past were keen to note structural cultural and social forces that influenced personal biographies, more recently there has been a wariness of cultural explanations of poverty because of their association with discredited individual pathology, under the shorthand term of underclass. They found deprivation and routes out of it are clearly linked to the range of social networks and reference groups of individuals and values that develop within these. Overall the research demonstrates that area effects are a daily reality constituted of norms and stories about what the people from an area can aspire to or achieve. However, area effects are a key concept in understanding social housing as it relates to this thesis.

Gotham and Brumley adopt a dialectical perspective concerning space and action and address the following questions. How do the poor “use space” to create their own autonomous identities and challenge externally imposed, stigmatised identities? How do different spatial meanings and locations enable or constrain particular forms of social action and behaviour among the urban poor? The goal of their research is to further understanding of the way individuals living in social housing construct a personal identity tied to place and to contest alternative meanings, degradations, and the stigma of social housing. Whether by conscious political design or institutional discrimination, social housing represents according to Massey and Kanaiaupuni (1993,p120), a “key institutional mechanism for concentrating large numbers of people within a small geographical space”, intensifying the problems of social

isolation and disadvantage. The perception of social housing is seen as inferior and generally negative, often stigmatising residents with pejorative labels. In the public eye, inner-city social housing is for people going nowhere characterized by social political and economic marginality. Yet public and scholarly accounts that focus almost exclusively on the social pathologies within social housing often overshadow and direct attention away from residents efforts to create a meaningful place and community. They focuses on urban space as a constitutive dimension of agency and identity and examine the active efforts of the poor in mediating the effects of poverty. In their research they use ethnographic data and interviews collected in a public housing development in a southern U.S. city and examine the strategic attempts of the poor to challenge negative public images of their living space, or theorize poor people agency and identity as spatial phenomena with spatial influences and spatial attributes. They focus not on urban space as a container of poverty, nor as a pre-given empirical aggregate of demographic variables that effect social outcomes. They view urban space as an object of political struggle (Lefebvre:1991:91) a constitutive component of human agency and identity and a facilitator as well as a constraint upon action. Urban space shapes and conditions how individuals and groups think and conceive themselves, cultivates and develop personal and collective identities and contest as well as reinforce prevailing meanings of race, class, gender and other social inequalities. Scholars have investigated this conceptualisation of space from a variety of angles, yet urban research on the special attributes of action and social conflict has remained distinct from recent poverty research on the role of “neighbourhood effects”. They draw on ethnographic field

observations and interviews with public housing residents to illustrate the spatial attributes and spatial influences of human agency and particularly the ways residents in public housing construct a meaningful attachment to place and stigmatised identities and negative stereotypes associated with project life. They look at the way residents use space in a range of activities to create, present and sustain a personal identity tied to place and to contest alternative meanings, degradations and stigma of residential life and space. So defined 'using space' may involve several complementary activities such as the construction of networks of reciprocity to construct a place-based identity that connects and overlaps with class and other identities. They focus on the concept of "Using space" as a mediating link between macrosocial constraints and actions of the poor. This concept also sensitises us to how individuals and groups assign interpretative and emotional meanings to spaces that "count" in influencing behaviour, styles of interaction, ability to create groups and maintain relationships. The specific meaning residents give to place is shaped by the ways they use space to make their daily round (Molotch:200:791-823). Second they develop the concept of using space in an attempt to move beyond one-sided models that employ the tropes of adaptation or resistance to explain social actions and behaviour of the poor. In both adaptation and resistance, structural contexts are analytically separate from (and stand over against) capacities for human agency. While these are important dimensions of poor peoples agency, neither by itself captures its full complexity. They argue that most sociological attempts to theorize space have embraced "space as container" ontology and neglected to provide an empirically grounded theory of the nature of the variable interplay between space, agency and identity.

However, agency and identity is an important concept for this project as much urban social politics has its foundation in communal identities. The research was based on encounters with individuals engaged in natural ongoing interaction and responses to semi-structured interview questions. I Specifically drew on this reading to illustrate the spatial attributes and spatial influences of human agency and particularly the ways residents in social housing construct a meaningful attachment to place and challenge stigmatised identities and negative stereotypes associated with inner city social housing. Some people use the restructuring as a vehicle to escape the stigma of social housing and to disavow the 'social housing identity'. In contrast other residents use this identity to give meaning to their actions, to challenge displacement and the resulting disruption of friendship ties and social network. Together these three function as a means of neutralizing externally imposed social identities on the one hand, and cultivating and asserting autonomous personal identities, on the other.

### ***Irish Context:***

In 1997, a research project funded jointly by the Combat Poverty Agency and the Katherine Howard Foundation was initiated to examine the quality of life in seven urban local authority housing estates in Ireland. Three were located in the greater Dublin area (Fatima Mansions, Fettercairn in Tallaght and south Finglas), one each in Limerick (Moyross), Cork (Deanrock), Dundalk (Muirhevnamor) and Sligo (Cranmore). "Social Housing in Ireland is a study of success, failure and lessons learned edited by Tony Fahey". The research team compared the quality of life, and the living conditions of the residents in



each case. They explored the social structure of each estate while paying particular attention to the perspective views of the residents about what made their neighbourhood good or bad places to live. They looked at the built environment of the seven different housing estates and drew on evidence from interviews with residents and the broad correlation between the physical features of the different housing estates and their success in housing terms. They explored how the planning and design of houses and estates and the physical standard of accommodation in which people live can affect their day-to-day living and their health. They took on board what they had to say about their relationships with local service agencies and local authorities in particular. Alongside the simmering despair at the level of neglect and decline into which many of the estates in the study had fallen, there is a palpable sense of an enduring social fabric and strong social ties. They found that residents registered high levels of satisfaction with their communities, if not with the physical environment in which communities are housed. They also found that residents take pride in their status as enduring communities, characterised by a high degree of sociability, supportive family networks and a norm of reciprocity, all features common to minority groups. Residents on all the estates engage in acts of resistance to deterioration of their living environment. These are communities that endure, both in the sense of suffering but also in the more positive sense of continuing to sustain themselves. A key theme that emerged from the research was the importance of socio-familial bonds for maintaining a good quality of life. The findings of this study are an invaluable addition to my understanding of what makes local authority housing succeed or fail, and on this basis is invaluable to my research project.

Research carried out by Dr. Mary Corcoran focused on Fatima Mansions built between 1949 and 1951 as part of a slum clearance programme in Dublin and went into serious decline in the 1970s. A series of factors gave rise to this process all linked to the decline of old-style Fordist industry and the imposition of cost efficiency in key state agencies. This factor alone would have propelled an estate such as Fatima from relative stability into transition (OECD: 50). Local government policy initiatives that promoted home ownership rewarded tenants who left Fatima. More vulnerable tenants frequently replaced those who moved out to purchase a local authority house elsewhere, undermining the social fabric that had been the basis of a strong community. Dublin Corporation services to the estate declined during the 1970s with the removal of the uniformed officials who had informally 'policed' the estate. It became more difficult for both the tenants and the corporation to exercise moral authority. A spiral of decline was set in motion. The estate became vulnerable to problems of social disorder, vandalism, joyriding, and later drugs. Fatima Mansions earned the reputation of being an undesirable place to live. It reached a stage of structural crisis, where poverty and unemployment were accompanied by falls in educational attainment, reduced rates of family formation, the burgeoning of an informal economy, and increased criminal activity (OECD: 50). A 1998 survey of the estate carried out by the author and a team of local residents revealed the high levels of social exclusion and alienation on the estate. 77% felt that the estate was changing for the worst and 50% felt ashamed of where they live. Only 12% felt that there was a strong sense of community spirit in Fatima, with a

similarly low percentage involved in an association or group active in the estate. 70% however felt they could rely on their neighbours for help. The numbers using local services and facilities available on the estate and in the immediate area were low the overwhelming majority did not feel themselves to be part of the wider Rialto community. The most typical household type in Fatima is the lone parent family, a group that has a higher than average risk of poverty. 44% of the surveyed population had left the education system with no formal qualifications. The employment level among respondents was extremely low at just under ten per cent. One third of households reported a member suffering from at least one chronic illness or disability.

A paper for the Canadian Journal of Urban Research (Volume 11, Issue 1, Pxxx-xxx) explores the meaning of place attachment and its connection to location and locale in the context of urban neighbourhood. This paper written by Dr. Mary Corcoran looks at the meaning of place in the everyday life of the community.

The paper draws on data from “Betwixt” a European project examining social exclusion and precariousness in seven European cities. The project adopted a two-pronged approach to the study of social processes in the city. First, the research mapped each of the participating cities –Dublin, London, Toulouse, Turin, Lisbon, and Umea, Sweden, - in terms of the extent and degree of urban social inequality and spatial segregation. Second, city research teams selected a single neighbourhood within their remit that exhibited levels of precariousness primarily in terms of relative income levels and unemployment

rates. Six (one dropped out) of the case study neighbourhoods were studied through the combined techniques of field research, interviews with key informants, and in-depth interviews with 27 households. Thus, a considerable amount of data was obtained on the social milieus of family, community and neighbourhood in these deprived urban contexts. The focus of the project was primarily on the presence or absence of resources in a material sense; the fieldwork also provided insight into the significance of non-material resources in the struggle to cope. For example place was frequently construed through a repository of shared memories and traditions. A sense of place rooted in the past was deployed as a resource to mobilise around the challenges of the present. Such feelings of place attachment resonate as a significant marker of identity and community in changing neighbourhoods. This research showed that it is impossible to separate how place is experienced in terms of material social practices from how it is imagined. What emerged in the biographical narratives collected from urban dwellers was a sense of ambiguity and indeterminacy in relation to place. This research suggests that Dublin City is the most socially polarised of the seven cities being examined in comparative context. This paper will draw on this data to explicate the central concern of this paper, namely, how a sense of place is socially constructed, and how a place-bound identity is elaborated in the context of the neighbourhood and expressed in its symbolic locale.

Some issues in particular emerge from the literature as being crucial in establishing a basis for this thesis.

### **Key Concepts:**

- **Community,**
- **Place Attachment**
- **Area Effects**
- **The role of agency, Identity**
- **Social Networks**

#### **Community:**

The word community can refer to a variety of ideas including a geographically defined space or a group of people with shared characteristics or interests but not bounded by physical locale. In this paper community refers to 'The Flat Complex' where a person lives. As a residential place, community has all the features of other places, including meanings imbued on the natural, built and social environments, as well as behavioural experiences and associated memories.

#### **Place Attachment:**

Place attachment has generally been defined as "an affective bond between people and a particular place", but researchers Hidalgo and Hernandez argue that this definition is too ambiguous and too easily confused with other sentiments such as satisfaction to be useful. They argue that the fundamental aspect of attachment is "the desire to remain close to the object of attachment"(2001). Using this definition of attachment "place attachment then is the positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place" (Hidalgo and Hernandez 2001).

**Stigma:**

Neighbourhoods are often a primary source of stigma for people living in social housing in urban areas. Negative neighbourhood reputations impact not only on the objective opportunities open to people living in stigmatised places (eg. through discrimination employment and access to credit), but also on their emotional well-being and sense of individual and collective identity.

**Social Networks:**

It is sometimes argued that a lack of strong positive social interaction and weak social ties are a key problem within poorer neighbourhoods. Efforts often then focus on 'community building', however a growing body of research evidence suggests that, far from being weak, the sense of community attachment in many inner-city areas is often exceptionally strong, and it is this that helps people cope with wider processes of social exclusion.

**Agency:**

When community activism brings success, people's sense of themselves as agents, rather than as subjects that are acted upon, is enhanced. But community activism within complexes does not in and of itself provide a mechanism for integrating residents into mainstream society.

## **Method:**

For the research I used qualitative data to highlight the internal dynamics of the residents of the flats, the processes associated with living in social housing in the inner city and the role of human agency in understanding the residents of the flats. The qualitative method seems to be the most effective way of understanding the ways in which other people see the world and interact with it and often provides a check on our own preconceptions and beliefs. The research examines data collected through semi-structured interviews with residents of the flat complex. The purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of how residents of a rapidly changing community thought about their attachments to their current community of residence. I did not select a random sample of residents, instead to gain access I had a meeting with a key informant, who I knew to be active for a number of years and this allowed me to identify an appropriate first line of approach to the residents of the flats. This also yielded further names and contact numbers of other respondents. I used these initial meetings to explain the purpose of the research, and to obtain their consent to participate in the research project. I assured them that their identity and all information gathered throughout the course of the research would be confidential and kept anonymous. In the interest of confidentiality I changed the respondents' names. I attempted to make contact not only with the more visible residents but also with the 'shadow' population those who avoided meetings, choose not to participate in community affairs and keep to themselves rather than socialize with other residents. This helped reduce the risk of contacting only those who were well connected with tenant leaders and other local groups.

Although I had some key aspects that I wanted to explore with the respondents, I began with a summary of the project with an emphasis on the desire to get the residents point of view. I encouraged the residents to talk openly about their lives in the flats in the past, at present and in the future. Throughout the course of the interviews I took some notes on areas of interest that I wished the respondent to elaborate on. I drew on the interviews to illustrate the spatial attributes and spatial influences of human agency and particularly the way residents in social housing construct a meaningful attachment to place and challenge stigmatised identities and negative stereotypes associated with inner city social housing. These interviews were tape-recorded and at a later date transcribed verbatim as 'texts' at intervals throughout the project. Some interviews were used for comparative purposes of extracted theories from quoted authors and reference points to back up my own hypotheses. I have included some photographs as a nod to visual culture. Since, in the post-modern world, if such a thing can be alluded to without ironically subverting itself, "the world as-a-text has been challenged by the world as-a-picture" and, "visual experience and visual literacy seem not to be fully explicable in the model of textuality"(Mirzoeff, 1998).

### ***Methodology:***

The interviews included six women and two men ranging in age from early thirties to seventy this represented one from each decade. Among the interviewees the length of residence in the flats varied from ten years to fifty years or more. I expanded the interview sample to include the council official who is the on site renovating and programme co-coordinator Questions on the



interview guide included feelings about the past, interest and involvement in the community, local social networks. In semi-structured or intensive interviews the interview guide is a list of topics to be covered rather than a strict script or tightly structured set of questions to be asked in precisely the same order (Lofland&Lofland1995;8-12). In this type of interviewing, both the interviewer and the respondent are free to veer from the order of questions on the interview guide and respondents are encouraged to speak freely in their own terms about the topics of interest in the interview guide. Because of this conversational nature, most interviews lasted an average of two hours. The shortest interview was half an hour and the longest was three hours. This method was chosen for its flexibility, potential to collect in-depth information, and ability to seek clarification about the topic.

## **Physical Design and Social Fabric:**

The flats are a high demand complex with a low turnover of residents, reasonably settled social conditions and a long waiting list to get in. Built in 1922, these flats are not high-rise as high-rise flats are exceptional in Ireland. The design is one flat on the ground floor, with two flats on top. They are like modern day duplex houses. The vast majority of the tenants are working-class. They would range in age from old age pensioners down to very young children. Some would work fulltime while others would work part-time cleaning. The complex contains seventy-eight units each consisting of two bedrooms, a sitting room, a kitchen, shower and toilet. Westland Row, Pearse Street, Sandwith Street and Fenian Street border the complex. Some flats would have been passed down through the generations and therefore they would be in the same family since 1922. Over the last few years the complex has undergone a major restructuring programme that has been a scene of controversy among residents and between residents and "Dublin City Council" over how the work was carried out.



Figure 1: Back Elevation

Situated primarily in Dublin 2's Southeast constituency, it is an area that is caught up in the restructuring and re-imaging of Dublin. The area traditionally a working class area with the main source of employment in the past due to its close proximity to the docks as well as local industries such as Archer's Garage, Bord Gais, An Post among others. These all contributed to the high levels of employment among the 'working class' residents of the flats. However major changes in work practices within these

industries and the decline in the 1980s led to a degradation of the built fabric. In recent years the area has attracted considerable private investment due to its close proximity to the city centre, the designation of the area for tax incentive

schemes in the “Urban Renewal Act” 1986 and its inclusion in the Dublin Docklands Development Scheme. Most of the investment has come from Trinity College Dublin (TCD) who over the last thirty years have been buying up properties adjacent to their campus in the Dublin 2 area.



Figure 2: Front Elevation



Figure 3: Back Entrance to Downstairs Flat

## **Community:**

Words like community appear a lot in relation to the inner-city. For example The Dublin Docklands Development plan identified the established residential community of the area as being a major strength. Community is a term that is widely used in Irish society. Irish people seem to enjoy the image of their society as one that is made up of communities and permeated by a spirit of community. Most public discussions in Ireland assume that communities are good and desirable forms of social organisation. People who do not belong to a community are often thought of as impoverished, or unstable or unreliable members of society. Our communality is one of our most dominant images of ourselves as Irish, and is produced through our literature, our politics and our mass media debates. Concern about a decline in community is a recurring theme in classical and contemporary sociology. In fact, it could be argued that the birth of sociology occurred in concerns about potential declines in community, due to industrialisation and the advent of modernity. Early sociologists spoke of a shift from *Geimeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Tonnies: 1887; 1957) or about the impact of the metropolis on human life (Simmel: 1903; 1957). This decline of community thesis has continued to resurface periodically (e.g. Wirth: 1938). One of the difficulties with this argument is that it tends to put a reified version of 'community' on a pedestal and pay obsequious homage. As a result, our understanding of what constitutes community has become confused. The term community has been used and misused in such a wide range of contexts that it is almost impossible to proffer a workable definition. G.A.Hillery in the 1950s counted 95 different



definitions and came to the tongue-in-cheek conclusion that the only thing they all had in common was that they were in some way or another about people! I will not try to add another definition to the list. What I hope to do here is pick out and discuss some of the more common uses of the term in relation to the Flat complex. I will concentrate here on community as it refers to place (as in 'my local community') and relationship (some people prefer to call this communality, or even communion). Many of our uses of community are associated with reference to a particular geographical location. This implies some social as well as spatial features that holds people together and allows them to be thought of as a unit. One old time resident whose family has lived in the flats for generations displays a strong sense of nostalgia often arising from the experience of having lived a lifetime entirely in the locality recalls.

“When these flats were built they were top of the range and anyone who got one deemed themselves very lucky...In them days nobody had much but what they had they shared with each other...People were caring and they looked out for each other... if you were sick neighbours would help out... because everyone knew each other...it was that sort of place... that community spirit goes back generations it came from shared hardship ... Clothes would be passed down through families so if you were the youngest you got a raw deal because if you came from a big family by the time the clothes got to you they would have been well worn... At 'Holy Commune' and 'Confirmation' time clothes could be passed from one neighbour to another...Mrs. W made most of the dresses for the girls ...she used the same pattern for them

all...yours might have a belt and a frill at the bottom whereas mine would have no collar and no frill...the money wasn't there to buy new ones...Everyone would get their bread and milk in Daly's shop every day... in them days there was no weekly shopping ...people were living from day to day...the shop was like the local newspaper anything that was going on in the area was discussed or gossiped about in Daly's The shop's gone now...there isn't the same feeling in the flats its changed but the community spirit is still there... they're there if you need them."

"I have great neighbours. If there's something wrong there's always someone to take the kids and to help I mean many a time I had to go running with his family I know if I couldn't take the kids with me there's somebody there prepared to take the kids for me while I go running"(Local authority flat).

"Here everyone knows everyone. Like they accept each other warts and all. We all know x is nosy and nothing gets past her" ... Sometimes its like living in a glass bowl... If anything happens you everyone knows (local authority tenant).

Respondents refer to a 'sense of community' be it in a positive or negative way. Some of the people I spoke to mentioned the fish bowl syndrome and how community can also be restrictive. However, in these instances they tended to justify this negative response by explaining that this is part of what a



community means and that the good tends to outweigh the bad. A respondent aged 70:

“I used to meet an old woman on the bus she lived in Sandymount and I used to talk to her all the time. Like she was lonely... You see she didn't know any of her neighbours. ... she would rattle around in that big old house from morning till night and no one would knock on her door to see if she's ok...I'd be telling her about the flats... I mean you can come outside your door and someone would have a chat with you if you were lonely or that. There's a good community here the neighbours are great if they're going for a message in the local shop and your there they'll ask if you want anything in the shop... they'll get it for you... They help anyway they can. I wouldn't like to live anywhere else sure I was born and raised here and me mammy lived here and she was very happy here she had great neighbours too (Local authority tenant aged 70).”

Community is a lived experience. People refer to community as part of their daily lives, how people help each other out on a day-to-day basis. It's a feeling of belonging and of knowing who you are and where you come from and where you feel comfortable, for example

“I originally came from “Mackin Street” so I kinda knew the area...I suppose I knew there was a tight knit community... It was his mothers' flat it's been in the family for forty years...I knew I was an outsider but when I came nobody isolated me. I like to keep to myself I wouldn't go on the committee or anything like that... but if someone knocks on me door and says B will you give a hand will you do x y

and z I'd help anyway I could, you know what I mean. I mean I've made so many friends around here I'd be very sorry to leave same thing again I have very good neighbours I know I could knock at anyone's door whether it be day or night if there's a problem plus he was born and reared here so I feel this is home I never want to move".

Neighbours act as a bulwark against social isolation and contribute to quality of life. The overwhelming majority of residents felt a sense of belonging in the flats because they were born and reared in the flats they knew all the neighbours warts and all.

"This account may seem to be painting a very rosy picture of the flats... but the fact is people don't see eye to eye about certain things but its like you expect that... and family and friends are here" (local authority flat).

### **Stigma:**

In 2002 as part of the 'Urban Renewal Scheme' the flats underwent a major restructuring programme. The tenants had to move out for eighteen month and were dispersed to different estates within the Dublin 2 area.

"I wasn't happy when we had to move to 'Pearse House' no disrespect to 'Pearse House' but I was born here and it was like going into a new environment to me you were meeting people you knew locally like hello how are you and all but when you move into their environment and feel like your not part of them you know they have their own group set up, they have their own way, and that would also apply to them if they moved over here they would find it just as difficult. I'd

say how do I integrate with these because your not part of what they've been for years. That's how I felt in 'Pearse House' I felt excluded so to move is not always the best like" (Local authority flat).

These feelings of alienation are clearly associated with a sense of placelessness.

"I don't think there's a stigma attached to these flats because these are built different ...I mean they not like other flats with big long balconies...they're not called something mansions or house... but the likes of "PearseHouse" and "Leo Fitzgerald flats" I'd stay on the street rather than move into them flats. There's no sense of community over there it just seems to be a free for all. I mean I don't drag me suite of furniture out into the flats and drink and send the kids to the chipper. I mean you go through there in the summer and they're standing on the balcony drinking cans. Don't get me wrong I'm not condemning anyone for drinking but there's a time and place for everything... I mean you go into "Dunnes Stores" and they write up the names of the flats they won't deliver messages to after three o'clock and "Leo Fitzgerald" is one of them"(Local authority flat).

Seemingly small distinctions in status are an important aspect of everyday practice.

Residents distance themselves from the other flats they see as blackspots. This sometimes has the effect of reinforcing or even exaggerating the latter's poor image. People in the flats clearly look down on the people who occupy "Pearse House" or "Leo Fitzgerald House". Subtle social distinctions are drawn and barriers erected between the 'superior' and 'inferior' resident

populations. People from poor backgrounds often have a lot in common, but tend not to see this and often feel threatened by each other.

### **Place Attachment:**

“I had to leave for nine months and I thought I would never get back”(local authority flat).

“If I ever had to move from here I wouldn't be at all happy...when I had to move to Pearse house you know the fact is that you get your mind set that your kinda there for eighteen months and your kinda saying he told us eighteen months and your counting every month as it goes by. I saw this myself, a lot of tenants rather than maybe walk up 'Pearse Street' would take a detour to see the progress of the work and go under the arch into the chapel lane just to see how is my flat doing so you were anxious to get back. This is home for me, very much so”  
(Local authority tenant).

It is clear that people draw on a reservoir of stored memories and images of their place in negotiation of everyday life in the flats. These quotes showed a strong sense of emotional rootedness to the flats predicated on a sense of the historical past. The neighbourhoods past and in particular embedded memories from childhood form an integral part of his interpretive frameworks. When asked to talk about attachment to place he resorted to elaborating specific memories of childhood for example,

“The flat since it was refurbished has lost its... how will I describe it... its like when we moved out of our old flat... we'd never been anywhere else... never lived anywhere else... so we knew the shape and size... and there was a lot of good feeling and maybe a lot of arguments and different feelings in the flat... but it was all part of the

nerves of the flat and when you move out of that... you come back and its like someone has stripped that flat of all its history and although its new doors and this and that... you had it the way you wanted it for your body to blend into... that feeling that this is where I was born is gone... it's like someone has cut off part of your being... you know what I'm trying to say its different when a person decides when their twenty one they are buying a house they're making that decision... that house becomes part of them... as they grow into that house the house grows into them and it's the same as the flat... when your in the flat eventually when you have to leave it's like your saying I'm abandoning this flat with all my feelings and all my complaints to my mother when you weren't well lying in that room looking at the crack in the ceiling looking at all that is wrong... so you've to accept all that again... so when your sitting mostly... the T.V. wouldn't hold an interest for me at the moment... I'd be sitting out on the veranda or walking in and out... I find it hard to just sit down and say Ah Jasus isn't that a lovely T.V. and new suite of furniture... the material things don't matter it's the feelings"(Local authority tenant).

This interview provides insight into the way people use non-material resources to cope for example place was frequently construed through a repository of shared memories and traditions. A sense of place attachment rooted in the past was deployed as a resource that could be used to mobilise around the challenges of the present. Such feelings of place attachment resonate as a significant marker of identity and community in changing neighbourhoods.

Place or space can be filled with a multitude of perceptions and meanings. Although the flats are a space in motion this is not to suggest that place is, or ought to be, a static concept. Landscapes change continually, however, a question being asked by some local residents in the area is Why is Trinity College killing Communities in the Dublin 2 area?

“All the buildings TCD has required over the last thirty years facing on to Pearse ST. and Westland Row have had their entrances sealed off. This “bricking up” policy has left large stretches of Pearse St. and “Westland Row” derelict, with dead frontage, and has had the knock on effect of driving other private business out of the area due to the lack of footfall. Businesses like B.B. Hopkins that survived the 1916 rising have left after 124 years. I think Dublin City Council should consider taking TCD to court over it’s anti-social behaviour, or try to take the properties back under the derelict Sites Act or compulsory purchase orders” (Local authority tenant).

The urban renewal process has seen the arrival of ‘outsiders into the physical space of the community. This has brought the boundary between outside and inside into sharper relief. The distinction is more marked because in some instances each group occupies a different stance in relation to ‘community’ and a different social class.

The construction by Trinity College Dublin of the multi-purpose Goldsmith Hall building on Pearse St., in 1995 marked the colleges’ first expansion beyond its city centre island site and into surrounding areas. With little underdeveloped land on which to accommodate rapidly rising student numbers

and a new wave of research activity, notably in the science faculties, the university was forced to look to further development beyond its own walls. Goldsmith Hall, housing student accommodation, lecture theatres and academic facilities, and connected to the campus by a transparent glass bridge over Pearse St. represented the beginning of that process. Questions arise such as, whether a new development should occur, and whether a place should remain unspoilt.



Figure 4: Cleared Out, dead part of Town

“I Mean they built that monstrosity Goldsmith Hall, on the corner of Pearse St./Westland Row...it has giant black roller shutters, that are pulled down in the evenings and at weekends, these shutters add to the derelict feel that TCD has been nurturing over decades. As far back as 1993 I have written to TCD about my concerns on this matter unfortunately they didn't have the courtesy to reply to many of my letters. Incredibly some of the buildings that are sealed off are listed for preservation. You can walk on the TCD side of “Pearse St”. from



College Green to “Sandwith St”. (half a mile) without passing one lit or inhabited building, so the street is devoid of passive surveillance, this makes the area very menacing especially for women. The College’s sealing off of Pearse St. and Westland Row has gone beyond an architectural and aesthetic issue and has now become a safety issue. A friend of mine who has worked in Pearse St. for many years told me that she would never walk down Pearse St. alone, as it has become so derelict. These derelict sites have become a liability at night. DCC should look at acquiring this corner site by compulsory purchase order”(Local authority tenant). Enclosed are several photos to highlight this point.



Figure 5: TCD – Educators or Property Speculators?

Perceptions and meanings about place may also be mobilised in battles over the material future of places. There are many instances in Pearse St. where these ‘battles’ are obvious, in particular when the ‘community’ is perceived to be under threat, or when a development is perceived to affect the ‘community’

or way of life within the 'community'. Lefebvre has argued that, as the world becomes subordinate to the capitalist global market, a counter movement occurs in which space becomes increasingly differentiated symbolically.



Figure 6: Symbolic Glass Bridge

“It’s like adding insult to injury, TCD installed a glass footbridge linking “Goldsmith Hall” to the main campus eliminating any contact between the college and the local community. That students have to use a footbridge, because to use the street is now considered too dangerous, just shows the extent of their vandalism. Also what kind of message does this bridge give students? If TCD considers Pearse St. too dangerous for their students they should re-locate instead of building a fortress”(Local authority tenant).



Figure 7: Formerly Historic Corner Site.

The glass bridge to the residents represents a symbol of the boundary where the community ends and the middle class college begins. These quotes highlight that in some instances, there is a perception of a divide between both groups. This is articulated in terms of class with one being defined in opposition to the other. Perhaps the restructuring process in the area has made these distinctions clearer and class is a way to articulate these differences. Skeggs defines class as lived as a structure of feeling, as a major feature of subjectivity, a historical specificity and part of a struggle over access to resources and ways of being (Scott: 1994:7).

Some of the residents expressed a certain detachment from this view.





Figure 8: Listed Building – Trinity Style



Figure 9 : Trinity's latest and most offensive development – Goldsmith Hall

“I’ve worked for ‘Trinity cleaning for fifteen years so I’m not going to bite the hand that feeds me now am I. The job suits me I go in at six am and I’m finished at ten. I admit the derelict sites looks awful but

they are starting to build on them now. There is a big new plan coming in now”(local authority tenant).

Some of the women would depend on ‘Trinity’ for their livelihood.

According to Magill magazine (September 2001) six years after it was built, “Trinity College and partners lodged a planning application with DCC for the demolition of Goldsmith Hall. In its place and covering an area more than twice its size to the east, the college sought to construct a 200-bedroom five-star hotel retail and service outlets, 100 new private residences and student accommodation, as well as an 80-metre tower structure that would function as a major tourist attraction. Approximately 20 metres higher than Dublin’s Liberty Hall, it would become the tallest building in Ireland. A radical re-examination of the development plan in recent years brought about in part by DCC belief that any plan should involve next-door neighbours CIE, has resulted in “Trinity’s relocation of the now imminent start-of-the-art sports complex inside the campus itself and the realisation that Goldsmith Hall cannot have a long-term future if the land is to be properly exploited. The project has become a joint venture between the university, CIE and two “commercial partners”. The most significant of those partners, according to Magill is the pharmaceutical company Elan plc. At a cost of approximately 50 million, and under an agreement that will last for 35 years, Elan will locate their new headquarters in the commercial space provided for them in the new edifice, thus easing considerably the financial burden of construction and effectively sealing the deal. One resident explained, “ There is little local enthusiasm for this project”. It is a safe assumption that some of those who

objected to the initial Goldsmith project in 1995, prompting DCC planning officer to remark that “some local residents did not want TCD campus to expand” will be similarly sceptical, while the indignation of those Trinity academics consistently critical of the perceived move towards commercial development will inevitably be raised by the university’s move into retail services on such a large scale. There is a growing sociological literature on the close relationship between accumulation and cultural consumption in the period of late industrialism. Urban revitalisation that involves the linking of an



Figure 10: Same Policy, Different Street.

accumulation strategy with a cultural policy amounts to the operation of what can be termed an artistic mode of production. In other words the production, distribution, and consumption of education and culture operate a cover for capitalist expansion (Corcoran:75-91).

“The question that has to be asked, is why are the taxpayers giving money for TCD to smother the local residential and business communities? The taxpayers are being penalised twice for TCD’s

activity. On one level we are funding their acquisitions, while on the other, we are paying DCC to try to up-grade the street... Before they spend a king's ransom employing consultants to tell them what is wrong with the area... TCD is the cause of its' dereliction and TCD have the solution... Another matter of concern is that TCD have now started acquiring properties along south Pearse St. at the Industrial Development centre. Their dereliction policy cannot be allowed spread any further it must be reversed. Are TCD educators, speculators or developers? DCC, The Dept. of Education along with what is left of the business and residential communities should join forces to demand that TCD behave in a socially responsible manner. All the necessary legislation to control neighbours from hell is already in place. Their irresponsible and anti-social behaviour has gone on far too long"(Local authority tenant).

## ***Social Networks:***

Residents said that relations with Westland Row church their immediate neighbours were spatially differentiated and historically weak. They told of how they were made to feel unwelcome and were discouraged from taking part in church activities in the past and of how they had been snubbed by voluntary organisations. They recounted stories for example

“The church looked down their nose on you if you lived in the flats even though the flats were part of Westland Row parish. The parish priest at that time was such a snob at the children’s sodality he would have the church segregated so as the children from the more affluent schools were at the top while the children from the poorer schools were at the back in the corner. He had this stereotypical image of local authority tenants implanted on his brain e.g. (father drinking, nobody working, kids neglected milking the state). He would ask you in confession what school you went to. If you said ‘Townsend Street’ he would tell you to go to ‘City Quay Church’ in future even though ‘Westland Row’ was your Parish. He only wanted kids from the ‘Loretto School’ the ones with the money. That kind of thing wouldn’t be tolerated today.”

While the majority of residents are involved in the established community this is not to say that they are not involved in social networks outside as well. Residents I spoke to are involved in networks that revolve for example around the workplace, the gym and social occasions with friends.



“I meet a group of girls...women now, I used to work with and we have a bit of lunch in town we’d go to a show a couple of times a year and go on holiday the odd time. I go to bingo on a Sunday night and afterwards we go to the local for a drink”.

“I would phone my Mother everyday or if I didn’t phone her she’d phone me. I have made lots of friends around here”.

“There is a big resource centre in “Pearse Street”. The old people can go and have there dinner there. They have Irish classes and flower arranging and there’s a girl sits down there and she helps the old people with their pensions and sends in their forms for them. A few of us did a gardening course so we could look after the plants like take cuttings and that...I help out with the active age”.

## **Agency:**

According to Bourdieu (1991:220-221), in social practice identities are the objects of mental representations, of acts of perception, cognition and ...of objectified representations, in things or acts. Struggles over identity –the lived experience within a particular place and the symbols which one associates with –are struggles for power in order to impose a legitimate definition for the division of the social world. Legitimate being what either group sees as real and tries to persuade others to recognise this reality (Morley & Robins: 1995:75). These power struggles make and remake group and also group and individual identities.

“All of the residents would be interested in the flats and the majority would get involved. There was snags left from the first phase that hadn’t been dealt with properly so by the time the second phase came along we had called a meeting in the school and formed a regeneration committee on behalf of the residents. We talked things out and balloted the residents about different things that came up in the building of the complex. The majority of the residents would agree like and they were always willing to hear the side of “Dublin City Council” (DCC) and the builder’s side of why things couldn’t be done and why they could be done. There was a good balance between interests, we had good people close at hand that were willing to take on DCCs effort what they were trying to do and work it and meet them middle of the road.”

Speaking to residents of the flats some would reinforce this view while others would not. It is clear that people had certain expectations of the place, and these are evident in further description. These expectations were based on promises made by Dublin City Council and their memories of their previous locations.

“We were all really looking forward to coming back to the flat looking to see what we were going to get and what we hadn’t got and what we had got. I mean we were really excited to come back but now that excitement is gone I know you probably say after two and a half years it should be but they took it out of us within six months of coming back here because of the trouble”.

“I mean we do more sweeping than the fellow that comes in. We keep our own areas clean I mean if x is away and her place is looking a bit grubby it wouldn’t bother me to go in with a sweeping brush and sweep it up. We do all the gardening and the weeding ourselves. I’m not satisfied with “Dublin City Council” They only empty the bins that’s all.

One resident recounts her ongoing battle with the local council to have her heating fixed and basic services maintained.

“These were good sturdy flats before they were renovated I mean with the amount of trouble were having with the heating and everything else its kind of taking the good out of it now. I mean he keeps saying... the husband... we’d four sturdy walls now we only have plaster boards

separating the kitchen from the parlour... the downstairs flats like are all right... the upstairs ones they moved the interior walls. I think if we didn't have the amount of problems we've had... I know there teething problems but it's now two and a half years down the line and we're still having major problems with the heating and I think they've kind of taking the good out of it all. A group of the neighbours went to Kevin Humpries (the Local Labour politician) then one day this winter just gone I was left with no heating for a whole weekend and three of us went up to the ombudsman so I have the ombudsman and Kevin Humpries fighting for me at the moment to come to some resolve in regards to the heating, but I mean even at the moment x (is one of the women who went to the ombudsman) heating is up and running but she will still fight because she started it and she'll go to the ends with it I have good neighbours we kind of stand together the whole lot of us and I think I'd be the same myself if I started something I'd sooner see it out whether I had it or not I'd like to be able to help me neighbours".

They feel DCC has underestimated their knowledge of this and their commitment to get it fixed. Many residents expressed the view that DCC has an attitude to local authority tenants, they felt because they were perceived by DCC as second- class citizens, they were provided with second rate services.

"Dublin City Council" dug up my sitting-room floor and its like that now, two months ago a kanga hammer was put to it and they still haven't come in and filled it and my kitchen floor was dug up four times that's one of the reasons why, it kind of took the good out of it

you know I'm still no better off than the day I moved in you know. I mean I've drowned Y (person underneath) I had a bad flood the first weekend in May and it just went straight through onto to Y ceiling underneath into his sitting room and of course I didn't know it didn't surface in my sitting room it was only then when it seeped through into Y I knew... they don't care".

"They think we're all stupid, local authority to them means undereducated, unintelligent and you can get away with anything because they don't know how anything works. They'll wrap it up in fancy language and try to baffle you and they'll try to convince you its better this way or its good for you... their biggest mistake is to underestimate us"(local authority tenant).

For example because they were not getting anywhere with DCC with their heating problem they took the initiative and became active and allowed the problem to become public. They knew that the structures were there and they also knew how to use them. Only through agency structure will change. This is a legacy for those coming after them.

From this quote we can see that the residents feel DCC have a negative impression of them. However this is not a perception they have of themselves. According to residents I interacted with the heating problems in the flats has long been a source of discontent and frustration for residents. These interactions form the basis for various perceptions, beliefs and expectations of

particular officials that in turn can affect future sociability as much as any physical boundary.

## **Analysis:**

When asked to talk about the community most people answered in the expected fashion, discussing traits of a good place, such as neighbourliness, natural amenities, social history, social diversity, and proximity to the city centre. The question “Do you feel at home here?” the overwhelming majority of residents replied that they did. When asked the follow-up question, “Why do you feel at home here?” most residents responded that they feel at home because they were born and raised in the flats and felt comfortable there. I suspected that “feeling at home” and “calling a place home” were not the same. This was confirmed when one of the interviewee replied, “yes I feel at home here” But then went on to tell me when she thinks of the place she calls home she thinks of her Mothers house. “You see my Mother is still alive and we go down to see her in Wexford, so I would say to the kid’s we are going down home for the weekend. I think if my Mother weren’t there it would be different even though my brothers are still there it wouldn’t be home then, this would be home”. This interviewee has lived in the flats for six years, she thinks of the place she moved from as home. I was surprised at the number of respondents who described the flats as their ideal community. I was expecting to here a list of characteristics that define a good community. The majority responded with statements like this place is great if I won the “Lotto” I wouldn’t move. These responses make these residents seem much more attached than the person who thinks of home as someplace else and is unsure about staying in the “Flat complex” in the future. Many residents are content with the familiarity and support found in their own locality and it would be unwise to suggest that their social relations are impaired or deficient. Unlike

Fatima Mansions residents in the flats do not want to move. Residents try to neutralize the stigmatised identity of social housing by distancing themselves from other complexes where the labelling effect can be traced back several decades and render the flats unable to escape the image. The residents I interviewed distinguished themselves from people living in “Pearse House” who they would contend are more excluded. They see “Pearse House as a refuse space. This clearly demonstrates that a hierarchical order is established between flat complexes. The community did not see themselves as socially excluded from society. I also found that resident’s perception of social disorder differs from the symbolic representation portrayed by Minister Michael Mc Dowell’s and the mass media of social disorder involving young men in hoodies, who leave school early with no jobs and no prospects, drunk on the streets, considered threatening, high on drugs and being violent. The pending social order bill which he hopes to implement in the autumn will not cover physical disorder that refers to the deterioration of urban landscapes, disorder perceived to be caused by capitalist developers like TCD to the existing local communities of Dublin 2. The question the residents are asking, Is Trinity college developers or educators?



## **Findings and Discussion:**

Systemic theories of urban communities have long pointed to the importance of residential stability as a major feature of urban social organisation. The ability of the community in the flat complex to sustain and reproduce itself depends on the stability of the residential population in the absence of any social institutions such as the GAA etc. The formation of social networks that undergrid localities and attachment to place is also linked to residential stability. By stability I do not mean lack of change but rather the social reproduction of neighbourhood residential structure typically when population gain offset losses. One of the most common goals is the desire of residents to live in a safe environment free of predatory crime, drugs and disorder. The upkeep of the physical environment is important to residents. Areas intended as communal spaces are kept clean and are used by residents to gather and socialise on a summer's day with a cup of tea. The phenomenon of informal efforts to socially control local areas has long been reported. In contrast to externally or formally induced action examples of indigenous informal social control relevant to reducing disorder include the willingness of residents to intervene and take action. The internal informal social control of the residents creates safe places where individuals can live as human beings. A key difference between this flat complex and other local authority complexes like the estates studied by Fahey and Corcoran is there is no breakdown of social order in this complex. Residents see the community as a major resource. Residents derive a sense of place from a shared historical past and the desire to maintain their traditional community. This drives them to resist some of the changes that are taking place in their area. They struggle to maintain some sort

of control over their environment and the meanings embedded in their spaces. The 'Urban Renewal scheme in some instances creates class contestation over local space and highlights the power struggles that are evident within the built environment.

The onsite project manager from Dublin city Council used the words tight knit community to describe how he saw the community in the flats. The overwhelming majority of residents I spoke to generally perceived themselves as a strong tight knit community. Where relations with neighbours are governed by a norm of reciprocity. Their evaluation of the complex is mainly positive. While recognising differences among themselves they also recognise a common essence that defines them as something distinct from society at large. Yet the differences among them are profound and openly acknowledged. Like communities everywhere those in the flats vary in their connections to and understandings of their identity. They include amongst them, outspoken activists as well as others with many degrees of apathy. They include people with a variety of different understandings of what community is, what it implies, what obligations it imposes and what practices it requires. These differences often produce a history of discord and conflict within the community. (like people who work for Trinity College and those complaining about its development). None the less community continues to function quiet successfully and even residents who dislike it acknowledge its centrality to the nature of the people in the flats. A sense of the community as a single group thus coexists with a manifest pluralism among them. Modern culture tends to fragment communities and identities, making a common culture for groups

virtually impossible. In many cases, the very meaning of identity becomes the subject of vigorous dispute.

Yet some groups like the community in the flats remain active, organizationally effective and in some sense unified. The fragmentation among the residents of the flats stems from a variety of sources many of them associated with modernisation in Irish society. The modernisation process poses serious challenges to communities everywhere, challenges that have been extensively documented by sociologists over the past fifty years. Modern demographic patterns in Ireland in the 1990s such as increasing geographic and occupational mobility tend to disrupt the bounded communities of the inner city within which groups traditionally thrived. Modern cultural trends such as universal education and secular public discourse, act both to mix members of different groups together and to devalue in-group knowledge. The rise of government and corporate bureaucracies tends to de-emphasise identities in favour of universalistic classifications. While such trends clearly do not mean the end of communities, they tend over time and space to disrupt the cohesion and organisation of traditional communities. In countries like Ireland, with post-Fordist, post-industrial economic systems and mass media presence, these social structural changes are accentuated by changes in the nature of personal identity. In such societies characterised by Giddens's in the term "High Modernity" the nature of identity becomes increasingly contingent and changeable just as individuals switch jobs and families with increasing frequency so too can they increasingly shift and redefine their understandings of self (Giddens: 1991) Advertising and the mass media tend to commodify identity, associating it with personal choice and consumption patterns rather

than with social networks. Therefore in “High Modernity” the construction of personal identity becomes a central problematic concern for most individuals. This increasingly fluid and contingent character of identity generally produces corresponding changes in identity. As the social structural bases of community attachments erode, the importance of identity derives more and more from its role in individual self-definition. Identity as a feature of one’s social position gives way to symbolic identity, identity as a dimension of self-perception. This style of identity affiliation militates against consensus within a community since the individual supplants the group as the location where the nature of identity is determined. However it would seem that the residents of the flats are utilising identity politics in order to ensure the survival of their community along the lines suggested by Smith who maintains that identity politics can be used to challenge the basis of equality as it translates justice over and against individualism. They seem to be using identity politics as a form of opposition to contemporary developments within their area because many of the derelict sites are former industrial sites. These spaces represent a previous era of employment and prosperity (real or imagined) among the locals. These representations are retained in the memory. Post-industrial capitalism represents a reorganisation of the meanings attached to specific spaces (Benson:2000:125).

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