

## **Achieving a right to the city in practice: community development and human rights approaches in Dublin's inner city communities**

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## ***Abstract***

The concept of the right to the city is increasingly being drawn upon by international human rights organisations, urban governments, NGOs, and marginalised and excluded communities, amongst others, to promote the right of urban inhabitants to an acceptable standard of living in a sustainable city in which they decide governance and development processes. However, it is increasingly becoming a contested concept between elite international, regional and city governments and NGO institutions defining it in terms of human rights covenants and liberal democracy, and radical theorists and grassroots activists of urban justice drawing on it to critique and challenge neoliberal capitalist urbanism. There is also a growing discussion on the practical political question of how the right to the city is to be achieved in practice. Is it through global movements and charters, government policy or community movements? There is also a necessary (but surprisingly not often asked) question to be investigated which is, where is the evidence of right to the city processes, in practice, altering neoliberal processes of urban development, austerity and exclusion? This working paper provides an overview and analysis of the struggles of case study disadvantaged communities in the Irish cities of Dublin and Limerick against neoliberal regeneration plans and a harsh neoliberal austerity regime implemented in Ireland from 2008 to 2013 which has had devastating effects on their community and neighbourhood projects. The paper outlines the various processes, actions, approaches, strategies, ideas, and policies developed by these communities within their social movement struggles at an individual estate level and at the city-wide scale. In recent years the communities have turned to a rights framework to try and articulate their demands for community oriented regeneration that would provide a decent standard of housing and neighbourhood, with an empowered community engaged in decision making processes, to enable these social housing tenants to remain living with dignity and equality in their local place that was their homes. These struggles are presented as a contribution to the debate in critical urban theory and urban social movement studies on how the right to the city can be achieved in practice. It reveals that the real world practice of community resistance is complicated and sometimes does not fit neatly with radical academics' and activists' desires for what movements should be and do. These communities successfully rolled back some neoliberal measures and achieved aspects of the right to the city through the adoption of a multiplicity of political strategies including publicly critical campaigns that involved community development, a human rights framework, collective action, empowerment, media work, political lobbying, and public protest. Interestingly the communities also prioritised on-going engagement with the state to develop practical solutions to their issues. The connection between these communities and their local area reasserted such marginalised, working class, neighbourhoods as a central territory for an alternative urban politics that can achieve social justice. The experience has implications for strategies of achieving the right to the city. For example it highlights the significant challenges faced by communities in engaging in scales beyond their community, in this case in a cross city network to influence national policy. The experience of the campaigns and policies developed by these communities in Dublin's inner city, therefore, provide

important reflections for academic, policy and activist debate on strategies to achieve a right to the city for its most marginalised populations.

Key Words:

Right to the city, community campaigns, social housing, neoliberal urbanism

### ***Introduction: Resisting neoliberal urbanism and the right to the city***

The right to the city and human rights frameworks are increasingly being drawn upon by civil society social movements and marginal urban communities to challenge spatial deprivation and inequalities in relation to neoliberalism and austerity in urban development, planning, housing and community development (Brenner et al., 2011; BarisKuymulu, 2013; Brown and Kristiansen, 2008; Harvey, 2008, 2012; Mitchell, 2003; UN Habitat, 2009). Human rights are being applied to policy and practice by international institutions such as the UN, local government, community development organisations, NGOs working on education, training, and community law and marginalized communities engaged in struggle on issues of spatial and social justice (Harvey, 2012; Right to the City Alliance, 2010; Soja, 2010; Stammers, 2009). These approaches seek to apply human rights specifically to the urban domain, and extend the boundaries of the human rights agenda to emphasise political, economic, social, and environmental rights, alongside new and emerging rights associated with urban development (Mitchell, 2003; UN Habitat, 2009).

The concept of the 'Right to the City' was first articulated in the 1960s by the French sociologist and philosopher [Henri Lefebvre](#) in "Le droite à la ville" (Right to the City). Lefebvre (1996) created a powerful paradigm focused on citizens' participation in the use and production of urban space, and a right to full involvement in urban life. In recent years Left political parties in Latin America with the support of urban social movements have enshrined the right to the city in constitutions in Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Mayer, 2011). The UN has also promoted the concept of the right to the city with UN-Habitat defining it as "ensuring that women, men, youth and children have equal access to basic services in the communities where they live...The right to the city also implies minimum levels of safety and security so that people do not live in constant fear of being assaulted or of being robbed. The right to the city also includes affordable energy and public transport to facilitate access to jobs, education and recreation. The right to the city includes the right to adequate housing and the right for people to participate in decisions affecting their livelihoods (UN Habitat 2010a, 3).

These draw upon rights outlined in various UN conventions, particularly the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which outlines, amongst others, rights to housing, health, education, and participation in decision making. At a European level the European Social Charter is a Council of Europe Treaty which articulates social and economic human rights including the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. However, there are significant challenges in realising these rights in practice. International human rights law is often

used as an instrument of the ruling class and imperialism, legitimising injustices in society. While states also use the potential vagueness of international human rights standards to deny their obligations, particularly in relation to social and economic rights (Felner, 2009; Kirkemann, et al, 2007). Mechanisms to assess and monitor states at national and local levels, such as the UN Universal Periodic Review and European Committee of Social Rights are limited in their power and impact (Felner, 2009). UN initiatives such as the World Urban Forum, and national and local government bodies have been criticised for co-opting the right to the city movement into neoliberal process of urban redevelopment (BarisKuymulu, 2013). Furthermore, local and national NGOs and community development organisations restrict their advocacy of the right to the city to just another ‘education’ tool to encourage responsible and active citizenship. This is in line with their increasing role of service provision as they mirror, rather than challenge, neoliberal governance. Their critical, political, campaigning and social movement building that can directly challenge institutional rights violations has been replaced with education and polite institutional lobbying (Meade, 2012). Within the field of critical urban theory, Harvey (2008, 2012) and Brenner et al (2011) propose that achieving the right to the city should be a central component in political and ethical discourses which challenge the exclusionary process of capitalist urbanisation, hegemonic neoliberal market logics, and elite modes of legality and state action. Human rights should be at the core of this. The right to the city should be part of a radical new urban politics that is collective rather than based solely on individual rights.

While these theoretical debates about the concept of the right to the city are important. It is the practical implementation, realisation, or achievement of the right to the city in practice that is the subject matter of this paper. The UN Habitat’s World Urban Forum in 2010 did identify some interesting challenges facing the practical realisation of the right to the city including the necessity of “putting in place appropriate legal and institutional frameworks as well as the necessary investments to make the right to the city a reality” and “for international monitoring and advocacy with national and local authorities as duty bearers<sup>1</sup> targeting governance and the provision of basic services (UN Habitat, 2010b, 14).” It also highlights that the ‘right to the city’ can only become effective when citizens become involved as ‘active agents of change’, influencing decisions about city development. Therefore, it is important to help build the capacity of urban dwellers to give increasing effect to their ‘right to the city’ (UN Habitat, 2010b). For grassroots activists aiming to achieve urban justice, the right to the city requires the exercise of the collective power of social movements to reshape the processes of urbanisation. It is through such social movements that pervasive privatisation of urban space and the displacement of low income and marginalised communities from their historic urban neighbourhoods can be challenged (Liss, 2011; Mitchell, 2003; UN Habitat, 2010b; Right to the City Alliance, 2010; Stammers, 2009; Soja, 2010). There is much to be learned about how the right to the city can be achieved from communities engaged in the real world

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<sup>1</sup>In human rights frameworks the ‘duty bearer’ is the state authority responsible for fulfilling the relevant human right (adequate standard of housing, education etc) of the rights holders (people who’s rights are being breached)

struggle of trying to challenge and alter neoliberal urbanism. It is within their actions, strategies and challenges that we can discover new ways of achieving an egalitarian city. This paper draws on the experience of a number of case study communities in Dublin to offer strategies and ideas for social movements that can progress the right to the city in practice. It then discusses what this means for critical urban scholars engaging with this topic.

### ***Neoliberalism, Austerity and Regeneration in Ireland***

In recent decades national and local government in Ireland has pursued entrepreneurial, market-led, approaches to urban development which encouraged property developers and speculators through investment tax reliefs, private rental subsidies, homeowner mortgage reliefs, and public private partnerships (PPPs) (Drudy & Punch, 2005; Hearne, 2011; Kelly & McLaran, 2004). These neoliberal policies led to an overinflated bubble in property prices from 1996 to 2007 with the resultant crash in 2008.

In this period Dublin's local government authority, Dublin City Council<sup>2</sup>, in partnership with private developers, engaged in the speculative redevelopment of some of the city's most marginalised social housing estates<sup>3</sup> through PPP regeneration (See Figure 1 and Table 1). Decades of underfunding of local government had resulted in inadequate investment in maintenance and management of these estates leaving tenants suffering from substandard housing conditions such as overcrowding, dampness and poor quality neighbourhood infrastructure. Most of the tenants have family and community ties to Dublin's inner city and thus, despite the deprivation the tenants<sup>4</sup> expressed a strong connection to, and pride in, their local community, emphasising their family and historical connections to these places and their identity as tight-knit inner-city 'working class' neighbourhoods (Bissett, 2008; Hearne, 2011). From 2001 to 2008 the City Council commenced the regeneration through PPPs of at least twelve of its inner city estates, comprising just over 2,000 social housing units, comprising 10% of the City's entire social housing stock at the time. The PPP plans, however, placed little value in these communities as they involved the transfer of the public land to a private developer for private residential and commercial development, in return for the provision of a much reduced amount of social housing on the estates. For example, most of the plans involved a tripling, and in one case quadrupling, of the housing density with

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<sup>2</sup>Dublin City Council is referred in the paper as 'the Council'.

<sup>3</sup>The estates are three to four storey apartment complexes, built between sixty and forty years ago to re-house families from Dublin's notorious tenements. They are significantly large inner city social housing estates in the Irish context. The estates comprise substantial parcels of public land. For example the Dolphin House estate contained 18 acres (7.28Ha), O Devaney Gardens, 16 acres (6.47Ha), St Michael's Estate 14 acres (5.7Ha) and Fatima Mansions 11 acres (4.45Ha).

<sup>4</sup>The term tenant and resident are used interchangeably in this paper to reflect the way in which the tenants in these communities refer to themselves interchangeably and at different times as tenants of a local authority estate with Dublin City Council as their landlord, but also as 'residents' of the estate or local area, which reflects their own identity as being of, from, and belonging to, the area as a resident, beyond just being a tenant, which has a more transitory connotation in Ireland.

private residential comprising three quarters of the planned 'regenerated' estates. To achieve this the Council undertook a process of 'de-tenanting' whereby it relocated tenants to other social housing units in the city and did not re-let the unit, thereby reducing the number of occupied apartments on the estates. This reflected the Council's longer term aims to reduce its role in the direct provision and management of social housing (Hearne, 2011).

Figure 1. Location of Case Study Dublin inner city Local-authority estates planned for PPP Regeneration

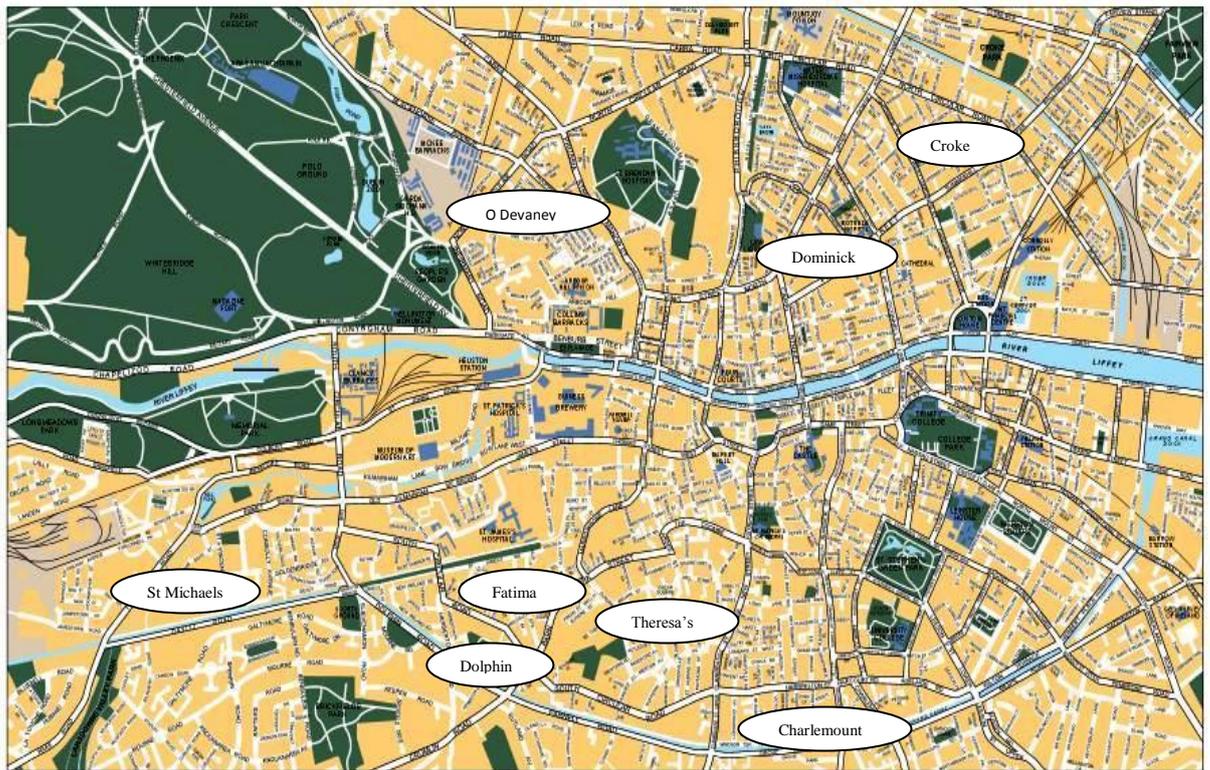


Table 1 Case Study Dublin inner city Local-authority estates planned for PPP Regeneration

Estate	Year Built	No of Original Social Units	PPP history	Occupied social units 2008	Occupied social units 2013	Regeneration status 2013
Fatima Mansions	1949	394	PPP tender advertised 2003, construction started 2004	150	150	Complete, 395 private, 150 social
St Michael's Estate	1970s	346	PPP tender advertised 2005, developer selected 2007	14	0	PPP collapse, detenanted, demolition of all existing units, 76 new social units, crèche and community building built by state funding in 2013, managed by housing association, remaining site derelict
O' Devaney Gardens	1950s	278	PPP tender advertised 2005, contract signed with developer 2007	178	44	PPP collapse, DCC abandon regeneration in 2012, de-tenanting on-going, some demolition
Croke Villas	1961	87	2005-7 consultation/tender assessment, contract signed with developer 2008	38	17	Detenanting, plans on 'hold'
Dominick Street	1961	198	2005-7 consultation/tender assessment	108	62	PPP collapse, plans 'on hold', de-tenanting on-going
Charlemont Street	1960s	181	2006-7 consultation/tender assessment	141	70	PPP plans resubmitted for planning 2012, de-tenanting, demolition of first phase 2014
St Theresa's gardens	1952	346	PPP tender advertised 2008	300	108	PPP collapse . 60 new units planned for 2014, De-tenanting on-going
Dolphin House	1956	436	PPP feasibility study & community consultation 2007	436	436	PPP collapse, 40 units refurbished with state funding in 2013, new regen plans of gov funded replacement of all social units on site, temporary tenant relocation not detenanting

Source: Hearne (2011, 2013)

Fatima Mansions and St Michael's Estate were chosen as pilot projects by the Council in 2003. These estates had well organised communities with a long history of community development work<sup>5</sup>. The Council stated that regeneration would only

<sup>5</sup>These areas, particularly Fatima and Dolphin (part of the Rialto community area), had a long history of voluntary community activism. In the 1990s the state provided funding to local voluntary groups in marginalised areas to enable them to employ community development workers. These areas attracted significant funding from these initiatives and developed Community Development Projects, Family Resource Centres, and Youth Projects with community workers actively engaged with the local tenants. They worked to challenge both the causes and effects of poverty by empowering communities to self organise and demand equality in treatment from the state. They applied a radical community development approach based on working with the community to build up its own capacity and organisation in order to enable it critically challenge the power structures of the state. They also played a key management and co-ordinating of local childcare, health, youth service provision), supporting communities to participate in state-community initiatives around estate management and policing. The community workers were often the representatives of the communities (chairs of residents associations etc) and generally tenants or former tenants of the estates.

take place if it was done through a PPP which, given the conditions on the estates, left the communities with little option but to engage with this new neoliberal policy (Bissett, 2008; Hearne, 2011). The communities insisted on the provision of resources (additional community workers and funding for independent architectural expertise) and the setting up of local regeneration 'Boards'<sup>6</sup> that would enable the communities participate in a meaningful way within the regeneration process. Despite the existence of these structures the communities had to argue with the Council and campaign to elected representatives to ensure their participation in important decisions such as planning and tendering (they were excluded from direct, formal, negotiations with the developer) and the resourcing by the Council of the community to enable them engage as equal partners in the process. This reflected similar experiences of other communities in Dublin engaging in participatory planning initiatives of the City Council in this period (McLaran, et al., 2007). The communities also contested the composition of the plans and made the case for higher numbers of social housing units, community facilities, and for 'social regeneration'<sup>7</sup>. As the Council commenced community consultation and the PPP process in other estates across the city, it became apparent to the communities that aspects of the regeneration plans and processes in regard to tenant participation, resourcing of local community boards and projects, and social regeneration components within the PPP was varying from estate to estate. These social components depended upon how well a community was organised to influence the Council (Hearne, 2011; Tenants First, 2005). In order to respond to this community groups active on the PPP estates came together to form a new tenant's network, Tenants First<sup>8</sup> which aimed to be a "strong collective voice for local tenants". They organised public meetings with tenants from across the PPP estates which enabled information sharing and empowerment. In 2005, Tenants First developed a cross-city community response to City Council PPP policy in the form of a community policy document. This provided the learnings from the communities' experiences of PPP regeneration as a guide for communities to ensure proper community participation in the development of regeneration plans and the sustaining of estate management

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<sup>6</sup>These regeneration Boards involved City Council architects, planners, local estate managers and community representatives. Each board also had a high profile independent chairperson, for example the CEO of Barnardos was chair of Dolphin and the CEO of a Dublin's children's hospital was the chair of the St Theresa's Gardens board. Significantly, it was agreed that all major decisions on each estate's regeneration was to be agreed at this structure and the tenants had equal voting power to the City Council.

<sup>7</sup>Social regeneration includes initiatives that address the non-residential aspects of the social inequalities affecting the communities such as provision of community facilities, local employment, education, training, family support, youth engagement, improved policing etc.

<sup>8</sup>Tenants First was set up in 2003 as an independent and voluntary network of representatives from Dublin's inner city local authority communities. Its principal structure is a central Steering Group which is guided and informed by grassroots public meetings with tenants and community organisations. The steering group has between 8 to 15 members who are mainly community workers and residents representing the various communities involved. Initially the communities represented in Tenants First included Fatima, St Michaels, O Devaney Gardens, and Dolphin House. A number of housing academic advisors were involved, including the author, from Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin. The local public meetings were held a number of times each year with around 40 to 70 community activists in attendance.

and community safety during the regeneration process. Five thousand copies of the Regeneration Guide (Tenants First, 2005) were distributed to communities across Dublin's inner city.

Through 2008 and 2009 Tenants First co-ordinated the city-wide community response to the collapse of the PPP regeneration plans. In May 2008 the private developers withdrew from the PPP projects (except for Fatima which was largely completed) as, due to the Irish property market crash, one developer explained had made the "concept of using the sale of private housing units to fund social and affordable housing...unsustainable in the current market" (McNamara, 2008). This starkly revealed the neoliberal structure of the PPP regeneration projects. The communities held public protests at Council meetings and called for the national government and the Council to intervene and provide state investment to undertake the regeneration the communities badly needed. But in December that year the Council announced that 'the regeneration projects are no longer viable under the Public Private Partnership process that had been envisaged' and the communities would have to wait for regeneration when there was an 'upturn' in the market and PPPs became viable again (Dublin City Council, 2009). Furthermore, in 2008 the Irish government commenced a series of harsh austerity Budgets that disproportionately reduced funding for social housing and the regeneration of disadvantaged communities<sup>9</sup>. The Council abandoned the regeneration plans and focused on further de-tenanting, demolition, and developing new plans entailing a very small amount of new social housing and large parts of the sites being left vacant for potential sale for private redevelopment in the future.

The following sections of this paper detail the communities' responses, both individually and through Tenants First, to the collapse of PPPs and the implementation of austerity in regeneration and community services (Table 2). It analyses the processes, ideas, perspectives, strategy and campaigns that these communities undertook to try and achieve a community oriented regeneration that could provide a decent standard of housing and neighbourhood to enable social housing tenants to remain living with dignity and equality in their local place that was their homes. This is then reflected on and analysed for its potential contribution to strategies for achieving the right to the city in practice for marginalised communities. The research for the paper is based on evidence gathered from over a decade of work and activism by the author with these communities<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup>For example, the 2008 Budget included a €250 million cut in funding for social housing and regeneration, resulting in a reduction in local authority funding by 24 per cent. Subsequent budgets reduced the funding for the National Regeneration Programme from €121 million in 2008, to €80 million in 2013 (Redmond & Hearne, 2013).

<sup>10</sup>The author participated in Tenants First events from its inception and has been a member of the steering group from 2006 to the present. He worked as a community worker and community advisor on PPPs on the Dolphin House estate from 2007 until 2013. In that period he was involved in setting up the Rialto Rights InAction Group, engaged in campaigns against the cuts to community projects and has been involved in developing the collective complaint with the Housing Rights Group from 2011 until present.

Table 2 Regeneration Policy Context and Community Activity in Dublin PPP Estates 2003-2013

Year	Regeneration Policy context	Tenants First activity	Estate level activity
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPPs introduced by Dublin City Council to Fatima and St Michael's</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tenants First Set up by PPP communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Fatima commences PPP</li> </ul>
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPPs extended to 12 estates across Dublin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tenants First produce <i>Real Guide to Regeneration</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Communities work to influence PPP at estate level</li> </ul>
2005-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fatima PPP constructed</li> <li>• De-tenanting across communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤</li> </ul>	
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property market crash &amp; PPPs collapse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tenants First organises protests at DCC meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ St Michael's Estate launches campaign</li> </ul>
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerity Budgets &amp; merger/closure of CDPs</li> <li>• €250m cut in funding for social housing and regeneration, 24% cut to local authority funding</li> <li>• CDP funding cut from €84.7m to €75m</li> <li>• St Michael's Estate Phase 1 gets state funding</li> <li>• Worsening conditions (housing &amp; safety) on former PPP estates</li> <li>• DCC attempts to close Regeneration Boards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tenants First produces <i>Housing for Need Not Greed</i> &amp; lobbies local election candidates</li> <li>➤ Community leaders organise campaign against cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dolphin Human Rights Campaign (RRIAG) starts</li> <li>➤ Communities struggle for DCC to address conditions</li> </ul>
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerity Budget</li> <li>• Merger/closure of CDPs</li> <li>• CDP funding cut from €75m to €67.5m</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Tenants First reduced participation &amp; question whether to continue or not</li> <li>➤ Communities ongoing campaign against cuts</li> <li>➤ Rialto Communities produce regeneration policy document &amp; lobby national election candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dolphin Human Rights Campaign holds public hearings</li> </ul>
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerity Budgets: National Regeneration Programme cut from €121 m in 2008 to €80 million in 2013</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ After lobby by Rialto Group the UN expert on poverty calls for Ireland to introduce National Regeneration Legislation and Community Consultation</li> <li>➤ CAN &amp; Tenants First start national human rights campaign</li> <li>➤ Communities ongoing campaign against cuts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Dolphin Human Rights Campaign on-going</li> <li>➤ Communities pressure for DCC to address conditions, provide regeneration, and to be part of decision making relating to Housing Associations</li> </ul>
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerity Budgets</li> <li>• DCC abandon plans for O Devaney</li> <li>• Dolphin House gets refurbishment</li> <li>• DCC implements new Gov policy of transferring new regen housing to Housing Associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ CAN &amp; Tenants First organise national human rights campaign for collective complaint, Limerick get involved</li> <li>➤ Communities ongoing campaign against cuts</li> </ul>	
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerity Budgets</li> <li>• St Theresa's &amp; Dolphin Regeneration get go ahead from government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ CAN &amp; Tenants First organise human rights campaign for local estates</li> <li>➤ Tenants First produce <i>Right to Regeneration</i> policy document to lobby local election candidates in 2014</li> </ul>	

***Extending a right to the city: Communities respond to the collapse of PPP projects***

The communities realised that their issues were marginalised within the national political context of austerity and, therefore, they needed to undertake action which

would gain them wider public support and thus provide a greater pressure on politicians and government officials. In an attempt to implement this strategy Tenants First used the local elections, which were due to be held in May 2009, as an opportunity to try influence the local and national policy response to the collapse of PPPs and highlight the worsening conditions on the estates. They did this by producing the policy document, 'Housing for Need not Greed; Tenants First Action Plan for Sustaining Homes and Communities'. It critiqued the policies and practices of the PPPs which "had left access to social housing and community facilities to the whims of the market...and lead to unacceptable living conditions, segregation, inequality and exclusion" (Tenants First, 2009, 2). It detailed how conditions were far worse than they were when regeneration was first proposed as a result of the neglect of maintenance of housing units, estate management and de-tenanting by local authorities. It argued that the underlying strategy of local authorities at the heart of the PPPs was to "allow estates deteriorate so people have no choice but to leave so that local authorities can get access to the prime development land that these estates are located on to sell for private development and the issue of these 'problem' estates is permanently removed" (Tenants First, 2009, 5). The Tenants First policy included proposals for a government investment fund of €3bn for a ten-year national regeneration programme. This was to be implemented by a newly formed *Social Housing and Community Regeneration Board* which would be representative of local authority, central government, tenants and community interests. It would also enshrine in national legislation the principles of community consultation and participation, sustaining existing communities, and the prioritisation of social regeneration measures. The Board and the legislation, it was outlined, would ensure that local authority practice followed policy evenly across different areas. It also called for a reversal of the neoliberalisation of social housing by reverting to local authorities' role in ensuring that good quality accommodation is available to households unable to compete in the market system and that any role for private sector investment should at all times be subservient to and supplementary to this key principle (Tenants First, 2009).

Ten thousand copies of the document were distributed to local communities in Dublin's inner city to empower them to seek commitments to these changes from local election candidates. A media launch was held, the document was distributed to all the political parties, and support was sought for the proposals from influential national organisations including Ireland's largest trade union, SIPTU, and social housing charities.

Meanwhile, at an individual estate level, the community of St Michael's, which had engaged in considerable public mobilisation around their original regeneration plan, undertook a proactive, publicly critical and political campaign including street protest, developing a website detailing the history of the estate and the campaign, participation in national media and organising public meetings with the local population, city council officials and elected politicians. A leading community worker within their campaign also wrote a ground breaking book on the community impacts of the PPP collapse (see Bissett, 2008). By June 2009 the campaign had successfully

achieved a government commitment to build the first phase of their regeneration including seventy social housing units on site.

In September 2009 the national policies of austerity began to impact on another aspect of these communities. The Government announced the closure of the Community Development Projects (CDPs) and their merger with Local Partnership companies. While funding for community development had already been reduced from €84.7 million in 2008 to €75million in 2009 the proposals include a further reduction of fifty per cent over the next five years. The merger would also entail a significant diminution of the autonomy of local communities to decide the nature of the work of the CDPs, as it gave local authorities, who played a key role in Partnership companies, greater decision making. This placed the entire community development infrastructure under threat as local authorities had shown themselves to be dismissive and often openly hostile to community development activism. In order to receive any state funding in 2010 the CDPs had to agree to the merger process. Faced with this assault on their communities the key community workers that had led Tenants First, up to this point, now took up the leadership of opposition to these proposals by organising a campaign at local and national level in an alliance with other community groups and SIPTU. The injustice and significance of the proposals was outlined by a community worker involved in Tenants First:

"These are community driven projects that continually work to weave and strengthen the social fabric of disadvantaged communities in the face of huge threats by the withdrawal and abandonment of both public and private services. Community based organisations have become the final line of defence for many vulnerable residents. These organisations help maintain some semblance of dignity for residents in face of acute poverty. Many community based projects are delivering services at a fraction of the cost it would take the state to deliver them. What kind of society would withdraw services that offer a vital form of social protection to vulnerable families while investing billions of the tax payers' money to prop up the bankers and developers who have failed this society and brought it to economic collapse?" (Tenants First Community Worker, speaking at a demonstration, January 2010).

The campaign against the proposals included the largest public demonstration held by these communities in decades, with over 12,000 attending a protest in Dublin City Centre, and weekly protests at the constituency office of the Minister for Community Affairs. In December 2009, however, the funding for community development 2010 was cut to €67.5million. This resulted in local projects having to reduce workers' hours, make workers redundant, and reduce spending on community initiatives and maintenance of community buildings. The government implemented the merger proposals in January 2010 but granted some concessions including the flexibility of local arrangements that would allow communities retain an influence on the work of the projects. Through 2010 the communities fought to retain the maximum autonomy within the merger process, particularly retaining the emphasis on community development work.

The community activists were exhausted by the volume of work and effort that they put into the campaign against the merger and cuts, while the reduction in community development workers and closure of projects meant increased workloads for those remaining. They also had to sustain the, on-going, intense, struggle at local estate-level to influence the city council into maintaining the estates (through stopping de-tenanting and providing improved estate management) and develop new regeneration plans. They were also faced with a proposal from a number of elected city councillors to abolish the local Regeneration Boards. The case was made that the Boards were unnecessary given the funding collapse. The reality was they had become a political irritant to the councillors who disliked the level of power and decision making being held at a local level by these Boards. The city Council officials also supported this as the independent chairs of the Boards provided an important public voice of support for the estates. Understandably then, community representatives had little energy or enthusiasm for engaging at a city-wide level with Tenants First and, as a consequence, numbers attending the meetings reduced significantly in 2009 and 2010.

In the context of this diminished participation the steering group sought to respond to the tidal wave of austerity and the ongoing neoliberalisation of social housing by leveraging support for their local issues and the policy outlined in *Housing for Need not Greed* at a national level from SIPTU and Irish social housing and homeless charities and NGOs. Tenants First tried to create an alliance with these organisations so that it could influence national policy and media beyond what was perceived as the existing capacity of the communities. A number of meetings were held in September and October 2009 where general support was expressed by the organisations for Tenants First policy, but the only action that emerged was an attempt to lobby politicians for representation of social housing interests on the board of the newly formed National Asset Management Agency. This reflected the housing charities' over focus on corporatist, partnership approaches, involving a narrow emphasis on their own service provision and preference for lobbying rather than political action and solidarity with community issues that they perceived as not directly linked to their organisation's priorities and responsibilities.

By early 2010 involvement in Tenants First had reduced to the point where the steering group debated whether there was a "need for a citywide organisation". Their analysis of the various strategies employed by the communities thus far suggested that the most important and effective action in the current crisis was the local estate-level action and, therefore, Tenants First should only continue if it was supporting that work. They identified that while Tenants First had been weak at building local commitment and grassroots connections it had provided an important space for information sharing between communities and "linking the local struggles to bigger policy battles such as analysis and production of policy guide" but "the 'bigger picture' policy and lobbying had become too far removed from local realities as most people are only worried about their local predicament" (Tenants First Steering Group, February 2010). Therefore, it was concluded that the local action

(particularly on issues of housing conditions and estate management) combined with city wide and national campaigns against cuts and austerity were a more useful vehicle for the communities to progress their issues at that point than Tenants First.

### ***A Right to The City in One Neighbourhood: The case study of the Human Rights Approach in Dolphin House***

The community in Dolphin House had taken a critical view of PPPs and resisted the policy of de-tenanting. This meant that the PPP had not progressed as far as other areas and there remained a strong locally committed community, as it was a fully tenanted estate when the collapse occurred (see Table 1). However, conditions on the estate deteriorated in 2009 and 2010, particularly illegal drug dealing and anti-social behaviour, and maintenance issues of sewage inflows and dampness. The local Community Development Project<sup>11</sup> and a Dublin based NGO, Community Action Network (CAN<sup>12</sup>), formed an alliance, the Rialto Rights InAction Group (RRIAG), to develop a radically different approach through human rights, to try pressure the Council to address the tenants' issues. The RRIAG focused on campaigning for the right to decent housing conditions, the right to community based regeneration that would sustain the existing community and a transformation of the unequal power relationship between the Council and tenants.

The RRIAG used radical community development organising principles<sup>13</sup> to educate and train tenants in human rights based approaches and support, organise and empower them to develop an innovative public campaign centred on highlighting how the Irish state had breached its human rights obligations to this disadvantaged community. This moved the scale of engagement and campaigning from trying to influence locally-based DCC officials who had little power or resourcing to provide fundamental change, to the state duty bearer, the Ministers for Housing and the Environment.

The RRIAG methodologically and scientifically gathered evidence of the breaches of rights in relation to the substandard housing conditions, organised public human rights 'hearings' where all the relevant state and community bodies were invited to state their case, undertook public relations work to obtain media coverage, lobbied

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<sup>11</sup>In which the author worked as a community worker and policy advisor

<sup>12</sup>CAN is a Dublin-based community development NGO that had trained, educated and worked with community projects in Dolphin, Fatima, St Michael's and other inner city communities for over two decades.

<sup>13</sup>This was based on CAN's interpretation of community development which is based on the idea that change is more effective if it comes from within communities and therefore the approach seeks to give communities and individuals the tools that will enable them to "organise for change" in the circumstances of their lives. CAN acknowledges that community development involves a certain amount of service provision, and that this is indeed essential given the persistent gaps in services to communities. However, the main thrust of community development, in their view, must be to enable communities to "do it for themselves", to vigorously assert their civic and human rights to a decent quality of life. Change must be systemic in order to achieve equality for marginalised communities and to get such a change requires a revolutionary change in society's systems, culture, politics and economics (CAN, 2013).

politicians, and met with the Council and the Department of Housing and the Environment.

At the first public hearing, the Irish Human Rights Commission condemned the substandard living conditions as deplorable and asserted that these conditions clearly contravened the rights of residents under the United Nations Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, to which Ireland is a signatory (Irish Times, 2010). This approach received significant coverage in the national media and political support with a member of parliament highlighting the issue in DailEireann<sup>14</sup>:

“Dolphin House and many other flat complexes have strong communities with people who are proud to live where they are. Generations have grown up rooted in the community where they live. They have supported the idea of regeneration from the start...The bottom line is that the human rights of these people, their right to proper housing and sanitation, are being totally disregarded which is unacceptable and cannot continue. It is vital that the Government takes action on the issue of housing conditions and on the broader issue of regeneration...I believe that the people living in Dolphin House, St. Teresa’s Gardens<sup>15</sup> and St. Michael’s Estate have rights” (Byrne, 2010).

In October 2010 the Dolphin and the Fatima<sup>16</sup> community reworked the Tenants First 2009 policy document into an updated proposal aimed “at influencing *national policy in order to try get improvements in practice of local governance at a local estate level as it was felt that only national legislation would ensure proper practice at local level*” (Rialto Learning Community, 2010). It critiqued the ongoing emphasis on “community displacement and property development approaches, rather than sustaining communities and ensuring participation.” Reflecting the influence of the RRIAG, it included the demand that regeneration meet human rights standards. The Group convinced the Independent Chairs of the five remaining Regeneration Boards<sup>17</sup> to publicly support the proposal and, as a result, obtained a meeting with officials from the Department of Housing and Environment and the Minister’s advisor. In January 2011, the group secured also a meeting with the UN Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, during a monitoring visit to Ireland. As a result, the Expert made the following recommendation to the Irish government, “the (Fatima) project provides a good example of community participation in the decision-making process that should be ensured in other projects, such as the Dolphin House project in the Rialto area. I encourage the Government to consider the proposal of adopting a legislative framework for a national Public Housing Estates Regeneration Programme, to ensure that international human rights standards and community participation are ensured in all regeneration projects in

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<sup>14</sup>Ireland’s national parliament

<sup>15</sup>St Theresa’s Gardens is also in Catherine Byrne’s constituency

<sup>16</sup>This was a project of the Rialto Learning Community which was resourced through funding from Atlantic Philanthropies

<sup>17</sup>The Chairs were from the St Michael’s, O Devaney Gardens, Dolphin, St Theresa’s and Fatima Regeneration Boards

the country. The right to adequate housing entails human rights obligations that Ireland must respect and ensure.”

As the Council continued to deny the scale of the problems in Dolphin and deny their responsibility to address them, the RRIAG held further human rights ‘hearings’ in 2011. A submission was also made to the UN Periodic Review of Ireland and the group secured a meeting with the Minister for Equality. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011 the national TV station aired a programme detailing the impacts of the collapse of the PPP regeneration projects. This made particular reference to the Dolphin human rights campaign. A few days later, the Minister for Housing was questioned in Dail Eireann about Dolphin. In his response he publicly accepted *“that accommodation which was designed and built more than 50 years ago has not kept pace with modern lifestyles and stated “I am assured that the council is taking a proactive approach to resolving issues in relation to ingress of damp, drainage and ventilation in Dolphin House”* (Penrose, 2011). The Council then accepted its responsibility to address the housing conditions, the right of the community to be sustained rather than dislocated, and the right of tenants to participate in the decision making process to address the issues. In 2013 the Council was funded by the Department of the Environment to refurbish forty of the worst affected apartments as a temporary measure before regeneration commenced. New, community oriented, regeneration plans were also developed and submitted for planning permission. Physical rebuilding is expected to commence in the regeneration of Dolphin house in late 2016. Thus, the RRIAG had successfully pressured Irish State agencies to begin to implement measures to rectify substandard housing conditions and provide community based regeneration for the community of Dolphin House, despite previously denying responsibility and claiming an inability to fund such measures given the impacts of austerity.

### ***Tenants First Reinvigorated: Human Rights Approach Extended to Other Estates***

Following from the success of Dolphin, CAN<sup>18</sup> held discussions with the Tenants First steering group to explore ways to spread the human rights model to other areas. Given the legitimacy of Tenants First in Dublin’s marginalised social housing estates it was decided that it would be a good forum to try bring together various social housing communities to assess the scale of housing problems and willingness to engage in a national human rights campaign. A number of successful meetings were held in 2011 and 2012 with over one hundred community workers and tenants attending. These included representatives from estates beyond the original participants in Tenants First including ones in regeneration processes and others, not designated for regeneration but also suffering from substandard housing conditions<sup>19</sup>. Significantly, there was representation from the western City of

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<sup>18</sup>Can were able to dedicate resources to do this as a result of successfully obtaining funding from Rowntree to extend the human rights work from Dolphin to other disadvantaged communities across the country

<sup>19</sup>These included communities from Limerick City, social housing estates that had been built in the last five years in Dublin’s suburbs, and older social housing communities not identified for regeneration in

Limerick<sup>20</sup> where communities designated for regeneration had suffered community dislocation, inadequate community consultation, and substandard housing conditions).

At this point the possibility of taking a collective complaint to the European Committee on Social Rights in relation to the housing conditions and failed regeneration was explored. It was hoped that this would progress the issues collectively for all these communities, in a similar fashion to the way in which the RRIAG was successful for Dolphin. A separate Housing Rights Group<sup>21</sup> took on the development of the collective complaint. Through the summer of 2012 CAN and Tenants First gathered evidence of substandard conditions to support the complaint from individual estates. However, the collective complaint procedure proceeded at a much slower pace than was initially expected given that it was tied up with wider housing issues and the reluctance of some Irish housing NGOs to support it. CAN and Tenants First, therefore, focused on providing training and community development support to empower the communities to implement a human rights based approach in their local area. This has been quite successful with tenants explaining at a meeting in June 2013 how the Tenants First meetings, training and CAN support meant they were more hopeful and more determined than ever to take on the council over their housing issues:

“this training and the (Tenants First) meetings have given us a new energy to go and campaign on our issues to the council” (Tenant 1)

“it gives the communities hope that they can do something, and because its human rights the council have to listen to us, it has already worked getting the council to do a survey on the housing conditions (Tenant 2)

“Our human rights are being trampled on and it has to stop. We had fewer problems five years ago; regeneration has destroyed our communities with depopulation and the boarding-up of homes” (Tenant 3)

‘its amazing what Dolphin has achieved, their human rights approach offers us a new way to address these issues (Tenant 4).

The human rights approach reinvigorated Tenants First. With this renewed energy it took up the campaign for a legislated national regeneration programme by putting the right to regeneration central to an updated policy document. This aimed to empower local communities with detailed knowledge of their rights specifically in

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Dublin’s inner city and suburbs. There was no representation from O Devaney Gardens as the City Council completely abandoned plans for the estate in 2012. O Devaney had also been affected by the withdrawal of funding by DCC in 2010 for regeneration workers and the government imposed closure of the Dublin Inner City Partnership in May 2010 which had provided support to the community for over twenty years.

<sup>20</sup>These included local authority housing estates of Ballinacurra Weston and Moyross where resident’s groups had been actively campaigning on these issues in relation to the proposed regeneration of their areas

<sup>21</sup> This involved the author, CAN, three Dublin community law centres, a housing and law expert academic from NUI Galway, and a homeless charity, Focus Ireland. The complaint also included housing issues affecting minorities, the homelessness and issues of security of tenure that were the community law centres were active on

relation to regeneration and to influence political parties leading up to local elections due to be held in May 2014. The updated policy also included the demand that the public land on the former PPP estates that was currently lying vacant be used to provide much needed social housing rather than being sold to private investors. It also called for genuine community consultation in relation to the radical change in Government housing policy implemented in June 2011 which gave a much greater role to voluntary Housing Association bodies<sup>22</sup>.

Significantly, community activists from these communities have also linked to wider campaigns against austerity, co-organising demonstrations against budget cuts with trade unions and other civil society groups. In 2013 they linked with housing academics and Dublin Occupy activists to try and develop a broader 'right to the city' movement in Dublin. A right to the city protest was held in Dublin to coincide with the European Day of Action on Housing Rights in October 2013. However, it was only a small protest. This represented the first tentative steps towards the development of a much needed broader right to the city movement that could link together the local struggles with other groups excluded from neoliberal Dublin such as trade unionists, migrants, unemployed youth, those in mortgage arrears facing eviction, those in private rented in poor accommodation with escalating rents. As the broader homelessness and private rental crisis worsened in Dublin in 2014 and 2015 new grassroots housing campaigns emerged that asserted a right to a home.

### ***Achieving the right to the city in practice: radical community development and human rights***

The community action involved in these case studies from Dublin can be analysed as combining four overarching strategies. Firstly, a radical community development approach was pursued, where tenants were empowered to lead and be involved centrally in decision making processes, both within the community campaign structures and local government estate management structures. It was ensured that the tenants were trained as the media spokespeople, chaired and facilitated meetings, made the presentations to the Public Hearings and UN structures, etc. There was also a process of direct democracy and accountability where the community representatives negotiating with the Council had to report back to weekly community meetings and then to the entire community at public meetings.

The other aspect to this radical community development and rights approach was its political nature. It was based on facilitating tenants to realise their political agency by organising actions aimed to publicly highlight the failures of the Council and government policy and practice. It also converted the demands and needs of the community into a framework of rights of the community, in relation to regeneration and housing. The communities realised that while the local and national state policy

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<sup>22</sup>Dublin City Council decided in 2012 and 2013 to transfer management of the new housing being built in the first phase of regeneration in St Michael's and St Theresa's to housing associations. The communities were concerned about the impact of this new form of social housing delivery in relation to rent levels, community influence, and privatisation (Redmond & Hearne, 2013).

and practice placed little value on the rights of the communities, the state was still accountable to political and public pressure. Therefore, if the communities engaged in the public sphere and obtained public and political support they could create a power that would force the local authority to address the issues. The key strategy then was organizing the power and agency of these working class communities into politically influential processes. This was done through campaigns of public protest that achieved media coverage and an intense lobbying of elected politicians. What the communities discovered was that using a human rights framework significantly added to their power. And it was the publicly critical nature of the human rights campaign which created the political pressure that, ultimately, forced the state to act. The approach empowered the community to undertake political actions that directly confronted neoliberal urbanism and outlined alternative approaches based on implementing the rights of these marginalised communities. This work was then followed through with engagement, lobbying and negotiation with the political institutions, including making the case to elected representatives in the government and opposition, and inviting them to respond at the Public Hearings. This reveals clearly as Mayer (2009, 2011) has outlined, that the rights implied in human rights frameworks and the right to the city only exist in so far as people fight to create them through social and political action. These examples show that the rights of these communities existed in institutional frameworks but it was not until they engaged in political struggle that their rights were defined from their own perspective and achieved in practice and became a reality.

It is important to note that the community workers most enabled to pursue this approach were those funded from independent philanthropic sources<sup>23</sup>. Community workers dependent on state funding were taking a risk in engaging in such publicly critical work, and while some workers did engage in radical action, they explained to the author that there was both an implicit and an explicit pressure placed on them from the Council to be less publicly critical of the local authority. The Government also attempted to silence community critique through the austerity funding cuts that were targeted at community development, which officials and politicians believed was too politically critical of government policy. This continued the policy trend which had emerged in the early 2000s where community development was encouraged to be less agitational and more focused on meeting service needs (Meade, 2012). The radical community development approaches applied in these case studies, therefore, provide a critique and challenge to community organisation and NGO practice that fails to directly challenge state power and neoliberalism.

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<sup>23</sup>Examples of where this independent funding enabled publicly critical action is the case of the RRIAG which was supported through CAN, which obtained philanthropic funding from Rowntree. Similarly the fact that while the author was working as a community worker in Dolphin he was funded by the charity Barnardos, which enabled the taking of a critical stance on the state. In Fatima, funding from Atlantic Philanthropies for the Rialto Learning Community enabled the Rialto Group to undertake political lobbying work on the legislation for a national regeneration programme to be pursued without fear of state funding reductions.

Another important aspect to these forms of community action was the way in which they adapted their strategies to the contradictory nature of the neoliberal state. They responded to state failure and neglect by commissioning their own architects and independent expertise to develop practical solutions to the housing issues, and creating policy alternatives, and funding proposals. They realised though, that they still needed the support and funding of the state to implement the required measures. Therefore, the communities organised on-going meetings, which took place in parallel to the publically critical campaign work, with various local and central government officials, planners, architects, and housing managers. They thus engaged with the state to ensure implementation. This also meant the measures implemented were closer to what the community needed and wanted than previously had been the case given, that the community was directly involved in overseeing and supporting their implementation. This did, however, challenge the community as it had to ensure it did not reduce its demands and compromise its rights as a result of the pressure applied from the local authority to limit what was possible within the complicated and frustrating practical implementation process of measures to address the conditions such as refurbishment and new regeneration plans.

In contrast to the dominant forms of community participation and consultation in local regeneration and planning processes these communities demanded, and achieved in some instances, a much more radical and fundamentally democratic and empowering form of engagement. They implemented a community development and human rights approach which achieved a radical social empowerment of marginalised citizens that both enabled tenants to become empowered themselves to view their conditions as a breach of the state's obligations and their rights under international human rights treaties but also forced the Irish State to engage with the tenants as legitimate rights holders through participative mechanisms. Tenants explained that it was the framing of their issues within a human rights context and language that gave them the legitimacy, confidence, and belief to campaign and state publicly that their living conditions were a clear violation of the state's responsibilities under human rights instruments. This framework provided a confidence to them to publicly demand that their desire to live where they were, in their communities, which encompassed their connection to their place, was a right that they had, and should be implemented. These approaches enabled them to believe that they had a right to *their* city, and through public action they could achieve that right.

The important role played by the human rights framework challenges those who critique human rights institutional frameworks as being tools of neoliberalism. These communities took the human rights framework and adapted it to their own reality. They drew on the rights enshrined in various UN treaties, and achieved the support from some of the institutional human rights infrastructure such as the UN reviews and the Irish Human Rights commission. However, they did not rely on such institutional human rights frameworks, but developed their own political agency and empowered themselves using these rights frameworks to challenge the local and

national state. This highlights that human rights have an emancipator role to play within the achievement of the right to the city.

It is apparent from this research that the activity and struggle at the local terrain remains a central arena for the achievement of the right to the city in practice. The communities believed that the most effective territory for practical political and policy influence was the local estate level. However, the experiences detailed in this paper also point to the necessity of, and community willingness to engage in, a city wide and national perspective that goes beyond the local. In response to the collapse of the neoliberal policy of regeneration through PPPs, these marginalised communities organised themselves on a cross city basis, through the setting up of the network Tenants First, in an attempt to reassert community based regeneration. While the government's implementation of a series of harsh austerity budgets inflicted heavy funding reductions in community development and regeneration projects the communities, in the face of this direct, political, attack and much reduced resources, continued to contest neoliberal austerity and assert their community agenda and campaign for a right to have decent standards of homes and neighbourhood facilities in their city. Indeed it was the existence of this cross city, and now cross cities, network of Tenants First that provided on-going important support to enable and enhance the local level struggles. The communities themselves identified, for example, that the city wide and national campaign was necessary to provide information sharing and influence national policy. Significantly, it was also through the cross city/ies network that enabled the spreading of the human rights approach which has given other marginalised communities that have been decimated by austerity and the collapse of regeneration, a hope that they too, like Dolphin House, can achieve their right to the city. The influence of this process is demonstrated clearly in the Autumn 2013 Newsletter of the Limerick City community of Ballinacurra Weston, which lead with an article headed 'Human Rights: Regeneration Wrongs' and explained,

*"we have just completed our Human Rights Action Training with CAN (Community Action Network) in Dublin. What went on here over the past seven-years with the boarding up of houses was an abuse of our human rights, it caused all sorts of problems for residents and forced many to leave; they had no choice in the matter. ..We learnt a lot from CAN about our human rights. We have the right to adequate housing, to security and safety. We also have a human right to participate in the decisions that affect our lives and that certainly isn't happening now, the Residents Association will be doing all we can to assert those rights going forward."*

Hit by wave after wave of austerity, Tenants First effectively ceased functioning as communities felt they had no alternative but to put all their energy into campaigns against funding cuts to their local community projects and try to influence the housing issues at a local estate level. It was only due to the resources (workers) provided by the independently funded NGO, CAN, which had a radical community development approach, and on-going commitment from a small number of community workers committed to the principles of cross city solidarity, that spreading of the human rights approach through Tenants First was organised. This

highlights the key challenge that faces these communities in finding the resources and energy required to keep a city wide and national network alive, which can organise the right to the city in practice across marginalised urban communities.

### ***Conclusion***

Despite the 2008 crash revealing the clear failure of neoliberal policies they have been continued through a regime of austerity urbanism in Dublin with continued detrimental outcomes for marginalised communities. Within this context the concept of the right to city has never been more relevant. The case study of community action in Irish cities has shown that communities have been empowered through radical community development and collective action human rights campaigns to achieve aspects of a right to the city in practice. The campaigns revealed the potential of communities to both critique and work with sections of the state. The communities provided creativity and policy and practical solutions in contrast to state failure. They have revealed that neoliberal governance remains a contestable space whose outcome is not predetermined. This suggests that academics, community organisations, NGOs, and human rights organisations that are interested in pursuing a right to the city need to include an aspect of publicly critical political action that empowers communities to define what they mean by the right to the city and supports them to campaign against the state institutions for its implementation. Socio-spatial inequalities can be thus challenged through these variants of 'right to the city' approaches that involve community development principles of empowerment and political action using a human rights framework. This paper also highlights the important contribution that territorial community identity, the connection of these working class, marginalised, communities to their place, can make to organising a movement to achieve a right to the city. Through their commitment to, and pride in, their community, the abstract concept of a right to the city becomes, for these communities, a practical possibility as they are empowered to demand the 'right to our city', 'in our communities'.

The Dublin cases are interesting also as they provide an example of traditional, working class, marginalized communities engaging in struggle for their socio-economic rights in the city against displacement and neoliberalism. They saw the central site of struggle as being their community but also attempted to link across the city space with other communities. A similar pattern is emerging in a new wave of resistance to the housing crisis in 2015 which is rooted in local communities (such as local activist group, North Dublin Bay Housing Crisis Community) and is also organising city wide protests and rights based approaches to addressing the crisis (for example through Housing Action Now, the Irish Housing Forum and the National Homeless and Housing Coalition). This suggests that these struggles should be given an important recognition as part of the broader right to city movement. They fit alongside the identity struggles, macro level critiques of neoliberalism, anarchist, autonomist and radical academic contributions to achieving the right to the city. The Dublin experience also reveals the real world difficulties of political struggle that seeks to transform extremely harsh conditions for marginalised populations. It

highlights the grubby, complicated, compromising, world of engagement between oppressed communities attempting to assert their rights against and to the institutions of politics and the state. These practical experiences challenge the theoretical purity of abstract concepts of the right to the city. If the right to the city is to genuinely achieve real world change, it has to see these forms of urban political struggles as relevant. There is an obligation on radical scholars advocating the right to the city to engage and support this local level struggle in the most marginalized communities. By doing this we can make the case for the link to be made with other struggles at a European and global scale. Making a theoretical argument of what such movements 'should' do does not offer much in the form of real strategy to achieve a right to the city for these communities.

There is also a debate about whether such struggles like that of the Dublin communities are in fact a form of collective individualism, in that they only seek to achieve a particular right for one social group (Kuymulu, 2013). However, the communities made extensive attempts to provide cross-city organization and solidarity. These struggles therefore could be more closely described as a form of collective solidarity that seeks to achieve their right to their city and link with other communities to provide solidarity.

Considerable challenges have faced the communities in trying to achieve their rights. Most pressing is the on-going commitment to neoliberal austerity urbanism by local and central government. Furthermore, many community organisations have substituted the role of the state and are focused on service provision rather than developing much needed radical, community-based, policy alternatives and undertaking political action and mobilisation. Added to this is the very real practical difficulty for marginalised communities to find the energy and resources to create city wide and national networks and alliances that can offer the potential to provide fundamental policy transformations, a right for the whole city, beyond local isolated examples of the right to the city achieved in one neighbourhood. These are the challenges to which academics, practitioners and activists must apply themselves, guided by the principles of empowerment, social mobilisation and social justice that are at the heart of achieving a right to the city in practice.

The promotion of these case studies is not to suggest that these are the only way to achieve a right to the city. Clearly, they offer only one strategy, amongst many others (including radical political parties, broader social movements etc) that has the potential to achieve aspects of the right to the city. A more fundamental transformation of neoliberal capitalism is required to fully achieve a right to the city, where private property and markets are democratised and run according to needs of cities' inhabitants. This paper does suggest, however, that the radical community development and human rights approaches adopted by the case study communities in Dublin, offer the potential to provide one forward step on the journey towards a more egalitarian city. They are also about the realm of collective consumption, the neoliberal state, rather than private property per se. In this way they raise the complicated questions of to what extent is the neoliberal state reformable? And

what are they trying to reform it to? The rights being struggled for, social housing, real local democracy, community empowerment can to some extent be accommodated within the existing institutional frame, however they also present a more radical challenge in that it requires the state to go beyond neoliberalism to meet these rights. They also are advocating for a more fundamental role of these communities in decision making which the neoliberal state is not showing signs of granting. Rather than legitimising and reinforcing the neoliberal state, therefore, these should be drawn upon as examples of hope that within the leviathan of neoliberal, austerity urbanism, an alternative right to the city is starting to emerge.

#### *Launch of Housing for Need not Greed 2009*



Dolphin House Conditions

Picture

Dolphin House Human Rights Campaign

Picture

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