



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

PROJECT LIFECOURSE

Neighbourhood Report Series, No. 1

Liberties Neighbourhood Report

Findings from the 3-Cities Project

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Institute for
Lifecourse and Society

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Liberties Neighbourhood Report

Introduction

This report documents research on the participation of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the Liberties, in Dublin city. The research focuses on different experiences and transitions in people's lives, described as their life course, and holistic forms of participation. The Liberties is one of six urban sites featured in the 3-Cities Project (see Box 1). It stands out as a vibrant inner city area of Dublin with a rich cultural heritage. The Liberties' central location and landmarks, such as St. James's Gate, makes it a popular Dublin neighbourhood. Undertaken in collaboration with local residents and stakeholders, the Project represents the first time that this topic has been investigated from the shared perspectives of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. Findings presented here offer insight into: shared experiences of individuals from across these groups; the ways in which they take part in the locality; and how the Liberties, as a place-based community of people and as a service site, facilitates or impedes participation. In the Liberties, two central research questions, developed in conjunction with community stakeholders and local children and youth, older people and people with disabilities, guided the research process. These questions were:

1. How do informal interactions contribute to a sense of community belonging for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the Liberties?
2. What are the implications of change, from processes such as gentrification and social and ethnic diversification, for participation of the three groups in the neighbourhood?

Box 1: The 3-Cities Project

The 3-Cities Project aims to engage in a collaborative process to re-imagine services and communities to maximise participation for children and youth, older people, and people with disabilities in their localities and cities.

Focusing on Dublin, Limerick and Galway the 3-Cities Project has five main objectives:

1. Capture the diverse life-course perspectives of these three groups, and integrate their voices into policy and practice innovation;
2. Explore the role of community and city contexts in shaping the participatory experiences of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
3. Critically review existing service infrastructure for supporting participation amongst these three groups in city life;
4. Underpinned by a commitment to citizen engagement, develop a shared understanding of the assets and opportunities of community living across the life course, with these groups, and local and regional stakeholders;
5. Inform the development of integrative models for participation that support and enable these three groups in their neighbourhoods and cities.

Key messages arising from this research include:

1. The potential role of the neighbourhood to enable participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
2. Changing views on what 'community' means within the Liberties and changes in the practices of how people from the three groups participate locally;
3. Life-course experiences and transitions in participants' lives influence their sense of place and community in the Liberties;
4. Services are a major local asset and can potentially enable more integrated participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
5. Connections between some groups of residents, and some areas within the Liberties, could be strengthened.

Why focus on the neighbourhood level

The research presented here is informed by the first phase of the 3-Cities Project. This work focused on the city-wide level and explored participation in Dublin, Limerick and Galway from the perspectives of service managers, service providers, and children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. The findings from this work (available from: <http://www.nuigalway.ie/ilas/project-lifecourse/the-threecitiesproject/outputs/>) pointed to the need to understand participation for children and youth, older people, and people with disabilities not only in the context of the local urban neighbourhoods that they reside in, but also in the context of their diverse and individual life experiences.

The importance of neighbourhood emerged as a key message. It was reflected in how service stakeholders



described the complexities of service provision to enhance participation. It also featured in local residents' understandings of participation and in their perceptions of barriers to greater engagement. Additionally, the findings suggested that greater consideration should be given to the diversity of neighbourhoods (in social, economic, cultural and demographic terms) within each city. Participation, and service need/provision to enhance participation, was seen to vary from one neighbourhood to the next. It is also important to recognise that these neighbourhoods do not exist in isolation; they are interconnected in various ways with surrounding neighbourhoods and the broader city. It is only by exploring in depth the different kinds of urban neighbourhoods across the three cities that we can hope to understand the role of the city in shaping the lives of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. Addressing themes within existing scientific literature on urbanisation, ageing, youth and disability, and to reflect differing social, economic, demographic and residential perspectives, two neighbourhoods in each city were chosen for the research. Each neighbourhood site fulfils one or more of the following criteria:

1. Represents neighbourhoods of different socio-economic status;
2. Represents new urban/suburban developments;
3. Represents new residential communities: e.g. ethnic minority and migrant communities;
4. Represents significant population and neighbourhood change;
5. Represents an inner-city location.

The first phase of work also illustrated the need to consider community participation as a holistic idea. Informants spoke about participation as involving elements of choice, control, independence and meaningful engagement across multiple areas of life (e.g. personal development; social relations; economic roles; cultural activities; civic participation).

Why did we choose the Liberties

The Liberties was selected as one of the 3-Cities neighbourhood sites as it fulfilled a number of key criteria including: representing an inner-city location, a site traditionally associated with social and economic disadvantage (now representing a population of mixed socio-economic status), and a community that has undergone significant population and neighbourhood change. The Liberties is an inner city neighbourhood

located in the south-west part of the city (see Figure 1). The Liberties is one of Dublin's most iconic neighbourhoods, and is an area of substantial historical and architectural significance. The boundaries of this neighbourhood remain difficult to determine, with no agreed specific administrative boundaries framing the area. Furthermore, individual perceptions of boundaries in the Liberties vary substantially. The geographical definition that we offer is therefore tentative.

Patrick Street and Bride Street. In the southern side of the neighbourhood, there is Cork Street, Theresa's Gardens and Donore Avenue. The area also includes three key commercial arteries which are Thomas Street, Francis Street and Meath Street.

Depending on the boundaries applied, the population of the neighbourhood can vary considerably. The current population is estimated to be over 23,000 (The Liberties, 2016¹). People aged 65 years and over constitute just under



Figure 1 Map of the Liberties.

Source: OpenStreetMap Basemap.

However, it can be said that this is an area with several distinct places of note. The Guinness Lands and adjacent industrial buildings lie to the north-west. To the south-west there are low-rise residential developments in the Maryland's area. At the centre you find residential areas such as Pimlico and the Coombe, while the eastern edge of this neighbourhood is delimited by Christchurch,

9% of the population, which is markedly lower than the national average (12%). Children and youth (aged between 12 and 18 years) comprise just under 5% of local residents, which again is lower than the national average (9%). By contrast, there is a high concentration of people with disabilities (16%) in comparison with the national average (13%) (CSO, 2011²).

The population composition of the Liberties is closely connected to its roots as a thriving industrial area dating

1 The Liberties (2016). The Liberties Business Area Improvement Initiative. Dublin City Council. <http://libertiesdublin.ie/>

2 CSO (2011). Census 2011. Dublin: The Stationary Office.

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from the 19th and early 20th centuries and its legacy as a culturally diverse neighbourhood. Historical links with the Jewish community provide an example of this cultural diversity (Brudell et al, 2004³). Traditional industries went into sharp decline in the 1950's and the area became marked by unemployment, poverty and poor quality social housing. These issues in turn led to the development of social problems associated with drug use, drug related crime and safety concerns in its recent history (Brudell et al, 2004³; Haase 2008⁴).

In the last 20 years, the area has experienced an increased influx of new groups of residents. This includes professional workers, more affluent families and, as stated, migrant populations from diverse nationalities and religious backgrounds. The proportion of foreign-national residents now stands at 32% which is double the national average of 13% (CSO, 2011²). Despite these population changes and considerable urban growth since the late 1990's the Liberties is still an area characterised by lower than average levels of owner occupied houses. Recent developments in the form of social housing regeneration, new housing developments and transport infrastructure would at a glance reinforce the growing assumption that



poverty and deprivation in the Liberties has been largely reduced (Lawton and Punch, 2014⁵). However, these developments are considered to conceal existing pockets of poverty at a micro-level. (Haase, 2008⁴). The urban landscape is now characterised by a very high level of social housing provision which co-exists in sharp contrast with infill housing developments in the form of gated communities and affluent housing estates.

The local community development and community-based health and social care sectors are a significant resource in the Liberties. The Liberties contains a wide range of organisations which service the needs of the residents and provides dedicated supports for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. This includes community and family centres, youth clubs, older adult support groups, meals on wheels programmes and disability services. The stakeholders involved include state bodies, semi-statutory organisations, non-governmental organizations and charities.

What we did

It is helpful to first situate this report within the wider methodology of the 3-Cities Project. The Project adopted an explorative and participatory qualitative approach. Each phase of work, and each strand of research within these phases, sought to inform subsequent research activities. This helped to refine the research questions as the project progressed. This innovative approach also focused on developing a collaborative participatory process with all participants, with a view to equalising power differentials between different groups.

City-wide data collection in the three cities took place



3 Brudell, P., Hammond, C., Henry, J. (2004). Urban planning and regeneration - a community perspective. *Journal of Irish Urban Studies*, 3:1, 65-87.

4 Haase, T. (2008). The changing face of Dublin's inner city. Dublin: Dublin Inner City Partnership.

5 Lawton, P., Punch, M. (2014). Urban governance and the 'European City': ideals and realities in Dublin, Ireland. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38:3, 864-885.

between January and October 2014 and involved: interviews with 20 public-service managers (e.g. health and social care service managers; local authority representatives and managers); nine focus groups with 78 public, private and voluntary and community service providers (in the areas of health and social care; social inclusion; housing; transport and mobility; and education, training and employment); and 12 focus groups with children and youth (12-18 years), older people (65 years and over), people with intellectual disabilities, and people with physical and sensory disabilities (one discussion per group) from across each city.

Neighbourhood-level data collection focused on two neighbourhoods in each city, and took place between April 2015 and January 2016. Neighbourhoods included Doughiska (as a part of the broader ARD region) and Claddagh in Galway, East Wall and the Liberties in Dublin, and Garryowen and South Circular Road in Limerick. These neighbourhoods were identified through a consultative process in each city with a Service Provider Advisory Forum (involving a sample of providers from the first phase), and a target group Advisory Forum (involving a sample of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities from the first phase). In the Liberties, and in each of the other neighbourhoods, a series of linked research activities were conducted with children and youth, older people, people with disabilities and community stakeholders. While these activities were limited in the number of participants that could be included in each strand, the focus was on securing a representative sample of each group across gender, ethnicity, and residential tenure.

Generally reflective of the experience in all six neighbourhood sites, and despite a range of recruitment strategies (e.g. stakeholders acting as gatekeepers; snowball sampling; contact through related community and support groups), people with disabilities are not represented in the study samples to the same extent as the other two groups. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the research. Recruitment in the Liberties required significant engagement with stakeholders, particularly given that the area has been subject to substantial research in the past.

The neighbourhood-level research included:

Local Focus Groups:

Two local focus groups were organised in each neighbourhood to gather insight into challenges and



opportunities with respect to the participation of the three participant groups in each neighbourhood. A resident focus group was conducted with a purposive sample of children and youth, older people, and people with disabilities in each site. In the Liberties, this discussion involved three children and youth, two older people and one person with an age-related disability (n=6). A community stakeholder focus group was conducted with key leaders and local champions, service providers from youth, ageing and disability sectors, and representatives from community development organisations, and national organisations with local remits. In the Liberties, seven people took part in this discussion. Adapted versions of Participatory Learning Action (PLA) techniques were used to structure how participants took part in the discussion, helping to ensure equal contributions.

Collaborative Forum 1:

This Forum drew together community stakeholders and residents from the local focus groups. The purpose of the Collaborative Forum was to agree and prioritise issues with respect to the three groups and to establish the central questions (as presented in the Introduction of this report) that needed to be researched in their neighbourhood. In the Liberties, seven community stakeholders, children and youth, older people and people with disabilities participated in the Collaborative Forum.

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Life-Course Narrative Interviews:

These interviews were used to explore personal experiences of participation and living in the neighbourhood from the perspective of the three groups. Using a variation of the Biographical Interpretative Narrative Method, the interviews provided an opportunity for participants to tell their own story of engagement with the local neighbourhood. In addition, through the use of semi-structured questions, the interviews allowed the research team to probe on topics related to the central research questions identified in the Collaborative Forum. In the Liberties, two children and youth, six older people and two people with disabilities participated in these interviews (n=10).

Go-Along Interviews:

Go-Along Interviews were used to capture insight into how individuals from the three groups accessed and used services and amenities, or participated in activities, in their local urban environment. These interviews involved the participant bringing the researcher to venues of significance for their participation in the neighbourhood. This approach allowed participants greater control over the interview process, while permitting the research team to contextualise individual experiences of participation. In the Liberties, three children and youth, one older person and one person with a disability participated in these interviews (n=5).

Citizen Researcher Training Programme:

Children and youth, older people and people with disabilities from each neighbourhood were trained as researchers. The Programme involved the co-development of a project to be conducted by participants within their neighbourhood to address the questions identified in the Collaborative Forum. Harnessing research techniques such as photo elicitation and focus group facilitation, this process helped to ensure the relevance and validity of the 3-Cities Project to people's lives and to support residents to communicate their priorities. In the Liberties, one children and youth participant, one older person and two people with disabilities took part in this training (n=4).

Collaborative Forum 2:

The findings emerging from these research strands were then presented back to the Collaborative Forums in each site and used as a basis to agree key recommendations for enhancing participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the neighbourhood. In the Liberties. A total of 4 people participated: one stakeholder, one older person, one person with a disability and one children and youth participant.

For the purposes of this report, we draw primarily on the findings from the life-course narrative and go-along interviews.



What we found

Findings on the participation of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the Liberties can be presented as four interrelated themes. These themes provide insight into factors that can facilitate or inhibit community participation at the neighbourhood level and which in some cases can construct contrasting experiences for the three groups with respect to participation. Neighbourhood change is a predominant and crosscutting element within the data, and this is reflected throughout these themes.

People-Neighbourhood Interactions

The Liberties has a range of defining characteristics linked to its residents and the spaces that they have created. These have not only come to symbolise traditions and customs in the area but also to create a particularly rich socio-cultural context that has a fundamental bearing on how people interact with the community.

The narratives of many of the research participants testify to how the Liberties has historically been a stigmatised place associated with deprivation, and characterised by high unemployment, poor housing, and social and economic hardship. While participants in this research recognise the vast improvements in quality of life that have occurred in the Liberties, they also spoke about persisting pockets of social deprivation and inequality in the area. For a number of participants, particularly older people who have lived in the Liberties for most of their lives, this legacy of disadvantage directly informs how they think about and relate to their surrounding community. It also informs particular values around participation and community togetherness. As illustrated by the following quote, life-course experiences of poor living conditions in the Liberties are very much etched in some older residents' accounts of the story of the community:

There was a lot of scurvy around at that time . . . most children had some kind of [health issue] – I suffered an awful lot with ringworm . . . and head lice. So my head was always either shaved or cut very short. When we discovered that my Dad and my sisters had TB we used to have to go down to the Iveagh Baths and they used to give you sulphur baths because we had no baths. (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC8).

While most of these narratives portray the daily struggle

to meet essential needs in the past, they also illustrate a strong tradition of mutual support within the locality. A strong sense of community togetherness and sociability is evident in the following quote from an older participant, pointing to a collective spirit of endurance in the face of deprivation:

Yeah it was a really close community and generally people lived on their wits, do you know what I mean. They didn't have work. There was very little work around - no work for people. But at weekends they found the money to go and have a few jars and have parties. They would party in each other's house from week to week. Your house this week, my house the next week. (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC5).

For many of the older residents of the Liberties, interpersonal solidarity remains a key characteristic of how they view their community. As poignantly described by this participant, it is the community's response to historical and contemporary problems stemming from drug use and alcohol abuse that perhaps best illustrates these positive community attributes:

Once a year we hang up a mat in the church. The parents all made a little square that size [participant indicating size with her hands] with a person's name on it and now it would cover all that wall of all the young people that have died from drugs. It has been horrendous, now I'm talking about over 40 years and it goes up once a year. And every year, it's out on the floor now, every year it's going out further. (Female, Older Adult Group, OM LC4).

For these individuals, the sense of community is rooted in the tradition of solidarity and mutual support and linked to shared experiences of endurance and deprivation. This gives rise to a complex life-course relationship between individuals and their community. It also shapes expectations of what the Liberties should be and how people should interact and come together. However, while these community characteristics were recognised by the majority of our participants, including children and youth and people with disabilities, it was clear that participants also had very different sets of experiences and perceptions of the neighbourhood and of participation within the area.

Stemming from long-standing associations with disadvantage and stigmatisation, a number of participant accounts described issues around community

fragmentation. For some participants, this was linked to well-established, and/or more recent, social divides within the area. Social fragmentation was described as reducing opportunities for participation and as impeding the development of a coherent and collective sense of local identity. This younger participant talks about such divisions and some of the perceived issues with respect to certain areas and residents of the Liberties – in this case the social housing flat complexes and their inhabitants:

It's like there's a social divide, like. You don't talk to the people in the flats...Because they're dangerous or something... (Male, Children and Youth Group, AR EI2).

Concerns over exposure to drugs and anti-social behaviour were credited as being the reasons why some parents (from more affluent areas of the neighbourhood) were reluctant for their children to mix in these parts of the community. A participant with a disability, who was allocated social housing in the neighbourhood, expressed similar perceptions of fragmentation. The following quote illustrates how feelings of interpersonal disconnection can arise from a lack of shared life-experiences and from different backgrounds:

To be honest I don't really feel like I fit in. The general demographics around here is a lot of unemployment. A lot of, you know, families, young families and I don't have either. I'm not married, I don't have kids, I'm working fulltime and all that kind of stuff and I sort of don't feel that I kind of fit in to be perfectly honest. (Female, People with Disabilities Group, AR EI4).

For these participants, it was apparent that there was generally an emphasis on mixing and interacting only within certain parts of the Liberties, or within Dublin city itself.

The research also highlighted the extent of the changes that have occurred in the Liberties with respect to living conditions, population demographics, and, for some, the sense of neighbourliness. While these changes are common to many places in Ireland (urban and rural), the ways in which they introduce new ideas around community and participation appear to be acutely felt in the neighbourhood. As one older participant succinctly expresses, such processes (in this case population change) can impact on familiarity and connectedness within a local area:

There is not many of the real old neighbours left here. (Female, Children and Youth Group, AR EI3).

Concerns about population change were most pronounced in relation to the growing size of migrant and ethnic communities within the neighbourhood. Some older participants talked about how they felt that they were unable to communicate with some of these new resident groups. They also noted the sort of challenge that these population transformations might present for integration and community togetherness:

...they don't mix, they don't make eye contact. Now they are not all the same. You will get some of them are very, very nice... but they don't integrate...No, no the only hope I would have now is that the children, I see a lot of them going to school down here, so maybe the next generation will have to, they will have to. (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC5).

These findings illustrate a diversity, and in some instances a divergence, in relation to experiences of living in the Liberties. They help to demonstrate the range of views on participation within the neighbourhood, and how these perspectives shape practices of participation in the locality for different groups.

Service Provision in the Liberties

Community-based service provision is a significant asset for the neighbourhood. This is particularly evident in relation to the substantial range of health and social care services that are available to children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. With a history of deprivation in the community, many of these local service organisations, such as the Penny Dinners, are long established components of the local infrastructure and are still considered to be as relevant today as they were in the past. Our findings provide insight into how this service infrastructure translates into specific impacts on children and youth, older people and people with disabilities.

A number of research participants who had a disability spoke about how the central location of the Liberties, and the range of services provided in the area, are of key importance to sustaining their independence. Favourable experiences of service access in this neighbourhood were generally in contrast to previous difficulties experienced when living in other communities. The Meath Primary Care Centre was noted in particular to be a very valuable

resource. The following quote, from a participant with a physical disability who moved to the Liberties specifically to avail of neighbourhood services, illustrates the value of centralised health and social care services at the local level:

My GP and my occupational therapist and all that, they are all based up in the Meath Family Care Centre which is brilliant. If I was ever to move from this area that would be one of the major reservations I would have in terms of moving. Because I must say I have an excellent service in terms of my, meeting my needs, in terms of my equipment and all that kind of stuff and they are fantastic. I have a very good occupational therapist which is really hard to come by and they are really, really good there. (Female, People with Disabilities Group, AREI4).

In addition to a range of available health and social care services, older people spoke about the variety of formally organised social activities (e.g. bingo; bridge; social clubs) that they avail of, often on a daily basis. It was evident that older adults often come from beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood to partake in these services and activities. It was also clear from the narratives of older participants that this sort of provision provided an important means of social inclusion for some individuals. The following quote illustrates the diverse range of activities and services that are available for older people, both within the Liberties and in adjacent areas, and how such activities can effectively structure daily routines:

There's great services, so there is. On a Monday I go painting in Whitefriar Street for €3, for two hours. On a Tuesday afternoon I go to a social club in Whitefriar Street as well. We just play bingo and have a cup of tea and a chat there, so we do[...] You'd have St. Pauls, you'd have St. Kevin's, you'd have Whitefriar Street, you'd have Inchicore, you'd have Bluebell, you'd have Rialto, St. Kevin's off the South Circular Road [referring to a range of senior clubs found in the area]. That's what I can name off roughly, you know... (Female, Older Adult Group, ARLC8).

Children and youth participants highlighted the many services within the Liberties that they could utilise. Donore Community Centre and St. Catherine's Sport Centre, and the initiatives and activities that they provide, were recognised as valuable facilities. A number of local youth clubs were highlighted, such as SWICN (South West Inner

City Network), and were described as offering significant support to assist in overcoming personal difficulties. From the accounts of children and youth participants, it was evident that such clubs and centres can serve as an important foundation for the development of social relationships and other interests. The following quote from a young participant illustrates this:

Well, one thing is I am not hanging around here all day... So, I am hardly around the streets. I am more, well, doing something. As well as that, SWICN gives the young kids an idea of social media or at least a bit of computer engineering. (Male, Children and Youth Group, OMEI1).

However, people's relationships with the local service infrastructure in the community were diverse and for some participants there were clear issues and concerns. A number of children and youth and older participants commented on how the structuring and delivery of service provision was not always in line with their preferences or needs. For instance, as illustrated by this older interviewee, the increased professionalisation of community services could result in feelings of alienation and a lack of trust:

... I was always involved in everything in the old centre that was over at our block... I'll tell you I find the ordinary Joe Soaps you can depend on [...] I don't believe anything they do [at the new centre]... I said I'd never help them again with nothing and I wouldn't. (Female, Older Adult Group, AREI3).

Some children and youth participants noted the strict structures that could accompany these community services and how they can in themselves represent a barrier in engaging more meaningfully with local people:

So, there is a big kind of basketball court I guess and you would have parties there. It is an allocated place and so I think you have to rent it. And there has to be one party renting the space at one time. I think that is kind of wrong because it shuts it off from quite a lot of people. (Male, Children and Youth Group, AREI1).

What these examples suggest, albeit in the context of a significant service infrastructure, is that some current forms of service provision in effect hinder opportunities for deeper community engagement. This points to the potential value in co-producing services with

local residents. It also points to the potential worth of encouraging more spontaneous and informal interactions between people. There was an acknowledgement that while there are many valuable services available in the community, the community itself is, to a degree, structured and mediated by the service system. The following quote from a young participant highlights how improvements to local services and amenities are not considered a substitute for fostering social and civic aspects of the Liberties:

The area itself looks quite nice, with the trees and the well-constructed roads. But there seems to be, I think it lacks maybe community. (Male, Children and Youth Group, AR EI1).

The Built Environment and Development

The built environment emerged as a significant theme for many of the participants in this research. With change once again evident as a strong component in participant's perceptions, this section explores some of the examples of how the built environment shapes participation in the local community for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities.

In a very fundamental way, participants spoke about the location of the Liberties as a key physical characteristic of the community. In general, all participants noted how it's advantageous central position facilitated ease of access to other neighbourhoods and to a significant network of public transportation systems. However, participants with physical disabilities, particularly wheelchair users, reported how long waiting periods for buses and difficulty negotiating space with other passengers could reduce this advantage. These issues are echoed by observations made by this older person with an age-related disability:

With regards to people on wheelie walkers or anything there is nothing here for them. If you got to Mount Jerome or anywhere you have to depend on getting a lift and that's it, you get your own lift or you get a taxi up to the gates. (Female, Older Adult Group, AR EI3).

Key commercial areas of the Liberties such as Thomas Street, Meath Street and Francis Street, were highlighted as important neighbourhood spaces, which help foster participation in the locality and represent important sites for local life in the area. The Grotto on Meath Street and the church on Francis Street were highlighted as landmarks

within these spaces that were of particular importance to people; particularly older participants. The following quote highlights the strong sense of place, and life-course continuity that are symbolised and punctuated by such landmarks:

...I was baptised in Francis Street. I made my communion and my confirmation there. All my children were baptised [there]. They made their communion and their confirmation and their weddings there in Francis Street, which I am very happy about... (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC8).

Interviews with participants captured a very strong set of community interactions based on routines around shopping and leisure activities in these spaces. The quote below shows the level of daily engagements stemming from these interactions for one older participant:

...we would get all our bits and pieces in there and maybe we would get bread and milk and eggs and stuff like... we take ages going around. Sometimes we ramble into the little St. Vincent de Paul shop, it's beside the chicken shop... we often go into the chip shop... and he is the only chipper around the place that I know does ray. I would get a ray and a couple of chips and a little bottle of 7-Up... I have loads of energy when I'm down there and I take my time going all around. I will go in the Grotto and I sit for about a half an hour. I light my lamps and all and I like Our Lady. Then I will just potter around the shops and I will walk back up to James's Street... (Female, Older Adult Group, AR EI3).

However, there were also concerns in terms of the decline of these areas. Children and youth participants suggest that these areas were more associated with older generations of residents, and that they would seldom use these kinds of commercial and retail outlets. Participants with physical disabilities indicated that they would also avoid such areas due to inaccessible aspects of the built environment. The following quote indicates issues with access and mobility:

Yeah because of the cobble stones and the narrow footpath on that street it's just not practical for a wheelchair user. As well sometimes, you know, up Thomas Street or up Meath Street the paths wouldn't be perfect... because the paths are quite old you would have to go on the street in places just where maybe a

few hundred metres and then get back on the path because not all the pavement is level... so you just have to be aware. (Female, People with Disabilities Group, AR EI4).

Changes in housing conditions reflect some of the most significant and visible changes in the built environment of the Liberties. For many older participants, the improvements in housing conditions were very tangible and were in stark contrast to the sub-standard dwellings that they had lived in earlier in life:

...I always remember there was bed bugs, there was behind the wallpaper. Because they used to use flour to stick up the wallpaper and there was some kind of insects on the walls from the paper, from the paste, so there was. So it was horrible. We didn't have really enough blankets so it was old overcoats put on the bed... (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC8).

Yet, a number of participants in this research detailed how housing provision remains problematic. For people with disabilities, who have been provided with social housing in the community, issues related to housing can take on additional significance:

Basically it was in the height of the boom and the quality of the building is very poor so things like insulation and energy ratings and all that is very, very substandard to be perfectly honest. The windows, because I'm facing the street you can, they are only double glazing which you can hear everything in terms of traffic... It's crazy oh it's crazy stuff. (Female, People with Disabilities Group, AR EI4).

In other instances, problems arose from the management and up-keep of housing complexes and the surrounding area. As this quote strongly articulates, such issues can impact on everyday experiences of living in the Liberties with potential implications for health and wellbeing:

My area is scruffy like there is trash and shit all over it. Like you don't even want to know what's in the bag. (Female, Children and Youth Group, OM LC2).

Finally, participants talked about the lack of green spaces within the Liberties. Existing parks and green areas were

described as being few in number, as being rarely used and/or as being of poor quality. This is a significant issue in terms of providing green zones in increasingly urbanised spaces. The following quote was taken from an interview with a young participant:

This place is for the older, kind of 50/40/30 year olds onwards. It is quite nice; it has a very nice garden. But I just don't think it is ...you know, as a young person I am not terrifically interested in gardening. (Male, Children and Youth Group, AR EI1).

Life-course Narratives in the Liberties

The theme of life-course narratives illustrates how particular transitions and experiences impact on people and their participation in the Liberties. These narratives reflect longer-term trajectories and neighbourhood connections that shape individuals' perceptions of life and the locality. In some cases, these experiences represented significant rupture points in people's lives that were rooted in the local neighbourhood context and changed how they related to, and interacted within, the Liberties. Ultimately, these narratives reflect an entanglement of individual experiences and the local place.

A key event within the narratives of our older participants was bereavement. Five of the older participants in this research had experienced the loss of their spouse and recounted the difficulty of this transition. Two accounts in particular stressed a notable absence of help from local friends and neighbours during this challenging period. The following quote from one older woman indicates not only the lack of support but the surprise that this gap existed in what she had perceived to be a supportive neighbourhood:

My husband is 20 years dead and I wouldn't have wanted to live any place else. Now I did find when [he] died that was different . . . although I knew everybody, but afterwards the neighbours who were here said, 'Oh God . . . I felt so bad.' They didn't realise until it happened to their own husbands that 'We didn't [realise], we weren't there for you.' One of the ladies said 'But you always seemed so capable, you always seemed to be on top of things.' But you are not... Now that would have been a difference, do you know where I am coming from, that there wasn't that kind of closeness. (Female, Older Adult Group, AR LC5).

Project Lifecourse

As referenced previously, life-course experiences of social and economic deprivation were a central feature of some individual's earlier lives that still influenced how they thought about community participation. While limited mainly to three narrative accounts, participants also spoke about a darker set of community experiences in the Liberties. These accounts emphasise the existence of enduring social problems in the neighbourhood and the impact they can have on individuals. Issues with respect to drug-use and criminal behaviour in the community had left a clear mark on the lives of some participants and how they viewed the Liberties. In some instances, these social problems impacted on family members with devastating consequences, leaving participants with a traumatic set of life experiences that implicated areas of the local community:

I had two kids and the two I had is dead... The eldest fellow he was on drugs and he owed someone £400 . . . They left his face unrecognisable. Then poor [younger son] he took to drinking . . . and sure he went to hell... he ended up, he was sleeping in an underground car park... He is seven years dead. (Female, Older Adult Group, AREI3).

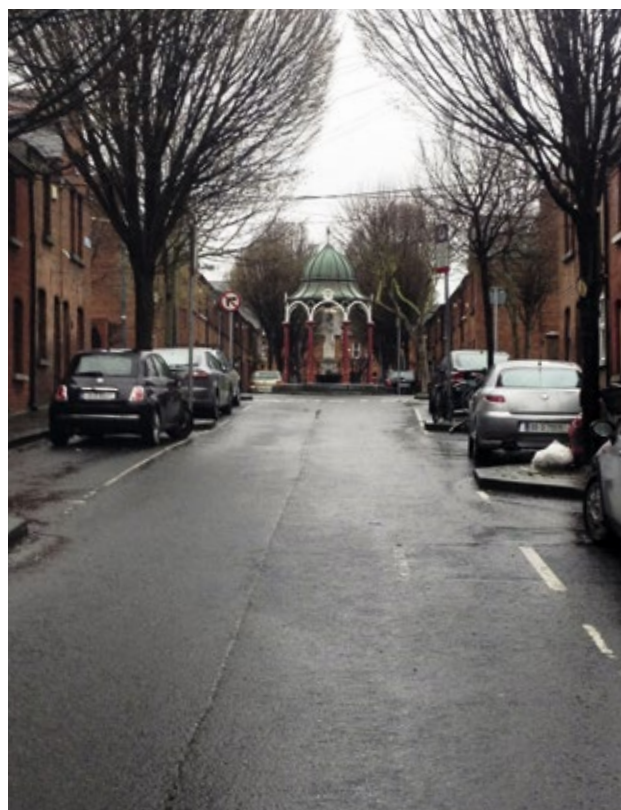
For some children and youth participants, it was apparent that particular issues in mixing with their peers in the neighbourhood represented difficult periods of their life course and shaped their relationship with the community. Again, the emphasis is on some of the daily challenges and routines of growing up and integrating into the more deprived areas of the Liberties. The following quote is from a participant who moved to Ireland and who speaks of the difficult transition into the locality:

I went to a school, it was like in the area beside the Luas..., a primary school there. It was really hard at first to go into school because I couldn't really speak English. I only had like about a few skills of English because I learned some in preschool in Poland but that's literally it, I couldn't talk, all I could say is yes or no. Yeah and I got really bullied like...one of the kids asked me like am I stupid and I said: 'Yes.' (Female, Children and Youth Group, OMLC5).

Finally, the onset of chronic ill-health and disability, and how the experiences of these conditions evolved within the context of living in the Liberties, had a significant bearing on the lives of some participants. As illustrated

earlier, these experiences may relate to new difficulties in negotiating the built environment of the locality, which inevitably has implications for the capacity to participate. The following quote, however, illustrates a different perspective, where in this case the onset of chronic disability, the local service and social environment and community participation intertwine in this person's narrative of key life-course experiences. This quote also demonstrates once again how the Liberties holds geographic and infrastructural advantages for people with disabilities:

I'm a blow in, I'm not a natural here, I came here about 20 years ago because my muscular dystrophy was beginning to kick in and I needed to be somewhere where I was on the level and near help... I already knew several people around and it's not very far from where my brother lives. So it's pretty ideal from that point... But since I've become much more disabled in the last two years, I have had a host of carers who all live in the community. And it's great, I get to know them. I go around with them sometimes, shopping or just out for a bit of air. And I'm very lucky here being so near the shops. (Female, People with Disabilities Group, OMLC6).



Concluding Points

In focusing on the Liberties, the 3-Cities Project sought to investigate experiences of community participation for the three participant groups in an inner-city neighbourhood, with mixed socio-economic levels and significant population and neighbourhood change. The Liberties reflects a unique combination of: social and economic disadvantage; formal and organic processes of regeneration and gentrification; established and new resident populations; and a developed service infrastructure. It, therefore, offered an intriguing context within which to explore community participation outcomes for people at different points of the life course and experiencing different life trajectories.

This research did not set out to capture the views of all children and youth, older people and people with disabilities resident in the Liberties. Nor does the research offer a comprehensive needs-based analysis of these groups. The value of this research is that it offers in-depth insight into the lives of some of the Liberties' residents who are younger, older, or living with a disability. In doing so, it explores the common experiences, opportunities and

challenges with respect to participation, and provides a unique look at children and youth, older people and people with disabilities as residents sharing this neighbourhood space. A limitation of the research is its failure to give adequate voice to people with disabilities within the research process. While five people with disabilities were included, and a range of efforts were made to involve other individuals from this group, we are restricted in what we can say about people with disabilities and their community participation in the Liberties. Nevertheless, the importance of this research is that it also has been led by the voices of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities, highlighting four interconnected key themes relevant to how they participate: people-neighbourhood interactions; service-provision in the Liberties; the built environment and development; and life-course narratives in the Liberties.

People-neighbourhood interactions:

How people interacted with, and participated within, the Liberties differed across generational and social resident groups. This was based on different understandings of what 'community' in the Liberties is about, and different practices of participation. Narratives around local

Box 2: Emerging findings from the 3-Cities Project Neighbourhoods

Across the six neighbourhoods in the 3-Cities Project, there is a clear set of emerging findings with respect to the participation of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in Dublin, Galway and Limerick. The research in the Liberties, as with the other neighbourhoods, feeds into some of these findings more than others. We can say, broadly, that agency, belonging, dynamic community contexts, urban design, trust and reciprocity, service led-enablement, and community efforts all matter for the participation of these groups. We can also say that each of the groups is considered in a specific and very narrow way within the contexts of these neighbourhoods: children and youth in terms of youth engagement and youth-related social problems; older people in terms of social isolation and health service use; and people with disabilities in terms of access. The integrated approach taken in this work moves beyond these narrow group considerations to identify five emerging cross-group messages:

1. A holistic idea of participation and a fuller assessment of how people live their lives needs to be embraced for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
2. Neighbourhoods can enable holistic participation in a range of areas of life for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
3. Life-course experiences and transitions are embedded in, and influenced by, the neighbourhoods in which people live;
4. Neighbourhoods can determine the degree to which experiences/transitions impact on the lives of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities;
5. Changes in neighbourhoods, such as demographic, social and economic shifts, and changes in the lives of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities combine to shape group and cross-group needs.

Future reports and publications will address these cross-cutting findings in more detail.

Reports on each neighbourhood will be available from: www.nuigalway.ie/ilas/project-lifecourse/

solidarity and shared experiences of interdependence were communicated by some older people. Whereas for other participants, place, community and participation were less geographically bound, and stratified by perceived divides between deprived and more affluent districts, and new and more tenured residents.

Service-provision in the Liberties:

Community-based service provision was a significant asset in the Liberties for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. While the vast majority of participants recognised the benefits of this infrastructure, the bureaucratic delivery, structure and stigmatisation of some forms of provision could serve to hinder participation for some individuals in the neighbourhood. The considerable potential of services to function as an instrument of wider integration in the Liberties was universal.

Built environment and development:

The built environment facilitated and impeded people's capacity to participate. In addition to providing centrally located amenities, parts of the built landscape served as a source of memory and a symbol of community, particularly for older people. Yet, issues of accessibility, relevance and suitability were raised with respect to physical and public spaces. There was a general concern about the decline in collective community space. Although housing conditions had vastly improved in the Liberties, there were remaining pockets of inequity with respect to provision, maintenance and accessibility.

Life-course narratives in the Liberties:

Life-course experiences that members of the three participant groups lived through, and that involved the Liberties' neighbourhood, impacted on how people participated in their locality. Personal-level change was intertwined with the social, economic and cultural aspects of the Liberties, and the behaviours of other residents. Experiences of bereavement, deprivation, traumatic life events, integration and more complex transitions around health and place were all aspects of life-course narratives that altered participants' relationship with the Liberties. For some, it involved a subtle re-positioning relative to the neighbourhood. For others, it involved a more significant readjustment.

As evidenced across the different thematic areas, there are considerable assets and resources available within the Liberties, which certainly have benefited the lives of local children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. Developing a stronger and more integrative

social infrastructure around these assets and resources is likely to help promote participation for the three participant groups and advance a shared sense of the Liberties. In looking across the findings in this short report, we can identify the main concluding points concerning participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. While a number of emerging and preliminary patterns cut across the six neighbourhood sites of the 3-Cities Project (see Box 2), the work in the Liberties points to five key messages with respect to participation for the three groups. These are:

- 1. Potential role of the neighbourhood to enable participation** – reaching beyond group-specific needs, the research illustrates the emphasis that children and youth, older people and people with disabilities place on neighbourhood as a facilitator of participation and, potentially, as a fundamental unit of societal integration;
- 2. Changing 'community' views and practices in the Liberties** – the research demonstrates that based on generational and social divides, participants had different understandings of what 'community' in the Liberties means, and had different ways of participating;
- 3. Life-course experiences and transitions in participants' lives influence a sense of place and community in the Liberties** – the research highlights that neighbourhoods are often implicated in these experiences, and that people's relationship with their local community and their participation needs to be understood in this context;
- 4. Services as a potential enabler of integrated participation** – the research shows that the local service infrastructure in the Liberties was a considerable asset and could potentially be harnessed to allow more integrated participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the neighbourhood;
- 5. Connections between some groups of residents, and some areas within the Liberties, could be strengthened** – the research highlights social fragmentation within the neighbourhood and how a more integrated social infrastructure across the various districts of the Liberties may assist in developing a more cohesive community for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities.

Future Directions: Voice-led Social and Neighbourhood Innovation

Based upon the key messages, we identify four interrelated principles that can assist in enhancing participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in the Liberties. A description of each principle, and some illustrative examples, are presented below;

Ownership

Developing ownership over the community and its resources is fundamental to fostering a collective and shared sense of community for the three participant groups. Creating the means through which children and youth, older people and people with disabilities can have an influence over their own local neighbourhood is central to this and is achievable across a number of dimensions. These include: providing more opportunities to contribute to the development of community-based services, to the design of the built environment and to the use and management of local resources and amenities. Practical examples of this form of initiative might include:

- Promoting stronger integrative partnerships between service providers across the disability, youth and ageing sectors in the Liberties, and their service users;
- Fostering co-production roles for members of the three participant groups in community-based partnerships between local residents and service providers.

Life-course Enablement

Enabling individual agency has the potential to be an important mechanism in facilitating participation for the three participant groups. This is particularly in relation to facilitating and supporting adjustment of individuals after key life-course transitions. The research has demonstrated how people belonging to the three participant groups can experience a disenfranchisement from the local neighbourhood as a result of significant life-course transitions and experiences – whether this is a person with a disability who has been allocated social housing where they feel they do not fit in, an older person who has experienced bereavement, or a younger person who is new to the community. Examples of enabling agency might include:

- Creating initiatives which respond specifically to particular life transitions (e.g. Bereavement Support Service; coffee mornings targeted at new residents);
- Develop communication strategies to target people living in new developments and gated communities.

Meaningful Engagement

There is a need to promote meaningful engagement amongst local children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in order to construct relevant and sustainable participation pathways. This is vital to the development of an effective and integrative social infrastructure. The research demonstrated the diverse range of community values and attitudes with respect to participation across and within the three participant groups. There is an opportunity to translate these ideas into the design and development of initiatives that more adequately represent the range of perspectives within the Liberties' population, and that challenge pre-set assumptions about participation preferences based on prescribed identity, social class, capability and life stage. Examples might include:

- Harnessing knowledge and oral history narratives of the Liberties by extending existing Liberties' tour services to include local residents as either guides or tour leaders;
- Developing a supportive social innovation space where people can communicate and translate their vision of community into practical projects and initiatives.

Integrative Public Spaces

Given the substantial rate of urban development in the Liberties, there is significant potential for the design of integrative and appropriate public spaces to enhance the participation of members of the three participant groups. Urban design developed in conjunction with local residents could positively influence social processes in terms of informal social contact, integration, safety and wellbeing. Integrative spaces in this context therefore entails paying close attention to the specific requirements and needs of different groups including accessibility, permeability, and friendliness. Relevant examples might include:

- Promoting the creation of intergenerational and accessible spaces in existing green allotment areas;
- Utilising existing/planned civic areas, such as Weaver Park, as a disability, age and children and youth friendly space ensuring 'interest pockets' relevant to each group;
- Building on naturally occurring gatherings that happen during daily routines, harness natural meeting points to nurture more involved interactions. For instance in the Liberties, this might involve setting up a pop-up cafe in Lidl, which was highlighted by various groups and informants as the one place where everyone now meets.



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ISBN: 978-1-908358-44-8

