



URBAN Community Initiative in Northern Ireland 1994–1999



*A summary of Evaluation Report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers
on behalf of the Department of Social Development
and the European Commission*



March 2001



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Background

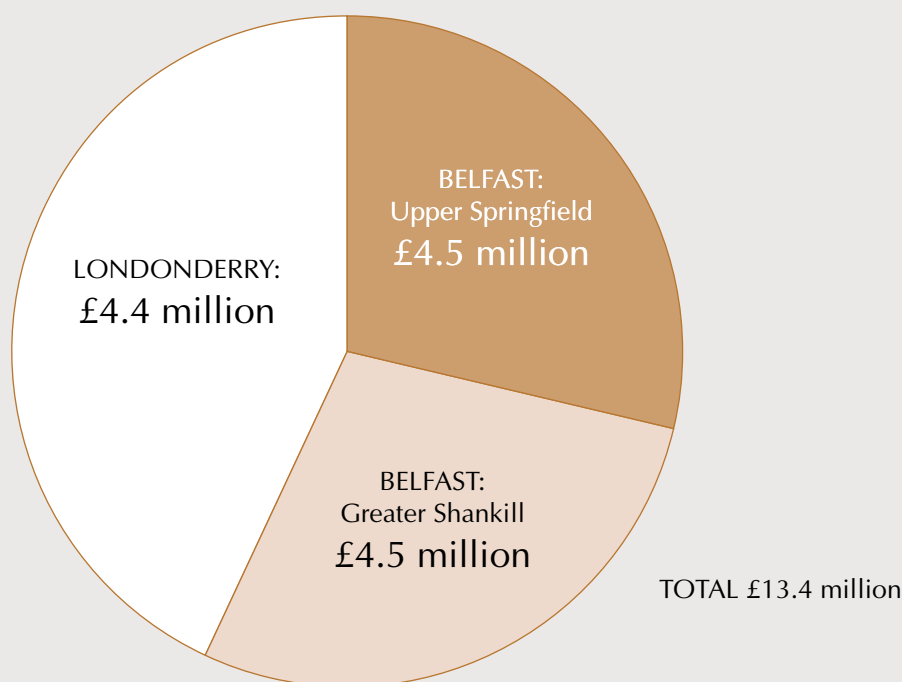
The URBAN Community Initiative was officially launched in June 1996 in a total of 118 urban areas throughout the Member States. The Initiative targets neighbourhoods in extreme deprivation, seeking to address problems of isolation, poverty and exclusion of their inhabitants through interventions that improve their physical and social surroundings.

In Northern Ireland the URBAN Operational Programme ran from 1994–1999 with a budget of ECU 600 million, which was increased by a further ECU 157 million in 1996. The awarding bodies were the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). Two Sub-Programmes were established to complement the Belfast and Londonderry area-based regeneration strategies:

- The **Belfast Sub-Programme**, prepared by Making Belfast Work (MBW) in partnership with a number of community and statutory organisations, aimed to address acute disadvantage felt by younger adults. It is being delivered within two designated areas by the Greater Shankill Partnership (GSP), Early Years Project and Upper Springfield Development Trust (USDT)
- The **Londonderry Sub-Programme**, prepared by the Londonderry Development Office (LDO) in consultation with Derry City Council and local community groups, aimed to address inner city multiple deprivation and the physical renewal of the Bogside/Brandywell, Fountain and the Creggan.

The total EU contribution to the programme in Northern Ireland was £13.4 million, distributed as in Figure 1.

Figure 1 URBAN Operational Programme in Northern Ireland 1994–1999



Methodology

The methodology employed by the consultants was based on a common framework for undertaking reviews of the two Sub-Programmes and bringing them together in the 'meta evaluation' (evaluation of evaluations). This framework was based on the results of the mid-term evaluation carried out in 1997. The evaluation drew as far as possible on existing material and primary research was undertaken to fill any gaps.

The output from this evaluation was an overall evaluation report, supplemented by three working papers providing a more detailed analysis of the two Sub-Programmes funded under the Programme. Copies of the detailed documents are available from the Department of Social Development.

Impacts of the URBAN Programme

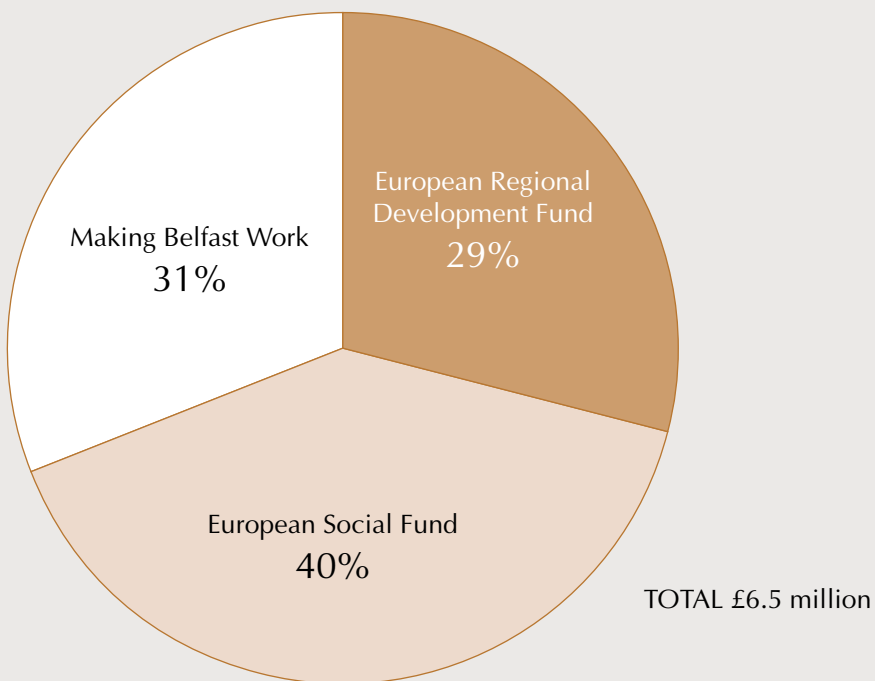
The Greater Shankill Early Years Project

This project, part of the Belfast Sub-Programme, operated between 1994 and 1999, its main aim being to stimulate a regeneration dynamic, based on the early years development of children and the empowerment of parents.

The Early Years Project trained and employed local people to carry out a home visiting service in the local community. Main project activities included a community home-visiting service, childminding service, training and community support activities.

The total funding committed to the Early Years Project was £6,521,977 of which 69% (£4.5m) was funded by the EU and the remaining 31% (£2m) by MBW (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Greater Shankill Early Years Project



Key outputs of Greater Shankill Early Years Project

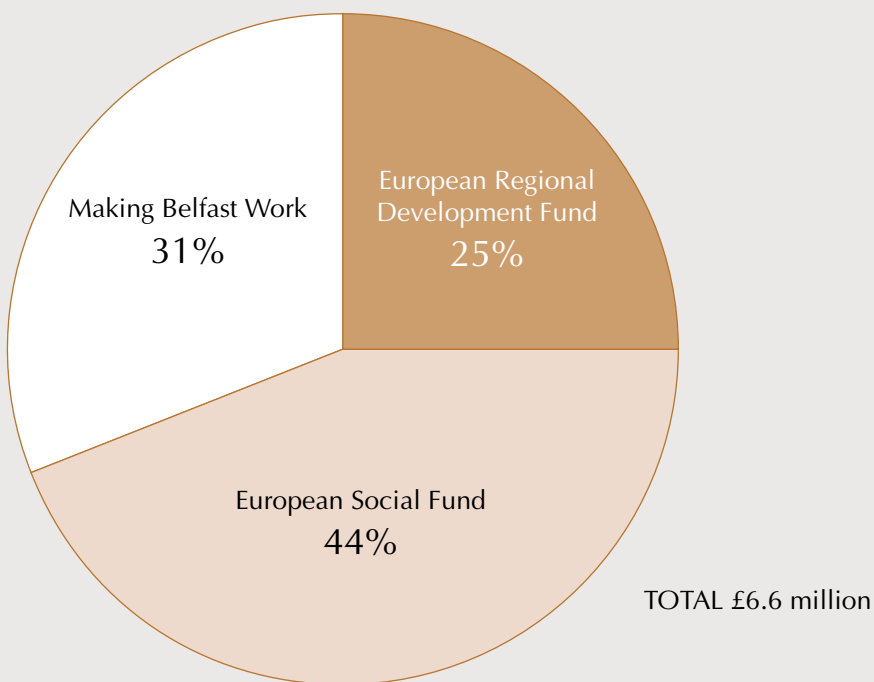
- 118 jobs were created and accreditation gained
- 770 families benefited from services (10% of all families)
- 195 parents attended education and training courses
- 596 children started at childcare facilities
- 716 organisations were actively involved
- 3 new outreach centres were set up.

Upper Springfield Development Trust Urban Programme

This project was the other part of the Belfast Sub-Programme and was aimed at tackling deprivation by ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to play an active role in the social and economic life of the wider community. The programme consisted of a wide range of training and development activities supplemented by a large infrastructure project, the Top of the Rock Development. This project, which is currently being completed, will cost approximately £1.6m and is also being supported by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI).

A total of £6,645,202 was committed to the URBAN Project over the period of which 69% (£4.5m) was funded by the EU and the remaining 31% (£2m) by MBW (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Upper Springfield Development Trust URBAN Programme



Key outputs of Upper Springfield Development Trust Urban Programme

- an estimated 3,375 young people participated in the various programmes
- 425 young people completed training courses
- 96 jobs were created (including 37 trainee posts)
- 215 volunteers were involved
- 108 persons gained qualifications
- 61 partnerships were established
- 1 new facility was created and 14 properties were enhanced.

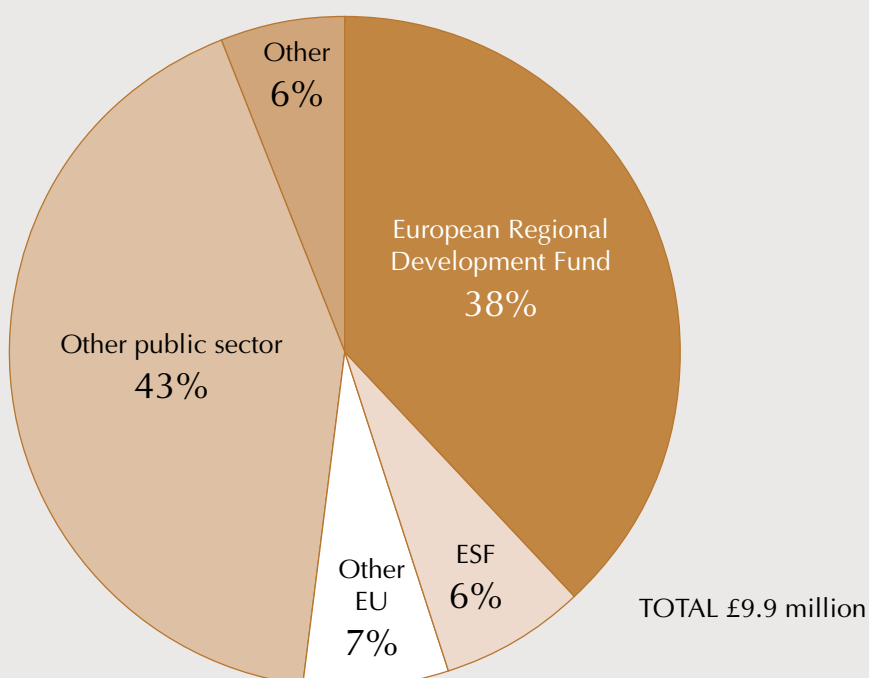
Londonderry URBAN Sub-Programme

This Sub-Programme aimed to fund integrated social, economic and physical projects in order to regenerate the Bogside/Brandywell, the Creggan and the Fountain. A Community Audit helped to establish priorities in the three areas and 19 projects were successful in their application for assistance under the Sub-Programme.

The baseline analysis carried out as part of the Community Audit showed that each locality experienced serious and multiple physical, social and economic deprivation. The repeat of the baseline was able to detect changes in the physical fabric and capacity of community infrastructure in the URBAN areas. As is the case in Belfast, deep structural economic and social problems remain including high rates of welfare dependency.

URBAN brought £4,402,000 of EU funding to the city, leveraging additional funds to produce a programme with a current value of £9,878,103 (Figure 4), an overall leverage of £1:£1.24. The comparatively low level of engagement of private sector resources was characteristic of the Programme as a whole.

Figure 4 Londonderry URBAN Sub-Programme



Physical projects dominated URBAN in the city: 25% was allocated to the refurbishment of property and 47% to new build property. These are intended for a variety of uses including training, youth facilities and community development services. The Sub-Programme distributed 32% of URBAN Structural Funding to the Creggan, 38% to the Bogside/Brandywell and 20% to the Fountain. Eight per cent was allocated to area-wide projects.

Key outputs of Londonderry URBAN Sub-Programme

- 38 jobs were created or protected
- 2,908 m² of new buildings was established
- 3,805 m² of property was refurbished
- 46 ha of open space was created
- 210 community groups were supported/involved
- 181 volunteers contributed to URBAN projects.

Results of the meta evaluation

The idea of the meta evaluation is to draw the lessons from the three distinct evaluations together to explore common or generic strands. A number of points emerged:

- The Programme engaged communities in the design and delivery of the Sub-Programme and had a significant effect in developing community skills, morale and projects. However, communities were critical of the slow pace of expenditure, the technical nature of the process and the audit restrictions on their management of the funding.
- Synergy is a key priority in structural funds policy. By this the Commission mean the additional benefits that result from careful integration of projects in local planning. The attainment of synergy can be recognised in a number of ways including the leverage rates achieved in areas of high deprivation, the capitalisation of projects and the link between URBAN and revenue-based programmes.
- The Programme brought significant benefits for the European Union, Government Departments and the targeted communities. These included the integration of measures on highly concentrated disadvantaged areas, recognition of the distinctive needs of Catholic and Protestant communities and the development of local governance structures and capacities.
- In this respect the Initiative showed how the broad policy aspirations of equality and Targeting Social Need might be interpreted and developed in the urban policy environment.
- The Londonderry Sub-Programme built strong horizontal integration with mainstream urban programmes whilst the transnational dimension helped participants learn from, and contribute to, the wider European debate on the future of urban regions.
- The Department for Social Development is rethinking its approach to urban policy. These projects that engage local people in the design of programmes, respond to distinctive needs in segregated urban areas and plan multi-elemental programmes in response to physical, social and economic decline all provide important experience and practice upon which to build.

Implications for URBAN II

As well as the broader lessons for the development of urban policy, the URBAN Initiative in Belfast and Londonderry also helped to inform directly the development of the URBAN II Operational Programme 2000–2006 for Northern Ireland:

- **Method of strategy development.** Much of the success of the URBAN Initiative can be attributed to the involvement of the local communities in the design of the Sub-Programmes. URBAN II has drawn on these lessons by using a multi-level approach to consultation that involved political representatives, community groups and voluntary sector organisations. An emphasis was placed on an open exchange of information and ideas culminating in a wide-ranging consultation conference informed by the project experiences of URBAN participants in both Belfast and Londonderry.
- **Focused, spatial approach.** The tight spatial concentration of URBAN had considerable benefits in the areas affected and this informed the selection of the URBAN II area in North Belfast. The URBAN II guidelines also placed tight restrictions on the population coverage and the need to focus on one continuous urban area with a single identified problem. The complex interplay of economic change, physical decline and segregation that have deepened the cycle of inner city decline in North Belfast underpinned its designation and enabled some critical reflection on physical renewal projects especially in contested areas of both Derry~Londonderry and Belfast.
- **Imaginative approach to URBAN policy.** The URBAN Programme in Northern Ireland was concerned as much with social regeneration as with the physical renewal of the inner city areas. The Initiative adopted a broad approach to urban policy, which involved risks. The need for an integrated approach to tackle physical, labour market and community capacities is recognised in the priorities set for URBAN II. The potential of information and communication technologies to help restructure the local economy represents an important innovative dimension to the new Programme.
- **Community involvement in programme delivery.** The partnership approach helped to make the Programme more responsive to local needs and priorities and developed capacities among local communities delivering services. In Belfast, separate local partnerships were given devolved responsibility whereas in Derry~Londonderry the Londonderry Development Office oversaw the implementation of URBAN. In the URBAN II Programme the North

Belfast Partnership will play a leading role in the design, delivery and evaluation of the Programme in concert with stakeholders in the statutory, community and private sectors.

- **Shared experiences.** An important element of the URBAN Programme was the participation in the UK URBAN and all-Ireland URBAN networks. The transnational activities were also important in forging stronger working relationships and sharing knowledge at both local and international level. The transnational dimension to URBAN II will be organised centrally by the European Commission but presents an important opportunity for North Belfast to contribute to and learn from other areas where race and poverty intersect to produce especially difficult urban problems.
- **Complementarity with other European programmes.** The URBAN Initiative, with its emphasis on restructuring both the physical and social environments of deprived areas, complemented other European-funded programmes. This is especially true in relation to the Northern Ireland Single Programming Document 1994–1999, Priority 2 ‘Investing in Communities and Local People’ and the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, Urban Regeneration – Measure 2. In general, URBAN formed a close fit with the overriding objectives of the Structural Funds, the Northern Ireland Community Support Framework and EU guidance on urban policy. URBAN II has identified specific linkages with other area-based programmes concerned with urban regeneration, housing renewal and health and education action programmes. It also recognises the importance that the EU attaches to sustainability, vertical integration with the planning priorities of the city and the need to produce synergy in the design of projects.
- **Sustainability.** Although valuable lessons were learned in the fields of training, social welfare, child and family support and community development, few of these projects translated into future or adopted programmes by the respective lead agencies. URBAN II has prioritised sustainable development in terms of the development of community capacities and specific skills, locally relevant and lasting job opportunities and restructuring the physical fabric of North Belfast to take advantage of growing sectors of the mainstream economy.
- **Monitoring and evaluation.** The evaluation highlights the need for a proper baseline analysis of urban conditions and clear targets for improvement. Under the current round of the Structural Funds added emphasis has been given to establishing comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems for Community Initiatives. A rigorous system for evaluation and reporting progress has been established to ensure that URBAN II maximises its impacts on the target area.

Conclusions

Overall, the URBAN programme did allocate resources in deprived inner city areas that provided real benefits to local people. The idea of targeting integrated actions on small areas with high rates of deprivation has worked well. URBAN took risks, adopted innovative approaches and learnt different ways of engaging target communities.

The partnership approaches adopted helped to build coherent relationships between local communities and statutory agencies. Although the parties involved had to overcome steep learning curves, such learning experiences are vital in identifying the priorities and targets for URBAN II.

The Northern Ireland URBAN Programme has provided resources, new policy and project ideas and participative methods in the design and implementation of urban regeneration. In the final analysis, the evaluation was able to trace definable impacts on a large number of people in need in some of the most deprived and excluded places in the UK and the European Union.