

Institution: University of Ulster

Unit of Assessment: 4

Title of case study: Impact on Northern Ireland Policymaking from the use of findings on Community Relations.

1. Summary of the impact

This case study refers to the body of survey research evidence on public attitudes to community relations, gathered over a period of two decades in Northern Ireland. The thesis on 'impact' is that this body of work influenced government policies, public debate and good practice in equality procedures during the period 2008-2013. The survey results have become ubiquitous within debates and reports within/from government, political parties, journalists, lobbyists and NGOs and as a consequence have had significant and wide-ranging effects on Northern Ireland society.

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research is the body of surveys that have taken place in Northern Ireland over the period 2002 to 2012. This has revealed a times-series in public attitudes to community relations that has had an impact on government policy, public debate and good practice in equality procedures. The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) is an annual public attitudes survey covering a wide variety of social issues year on year. NILT follows the same methodology as its predecessor the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey (fielded between 1989 and 1996). A random sample of individuals (approximately 1200) are selected and interviewed face to face from across Northern Ireland. A range of social topics are included on the survey including the key time-series questions on politics and community relations that have been asked each year since 1989. Results are made publicly available on the NILT website six months after the end of fieldwork as are the key time-series on political attitudes and community relations. Key to the impact of the NILT research is that results are made publicly available online in lay-friendly tables so that any user from any sector may use the data free of charge and without permission. Policymakers, schoolchildren, journalists and lobby groups form part of the 3690 page views monthly (2012). Even apart from the impact of the body of work on community relations the NILT 'brand' has become a recognised and trusted reference for practitioners and users from all sectors.

The context for this area of research is key to the significance of the impact. Very little is of more importance to Northern Ireland society than that there should be no return to the conflict that dogged the thirty year period from 1968 to 1998. This body of research has therefore been critical in the post devolution period. Between 2002 and 2010 the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) results have shown a rise in the perceptions that relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland have improved and are improving. Findings also show a consistent and increasing desire for mixed religion neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces. Other time-series indicate a shift in identity – particularly for young Protestants from a 'British' to a 'Northern Irish' identity. Many more people in Northern Ireland now see themselves as British *and* Irish and an increased Irish identification among Catholics, and particularly among the young, go hand in hand with a steady or even falling voiced desire for Irish reunification. Results also reveal the extent to which people believe that the Northern Ireland government is meeting its targets in terms of the Good Relations strategy. The most recent 2012 survey shows the dip in public confidence following the 2012 flag disputes.

Key Researchers

Professor Gillian Robinson, Professor University of Ulster, 2008-2013

Dr Paula Devine, Senior Research Fellow, Queen's University Belfast, 2008-2013

3. References to the research

The key outputs are the NILT Databases themselves published online between June 2008 and June 2013. Authors for all are Gillian Robinson (University of Ulster) and Paula Devine (Queen's University Belfast).

http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2007/Community_Relations/index.html
http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2008/Community_Relations/index.html
http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2009/Community_Relations/index.html
http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Community_Relations/index.html
http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2012/Community_Relations/index.html

The quality of this research is evidenced by the ESRC grant (2006-2011) *ARK Access Research Knowledge (formerly ARK : A Social and Political Archive for Northern Ireland)* (of £2.7m) Award Reference RES-060-23-0015 which effectively endorsed the ARK open-access model and specifically funded Paula Devine as NILT Director between 2006 and 2011. It also funded Professor Robinson as ARK Director. Individual modules of fieldwork were funded by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) with grants of 210K in 2007/8, 90K in 2010 and 319K in 2012.

4. Details of the impact

NILT databases have had impact because their regular production and open access has helped frame policies around an unsteady peace. This impact is **significant** because the stakes around a return to violent conflict are so high. The Community Relations Council referred to the NILT time-series (see attached letter):

This aspect of the NILT survey is very valuable to our work given the serious impact of a failure to identify a change in attitudes that might herald a return to violent conflict.. and given the highly charged political environment, it would be hard to overstate the importance of factual information and the role of long range research such as the NILT survey.

The impact is **wide-reaching** because NILT data have become ubiquitous within debates and reports within/from government, political parties, journalists, lobbyists and NGOs. The Research Director of the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report (see attached letter) notes:

...I cannot think of any serious analysis of Northern Ireland as a post-conflict society that doesn't make reference to its survey data.... Not to include NILT survey data suggests a lack of concern for the lived experience of the people of Northern Ireland. That's how central its research has become.

The history to the specific impact presented in the case study begins In March 2005 when the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) published 'A Shared Future: The policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland'. A total of forty six NILT indicators were identified in this action plan. In January 2007, a baseline report was produced which contained 96 citations of NILT data. Subsequently reports were produced in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2013.

However it is the use of NILT data by non-governmental users that evidences the reach of this impact. With the resumption of devolution in May 2007, OFMDFM initiated the development of a new programme on *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (CSI) but with seemingly ever long delays in its publication. During spring 2010, discussions in the Northern Ireland Assembly on CSI (or the lack of it) where Life and Times data were cited featured on 18th Feb 2010; 2nd March 2010 and 23rd June 2010.

The public consultation on (CSI) was launched on 27 July 2010 and generated enormous controversy. Twelve of the responses to the consultation made mention of ARK survey data (Alliance Party, Worker's Party, Commission for Victims and Survivors, Irish Peace Centre, Integrated Education Fund, Chartered Institute of Housing, NI Federation of Housing Associations, Public Health Agency, Sharing Education Learning Forum, Volunteer Now, Youth Council for Northern Ireland) but of particular influence was the damning response from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (by Jennifer Todd and Joseph Ruane). This analysis used NILT data to evidence her criticism of the jettisoning of the goal of 'reconciliation' emphasised in *Shared Future*. She warned that CSI posed a practical danger and in this context it is 'easy to revert to sectarian opposition'.

Alongside the CSI debate there was continuing demand for government action in specific areas of community relations. Five Assembly questions were tabled citing NILT data. One particular committee debate in October 2010 drew the comment:

If there is an academic case, if the Life and Times survey supports it, if Bain indicates it, and if the financial rationale is already known, what is really of interest is why it is not happening.
(Basil McCrea, 20th October 2010)

In May 2012 the Alliance party pulled out of CSI talks while in July 2012 the Secretary of State expressed his disappointment that there was still no publication of the strategy. The flags dispute in late 2012 further increased demand for action and elicited the comment from the editor of one local paper:

All the political parties would do well, if they haven't already done so, to study the research from the University of Ulster/Queen's University's ARK project and from the Institute of British and Irish Studies in Dublin.
(Ed Curran, Belfast Telegraph 2nd October 2012)

In April 2013 the new Secretary of State Theresa Villiers again urged progress on the new strategy in a Commons debate and paid tribute to ARK and other organisations helping people to understand the past:

Yesterday I visited the University of Ulster to learn more about its CAIN-ARK network... I encourage anyone who wants to understand Northern Ireland's past to visit the website.
(Theresa Villiers April 23rd April 2013, Column 813)

By May 2013 the controversial CSI strategy had finally disappeared and the Executive brought forward its new policy *Together-Building a United Community*. NILT is cited a number of times in this key policy document and the Director of the United Community Division in OFMDFM affirms that NILT will continue to be invaluable when monitoring the impact of the new strategy (see attached letter).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- Letter from Chief Executive of Community Relations Council
- Letter from Director, United Community Division, OFMDFM
- Letter from Research Director of the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report.

Good Relations Indicators 2009 Update

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/good_relations_indicators_-_2009_update.pdf
Reference on pages 7,8,9,10,12,20,22,24,25,26,27,28,31,32,34,35,40,41,42

Good Relations Indicators 2012 Update

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/gr-pubs>
Reference page 2 Priority outcome 1
Reference page 1 Priority outcome 2
Reference page 1, 2 Priority outcome 4
Reference page 1, 2 Priority outcome 5
Reference page 1, 2 Priority outcome 6
Reference page 1 Priority outcome 7
Reference page 1 Priority outcome 9

Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration: Consultation Document

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/reformatted_final_print_version_csi_-_26.07.10.pdf
Reference on pages 13,19,29,36,44,47,76

Together: Building a United Community

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf>
Reference on pages 19, 54, 71, 86

Sample response to CSI Consultation

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/csiresponses2010_alliance_party_of_northern_ireland.pdf
Reference on pages 4 and 22

Sample response to CSI Consultation

www.jrct.org.uk/core/documents/download.asp?id=429

Assembly Question

<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/questions/printquestionssummary.aspx?docid=68365>
Reference in answer to Assembly Question from Naomi Long

Assembly Private Members' Business

<http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2009/100302.htm>
Reference in Private members' business - Cohesion, Sharing and Integration Strategy - D Kelly

Parliamentary Business

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130423/debtext/130423-0002.htm#13042381000001>
Reference by Theresa Villiers Column 812