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South Circular Road Neighbourhood Report

Findings from the 3-Cities Project

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South Circular Road Neighbourhood Report

Introduction

This report documents research on the participation of children and youth, older people and people with disabilities in South Circular Road, in Limerick city. The research focuses on different experiences and transitions in people's lives, described as their life course, and on holistic forms of participation. The South Circular Road, an established suburban residential neighbourhood, is one of six urban sites featured in the 3-Cities Project (see Box 1). 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 South Circular Road, as a place-based community of people and as a service site, facilitates or impedes participation. In the South Circular Road, 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 children and youth, older people and people with disabilities experience the South Circular Road neighbourhood as a built environment and how does this environment impact on their participation?
2. To what extent is neighbourhood belonging, a shared experience by all children and youth, older people and people with disabilities resident in South Circular Road?

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. Neighbourhood change influences connections to place and is having an effect on community cohesion in South Circular Road;
3. Institutions serve as powerful neighbourhood participation actors, informing residents' experience of South Circular Road as a neighbourhood;
4. Emergence of multiple communities of participation in South Circular Road can fragment an overall sense of community;
5. Exclusion from deciding neighbourhood directions impacts on participation, reinforcing local disconnections and perceived neighbourhood issues.

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/thethreecitiesproject/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).





Figure 1 Study boundaries of South Circular Road.

Source: OpenStreetMap.

Why did we choose the South Circular Road?

The South Circular Road was chosen as one of the 3-Cities Project’s neighbourhood sites as it met several of our key criteria, including: being traditionally a middle-class, established neighbourhood close to the city centre. The area has also experienced increasing population and neighbourhood change, including a recent influx of migrant residents and a growing proportion of transient residents located towards the city centre.

South Circular Road is located on the south side of Limerick city. With reference to Figure 1, the area we have chosen for consideration is delineated by Alphonsus St. on the north end of the community, and incorporates the area between South Circular Road (encompassing both sides of the road) on the east and Dock Road on the west,

and extends down as far as Ballinacurra Road in the south. The neighbourhood is within reach of the city centre to the north, and the Crescent Shopping Centre to the south. The South Circular Road is part of the larger St. Joseph’s parish, and also has a Redemptorist Church in the community.

The South Circular Road neighbourhood is largely comprised of residential housing, including large houses and newer estates. There are also some apartment complexes at the very north, central and very south of the area. The population as of 2011 is estimated to be just under 3500 (CSO, 2011)¹. South Circular Road has a reputation for being an affluent community along the central road that defines the neighbourhood, with a prevalence of professional occupations throughout the locality.

The neighbourhood has, over the years, become increasingly demographically diverse, with a Direct Provision Centre for asylum seekers located in the area and

¹ CSO (2011) Census Small Area Population Statistics: usually resident by population by place of birth and nationality. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

Project Lifecourse

a foreign-national population of around 18% of the total neighbourhood's population. About 8% of the population is aged 12-18 years, 13% of people are aged 65 years and over and 6% of local adults possess a disability. Young people are evenly represented across the area, with a slight increase evident in the environs of Mary Immaculate College, while older people are slightly more prevalent in the smaller north end of the community (CSO, 2011)².

The area is home to a number of institutions, particularly with educational remits, both in the community and at its edges. This, as already mentioned, includes the Direct Provision Centre and Mary Immaculate College. Along with the Model Primary School, there are two prominent secondary schools, Laurel Hill and St. Clement's, while Scoil Carmel was closed in June 2016. Catherine McAuley Primary school for children with learning difficulties is adjacent to Mary Immaculate College, with the Limerick City Adult Education Services and Limerick School Project located on O'Connell Avenue. The neighbourhood also hosts McGarry House, which is considered to be Ireland's first low-threshold, direct access emergency accommodation facility. In addition to the services provided by these institutions and agencies, there is a



medical centre in the neighbourhood and a local active retirement group held in St. Joseph's Church on O'Connell Avenue. The area does not have a dedicated community centre.

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 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 South Circular Road and Garryowen in Limerick, Doughiska (as a part of the broader ARD region) and Claddagh in Galway, and East Wall and the Liberties in Dublin. 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 South Circular Road, and in each of the other neighbourhoods, a series of linked research activities were conducted with members of each of the participant groups. While these activities were limited in the number of participants that could

2 CSO (2011) Census Small Area Population Statistics: population aged 0-19 by sex and year of age, person aged 20+ by sex and age group. Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

be included in each strand, the focus was on securing a representative sample of each group across gender, ethnicity, and residential tenure.

While reflective of the lower numbers of people with disabilities in the research across all six neighbourhood sites generally, it was not possible to recruit people with disabilities for the research in South Circular Road. This was despite the research team using a range of recruitment strategies (e.g. stakeholders acting as gatekeepers; snowball sampling; contact through related community and support groups) to attempt to identify and recruit members of this group. This is acknowledged as a significant limitation of the research in South Circular Road and restricts what can be said about shared experiences across the three target groups.

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 South Circular Road, this discussion involved two children and youth, and nine older people (n=11). 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 remit. In South Circular Road, eight 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 South Circular Road, eleven community stakeholders, children and youth and older people participated in the Collaborative Forum.

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 an adaptation

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 South Circular Road, three children and youth, and five older people participated in these interviews (n=8).

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 South Circular Road, one older person and two younger people took part in the Go-Along Interviews (n=3).

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 South Circular Road, two older people took part in this training (n=2).

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 South Circular Road, five community stakeholders and one older person participated in the second Collaborative Forum (n=6).

What we found

Three interconnected themes emerged from the data collection in South Circular Road on community participation and the participant groups: neighbourhood

institutions, participation structures and cohesion; micro-communities in South Circular Road; safety, consultation and planning. Reflecting the different social and institutional structures of the area, and how social cohesion impacts on local participation, the themes focused on neighbourhood-level issues rather than focusing solely on individual needs and preferences of the participant groups. Throughout the broader research process, participants spoke about the neighbourhood as a desirable location in the city, with amenities close-by and the opportunity for them to live independently.

Neighbourhood Institutions, Participation Structures and Cohesion

Neighbourhood cohesion was an important factor that shaped how people participated in the South Circular Road area, and influenced their motivations to participate in different ways. There were a number of mechanisms arising from neighbourhood institutions and participation structures, and the cross-over between both, that shaped experiences of community cohesion in the locality.

Participants spoke about the different institutions (i.e. the local schools; Mary Immaculate College; McGarry House emergency housing accommodation) based in the area and the influence that the kinds of services they provide, and the different groups who access the services, have on residents and their participation. While acknowledging the strong, sometimes national, reputation and the wider impact of some of these institutions, a number of people highlighted that these organisations and their service users were largely composed of people who come into the area, rather than those ordinarily resident in the neighbourhood. Thus, the large number of institutions and the volume of people attending these establishments were considered, in a range of ways, to shape daily interactions in the neighbourhood and to impact on the coherency of the locality.

At a very fundamental level, these institutions significantly contributed to who was in the area on a day-to-day basis through the inward flow of service users, whether this was on a daily basis or over the course of longer periods of time. In some cases, the institutions influenced the local urban landscape, expanding into residential areas, purchasing and transforming neighbourhood housing stock. As a part of the wider research process, focus-group participants also talked about feeling reluctant to leave their homes during school drop-offs and pick-ups in the neighbourhood due to increased traffic congestion and parking problems.

Many participants felt that the institutions have different responses to the local neighbourhood and approach interaction with residents in different ways. Although engagement was sometimes viewed as sporadic and specific to certain projects, Mary Immaculate College (Mary I.), for instance, was noted as taking the initiative to lower the height of part of the College's wall to make the campus more visible and welcoming. More informal arrangements, with respect to facilitating parking or room bookings for local groups and residents, demonstrated how such institutions can engage positively, as this older man talks about:

Mary I. now across the road they are very, very good to the neighbours. Like if they are having a graduation, they send out forms and tell you the traffic might be a bit chaotic you know or just take your time. They allow the neighbours to park their car overnight in the college grounds as long as they have it out by nine o'clock in the morning. (Male, Older Adult Group, KE LC1).

A number of participation opportunities arising from Mary Immaculate College being in the neighbourhood were also noted by children and youth and older people: the College provides opportunities for locals to attend courses; young people, the immigrant community and pupils from the local Catherine McCauley School can use the campus sports fields; and local residents walk their dogs on the grounds. The Lime Tree Theatre, located in the College was especially highlighted as a neighbourhood and city resource. Along with Mary Immaculate College itself, it was noted as a much-needed cultural amenity in Limerick, allowing people to view and partake in cultural events:

It's a very useful service in the place. Limerick has improved its theatre. The Lime Tree now is the saviour for us so we need something... Like when I was young there was five or six cinemas in the city... Mary I it has a big influence on this particular side of the city. It brings life, new people into the area and it brings arts and it brings crafts in as well... (Male, Older Adult Group, KE LC4).

Since student accommodation has come to be developed as part of Mary Immaculate College itself, it has taken students out of rented housing accommodation in the area. While this meant that the anti-social behaviour that some participants were previously worried about was now less of a concern, it also increased the separation of the students

from the everyday life of the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, older adult participants recognised how such institutions provided the ageing neighbourhood with a larger than usual population of younger people, adding vibrancy and demographic diversity to the area. In the broader context of South Circular Road needing support, this older woman talks about how having a younger generation in the area, even temporarily, is a boost to the neighbourhood:

...we had a loan of a generation for the college year and then they were gone but that was all you had. That has definitely enhanced it and you would like to think then that the services in the area would support all of this, to regenerate all of this, in time to come. (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC2).

Similarly, the two secondary schools in the neighbourhood draw large numbers of pupils from across the city and county, as well as the immediate locality. Although, the impact of these younger people on the feel of the neighbourhood was thought to be less significant due to their daily commute in and out.

For the most part though, research findings suggest that these institutions sometimes operated without integrating with the social fabric of the surrounding residential area. Many participants talked about how there can be a lack of embeddedness of some institutions in the community. This was especially an issue, where the focus of service provision was perceived to be primarily for the wider city or county of Limerick. This young girl, who found her neighbourhood generally to be a friendly place, discussed how her experience of the local educational structures and their pupils suggested a disconnection to local residents:

The two schools Laurel Hill and Clements in my opinion they are full of snobbies... People that are just like 'I am better than you' and stuff ... you would have like the odd time where you would actually have a decent person there but then other times it would be very like 'Why are you standing near me, you are not cool enough to talk to me...' (Female, Children and Youth Group, KE LC3).

Further, some interviewees felt the separation between the neighbourhood and its institutions ran deeper and impacted on neighbourhood social cohesion. For some participants, this was not just in relation to services users, but also to the structures and staffing of the institutions themselves. In particular, the greater mobility of many teachers, lecturers

and other workers in the various institutions has meant that people working in the neighbourhood do not for the most part reside there. This dearth of local communal investment has, for some, a profound impact on the fabric of the local community, leading them to lament more traditional notions of community:

They don't bed themselves in the community. They earn their crust here but they don't really bed themselves in the way they did in times gone by... it is a very changed society we're living in and it is going to become more unrecognisable. Our concept of community is changing dramatically and looking back we're probably not going to recognise it if we live long enough, looking back. It is a pity. It is something that I think, we will mourn the loss of it. What else have we? (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC2).

As will be revisited later in this report, the positioning of some institutions within the neighbourhood also introduced concerns about safety in South Circular Road. McGarry House was specifically highlighted by some participants as shaping their consideration of participation in the Neighbourhood. Located on the northern boundary of South Circular Road, McGarry House hosts 27 long-term residents, as well as other individuals on a more casual basis. While the wider research process (involving community stakeholders) indicated that McGarry House workers endeavour to foster a sense of community among their service users, the institution appears to remain apart from the neighbourhood in a number of ways. This includes being largely invisible to some participants, while also being viewed as a possible source of antisocial behaviour in the eyes of other participants.

Reflecting a scalar disjuncture between the larger St. Joseph's parish and South Circular Road, religious institutions also played a role in the dilution of a sense of cohesion. Even outside of population groups from different religious backgrounds, participants highlighted that people from the same neighbourhood were patrons of different Catholic churches, whether this was St. Joseph's Church or the Redemptorist church. This subtle separation of the community into distinct yet fluid congregations has been a barrier to a more integrated community feeling. As this older man highlights, while church services can often be an important mechanism for fostering contact among residents of neighbourhoods, the presence of multiple churches in close proximity disrupt this integrative function:

The problem in Limerick there, you have so many churches in the parish like, you have the Redemptorists ...which is in this parish and then you have below there Our Lady of Lourdes which is a different parish alright. But that church is nearer to us than our parish church. So the thing is a lot of people even when they were going to mass, and most of the older people do, some of them went to Our Lady of Lourdes and some of them went to the Redemptorists or some of them went to other city churches. Unlike a town like Glin or Listowel where everybody went to the one church it was more a community. I found that that broke up the community. That broke up the community here big time. The different churches. (Male, Older Adult Group, CF LC8).

Thus, for interviewees, institutions can be a large part of how they see the South Circular Road as a place in which they live and participate. At the same time, it was clear from the findings that the broader sense of co-ownership or communal feeling among all stakeholders has yet to be fully achieved. This is despite many of these institutions being viewed as assets to the neighbourhood.

In terms of other participation structures, and in order to make connections with other residents, children and youth and older people who took part in this research seek out clubs and spaces where their peers can gather together.



Lava Java's youth café, which is outside the boundaries of South Circular Road, but is in close proximity to the neighbourhood, served as a valuable meeting place for younger residents. Within South Circular Road it can be difficult for young people to find a place to meet without having to spend money. The challenge for young people, then, is to fill their time meaningfully and not outstay their welcome in the few outlets they are in a position to frequent, as this younger participant talks about:

These days we just go down to Centra or Spar because they've got lovely like tables and seats and all that to hang around in. but you know, to do that we've to pay, we've to go in and we all have to buy ourselves a big dirty chicken roll or get a drink or something, just to sit down. And of course we milk that, we go in at, well in the summer when all the clubs and everything are closed... You know, so we would just sit there until they kick us out. Or until somebody, some genius, is like "Hey guys, let's go." And we're like, "Where? Where are we going to go? I mean if you want to buy something in the next place then sure. (Male, Children and Youth Group, KE GA1).

Older people too talked about availing of the close proximity of the city centre for different forms of participation. Some older participants talked about how the local Active Retirement Club provided an important source of participation. However, as the club is held in St. Joseph's parish hall, the club caters for the larger parish district and has, as a result, less of a neighbourhood focus. All participants in this research recognised that there are few spaces for intergenerational contact within the South Circular Road neighbourhood. The expanded physical community and increase in apartments have all served to weaken small-scale communal ties. The opportunities for residents of the South Circular Road to come together as a community seem to be less common and, as noted by this participant, has meant that most residents look outside the neighbourhood to participate:

There isn't really [something that brings us together] except the residents association, there's an annual general meeting once a year which not very many people go to anyway... But if you want to get involved in anything, you have to really go outside of the community, because the community itself is too small, with just fifty houses. (Male, Older Adult Group, CF LC8).

Micro Communities in South Circular Road

Arising from the particularities of the institutional and participation structures in South Circular Road, presented in the previous section, the area can be considered to comprise a series of locales and micro communities. This has contributed to a general absence of overarching connections across the neighbourhood. The interviews revealed that, as a result, a sense of community in South Circular Road may be difficult to discern, and this has become more apparent over time.

The various institutions function in their own right as distinct communities, being reinforced by: the lack of engagement with the surrounding neighbourhood; the fostering of a distinct community spirit within those institutions (service users and providers); the physical growth of these establishments in an area that has little space left for more expansion and the physically elongated neighbourhood itself. This situation, in some respects in effect for decades, has diluted the sense of value that the community experience can bring to urban living. As this older woman discusses, when asked if she felt at home in the neighbourhood after twenty years living there, even local estates were more transient and less connected in part because of this institutional presence:

I do yes, we don't mix together though. We salute each other. It's different to where I was, people come and go here. People next door, who's next door to me... It's a different area but it makes no difference to me, I have my friendships. I don't know how the rest of them feel, we talk to each other but I don't know them that well... We're all living our own lives here, it's that kind of way... (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC5).

However, there are also a number of other factors that contribute to the development of micro communities in South Circular Road. Given their more expanded life-long perspectives, these factors are most evident within the accounts of older adult participants.

Reflecting the layers of housing development that have occurred in the area at different points, many smaller areas in the neighbourhood did not develop the habit of meeting up regularly. Instead, they relied on fostering small-scale networks to participate collectively with fellow arrivals into the area who were at similar life stages. Interviewees remembered a good deal of communal contentment when young families with children bonded on particular streets, with little contact beyond their immediate area. As this

older man discusses, this meant the emergence of discrete bounded areas and relational communities within South Circular Road:

Well we came into this particular community here about fifty years ago, which is a small community. There are only about fifty houses here altogether. It is a cul-de-sac, once you come in off the main road. And it is a very close-knit community, because it is so small and there is a mixture of Limerick City people and people from County Limerick and Clare and so on. So it has been a very, for us, a very friendly community and we all got to know each other very well about forty odd years ago... Out on the main road it would be even a more settled community than in here and we never really got to know that many people out on the main road, maybe that is part of it, because we were teachers ... I never got to know that many of them now. (Male, Older Adult Group, CF LC8).

The style of housing and residential development contributed to this emergence. Again, the elongated physical environment has been a factor in preserving the smaller communal focus, engendering a less cohesive neighbourhood experience. In some parts of South Circular Road, people described their homes as somewhat secluded, either living in newer apartment blocks in the neighbourhood, or in houses that sit behind a high wall. In the case of the latter, these houses, set back from the main road helped to maintain a sense of distance from the street and the community when wished, and now provide a sense of safety. This older woman notes the sense of security her house provides, one of many similar houses on the same street:

...it was a lovely place to rear my two kids because you can see the setup here that I have, you have to be let in with buzzer systems so it was very secure, (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC2).

Changes in the population have also altered the feel of the neighbourhood, from service users and providers who commute in and out, to increasingly evident population diversity towards the inner city. This older man discusses the impact of inward migration flows into South Circular Road and its consequences for more established sections of the population, their normative expectations, and a sense of familiarity with who is in the neighbourhood:

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We are flooded with a lot of different communities... They could be living in one of these apartments with, they are being moved into social apartments, that's what I'd call them. They bring that certain element. If you are bringing people like that into an element where there's a lot of people who are settled for years they are not expecting this kind of situation and this can be upsetting the balance of things. (Male, Older Adult Group, KE LC4).

More subtle population changes occurring over the life course of participants contributed to the creation of micro-communities, including adult children moving away and peers passing away. Older, established parts of the South Circular Road—once sustained with new populations arriving in the 1960s and again in the 1980s when new estates and apartments were developed—are now home to ever-shrinking community contexts, as children grow up and move away. The social networks that flourished in the beginning of the lives of new residents have struggled to withstand the impact of the various life-course trajectories and transitions that shape the experience of people in communities. In effect, the bonds that held a number of the smaller areas together have been stretched. These networks have shrunk for many older people, as this older man describes:

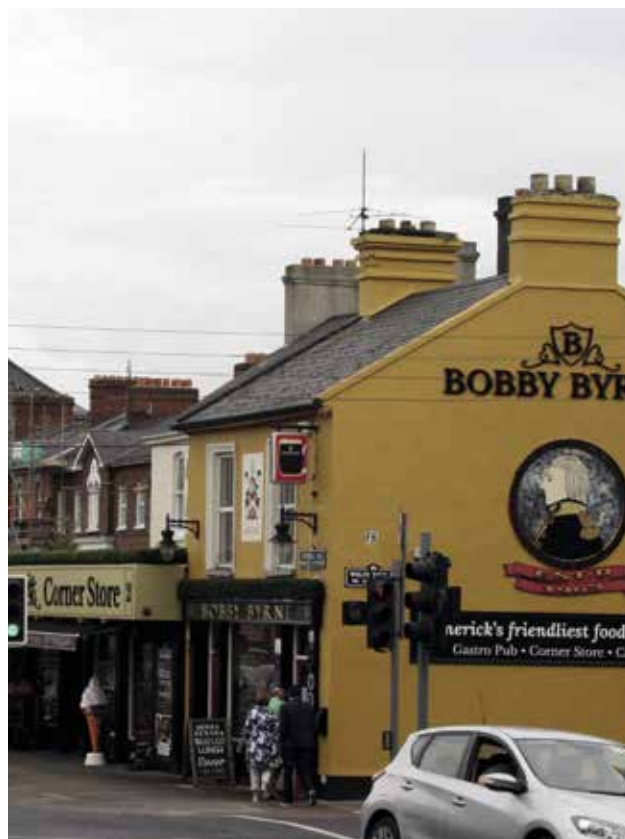
A lot of the families have changed there in the 20 years. I walk up and down there now and it's lonesome because there are so few there that I really know... [Before a local woman] got a group together and we used to meet every Monday, to keep fit and have a cup of tea and a chat afterwards. Some days we'd go for a walk together, all the neighbours, regularly, all the mothers and all our children. If they weren't in my house they were in someone else's house, we knew where they were, they were within our area. All the children played. It's all gone now, they're all married. Some of them [neighbours] are gone to Heaven now but we had a lovely community there in my early days there. (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC5).

Younger people, with greater mobility, tend to report feeling free to move in groups through the community without feeling under suspicion by residents. They have fewer expectations of knowing people or being known, and pick up on the smaller aspects of everyday life that contribute to the feeling that they belong, as this young girl who recently moved to the community talks about:

When, as soon as we moved in when our neighbours came over and everything just to say hi and then when I am walking through the estate and you just see like some of the neighbours as well they just stop and say hi as well... Like there is more people that are actually my age and that would have the same interests that I have to things, as in like say the style of clothes I would wear, the style of like music I would listen to or something. (Female, Children and Youth Group, KE LC3).

Safety, Consultation and Planning

For the most part, participants agreed that theirs is a safe community to live in. Children and youth participants especially picked up on the feeling that they are lucky to live in a quiet neighbourhood. With awareness of the difficulties that young people experience in other city neighbourhoods in general, and in other parts of Limerick city, these participants did not speak of concerns around feeling unsafe or unwelcome. One participant who moved into the area within the last two years from what is considered to be a more deprived neighbourhood notes this relative calm in South Circular Road in comparison to other areas of Limerick:



Like since I first moved out here from [neighbourhood name], I could see that it was a lot more peaceful because when I lived in [neighbourhood name] there was, like say three or four in the morning, there was a lot of racing. Like, you could just hear race cars and stuff. But since I moved out to like South Circular Road it has been a lot more quiet and like I feel safer walking through here. Because where I lived before, you would just be scared in case someone would just like pop up. But really out here like there is nobody like that nobody is threatening or anything. (Female, Children and Youth Group, KE LC3).

Older people were also aware of the relative sense of peace and safety that was in South Circular Road. They highlighted the benefits of the enclosed nature of the neighbourhood and of living in a place where people were vigilant against crime, typified in the text alert being set-up locally. Together with its central location, this represented some of the neighbourhood's most significant assets and, as this older woman described, was why the majority of participants were very happy in the area:

I do, I feel very safe because it is very safe. We're enclosed, no one would bother [you]. They wouldn't try anything I'd say around here, to break into you, because they'd be caught or someone would hear. I'm very happy here and I'm central and I'm near the church and I'm near all my activities. (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC5).

Nevertheless, there were concerns amongst some older participants about aspects of safety in South Circular Road, pointing again to the variety of micro communities within the neighbourhood, the different populations of service users coming in and out of the neighbourhood and how the population becomes more diverse and less familiar towards the city centre.

There was a general sense of needing to ensure the safety and well-being of children in an area with few green spaces and heavy traffic stemming from commuters travelling to and from, and through South Circular Road. The physical neighbourhood and built environment, which give the area its elongated shape, was considered to only compound some of these issues. These circumstances, according to some older adults, conspired to keep younger children in their homes rather than being allowed to move freely and safely within and through the neighbourhood:

But like, even our grandchildren, they don't be out playing at all there, once they come home from school they are in their houses. Which is sad actually, I suppose it is the same all over, you know. (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC1).

There was concern amongst some interviewees about people who they felt were capable of bringing anti-social behaviour into South Circular Road. This was also felt to contribute to wanting to protect and look out for more vulnerable groups of local residents, such as children. The area was not thought to be crime free, and a number of participants were wary of those people they do not recognise in the neighbourhood. The text alert system that was set up in the neighbourhood to heighten awareness and security in South Circular Road, especially with the decreasing presence of community Gardaí, was considered a rare instance of the community being brought together for a common purpose. Henry St. Garda station was noted to have one community Garda while Roxboro Station, which covers the southern half of the South Circular Road, was not thought to be in a position to appoint someone to patrol the area.

A prominent source of concern for a small number of participants was the opening of the McGarry House emergency accommodation facility at the north end of the neighbourhood. It was felt that this allowed people who were struggling with addiction into a neighbourhood that they typically would not frequent otherwise:

...the biggest blight of the landscape is we have the wet house. ... How could somebody like the HSE [Health Service Executive] who should have a duty of care to children consider this was a suitable location when they were surrounded by even primary schools? (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC2).

It was clear from the accounts of perceived safety issues that many of the concerns were exacerbated by participants' feeling that they were not consulted about such neighbourhood developments. The decision to locate McGarry House in South Circular Road was felt to be taken without sufficient regard for, or discussion with, local residents. The presence of people panhandling in the Redemptorist Church, reports of drug use in the area, as well as a sense among interviewees of burglary being an issue in the neighbourhood, were contributory factors to concerns about such decisions being made without the full knowledge or consent of local residents:

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And it was something that was all hatched up between central government, I would say. When I say the HSE [Health Service Executive] I kind of mean the Department of Health... Limerick Corporation, and one girl and myself went to meetings when we heard it was coming off.... We got a meeting in the corporation one day at which we had Willie O'Dea, I think Michael Noonan was there, Paddy Kennedy who was a senator from down here, they were all at it... (Female, Older Adult Group, KE LC2).

It was also clear that some of these concerns were related to a broader unease around lack of consultation regarding neighbourhood planning and development. There was a general impression amongst a number of participants that various kinds of neighbourhood and city developments were communicated as pre-approved, rather than being open to guidance by local concerns or constructive feedback. In the case of particular institutions, this was thought to decrease the likelihood of service users being able to integrate and participate in the community. It was felt, therefore, that planning and consultation

that engages people less reinforces barriers to broader participation for both long-term and recently-arrived local residents. These issues appeared to foster a sense of disempowerment and powerlessness for some residents in the South Circular Road area, with longer-term impacts on the neighbourhood's sense of belonging and its capacity for collective participation. As this older man describes, feelings of being detached from city-level decision-making processes that impact on South Circular Road can create feelings of political and social disenfranchisement:

You can't go to a TD anymore. You have to go to your councillor. The councillor has more power than people think. People think oh sure he's only a councillor if you look at, say the concert in Dublin the city manager decided no concert, you know... but yet there is lots of other things that the residents decided that they don't want and it comes along and it can't be stopped... There needs to be some plan where you know exactly what can happen and they explain. Maybe it's just me, I'm not picking up on it. (Male, Older Adult Group, LC4 KE).



Concluding Points

In focusing on South Circular Road, the 3-Cities Project sought to investigate experiences of community participation for the participant groups in an established neighbourhood close to the city centre that is experiencing increasing population and neighbourhood change and has a relatively affluent neighbourhood-level socioeconomic status. With many long-term residents, a growing transient population and a significant number of city-wide and national institutions in the neighbourhood, South Circular Road provided a series of intriguing characteristics that were likely, to some degree, to shape participation for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. The neighbourhood also offered a context from which to interrogate assumptions about how place-based challenges to participation for these groups living in urban areas only derive from deprived settings. Further, given its proximity to other neighbourhoods and the city centre, there were questions about whether the boundaries of South Circular Road would be that much

more ambiguous and fluid, and what consequences this may have on neighbourhood cohesion and belonging.

This research did not set out to capture the views of all members of the participant groups resident in South Circular Road. 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 South Circular Road's residents who are younger and older. In doing so, it explores the common experiences, opportunities and challenges with respect to participation, and provides a unique look at children and youth and older people as residents sharing this neighbourhood space.

A limitation of the research is its failure to give voice to people with disabilities within the research process in South Circular Road. While a range of efforts were made to involve individuals from this group, we were not in a position to identify and recruit people with disabilities for this research—this is despite official statistics indicating a small but significant population of people with disabilities

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 South Circular Road, 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/

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living in the neighbourhood. It would be beneficial to our understanding of shared life-course experiences of participation in urban settings if the voices of this group were captured in future research in South Circular Road or in similar neighbourhoods.

The importance of the wider research project is that it also has been led by the voices of children and youth and older people, highlighting three key themes relevant to how they participate: neighbourhood institutions, participation structures and cohesion; micro-communities in South Circular Road; safety, consultation and planning.

Neighbourhood Institutions, Participation Structures and Cohesion:

Locally-based institutions and participation structures shaped experiences of community cohesion and participation. The service provision, the organisation and the service users of some institutions could influence daily interactions for these groups. This included: in basic ways, such as impacting on routines of participation; in positive ways, such as providing local participation assets; and in more challenging ways, such as operating without integrating with the neighbourhood social fabric. Some institutions were considered more problematic and a potential source of safety issues. Other participation structures for the participant groups were typically located outside South Circular Road, with a lack of neighbourhood-based participation opportunities, and intergenerational spaces, available in the immediate area.

Micro Communities in South Circular Road:

South Circular Road is comprised of a series of micro communities. This has resulted in, for some, the absence of an overarching sense of community in the neighbourhood. It has also meant that a lack of opportunities for collective participation and a concentration on immediate locales around people's home for participation and a sense of belonging. Contributing factors include: neighbourhood-based institutions functioning as distinct communities; different layers of housing development over time and the accompanying social networks; the style of housing and discrete physically-bounded areas; and population changes that introduced new communities to the neighbourhood and shrank existing relational communities.

Safety, Consultation and Planning:

Both participant groups cited safety as a significant asset of the South Circular Road area, and as why people liked living in the neighbourhood. However, some concerns amongst older participants about aspects of safety were evident. Few green spaces and heavy traffic contributed

to feelings that there was a need to be wary of the safety and wellbeing of younger children. Some service user populations in the neighbourhood, and the lack of familiarity with the new and more diverse residents in the area, produced concerns about anti-social behaviour in the locality. A perceived lack of consultation in key decisions pertaining to planning and development that impact on South Circular Road exacerbated these concerns.

It is important to note that within these research interviews and throughout the wider research process, there was an acknowledgment of people's overall satisfaction in living in South Circular Road over their life course. The vast majority of participants were very happy living in the neighbourhood. There was also recognition of why South Circular Road was a desirable location. Participants were very aware of how the neighbourhood itself embodied a series of assets for participation over the life course, including several institutions that are highly respected across the city, county and nation. However, and as reflected in the themes presented in this report, the research process itself offered a rare opportunity to voice concerns and, therefore, in itself fostered a focus on neighbourhood-level issues. This only underlined the feelings of disempowerment and lack of control felt by some participants, and their sense of being excluded as stakeholders from the developmental evolution of their neighbourhood. In this light, bringing community stakeholders and different groups of residents together for the first time during this research, in the Collaborative Forum, was seen as being positive.

The research demonstrated the significance of the institutions in the neighbourhood, and their associated communities, when looking at the holistic ideas of participation for children and youth, older people, and potentially for people with disabilities. The research was constrained in its inability to capture the voices of the different institutions' service users. Apart from involving community stakeholders representing some of these institutions, the scale and aim of the research dictated that our focus was only on children and youth, older people and people with disabilities. Incorporating these voices would be important in any future research in South Circular Road. The findings also demonstrated a challenge that many established city neighbourhoods are likely to face around how to integrate different life-course cohorts as layers of new residents accumulate in a neighbourhood over time. It was clear that participants benefited from

access to networks of support, trust and reciprocity over their residential life course in South Circular Road. These networks just did not always intersect across the neighbourhood's various communities.

In looking across the findings in this short report, we are able to identify the main concluding points concerning participation for children and youth and older people. 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 South Circular Road points to five key messages with respect to participation for the participant 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. Neighbourhood change influences connections to place** – the research demonstrates how changing neighbourhood contexts can shape connections to place and are having an effect on community cohesion, particularly as new residents move in and longer-term residents age;
- 3. Institutions serve as powerful neighbourhood participation actors** – the research shows how neighbourhood-based institutions, with remits that extend beyond the immediate area, can introduce opportunities and challenges for participation, but ultimately inform residents' experience of South Circular Road as a neighbourhood;
- 4. Emergence of multiple communities of participation in South Circular Road** – the research illustrates how population changes, different residential cohort layers, the structure of the built-environment, and institution-based social networks, can combine to fragment an overall sense of community;
- 5. Exclusion from deciding neighbourhood directions impacts on participation** – the research highlights how feelings of disempowerment can undermine personal agency in relation to neighbourhood matters, reinforcing local disconnections and, potentially, perceived neighbourhood issues.

Future Directions: Voice-led Social and Neighbourhood Innovation

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

Neighbourhood Cohesion

Neighbourhood-wide programmes and events that foster integration between the different areas and sub-communities in South Circular Road can bolster the social fabric of the wider neighbourhood, and create new opportunities for participation amongst the participant groups. The research showed that, for some participants, the sense of local belonging has become focussed on smaller settings and resides in cohort-specific networks. The population of the South Circular Road is also experiencing a number of changes, with recently built estates and apartments changing the demographic of the area and few opportunities for newer residents and longer-term residents to connect and interact. Programmes focused on building neighbourhood cohesion across areas, communities and groups of different cultural and religious backgrounds in South Circular Road are necessary to foster familiarity, relationships and trust, and a co-produced sense of community. Service users of the different institutions should also be included in these programmes where appropriate. Key aims of the programmes should include nurturing ownership, agency and meaningful engagement in the neighbourhood, and exploring shared values. Examples of building neighbourhood cohesion might include:

- Establishing a neighbourhood panel with the aim of representing the views and perspectives of all population sub-groups in South Circular Road;
- Co-developing services and programmes that address changing needs and preferences of South Circular Road residents;
- Creating intra- and inter-religious events to bring together the two parish settings and promote communication between faiths and communities living in South Circular Road.

Neighbourhood-Focused Intergenerational Zones

Intergenerational contact zones that offer opportunities for collective gatherings across generations can strengthen

communal ties in South Circular Road. The research demonstrated that there was a lack of intergenerational opportunities and spaces in the neighbourhood, impeding meaningful engagement involving different generations. Promoting contact among children and youth, people with disabilities and older people, will foster cross-generational relationships and solidarity. Intergenerational contact zones should involve a combination of informal opportunities, creating the foundations for more sustained intergenerational relationship development in the neighbourhood, and structured initiatives and projects that focus on the neighbourhood. Examples of neighbourhood-focused intergeneration zone might include:

- Engaging existing local spaces, such as college facilities and green areas, to promote regular contact and intergenerational projects;
- Structuring neighbourhood-based intergenerational programmes to include post-primary and third-level students, strengthening connections with different users of the neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood Institutional Forum

Establishing a forum that brings representatives from neighbourhood-based institutions together with local children and youth, older people and people with disabilities, would help enhance resident-institution engagement and identify new ways to transform local institutions into assets for participation. The research demonstrated that there is a preponderance of institutions in the local area, many of which have fostered their own communities of people who access services. In collaboration with members of the three participant groups, each institution may be in a position to enhance integration of their communities into the wider neighbourhood and to foster more inclusive participation. Examples of the neighbourhood institutional forum programme of work might include:

- Focusing on developing a co-ordinated institutional effort to enrich the neighbourhood as a collective and shared space for service users and residents;
- Formulating a neighbourhood dissemination and consultation strategy to inform and involve local members of the participant groups in institutional developments.

City-Neighbourhood Communication

There is significant value in more closely connecting existing development strategies with the contexts of diverse local neighbourhoods and the life-course perspectives of their residents. Building on existing consultation efforts within the city (e.g. Intercultural Cities and Age-Friendly Programmes, and the Limerick City and County Council Corporate Plan 2015-2019) enhanced consideration of specific neighbourhood contexts, such as the South Circular Road, and the inter-linking life-course needs of different groups would help promote buy-in from stakeholders. It may also help to potentially deliver more effective services and development strategies. Regular communication between city-level decision-makers and the South Circular Road neighbourhood stakeholders and residents would help to develop active debate on, and an understanding of, strategic decisions that are impacting the local neighbourhood and local opportunities for participation. Neighbourhood voices can be useful policy development instruments when stronger relationships are fostered between city structures and local contexts. Examples might include:

- Re-establishing and supporting local efforts to promote community voices at a local and city level, such as local residents' associations;
- Fostering local interest in a structured approach to representing the South Circular Road neighbourhood in order to address local issues with local political representatives.

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