

## 7. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, CHILDHOOD DEPRIVATION, AND URBAN REGENERATION

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Previous chapters in this book have considered the issue of spatial justice as it applies at various spatial scales and to a range of issues and policy domains. In this chapter, we focus on the closely related concept of environmental justice and its application to understanding urban problems in contemporary Ireland. Specifically, the chapter focuses on children and families in areas of Limerick city targeted under what was planned, just as the current financial, economic and fiscal crisis began, as the largest urban regeneration programme in the history of the state. As the crisis has unfolded, in particular the rapid deterioration in the public finances, the regeneration programme has been scaled back severely, with the result that the main activity to date (February 2014) has been the demolition of houses in, and relocation of families from, the target estates. The chapter poses questions about the downscaling of the regeneration programme as a result of the crisis, and argues that what has been perceived by some as the abandonment of these areas by government<sup>1</sup> can be understood as an environmental justice issue that impacts negatively on those who remain living in these areas, in particular the demographic cohort that is most confined to, and affected by, the quality of the neighbourhood, i.e. children.

### Environmental justice, neighbourhood effects and childhood deprivation

The notion of environmental justice is connected to the ways in which the goods (and conversely the 'bads') of society are distributed, both socially and spatially. The concept has been most strongly developed in the US, where a distinctive environmental justice movement grew in the early 1980s out of protests against the siting of a large dump for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the predominantly poor, black, and powerless community of Afton, in Warren County, North Carolina. As it developed, the protest movement identified inequalities in the

exposure of individuals and communities to environmental risks and hazards as fundamentally, and profoundly, a justice issue, wherein already well-documented inequalities in the consumption of society's goods were being exacerbated by concomitant inequalities in the distribution of the negative externalities arising from the production of those goods. These inequalities were of concern particularly because of growing evidence about the adverse health outcomes of exposure to toxic substances and pollutants. The focus on environmental or public health was therefore central to the early environmental justice movement, which asserted the right of everyone to a safe and healthy environment.

More recently, understanding of environmental justice has been broadened in at least two respects. First, there has been a growing interest in outcomes besides (though linked to) health, and second, the initial concern with inequalities in exposure to hazards has been extended to take account of differences in the availability of, and access to, environmental resources. Both of these developments are exemplified by Hornberg and Pauli (2007) in their treatment of environmental justice as it relates to child poverty. The authors argue for a more holistic understanding of the environmental conditions that impact on child poverty, to include dimensions such as the absence or degradation of green spaces and parks (e.g. due to littering and poor maintenance), as well as environmental vandalism. Furthermore they recognize the central importance of inequalities arising from aspects of the socioeconomic environment, e.g. differences in levels of social capital and social networks as between middle-class and marginalized communities.

As broadened in this way, the concept of environmental injustice or inequality comes close to that of so-called area or neighbourhood effects, which have been cited as contributing to poverty and deprivation (Buck 2001). The term 'area effects' refers to the exacerbation of poverty by features of the neighbourhood, which can include physical/environmental aspects (giving rise to place-derived area effects) as well as social aspects (leading to people-derived area effects). The key idea is that it is worse for an individual or family to be poor in a poor area as opposed to in a mixed or wealthy area. Area effects have been identified as one of the main justifications for anti-poverty measures that are area-based (Humphreys and McCafferty 2014). Urban regeneration programmes are among the largest area-based interventions to tackle poverty and deprivation.

The significance of area effects as an explanation of poverty and deprivation has been challenged by several authors, as have been both

<sup>1</sup> For a critical view of the regeneration programme to date, see the website of Limerick Regeneration Watch ([www.limerickregeneration.org/](http://www.limerickregeneration.org/)).

the efficacy and the efficiency of area-based approaches to tackling these problems (Ellen and Turner 1997; Tunstall and Lupton 2003; Galster *et al.* 2008). One of the grounds on which the critique of area effects is based is the argument that, as demonstrated in early work by Townsend (1979) in the UK, and more recently in the case of Ireland by Watson *et al.* (2005), the geography of poverty is extremely fine-grained, so that it is difficult to identify spatial concentrations of the poor over any area of significant size. It is for this reason that we prefer the concept of environmental justice to that of spatial justice in the context of the empirical research reported in the present chapter. Given the focus on deprivation, and the micro-level spatial scale of the analysis, the concept of environmental justice seems more appropriate since it has always been anchored to the local and to notions of place rather than to space or location in the abstract. The concept of environmental justice is also favoured because of the strong emphasis it places on the issue of geographical mobility – or the lack of it. From the earliest days of the movement it has been recognized that environmental injustice flows in large part from the inability of the poor to move away from the hazards presented by their environment, without incurring both pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs that are particularly onerous given their limited resources. For children, who are the focus of this chapter, the mobility issue is particularly acute: their more restricted daily mobility patterns mean that they are more confined to, and affected by, the quality of the environment in their immediate neighbourhood. This includes both the aspects identified as important by Hornberg and Pauli, namely availability of safe and secure play spaces, and freedom from bullying and negative peer influences.

In view of these mobility issues, it is surprising that, while there has been an increasing focus on children in public policy in recent years, environmental aspects of children's wellbeing have received little attention.<sup>3</sup> This is well illustrated by anti-poverty policy. In recognition of the fact that both the rate and the incidence of poverty among children (defined as those aged less than 18 years) have exceeded those of other age cohorts for some time, the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (Department of Social Protection 2012) recently established

a specific sub-target relating to children. This target relates to the 'consistent poverty' indicator, which is based on a combination of household relative income poverty and material deprivation. The latter in turn is specified with regard to a checklist of items considered the norm in Irish society, but this checklist is constructed with reference to adults: none of the items relate specifically to children, or indeed the environment. The most detailed study of child poverty conducted to date (Watson *et al.* 2012) does attempt to build a measure of consistent poverty based on 'child-specific deprivation', and one of the items tested for inclusion in the indicator (using data from the 2009 Survey on Incomes and Living Conditions, or SILC) is whether the child has an outdoor space in the neighbourhood where he/she can play safely. The authors report the finding that 5.3% of children nationally lack this item, but 4.7% do so for reasons other than affordability, and they are therefore not considered deprived. This treatment of deprivation ties the concept closely to income poverty. Because of the low rate of deprivation on grounds of affordability, and the fact that it is likely to be strongly affected by urban/rural location, the safe play areas item is not recommended by the authors for inclusion in a general scale measuring childhood deprivation in Ireland. Whatever about considerations arising from the construction of national poverty indicators, we would argue that the lack of attention to children's interaction in and with public space is a significant deficit in our understanding of child wellbeing.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. The next section sets the background to the empirical research that is at the centre of the chapter by looking at some of the socio-economic problems that affect Limerick, and especially the regeneration areas within the city. This is followed by an account of that research which focuses on its findings in relation to children, highlighting issues of children's affective response to their neighbourhood environment, and of child health, emotional development and behaviour. The chapter concludes with some thoughts on the implications of cuts in the city's regeneration programme for children and families in the areas designated under the programme.

## Deprivation and regeneration in Limerick

Limerick has been recognized as one of the most socially deprived urban areas in Ireland (Fitzgerald 2007). The Pobal HP Index of

<sup>3</sup>Interventions under the Area-Based Child Poverty Programme (also known as the ABC Programme) launched by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2013 are still at the design stage, but indications are that the focus will be on improved coordination of early years interventions in the areas of education, health and parent support, rather than on local environmental problems.

Affluence and Deprivation shows that, based on data from the 2011 Census of Population, the city of Limerick ranks last (most deprived) of all the 34 city and county authority areas in the state (Haase and Pratschke 2012). This picture has remained more or less unchanged since the index was first calculated for the 1991 census. Moreover the city contains the two most deprived of over 3,400 EDs in the country, and six of the 37 EDs, or 16%, are classified as 'very disadvantaged', as compared to less than 1% of all EDs in the country.<sup>4</sup> In their study of the geography of poverty in Ireland, Watson *et al.* (2005) found that the income poverty risk in the city was between 30% and 50% above the national average, and the rate of consistent poverty was 50% above the national average. These problems of deprivation and poverty are of long standing, and are closely linked to long-term economic trends.

There was a severe housing problem in Limerick as far back as the mid-nineteenth century (Logan 2009), and a visitor to the city in the early 1960s found it to be still struggling to overcome the economically ruinous aftermath of the Great Famine (Bloomfield 1962). The city's traditional industrial base was severely affected by the competitive pressures arising from the Irish government's policy switch from protectionism to free trade during the 1960s and early 1970s, and attempts to compensate for job losses in the indigenous industrial sector, by attracting mobile foreign direct investment to the city, have had mixed results at best, with continued volatility in employment in foreign-owned companies (McCafferty 2009). The city's weak performance in terms of attracting higher value-added, knowledge sector activities has been recognized at both local and national levels (DEHLG and Forfás 2006; Limerick City and County Councils 2013). According to the 2011 census, the city's male unemployment rate was 32.7% as compared to a national average of 22.3%, while the female rate of unemployment was 23.7% as compared to 15% nationally.

Poverty and deprivation do not affect all areas of the city; rather there is a clearly defined internal geography of affluence and deprivation in Limerick. Compared to other mid-size cities in Ireland, Limerick displays high levels of residential segregation along tenure and social class lines (McCafferty 2011), and this in turn translates into marked spatial differences in socio-economic wellbeing. The most problematical areas correspond to a considerable degree to those with

the highest levels of social rented housing. These are the areas that were most affected by job losses in the manufacturing sector, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the situation of the public housing estates deteriorated inexorably from the 1980s onwards, as economic change, combined with certain aspects of housing policy, led to the residualization of these areas (McCafferty 2011). By the early 2000s, when the national and local economies were booming, the public housing estates were characterized by the concentration of a range of social problems, including high levels of unemployment and of poverty (McCafferty and Canny 2005), and high levels of antisocial behaviour as well as more serious forms of criminality, much of it linked to the drugs trade (Fitzgerald 2007; Hourigan 2011b).

In response to the problems outlined above, a massive regeneration programme was introduced in 2007 with the establishment by Ministerial Order of the Limerick Regeneration Agencies. A year later the Regeneration Agencies launched a multi-billion regeneration programme focused on the four areas of the city with the most severe social and economic problems: Moyross and St Mary's Park under the remit of the Northside Regeneration Agency, and Southhill and Ballinacurra Weston under the remit of the Southside Regeneration Agency.<sup>4</sup> The regeneration master plans envisaged the investment of €3.1 bn, of which €1.7 bn was to be publicly funded, in a major clearance and rebuilding programme that aimed to redevelop the regeneration areas as mixed tenure, mixed social class estates, with residential development balanced by retail and enterprise development. However, the launch of the master plans could scarcely have occurred at a less auspicious time, coinciding almost exactly with the beginning of the financial and economic crash. The deep cuts in public expenditure, both before and after Ireland entered the EU/IMF bailout programme in late 2010, and the virtual collapse of the property development sector meant that implementation of the plans was compromised from the start, and when the Regeneration Agencies were wound up in 2012 only a small fraction of the new building programme had been completed.<sup>5</sup>

The research reported in the present chapter was conducted by the authors in 2010 on behalf of Limerick City Children's Services

<sup>4</sup> Following the nomenclature of the two Regeneration Agencies we use the term 'Northside' to refer to Moyross and St Mary's Park, and 'Southside' to refer to Southhill and Ballinacurra Weston, in the remainder of the chapter.

<sup>5</sup> The work of the Regeneration Agencies has now passed to an Office of Regeneration within the City Council, which itself will merge with Limerick County Council in 2014.

<sup>6</sup> This is based on affluence-deprivation scores for EDs that are derived by aggregating up from the affluence-deprivation scores of their constituent small areas (SAs).

Committee, which was established in 2007 as one of four pilot initiatives countrywide, with a remit to improve coordination in both the planning and the delivery of services to children (Humphreys *et al.* 2012). The research was funded by Limerick Regeneration Agencies and Atlantic Philanthropies, and sought to document the needs and experiences of children and families in Limerick city, particularly those living in the communities targeted for assistance under the Limerick regeneration programme. The objectives were to produce a baseline profile of children in the regeneration areas, and to assess the 'relevance, quality, efficiency and impact' of services directed to children. The methodological approach of the study entailed both qualitative and quantitative elements. The latter was based on a survey of parents/carers<sup>6</sup> and of children aged seven to 17 years, which was structured so as to incorporate an element of control. As well as households in the four severely disadvantaged housing estates designated under the regeneration programme, the survey also covered a less severely disadvantaged area not included in the regeneration programme, and an area of the city that ranked as 'average' in terms of socio-economic wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> The sample of 418 parents/carers and 128 children was based on a random sampling design implemented using a systematic selection procedure. The research instrument for both the parents' and children's surveys was a structured interview schedule incorporating, where possible, standard internationally used questions relating to a wide range of domains, including parents' education, parents' health, parent-child relationships, child health and development, child education, and both parents' and children's views of their neighbourhood. The key findings of the survey in relation to children are described in the next section.

### Children and families in the regeneration estates

The profile of parents in the regeneration estates that emerges from the household survey is consistent with the designation of these areas as the most disadvantaged in the city, as measured with respect to indicators such as educational attainment, lone parenthood (strongly linked at national level to elevated rates of poverty), and the source and adequacy of household income. In the regeneration areas, levels of educational

attainment of parents were very low – 70% of parents interviewed in the Northside regeneration estates (Moyross and St Mary's Park) and 68% in the Southside estates (Southill and Ballinacurra Weston) had not proceeded beyond lower secondary education, while no-one on the Northside and less than 1% on the Southside had a third-level degree or postgraduate qualification. This was in sharp contrast to the average control area, where just 12% had not advanced beyond lower secondary education and 29% had a third-level degree or postgraduate qualification. Less than 6% of respondents in the latter area were parenting alone, but this increased to approximately 50% in the areas designated under the regeneration programme. Reflecting both low educational attainment and high levels of lone parenting, there was a high level of welfare dependency in the regeneration areas: close to 80% of parent respondents in these estates identified social welfare remittances as the largest source of household income, as compared to just 13% in the average control area. These differences in income source translated into marked differences in the reported adequacy of income to meet household needs. Across all areas more than one-third of respondents indicated that they faced 'great difficulties' in making ends meet, but the proportion was as high as 56% in the Southside regeneration estates as compared to 12% in the average control area.

Against this background of generally lower levels of socio-economic wellbeing in the regeneration estates, the household survey focused on a range of indicators of neighbourhood quality and safety, as assessed by both the parents and the children. Parents were asked to identify which, if any, from a list of issues could be described as a 'big' or 'very big' problem in their neighbourhood. In the average control area no item was identified as a big or very big problem by more than half of parents. However, in the Northside regeneration areas four problems received this level of mention (rubbish/litter; boarded-up houses; drugs availability; and area stigmatization) and seven were identified in the Southside estates (as above, plus: crime against property; joyriding/car crime; loitering youth). Other social aspects of neighbourhood quality were investigated also, in particular community social capital, where previous research on Limerick and the Mid-West region has shown significant local variation (Humphreys and Dineen 2006). The household survey indicated that social capital was most developed in the average control area, and least developed in the regeneration areas, with the disadvantaged control area in an intermediate position.

<sup>6</sup> The person interviewed in each household was either a parent or a carer for children. The term 'parent' is used to cover both categories in the remainder of the chapter.

<sup>7</sup> The Pobal HP Index based on the 2006 census was used for making this determination.

Approximately 90% of parents in the regeneration areas reported knowing most of their neighbours, as compared with 68% in the disadvantaged control area and 49% in the average area. However, this gradient in levels of neighbourly familiarity was reversed when the question of trusting people in the neighbourhood was raised. The percentage of respondents reporting that they trust most people in their neighbourhood was highest, at 60%, in the average control area, falling to 51% in the disadvantaged control area, 45% in the Northside estates of Moyross and St Mary's Park, and just 30% in the Southside regeneration estates of Southill and Ballinacorra Weston. This gap between knowing and trusting neighbours in the regeneration estates can be considered an indicator of low social capital.

As a summary measure of neighbourhood quality, parents were asked to rate their neighbourhood as a place to raise children. In total, some 87% of parents in the average control area and 70% in the disadvantaged control area rated their neighbourhood as excellent or good. However, in the regeneration areas the corresponding levels were considerably lower – just 34% in the Northside regeneration estates and 31% in the Southside regeneration estates viewed their locality in a positive light. Parents' assessment of the child-friendliness of the neighbourhood is confirmed by children's own views of their neighbourhood, as ascertained from the child survey. When asked to indicate whether they agreed with a series of statements relating to the area 'where you live', a large majority of children across all areas (81%) agreed that they like where they live. However, the percentages agreeing with the statement ranged from approximately 95% in the two control areas to roughly 70% in the two regeneration areas. Some 62% of children in the Northside and 48% on the Southside regeneration estates agreed that 'there are lots of mean kids living around here'. The percentage in agreement was also high (49%) for the disadvantaged control area, but considerably lower (21%) in the average control area. All children surveyed in the latter area agreed that 'I feel safe when I go outside', but this fell to 65% in the Southside regeneration area. Conversely, the proportion stating that they are 'afraid to go out' was highest in the latter area (26%), followed by the Northside regeneration area (22%), with just 4% of children in the average control area expressing this fear. Children's perceptions of neighbourhood safety can be a basis for a desire to move from the area in which they live. In line with the findings above, the percentage of children indicating a desire to move was close to six times higher

in the regeneration areas (both approximately 48%) than in the average control area (8%).

Being unable to move from a neighbourhood that inspires fear is likely to have negative consequences for child health and for emotional and/or behavioural problems in the child, and it is to these outcomes that we turn next. For this purpose we again use responses from parents, who answered in relation to a randomly chosen reference child in the family.<sup>8</sup> With regard to general health, a large majority of parents across all areas rated the reference child's health as excellent (66%) or good (26%), and while ratings of child health were somewhat poorer in the regeneration estates (especially the Southside areas), the differential between the regeneration and other estates was less marked on this than on some of the indicators discussed already. This differential was more strongly in evidence in relation to child strengths and difficulties as measured using Goodman's standardized screening instrument, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman 1997). The SDQ generates five distinct scales, four of which measure emotional and behavioural difficulties in the child, and one of which measures strengths. Scales to measure difficulties relate to emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer relationship problems, and these can be combined to develop a scale measuring total child difficulties. The pro-social scale is a measure of child strengths, with scores based on behavioural tendencies such as being kind, considerate and helpful towards others. As with parental assessment of the child's general health, there were no statistically significant differences between the areas on the pro-social scale.

With regard to child difficulties, the findings indicate that children in the regeneration areas had greater difficulties on all scales than children in the disadvantaged and average control areas. Differences between the areas were greatest in relation to conduct problems and peer problems. These differences are thrown into sharper focus by regrouping or banding scores into 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal' ranges, following the methodology developed by Goodman. This shows larger proportions of children in the abnormal and borderline ranges on all four of the difficulties scales in the regeneration areas as compared

<sup>8</sup> The reference child was selected as the child whose birthday occurred soonest. This then is not necessarily the same child as was interviewed for the child survey, and the sample size (418) is higher than for the child survey (128).



to the control areas, with children in the Southside regeneration area consistently showing the most difficulties (Table 7.1). In relation to conduct problems, the proportion in the abnormal range in the Southside regeneration area was 37%, as compared to 6% in the average control area; on emotional symptoms, the corresponding levels are 40% (Southside regeneration) and 17% (average area); on hyperactivity problems, 30% and 12%; and on peer problems, 27% as compared to 6%. On the combined total difficulties scale, 33% of Southside children scored in the abnormal range, 29% in the Northside regeneration areas, 15% in the disadvantaged control area, and 7% in the average control area. To put these findings in a wider context, we can note that according to the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Williams *et al.* 2009) the proportion of Irish nine-year-old children in the abnormal range is 9%. Clearly, rates of child emotional and conduct problems in the regeneration estates are extremely high, both in the local (city) and national contexts.

**TABLE 7.1** Percentage of children in the abnormal range on difficulties scales (Humphreys *et al.* 2012, Tables A12–A17, 290–1)

SCALE	AVERAGE CONTROL AREA	DISADVANTAGED CONTROL AREA	NORTHSIDE REGENERATION AREA	SOUTHSIDE REGENERATION AREA
Conduct problems	5.8	13.6	25.2	37.2
Emotional difficulties	17.4	23.9	29.1	39.7
Hyperactivity	11.6	19.3	27.2	29.5
Peer relationship problem	5.8	14.8	15.5	26.9
Total difficulties	7.0	14.8	29.1	33.3

## Children and regeneration: An environmental justice issue

The Limerick regeneration programme was introduced in response to the kind of problems outlined in the section above, and the concentration of those problems in certain multiply disadvantaged parts of the city. Because of the severity and persistence of the problems, but also perhaps because it had become the 'standard' approach in Ireland, the regeneration master plan envisaged the radical reconstruction of the targeted areas, with a programme of wholesale clearance and demolition to make way for the rebuilding of mixed-use, mixed-tenure communities.<sup>9</sup> If implemented fully, the programme would have wrought one of the most radical transformations ever in the social geography of the city. However, as indicated earlier, the plan was effectively stillborn, its launch coinciding with the financial crash in the autumn of 2008.

Initially the implications of the crash for the programme were unclear, and in particular there was considerable uncertainty regarding the Irish government's financial commitment. In this climate of uncertainty the programme of clearance got under way, most immediately and extensively in the Southside estates of Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. The impact of the clearance programme can be assessed from Census of Population data for 2006 and 2011 (Table 7.2). Over the five-year period the population of each of the four regeneration areas showed significant decrease, ranging from a decline of 16% in the Moyross area to 44% in the O'Malley Park and Keyes Park areas of Southill. Over the same period the population of Limerick city as a whole fell by 5%, so there was clearly a significant differential out-migration from the regeneration areas. While population decline had been ongoing in areas such as Southill for some time prior to 2006 (McCafferty 1999), the size of the decrease in the most recent intercensal period appears to be linked directly to the relocation of families from the area.

There is no certainty that the regeneration master plan would have been successful, and in particular that its ambitious objectives on social mixing would have been achieved. It is clear however that while the demolition programme has alleviated some of the problems associated with abandoned, boarded-up and burned-out housing in the estates, it has also left behind an unfinished landscape. The household survey,

<sup>9</sup>This was the approach followed, for example, in regeneration projects such as those in Ballymun and Fatima Mansions in Dublin.

**TABLE 7.2** Population change 2006–2011 in the regeneration areas (CSO 2012a, Table 6, 91)

ED/ REGENERATION AREA	POPULATION 2006	POPULATION 2011	%CHANGE
Ballynanty ED*/ Moyross	3,468	2,918	-15.9
John's A/St Mary's Park	1,211	863	-28.7
Galvone B/Southill	1,574	878	-44.2
Prospect B*/ Ballinacurra Weston	1,026	751	-26.8
Limerick city	59,790	57,106	-4.5

\* Not all of the ED lies within the regeneration boundaries.

conducted while the clearance programme was under way, indicates that, as assessed by both parents and the children themselves, children in the regeneration areas face a more challenging environment than their peers in other areas of the city. Children find this environment difficult, and unsurprisingly express a desire to move from the area.<sup>10</sup> The clearance and relocation programme, and the depopulation associated with it, have also given rise to concerns about threats to the viability of community services (such as crèches).

In conclusion, children in the regeneration areas of Limerick experience an environment that can be considered hazardous to their health and development in respects such as the lack of green spaces and other areas in which they can play safely and without fear of bullying or physical harm. This environment is created by wider social processes, in particular processes of polarization and segregation operating in labour markets and housing markets – and indeed by public policy initiatives,

<sup>10</sup> We don't know to what extent, if any, expressed wishes to leave may be associated with the movement out of friends under the relocation programme.

such as the regeneration programme, designed to tackle these processes. Not alone are children powerless to influence these processes, they are the least independently mobile section of the population and therefore the most affected by the quality of the neighbourhood environment. In these key respects – problems created by wider social and policy processes, the inability either to mitigate the problems or to move, and the consequential adverse health effects – the situation of children in the regeneration estates can be viewed as raising important environmental justice issues. As a matter of environmental justice, it is important that the range of social supports for these communities be retained. Whether those supports are delivered through mainstream or area-based initiatives such as regeneration is a subject for a different debate.