

Community demographics

Following the marked industrial decline of the south-west inner-city of Dublin, the area is characterised today by all the compound problems which accompany long-term unemployment. The area has suffered from dereliction, physical neglect, large-scale environmental decay, heavy pollution, poor infrastructure, substandard housing, and a lack of recreational facilities and open green spaces. The south-west inner-city is now characterised by complex social exclusion and by multi-dimensional deprivation.

The area houses the largest concentration of public-authority housing in the Irish state, and unemployment rates of 80–90% are found in many of these flat complexes. The number of lone-parent households is above average, and the South Inner City Drugs Task Force estimates that as many as 12% of the population in its area are drug users: among the male population aged 15–24 in the Dublin 8 area alone, 10.7% are drug users.

The population of the south-west inner-city is 35,926, and the population density is 17,067 persons per square mile – nationally the figure is 135 persons per square mile.

- 16% of the population of the south-west inner-city are aged 14 or less;
- 36% are under 25 years;
- 34% are aged 25-44 years;
- 17% are aged between 45-64 years and 14% of the population are aged 65 and over.

A total of 29% of the population is judged to be age dependant

- 35% of the population have no formal or primary education;
- 16% have lower secondary education;
- 22% have upper secondary education;
- 27% have third-level education;
- 41% of the adult population have left school at or before the age of 15 years.

Within the area, 32% of men and 37% of women have left school with no formal or primary education; 39% of the unemployed population in the south-west inner city have either no formal education or have attended primary level only. Community personnel estimate that as many as 50% of adults have literacy problems.

The social class of all persons aged 15 years and over is determined by their occupation and employment status:

- 21% are in Social Classes 1 and 2 – professional, managerial and technical;
- 28% are in Social Classes 3 and 4 – non-manual and skilled manual;
- 22% are in Social Classes 5 and 6 – semi-skilled and unskilled;
- 28% have never been in paid employment or who live in households where the head of the household has never been in paid employment.

Of the unemployed population in the south west inner city, 55% have been unemployed for three years or more.

Aims and Objectives

Under the [Dublin Inner City Partnership Strategic Action Plan 2001–2006](#), the following core strategies are seen as the way to achieve real inclusion for inner city residents:

- Regeneration of the community;
- Tackling educational disadvantage;
- Access to employment and enterprise;

Between them they aim to enhance the quality of life for local residents. The community regeneration strategy aims to ensure that lasting benefits accrue to the inner-city population as a result of regeneration programmes. It lists actions for arts, sports, equality, information technology, capacity building, leadership training and social housing. The educational strategy aims to remove barriers to participation, promote parental and community involvement, expand quality pre-school care, and assist adults and early school leavers to return to appropriate learning opportunities. The employment and enterprise strategy focuses on the further development of the Inner City Employment Service, which provides routes out of poverty for long-term unemployed inner-city clients, and linkages with employer clients. It also encompasses pre-employment and enterprise initiatives.

Each of the strategies requires a dedicated infrastructure capable of focusing on the specific measures and facilitating the delivery of the overall strategy. The core infrastructure at present includes the local network co-ordinators, local development workers, the educational initiatives operating at each level, the employment and enterprise support services and the social economy

job co-ordinators. The primary strength of the partnership lies in the collaboration of community, statutory and private sectors to achieve the agreed targets.

A significant proportion of the population of the south west inner city (one of four quadrants operating under the Dublin Inner City Partnership) remains excluded from all economic activity. This area continues to be characterised by the myriad of factors and problems which has led analysts to rank more than half the quadrant's electoral wards as among the most disadvantaged 10% in Ireland. Combating exclusion requires resources, and the South West Inner City Network Action Plan 1999–2006 issues a very specific challenge with regard to this issue to policy makers within the Irish Government. This action plan is about the translation of the concept of combating social exclusion into practical actions, with all the inherent implications for policy and practice on the ground. In consultation with the community of the south west inner city, this plan proposes to refine the agenda provided by the network into a number of recommendations and proposals which will constitute a working programme for the period 1999-2006.

The stated objective of the Integrated Area Plan is 'to bring about sustainable urban regeneration by integrating physical, social and economic interventions to address the key issues in the area'. Such key issues are given expression in the objectives outlined within the plan:

- achieve sustainable urban regeneration through a framework of intervention that achieves a balance between social, physical and economic renewal;
- attract significant investment to underpin the three-pronged approach of economic, social and physical renewal;
- consolidate existing industry and create a positive framework to attract a broad base of small, light and incubator industry;
- improve the quality and amenities of both private and social housing;
- encourage the provision of a range of housing types and a variety of tenures;
- exploit the area's close location to the Central Business District and develop synergies with the HARP (Historic Area Regeneration Project) area;
- develop the tourism industry in the area, including the provision of an adequate tourism infrastructure, creating maximum spin-off for the local economy;
- create mechanisms and framework to ensure that the social dimension of urban renewal extends tangible benefits to local residents;
- ensure that education and training are key components in framework interventions to address social disadvantage and exclusion;
- create a widespread mixed land use culture;
- consolidate the antiques trade in Francis Street;

- create a physical renewal based on reinforcing the coherence of the street as an essential building block in the urban form of the area;
- rebuild the urban fabric of Cork Street/The Coombe and Marrowbone Lane combining appropriate infill with models of mixed-use development;
- achieve a radical leap in the quality of the public domain;
- restore the civic character of a number of key urban spaces including Cormarket, St. Catherine's Precinct, Newmarket and Dolphin's Barn Village.

This area has also been selected for the development of advanced research and commercial activities in information technology and multimedia content, by the establishment of [MediaLab Europe](#) and the associated development of the [Digital Hub](#) in the immediate areas. Digital Media Development Ltd, which is overseeing the development of the Digital Hub, has committed itself to 'engage the local community in the development process, including new pathways through learning and applied technology to employment, and in relation to the impact and benefits of the development generally'. Further commitments are made to the provision of social housing, environmental sustainability and to urban regeneration.

The Digital Community Project

In 1998 DIT began an initiative in which it took unused computer equipment from its own resources for relocation to a school environment. They reconditioned the equipment and then distributed it to a number of schools in Dublin's inner city. Since then, the Dublin Inner City Schools Computerisation (D.I.S.C.) Project has computerised 40 inner-city disadvantaged-status schools, and in the process trained 700 teachers in a range of basic ICT skills. From this initiative it became clear that a gap existed with regard to ICT access for students outside of the classroom environment. As a result, together with Hewlett Packard, DIT started the Digital Community Project. The aim of the project is to provide access to information technology and exposure to the educational system for those who are marginalised, and the strategies of the Dublin Inner City Partnership can be seen as the vision statement for the Digital Community Project. The project works with a range of partners to deliver its services, which puts state of the art ICT equipment –including PCs, printers, scanners, digital cameras, broadband internet access and networking – in each of 11 inner city flat complexes. Through this access, it is also hoped to provide opportunities for jobs for participants.

The 11 flat complexes involved are Bridgefoot Street, Charlemont Street, Dolphin House, Fatima Mansions, Iveagh Trust, Michael Mallin House, St. Theresa's Gardens, Whitefriar Street, O'Devaney Gardens, Dominick Street and Hardwicke Street. Most of these are situated in the

Dublin 7 and 8 inner-city area. The partners in the project are Dublin City Council (who provide premises and infrastructure, benching, lighting painting, security, and funding for paper and ink); the Digital Hub (who provide the project with funding for technical support; they also provide software and training facilities); Eircom (who supply broadband internet access and technical support to the 11 complexes and pay for all charges); Dublin Inner City Partnership (who provide support and meeting facilities); NCTE (who contributes very sizeable funding for a 'train the trainers' programme together with professional advice and support); Hewlett Packard (who supply a range of state-of-the-art hardware to the communities, including computers, servers, printers, scanners, digital cameras and network facilities, and also fund the services of a full time project manager); and DIT (which administers the project and provides expertise and support through the Community Links Programme, as well as office, telephone and computer facilities for staff, plus the services of a full-time project director).

Since January 2003, all of the 11 complexes have been fully fitted out with hardware, which has completed phase one of the project. The second phase began in September 2003, which involves the delivery of training courses for the participants. To achieve this, the necessary software for the equipment had to be acquired, and a team of sponsors were set up comprising Microsoft, CDVEC, BTEI (Back to Education Initiative) Prodigy (who deliver the Microsoft IT academy programme) and Intuition (an Irish e-learning company who are providing training materials including an online learning facility). Microsoft supplied MS Office Pro on all the computers. In addition, gave access to the full range of courses delivered through their IT academy, which in turn allowed access to its new core IT course, IC3 (Internet and Computing Core Certification). This course has three basic modules: Fundamentals of Computing; Key Applications (Word Excel); and Internet or On Line Living. It is more suited to the clientele than the well known European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) programme for a number of reasons. First, most of the prospective students have not been exposed to education for a considerable length of time. Through ECDL they would have to undertake seven modules and seven exams, whereas through IC3 they do just three exams. Second, the length of the course is much shorter. Third, it covers a more practical range of subjects for the particular clientele.

In October 2003, 15 students began their first IC3 exams. Despite the very high standards required (80% for a pass), five passed their modules successfully. Over half of the students who did not pass got above 75%, which by any standards was a major achievement. Over half the participants were early school leavers. The Project has now commenced its train the trainer programme, funded by NCTE, and it is hoped that this process will allow residents to pass on their knowledge gained through IC3 to their neighbours both young and old, through an ongoing training programme.

There has been an opportunity to compare the model that has been created by The Digital Community Project to similar models in other countries with the help of Hewlett Packard. In November 2003 Hewlett Packard invited a number of countries with similar initiatives to meet and discuss their projects in Paris. Arising from this, it is clear that despite having less than a year, a very high quality product has been delivered in a very short space of time. Indeed, the project is regarded as highly innovative and successful by other players worldwide. In conjunction with the Digital Media Centre in DIT, funding was acquired to carry out an evaluation of the project. This work will be done by a graduate student. The results of this evaluation will be made available to all interested parties in due course.

In December 2003, the Information Society Commission launched a report into the digital divide in Ireland. The report was commissioned by a number of groups including Dublin City Council, The Dublin Unemployment Pact, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Fingal and South Dublin County Councils. The reports authors were Trutz Haase and Jonathan Pratschke, both of whom are well known and respected Social and Economic consultants. In their report they compare a number of information and communications technologies (ICT) community-based initiatives which took place in Ireland over the last number of years. They specifically compare the government initiatives CAIT 1 and CAIT 2 ([Community Access to Information Technology](#)) with the Digital Community Project, and recommend that the Digital Community Project model be regarded as being of a very high standard and capable of addressing, to a very large extent, the problem of the digital divide in this country. (The full report is available from the Dublin Employment Pact at info@dublinpact.ie.)

The Digital Community Training Programme started at the end of Sept 2003. In a very short space of time, considerable progress has been made in the training of our clients. It is our intention to consolidate this training in the future. Already we have plans to integrate our current commercial courses with accreditation from DIT. We are also planning a teacher-training course with the DIT Learning & Teaching Centre to enable clients to pass on their knowledge to their peers. Again with the support of the Learning Technology Team within DIT, an online learning and communication structure for the communities was launched early in 2004, using WebCT. Within the Digital Community Project, e-inclusion has been embraced strongly, and it is our goal to continue to strengthen our engagement with the communities and partners.