

**The Post-Brexit Security Field
on the Island of Ireland:
The Role of Civil Society in
Everyday Security**

**Workshop Summary Report
from Event at the Carrickdale Hotel
on 28 June 2023**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RESEARCH TEAM	1
OVERVIEW	2
Introduction to the BORDEX Project.....	2
Concept of Security	3
CONCEPTUALISING THE EASTERN CORRIDOR.....	4
Outlining the Research Area.....	4
Identifying the Key Security Issues.....	5
CONCEPTUALISING THE SECURITY FIELD	7
Key Community Actors and Examples of Good Practice	7
Relationships with Statutory Organisations	8
CONCLUSION.....	10
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11

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For more information please visit: www.bordexproject.com

OVERVIEW

This report documents the discussions of participants during a workshop at the Carrickdale Hotel, County Louth, that was held on June 28th 2023. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the BORDEX project, learn about safety and security in local communities, and gain understanding about the organisations involved in producing and maintaining security, often in informal ways. In addition, the purpose of the event was to develop new connections and provide networking opportunities.

The BORDEX team provided an overview of the project and there were a number of break-out sessions to discuss particular topics. The first session addressed defining the geographic area that would be covered by the research on the eastern side of the Island, with feedback from participants focusing on the main concerns and safety practices in the region. The second session concerned the conceptualisation of a 'security field', and participants were able to discuss the key organisations and actors within the area, as well as the relationships between community-based groups and statutory organisations. This report summarises the issues addressed and the feedback of the participants.

Introduction to the BORDEX Project

BORDEX is a research project funded by the Shared Island Initiative North-South Research Programme which supports collaborations between university-based researchers. The full title of the project is 'The Post-Brexit Security Field on the Island of Ireland: The Role of Civil Society in Everyday Security'. This means that the research is focused on the role of community-based actors in producing safety and security.

The BORDEX project is primarily focused on informal (non-state) agencies and groups that play a role in maintaining civic peace, often beside and sometimes independently of the formal police service (either north or south) or other statutory organisations. The research seeks to identify how these processes play out and aims to explore the future of formal and informal relationships in a Shared-Island context with respect of producing 'safe communities'. Additionally, the research is keen to discover more about the security experiences of marginalised groups and to understand how people of different genders and identities experience security. Further information about BORDEX can be found on the project's website <https://www.bordexproject.com/>

Key Research Questions

1. What and who are the key social, cultural and economic institutions involved in security production? How are they critical to maintaining everyday peace and security? How are community-based actors valued and supported relative to more institutionalised forms of security governance?
2. What are the security futures facing the island of Ireland, particularly in a shared Island context? What role should these formal and informal institutions play?
3. In our research questions, how do different genders and marginalised groups experience engagements in the security field, and do actors' reflections on the situation vary by gender or identity?

Concept of Security

To create a foundation for the discussions in the workshop, the research team first reflected on the concept of security and its meaning within the project. Participants were asked to define 'security' from their own perspective in a brainstorm session. Their understandings are outlined in Box 1:

Box 1: What does security mean to you?

- Includes feelings of safety and wellbeing, relates to lived experience of individuals
- Means having your needs met (Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs')¹
- Equal rights, co-operation, partnership
- Might include state safety agencies (first responders, police, benefits, healthcare, etc.), but also community groups
- Generational / historical / past experiences impact perceptions of safety and attitudes towards official security agencies
 - Past trauma influences how people perceive safety organisations
- Importance of community, not being isolated
- Border can impact security

From Box 1 it is clear that security has a (i) *a wide meaning* – that it doesn't only belong to the police and formal institutions. It involves the entire community and a wide range of actors, including first responders, state agencies, and grassroots actors, and is built on co-operation and partnership. It is also clear that security has (ii) *a deep meaning* – it involves feelings of safety and wellbeing that may be connected with how the history of conflict and 'the Troubles' is dealt with, recognising the role that traumatic experiences may have played. Participants raised issues about meeting needs and ensuring there is equality. There is a recognition that how people experienced security in the past may have indeed been difficult and contentious and that it may well determine how they experience it in the present.

The BORDEX project works with a definition of security that is broader than that typically used by state organisations such as the police, or private security companies. Whereas those conceptualisations often conjure up militaristic responses, international security, the use of force, or technological intelligence, we recognise that in current times, security is often considered more broadly because state organisations increasingly form partnerships with civil society groups (NGOs, community groups, grassroots movements, etc.) on particular crime and security issues. The project also understands security as a state of trust, confidence, and wellbeing, of feeling secure or 'being without a care' or 'carefree'. Central to our project is the idea of *everyday security*. This means activity that is beyond the formal official processes—instead, we are concerned with the lived realities of the practice of security, either those practices which the community actively undertakes in order to build security or those practices to which it is opposed.

¹ Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs suggests that humans must meet basic needs in order to progress to towards self-actualisation, or our fullest sense of self. He argued that basic levels of need had to be at least partially addressed before a person could experience higher levels of needs being met. Maslow ranked these needs starting at the lowest end with i) our physiological and bodily needs (food, water, sleep, etc.) and ii) our physical, mental, and emotional safety and security needs (shelter, lack of violence, freedom from fear, etc.), and progressing to iii) our needs for love or belonging (nurturing relationships, inclusion, trust, intimacy, etc.), iv) self-esteem needs (reputation, respect, dignity, status, etc.), and finally v) self-actualisation (achieving full potential). His theory is often represented as a pyramid.

We therefore visualise everyday security as ‘...the lived realities of practical security measures, including the diverse ways in which programmes, strategies and techniques for governing security are experienced, taken up, resisted, and even augmented by different individuals and groups within society...’ particularly ‘beyond the formal, official processes of national government and other political authorities’.

— Crawford, A. and Hutchinson, S. 2016. *Mapping the Contours of ‘Everyday Security’: Time, Space and Emotion*. *British Journal of Criminology*, 56, 1184-1202 (p.1185).

CONCEPTUALISING THE EASTERN CORRIDOR

In the next session of the workshop, participants were asked to outline their areas of work and their major concerns in respect of safety and security in the region. In particular, the research team raised the idea of an ‘Eastern Corridor’ as a potential means of capturing the movement and transfer of ideas, goods, people, and crime in the area. It was suggested that research could focus on a segment of the larger Belfast-Dublin corridor, specifically capturing the Newry-Dundalk portion and surrounding influences, and it was noted that the research team was seeking feedback on this concept (or proposals regarding the region covered by the project). Participants were therefore asked to identify key areas of concern, or where there were examples of safety issues, as well as areas of best practice, or where there were examples of good safety practices (these are discussed in Section 3).

Outlining the Research Area

To begin, participants noted where they provided their services and which areas they covered (Box 2):

Box 2: Participants’ Primary Areas of Work

- Majority of attendees identify working across Armagh / South Armagh
- Rural areas around South Armagh, Louth, Cavan, Monaghan, border zones
- Some organisations work across all of Northern Ireland or all Island
- M1 / A1 corridor and ease of getting from place to place, incidents can be associated with each other, but are spread out because of quick mobility of motorway
- Impact of new world / technology / AI: work might be even broader (example: someone controlling something in Drogheda even though they are outside of the country)
- Suggestion to broaden area to include Armagh / South Armagh / Monaghan (factories and farming along border and other work, especially relating to immigrants and Travellers)

From these responses, we see that many participants cover very large areas. This was especially true of organisations that provided services in rural environments. Some participants stated that they were not restricted to any particular locality and that they covered all of Northern Ireland, or the entire Island

of Ireland. There was also discussion concerning the nature of crime and safety issues, which participants noted did not respect county lines or international borders, and sometimes required them to address faceless or spaceless problems. They cited examples of technology being used to commit crimes within their area, even though the person using the technology (the origin point) could be in England or somewhere further afar.

In light of this feedback, the research team noted that a narrow understanding of an 'Eastern Corridor' was not reflective of the general practice and issues occurring in the area, although it still held some relevance for certain issues pertaining to movement along the motorway. It was thus suggested that the proposed Newry-Dundalk corridor be expanded, as safety problems and community work were not isolated to this specific zone. In particular, participants recommended that researchers consider more of the border area, as well as South Armagh, South Down, Louth, and Monaghan.

Identifying the Key Security Issues

Next, participants discussed the primary safety and security concerns in their communities, which they identified as follows (Box 3):

Box 3: Participants' Primary Concerns

- Recurring concern about non-investing in community (feel forgotten, under-resourced), pattern of poor investment leads to problems
- Communities feel they don't have the skills to intervene or respond (need training or skills or support)
- Rural areas in particular lack services and support, mass deprivation in areas, lack of security presence (formal or informal, statutory agencies for self-care, etc.)
- Must remove power from state agencies to empower local communities so they have tools to address issues
- Investments often only happen after a crisis
- Border issues (challenges related to co-operation between agencies across border)
- Exploitation a major concern, depends on type of organisation (medical services, families, youth, criminal, gang), exploitation of marginalised groups
- Criminalisation of youth
- Marginalised groups lack of workplace safety, compromised rights, procedural injustice, unfair stop and search; no trust in state agencies; racism, sexism, etc.
- Violence against women
- Paramilitaries discussing specific marginalised people and publicly naming organisations that support them
- Ukrainian War has led to rise in agricultural crime, bans on Russia, Irish / UK criminal groups involved

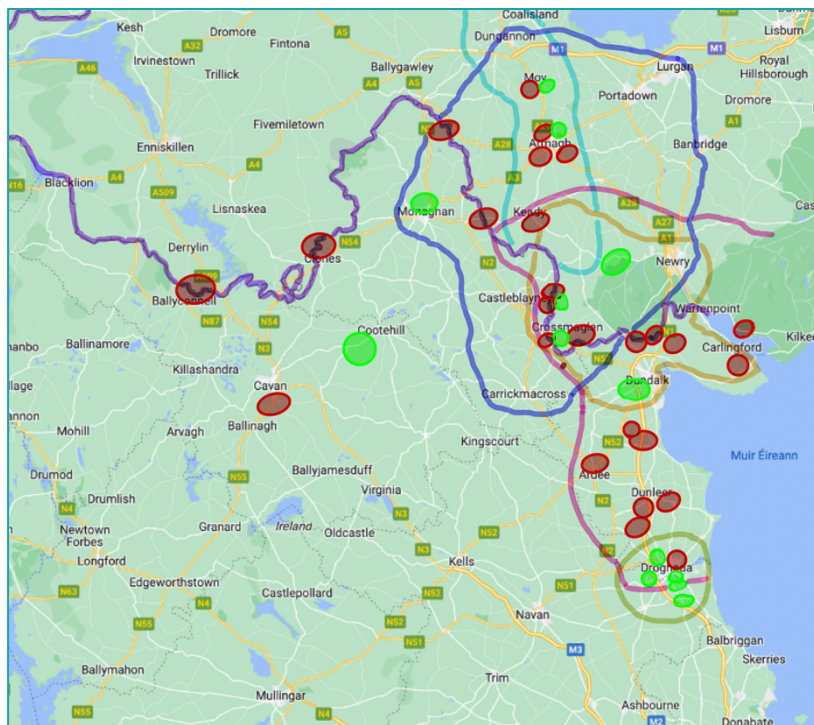
One of the main issues participants raised concerned a lack of capacity or services, which was felt acutely in rural areas, either as a result of poor investment, lack of training, or inadequate support. They noted there were particular concerns related to the existence of the border, and that co-operation between agencies across the border could sometimes pose challenges. They also stated that exploitation was a major concern for their areas (including the exploitation of youth, immigrants, and other marginalised groups). They noted that this exploitation could be carried out by criminal gangs, paramilitary organisations, youth, or other predatory people. Some commented that paramilitary

organisations were targeting marginalised people and the groups that supported them. Participants were also particularly concerned about youth, and listed a wide range of problems (for example car theft, drugs, trafficking, domestic abuse, etc.). They noted they were also concerned with youth being criminalised, and that some youth were being unjustly targeted by police and were having their rights violated (for instance through improper stop and search practices). They felt this was especially true of youth from minority backgrounds. They also commented that youth were not knowledgeable about their rights or the consequences of some of their own actions, and, for example, were announcing their participation in ASB or criminal activity over social media. Participants noted marginalised groups—and immigrants in particular—were also very vulnerable, and were experiencing lack of general safety, lack of workplace safety, procedural injustices, and compromised rights. They also identified domestic abuse as a major problem.

Participants felt that there should be more effort to empower local communities, specifically suggesting reinvesting from the state to build community capacity. They felt that investment in local communities typically only occurred after a crisis, and wanted to change this cycle so that they were equipped to properly engage in preventative work. They stated that generally, there was very little trust in state agencies, which were often viewed as discriminatory, and underscored the importance of local community organisations. They noted that community groups should be underpinned by professionalism and high standards in the provision of their services and responses.

They also identified examples of good practice, in which groups were successfully contributing to the security context, which are discussed further in Section 3.

Figure 1: Map - Participants were asked to highlight areas where they worked, areas of concerns (red), and areas of good practice on a map (green). This image depicts their combined responses.



CONCEPTUALISING THE SECURITY FIELD

The remainder of the workshop focused on the concept of a 'security field'. This idea draws on Bourdieu's theory of a field as a network or configuration of actors, with tensions sometimes arising between powerful actors and dominated actors over access to resources. We therefore envision the security field as a multi-level arena, based upon actors' positions in relation to resources and power, who help contribute to the maintenance and provision of everyday safety, including both statutory and non-statutory actors. The research team was interested in hearing participants' ideas about which organisations and actors might exist and interact within this field.

Figure 2: A depiction of the multi-level security field with example actors and organisations.



Key Community Actors and Examples of Good Practice

In this session, participants were asked to identify existing initiatives, projects, and services which they considered to be models of good practice in dealing with the issues and challenges identified in earlier sessions. Their responses are set out in Box 4 below.

Box 4: Participants' Examples of Good Practice

- Many good practices going on to protect and develop secure communities
- Practices that address hierarchy of needs, provide help and assistance and mitigate predatory behaviour; groups as part of something larger

- Good examples of community responses: National Safety Plan, Rural Safety Plan, networking between community agencies, local businesses working together, targeted efforts with groups (youth groups, women's groups, GAA, etc.), links between groups with same funder, wrap-around support, some community WhatsApp groups, family resource centres, youth diversion projects, community alert programmes, joint policing committee, HSE and public health nurses, CRJI, schools, housing associations, local business and shopkeepers, groups assisting people to get ID/passport, going to 'former' paramilitary members for advice, local leaders, community groups helping to identify suicide risk – taking vulnerable people for day out
- Funding is there
- Emphasis on communities working together — everyone must come and sit around the one table to understand; huge value placed in networking, connection, signposting
- Even organisations that might not seem directed related to safety can play role in maintaining community wellbeing (Example: An Post can help identify vulnerable people)
- Area-Based Community Development ('ABCD')²
- Working in post-conflict society with groups can be difficult
- Covid brought changing needs, resources, and abilities

Participants were keen to emphasise that there were already a range of funded initiatives in place that were engaged with and active on crime, security, and related issues. It is clear that the participants regarded such services as constituting a spectrum of different interventions that ranged from direct crime control intervention to local health services. These interventions included both community initiatives, such as resident associations and youth groups, as well as police led crime partnerships, such as neighbourhood watch and Community Alert schemes. Specifically, the place of the community working in partnership arrangements was also clear from the responses in Box 4 above. They highlighted the necessity of both formal and informal networks in achieving robust security provisions, and the importance of communication between them. In addition, participants noted that local groups act as a security network by virtue of the way they can care for vulnerable populations but may not have a direct focus on security – the example given of An Post (postal service) who call door-to-door on daily basis. There was also an emphasis on the importance of inclusion, care and working together. To this end, participants stressed that all sectors of the community must play a role in security, with local individuals, families, centres, organisations, and formal and regional partners all serving as crucial stakeholders.

Relationships with Statutory Organisations

During this final group discussion, the participants were asked to identify their links to statutory agencies. They considered the nature of their relationships, which agencies they interacted with most commonly, and whether the collaboration was effective. They were also asked to think of any challenges or areas for improvement. Responses are set out in Box 5 below.

² ABCD approaches seek to strengthen communities through the identification and mobilisation of local assets (such as skills, resources, experience, knowledge, etc.) that already exist. Such a strategy aims to empower local communities and promotes sustainable development by recognising the unique skills and networks that particular communities have at their disposal. Within the approach, assets are divided into five categories: individuals, associations, institutions, places, and connections. By placing local citizens at the centre of the process and focusing on positive strengths and potential, the method can help communities organise around an issue and take appropriate action. These concepts were originally developed by John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) in *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Chicago: ACTA Publications), and have been further developed by Cormac Russell.

Box 5: Participant links and relationships with statutory agencies

- Daily interactions with: Department of Justice, Garda, TUSLA, education facilities, policing partnership teams, Advice NI, Northern Ireland Newcomers Associations, Jobs and Benefits office, welfare bodies
- Relationship with statutory as two-way street: seek information and advocate for clients
- Over-reliance from statutory sector on voluntary groups to do the state's job but without the funding and a lot of gatekeeping, list of challenges:
 - everything has to fit within the state's criteria (dictating attitude), expectations too high and not deliverable, fear of innovation
 - disconnect and overlap, confusion in the sector about who is who and what their role is / structure within structure within structure
 - bound by public money, small organisations are shut out, cliques and favourites of statutory bodies get more funding, feel that you'll be excluded if you rock the boat
 - if not government mandated it can be difficult to access statutory bodies, because they are voluntary state doesn't feel like they need to interact, criticism not always taken well, open conversations are imperative and create trust.
 - statutory agencies might consult but no action, nothing comes out of it, you need to see the action

It is clear that participants from civil society groups (both national and in the local community) have regular contact with state actors on a day-to-day basis. While there is a strong sense that civil society is an essential engine of delivering the public good in community safety and security, there is also a level of frustration with dealing with state agencies who work within different frameworks. There are issues of legitimacy and autonomy raised also, with participants feeling that the state could dictate criteria. Similarly, communications with statutory bodies were also identified as being problematic, with a tendency for state agencies to rely on community groups without reciprocating funding or results. In particular, they found that turnover within state agencies could lead to breakdowns in connections, as they often relied on personal relations to maintain working relationships as they lacked formal partnership structures or agreements. They noted that the relationship should function as a two-way process, built on trust.

Participants also commented that community organisations were facing key funding challenges. For instance, they noted that statutory agencies and funders sometimes favoured established groups over those that have not received as much funding or generated as large of a presence — in this sense, community based organisations needed funding from the state, but there was a paradoxical potential to disregard the organisations that were not publicly funded. They also stated that the disappearance of EU funding was especially difficult for groups in Northern Ireland, and that this compounded difficulties in securing fundings. Overall, they felt that the requirements or expectations set in place by funders and state agencies were not always practical, and could cause significant problems for small organisations, resulting in burnout and stress.

Participants also highlighted a lack of awareness of the services that existed, and commented that not everyone was always knowledgeable about the groups available. Nevertheless, they felt that community groups offered key strengths and could complement each other, as well as statutory services.

CONCLUSION

Participants and researchers were in broad agreement that ‘security’ has a wider and deeper meaning than that often attributed to it by state authorities and security interests. It includes quality of life, wellbeing, and a sense of trust and confidence.

Participants also felt that while the idea of an ‘Eastern Corridor’ might have some meaning in respect of how crimes — including drug trafficking, stolen goods, and so on — move up and down the Island, there is a need to consider the border horizontally as well as vertically. More consideration needs to be given to that which is not grasped by the Dundalk-Newry eastern corridor.

The workshop participants identified a range of security challenges including predatory drug distribution networks working in the border area and in local communities. Young people and those marginalised, it was felt, were particularly vulnerable to this form of predation. The history of the conflict and the existence of the border makes it difficult at times to organise against cross-border crime.

Participants noted that while relationships between the community organisations and the state are generally good, and that there are many positive developments taking place, there is considerable work to be done to improve communication and to build the capacity of the community to respond to safety and security issues as they emerge in local and regional contexts.

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