

CASE STUDY: SKAINOS

Jurisdiction: Northern Ireland

Lead organisation: Social enterprise

Key partners: East Belfast Mission, Age NI, Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health, Replay Theatre Co, New Life Counselling and Tearfund NI

Funding: EU Peace III Programme, Department for Social Development NI, International Fund for Ireland and East Belfast Mission

Area: Urban regeneration – providing a shared community space.

Website: <http://www.skainos.org/>

Period of activity: Operational for less than a year

Resource required: £15.8 million for construction and development.

Key Features: A holistic approach

Background: Skainos is a structural regeneration project in a socially and economically challenged community in North East Belfast. Led initially by the East Belfast Mission and then laterally by a separate development company (a social enterprise which spun out of the East Belfast Mission), the project grew out of a desire to redevelop the current Methodist church into a more functional workspace that would allow the Mission to better carry out its voluntary work in the local area. When the mission was enabled to land bank an area with vacant business units on it in 2003 the project began to grow into something much more ambitious. At the heart of the development was an ambition to build a shared community space and to bring together housing, voluntary and community activity and local enterprise. After over 12 years in development, Skainos opened in October, 2012.

How does it work? It is an architecturally striking development on a street that remained untouched during the troubles. Skainos is a managed community facility that cohouses commercial office space (largely office space for third sector organisations that can bring added value to the local community), community facilities (auditorium, civic square), office space for voluntary sector organisations, a day nursery, a café and a mixed tenure housing development. From the start, the East Belfast Mission sought to engage local people in the design of the project: knocking on doors and taking the architects out to meet the local community. The project board includes members of the community and the mission recognises how important a sense of community ownership and control over the development is. Glenn Jordan, the CEO of the development company says that doing things to or for the local community is very much against the ethos of the Mission. He sees the building as a facilitator and catalyst of community activity and development.



What's different? In many ways, Skainos could be seen as a traditional regeneration project, what makes this project different is the desire to build a holistic space that enables community led development.

Impact: It is still early days, but the community is already beginning to use the space as their own. A women's group has started using some of the community rooms for meetings and inspired by their success a men's group and a walking group have also sprung up. Recently the community spontaneously used the civic square as the location for a vigil after the drugs linked deaths of 5 local people. Events and exhibitions are bringing a wide variety of groups into the space, connecting the community to wider networks and activity.

Success factors:

1. Length of time from development, although not intentional, actually gave the community a chance to be fully involved in the design process.
2. The quality of the design has meant that it has attracted lots of attention and positive publicity, helping the community adopt it as a space to be proud of.

Key challenges:

1. The on-going impact of the Troubles.
2. The bureaucracy involved in the planning, building and grants.