

Young People, Job Search and Local Labour Markets: The Example of Belfast

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the role of area perceptions in shaping access to work for young people in Belfast.¹ The context for the paper is set by UK-wide academic and policy debates about employability, spatial mismatch, social exclusion and cohesion, and sources of careers advice/guidance. The more local Northern Ireland concerns with sectarianism and Targeting Social Need (TSN) policies involving commitments to locate jobs in or near socially deprived areas are also highly pertinent.

There are several reasons why employment location and the geography of access to work are important from a policy perspective. Physical accessibility is a key element in debates developed in North America about spatial mismatch which focus on the spatial separation of residents and workplaces in the face of economic restructuring (Kain, 1968; Holzer, 1991; McLafferty and Preston, 1996; Zax and Kain, 1996; Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist, 1998). Poor public transport links and lack of access to private transport exacerbate unwillingness or inability to travel to employment. It has been argued that spatial mismatch may compound skills mismatch (Kasarda and Kwok-fai Ting, 1996), as a decline of local low skill jobs leads to greater spatial and skills mismatches for residents with limited education, generating greater competition for low skilled jobs remaining. At the same time segregation in housing markets means restricted opportunity for moving closer to decentralised jobs. The concept of spatial mismatch has been further developed in Britain. In the guise of arguments about the role played by lack of local labour demand in creating the conditions for unemployment, it has been used to critique supply-side measures which have been advanced as possible answers to the problem of local concentrations of unemployment (Webster, 1994, McGregor and McConnachie, 1995; Webster, 1996; Turok and Webster, 1998; Houston, 2001). Specifically, observations of the low commuting tolerances of unemployed or low-skilled people have been used to argue for the need for 'local jobs' which are proximate to deprived neighbourhoods if residents of these areas are to gain work.

This raises the question: "how 'local' is 'local'?". Current policy interest in the UK on social exclusion and neighbourhood renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) suggests that "neighbourhood is an important location that profoundly affects such outcomes as education, employment and health" (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001, 2277-2278). In discussions of local employment opportunities definitions of 'local' are not always clear, and because of this spatial mismatch is to some extent a chaotic concept. It is known, for example, that commuting tolerances vary between different sub-groups of the working population (Green et al., 1996; Coombes et al., 1988; Hamilton and Jenkins, 2000) and between rural areas and urban areas (Coombes and Raybould, 2001) with 'local' meaning quite different things in

¹ The research reported here draws on a study funded by DELNI.

these varied contexts. The debate on spatial mismatch could also be limited in other more basic and conceptual ways. Many indicators of local labour market conditions and the shortfall (or surplus) of local employment opportunities are constructed in terms of objective 'real world' measures of distance. In the same way, information on the travel-to-work distances of individuals currently in employment is used to infer whether jobs are locally accessible or not to those who are not in employment.

Such approaches are valuable in the ways in which they map labour market behaviour. However, they also have important limitations. We know that labour markets are institutional and social constructs (Peck, 1996; Martin and Morrison, 2002), shaped by lived traditions within localities, and that because of this labour market experiences are highly diverse. The spatiality of labour markets can and does vary by other background characteristics such as educational level, ethnicity, and access to transport. Following this reasoning, objective real world measures of labour markets and locality might not always be the most appropriate indicators, since they do not take account of the fact that decisions are based on information that has come through a perceptual filter (Gould and White, 1973). This move towards 'social space' – understandings of the geography of labour markets as shaped by perceptions and social contexts – is given greater force by the work of Quinn (1986), which showed that young peoples' perceptions were highly important as influences on their uptake of job opportunities. Even if, in some cases, jobs were formally accessible (in geographical and skill terms) to the young people in Quinn's study, there were difficulties in accessing them because they were ignorant of the opportunity because their experience of the city had led them to look elsewhere. A recent Social Exclusion Unit report (2003) has reiterated how limited travel horizons, poor awareness of transport services available and a tendency to look for work in, or travel to, places that are familiar serve to limit the employment opportunities some individuals are prepared to consider. In North America it has been shown that objective spatial variations in many aspects of metropolitan labour market opportunity structures may combine with subjective spatial variations in values, aspirations and preferences in perceived opportunities, leading to geographical differences in labour market behaviour (Galster and Killen, 1995). Hence, spatial behaviour and local social capital shape life chances and involvement in employment (Granovetter, 1995, Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002), and 'imperfect knowledge' about the geography of labour market opportunities has been demonstrated to be a barrier to employment for disadvantaged people (Ihlanfeldt, 1997).

In Northern Ireland problems of imperfect knowledge are compounded by social and religious divisions that mean that some areas are perceived as inaccessible or unsafe for employment purposes because of sectarian reasons. Sometimes these perceptions are based on ignorance or on the legacy of long-past violence. In other cases, however, they may be based on an accurate assessment of the risks of working in or moving through an area of the 'opposite community' through direct experience, or the indirect experience of friends and family. This 'chill factor' was not ended by the Ceasefires of the 1990s since, although the number of killings has lessened, there have been threats to public service workers and work-related murders in the recent past. These events, and the continued importance of sectarian divisions, are another rationale for the examination of labour market perceptions and the ways in which they are socially constructed. Moreover, although Northern Ireland is unique in UK terms in the duration and intensity of civil conflict it is not alone in experiencing social segregation. Qualitative research in some large British cities has highlighted restrictions on job search areas some minority ethnic groups might apply in the face of racial discrimination (Wrench and Qureshi 1996). The Cattle Report (2001) on the riot-hit towns of northern England pointed to residential and labour market segregation as being important factors in poor community relations and the debate about spatial mismatch in the USA has racial implications. In these circumstances, the experience of Belfast could be an exemplar that could shed some light on the problems faced by other areas and, in return, its experiences could be seen in a wider context.

The rationale for focusing on young people (aged 16-24 years) in this paper is that they have started to make labour market decisions influencing their transition from education to employment (through a variety of routes), and the decisions made could play an important part in shaping later labour market trajectories (Ball et al., 2000). Young people in this age group – particularly those who are younger – are unlikely to have had much direct experience of employment. Therefore their attitudes and perceptions are 'the starting position' which they bring to their initial involvement in adult life and labour market involvement. Since this paper is framed in terms of debates about local labour market perceptions, daily movements, spatial movement, social exclusion and implications for policy, an orientation towards young people leaving secondary schools (as opposed to grammar schools²) and passing through various parts of the training system was appropriate. This focus on relatively disadvantaged young people led to a concentration on individuals from socially-disadvantaged areas, and is justified on the grounds that they are more at risk of social exclusion than their counterparts choosing a route through post-compulsory schooling and higher education.

The central concern of the remainder of the paper is to gain an understanding of what less-affluent young people in Belfast know about the geography of labour market opportunities in the city (and beyond) and the locations where they were prepared to work. This concern is addressed by examining the key features of mental maps of young people, by investigating the geographical extent of likely/actual job search, and then addressing the question whether opportunities are restricted because jobs in accessible yet unfamiliar areas are not considered. There is also an interest in identifying the subjective behavioural factors that influenced young people's choices about *which* jobs should be sought *where*. This involves not only considering not only the significance of the religious chill factor and its operation in Belfast, but also other aspects of spatial decision making of wider resonance beyond the Northern Ireland context - including area perceptions, neighbourhood identity, gender and the influence of social class.

Methodology

Given the scope of the concerns addressed, ranging from an objective assessment of employment locations in Belfast and the surrounding area, through engagement with individuals' motivations and attitudes, to an analysis of the accuracy of individuals' subjective perceptions, a diversity of methods and data were used.

A range of secondary sources was used to obtain an overview of the geography of employment in Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland. Information from the 1991 Census of Population was used to calculate average travel-to-work distances by ward throughout Northern Ireland, in order to show how far workers typically travelled and so provide some insights into the sorts of geographical horizons likely to shape the individual labour market and travel-to-work perceptions. Data on employee jobs by workplace, from the Census of Employment, was used to give information on employment locations to ward level. Information on trainees and training provision was obtained from the Department for Employment & Learning, to map existing patterns of spatial mobility of trainees as a basis which could influence knowledge of the Belfast labour market.

Primary data collection focused on selected deprived areas within Belfast, chosen to represent different locations within the city as well as different community backgrounds. Such an approach was necessary to investigate the effect of both religion and location on perceptions and behaviour. Catholics and Protestants might have differential awareness of the city because of experiences of past and present labour market discrimination amongst family members and friends and sectarian-based fear. However, potential perceptual

² Northern Ireland retains a selective secondary school system.

differences could be a result of existing patterns of residential segregation (Leonard 1987). Hence, seven deprived neighbourhoods were selected (see Table 1), providing a mix of inner and outer areas in the East and West of the City, and associated with different communities.

A broad-brush picture of labour market perceptions within Belfast and of the desirability of various employment locations within the city was obtained in two ways. In the first instance, a self-completion questionnaire circulated to young people (accessed via schools and training providers), to collect quantitative information from respondents on their background characteristics, and on educational attainment, job aspirations, access to transport, willingness to be mobile, sources of labour market information and socialisation patterns. Then secondly, respondents were provided with two maps. They were asked to rank areas in terms of the number of jobs they thought different pre-defined locations contained on the first map (see Figure 1). This was used to test the accuracy of respondents' knowledge about employment locations. On the second map respondents were asked to rank areas in terms of their acceptability as a location where they would like to work. This was used to identify possible 'job search' areas and 'no go' areas. In total, 540 completed questionnaires were obtained (234 from Year 12 pupils³ and 306 from trainees).

A more detailed investigation of the finer-scale details underlying the broad-brush picture, and of underlying attitudes and motivations, was obtained in guided in-depth focus group discussions. During these discussions, group members were asked to draw free-hand maps to indicate areas that were 'known' and 'unknown' and that were perceived as being 'safe' or 'unsafe'.⁴ In total, 53 young people participated in the focus groups and mental mapping exercises. The discussions with young people were supplemented with a number of one-to-one interviews with trainers and student advisers/counsellors active in the youth labour market.

The Belfast labour market: the objective picture

The 'mobility' context of workers in Northern Ireland against which young people's perceptions and behaviour is shaped is shown in Figure 2, with average commuting distances of workers resident in each Northern Ireland ward grouped into four main classes. Belfast emerges as a low mobility area with relatively small travel-to-work distances in comparison with the more rural parts of Northern Ireland. Further analysis by Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2003) suggests workers in urban areas simply travel smaller distances than those in rural areas because there are more accessible jobs within reach, since urban areas tend to have greater concentrations of employment than rural locations. If the young people interviewed in Belfast in 2002/3 are anything like the individuals in the 1991 Census, they are likely to be mobile only over relatively short distances (less than 5km), and they might look for work in major nearby employment concentrations.

Analysis of the geography of employment using Census of Employment data shows the greatest concentrations of employee jobs in the major urban centres. Figure 3 shows the number of jobs available within a 5-km radius of each ward. This suggests that those who are prepared to travel up to 5km – a typical distance travelled by Belfast resident workers in the 1991 Census of Population – can find ample employment opportunities within this 5km search field. Moreover, there is a surplus of jobs over working age population resident in the Belfast District Council area. This suggests that spatial mismatch is not a problem at this geographical scale as the project's study areas are in job-rich locales. To qualify this

³ Year 12 pupils in Belfast are in their final year of compulsory schooling at the age of 16 years.

⁴ The planning and conduct of the mental mapping process drew on the literature on this subject including Gould and White (1974) and the experiences of Lynch (1971) who examined contrasting perceptions of Los Angeles by social class and ethnic background.

picture, many of these jobs do not go to Belfast residents but instead to in-commuters from other parts of Northern Ireland (Shuttleworth et al 2000). Indeed, no account is taken in this analysis of the skills requirements of jobs, and the extent to which local residents, as opposed to in-commuters, are equipped to fill these jobs. Furthermore, there is evidence that spatial mismatches possibly occur at smaller spatial scales.

Ward-by-ward analyses of employment totals from the Census of Employment indicate that the majority of employment is concentrated in central Belfast in the Shaftesbury, St Annes and Botanic wards. In contrast, peripheral residential wards whether with private housing like the Four Winds or public housing, such as Twinbrook, have low numbers of employee jobs and surpluses of working-age population over jobs when examining the picture ward-by-ward. A key question for this paper concerns the extent to which respondents accurately perceive Belfast city centre as having a rich concentration of employment opportunities, the degree to which they are prepared to travel to the city centre, and the extent to which they feel it is 'safe'. Opposed to this is the degree to which they see their immediate residential locality as having employment opportunities or as the area in which they would prefer to work despite the location of jobs elsewhere in the urban area. Residents of some locations, if only prepared, willing or able to travel less than 2km could find themselves in an employment-poor context despite the availability of jobs around them in the wider city area. These mobility problems could arise for a number of reasons. Issues like transport (or its lack) could restrict deprived people who wish to be mobile. Equally restricted social networks mean that some individuals do not know about opportunities beyond their immediate residential neighbourhood or do not feel able to venture to them. And there could be circumstances where employment concentrations are perceived as being unsafe and therefore inaccessible.

Changes in the geography of employment may exacerbate some of these possible problems through time. Analysis of the Census of Employment data for the period from 1995 to 2001 points to two opposed trends which could make new employment growth inaccessible for some people. On the one hand, there has been a concentration of employment growth. Wards with high levels of employment in 1995 tended to maintain or increase them by 2001. On the other hand, opposed to this centralisation, there has been decentralisation of some jobs to favoured peripheral parts of the Belfast Urban Area and to small towns outside Belfast. Further analysis of the accessibility of this jobs growth could be of benefit given the potential mobility problems – both in terms of limited travel horizons and inadequacies in transport provision - of some parts of the urban population.

Information was provided by Jobskills and New Deal Training Centres on the locations of trainees attending the centres. Two examples are presented here. First, Figure 4 shows a Jobskills provider in West Belfast drawing trainees from a spatially restricted cluster of Protestant wards. Conversely, Figure 5 shows a provider that draws from Catholic West and North Belfast but not from Protestant West Belfast. These exemplar maps suggest that training can be highly spatially restricted and that some trainees might leave providers with comparatively localised spatial horizons. Potential localised knowledge of the city on leaving school might therefore not be widened in the training system, and entry to employment could take place on the same localised terms as training. Moreover, these and other analyses (not presented here) suggest that training can, in some cases, be sectarianised.

The objective picture painted by secondary and administrative data sources forms the backcloth against which the labour market perceptions, attitudes and aspirations of the young people are shaped. Young people, although not scarred by problems they have directly experienced over the course of their working life in the labour market, are not free of these contexts and indirect experience or events in the past will at least to some extent, form their perceptions.

The Belfast labour market: young people's perceptions and aspirations

The social class background of the young people included in the study background mirrors findings observed by Gallagher and Smith (2000) in their study of the Northern Ireland selective system, as well as those of earlier work (Shuttleworth 1995). Slightly over half had father's working in skilled manual occupations and a further fifth in unskilled manual occupations. Nearly half of the Year 12 pupils surveyed expected no GCSE passes at grades A*-C, while a third of the trainees surveyed gained no such passes. 40 per cent of the Year 12 pupils expected 5 or more GCSE passes at Grades A*-C, compared with an achievement rate of 20 per cent of trainees. 47 per cent of Year 12 respondents expected to get GCSE passes at Grades A*-C, while a third of trainees had achieved no such passes. Table 2 presents information on career aspirations for respondents from Year 12 and for trainees. The high proportion (30 per cent) of Year 12 pupils expecting entry to professional occupations may be unrealistic given their location in the education system. The equivalent percentage (10 per cent) is much lower for trainees and may reflect a combination of disillusionment and experience. The lead category, however, is skilled manual employment reflecting the vocational path that has been taken by many of the respondents. The proportion aiming to do A Levels – for Year 12 pupils – is high but it seems to be matched by hopes about GCSE performance. Those who intend to take this option, for example, expect and hope to pass a higher number of GCSEs on average than those intending to enter other categories. The responses to the question on why the particular occupational group stated is sought (see bottom panel of Table 2) are multiple responses so they need not add to 100 per cent. There are some similarities between the groups in that money and interest are the two most important motivating factors. However, the greater experience of the Trainees might again be reflected by the higher weighting that they give to security and the fact that plenty of jobs⁵ are available, with qualifications being less important as criteria in their choice of occupation.

In terms of advice about the labour market, the most often used sources of advice for Year 12 respondents were family, careers lessons in schools, friends and talking to teachers. These are therefore probably the most influential information networks that shape young peoples' decision making. As noted by a participant in a focus group conducted with Year 12 pupils, when considering jobs and training courses, friends and family members with relevant experience "*can tell you what it's really like*".⁶ Friends and family seemed to be most frequently used sources of advice for trainees also. The importance of family and friends is difficult to over-estimate. In a focus group conducted with young people from the Shankill, one participant admitted that their were courses that he would rather have taken elsewhere, and that he would have done so had he been able to get a couple of his mates to go down with him. In a study in Central London of the process of making post-16 choices, Pitcher and Green (1999) also highlighted the importance of dependence on peers, and the tendency to follow one's friends. An earlier study in Belfast also highlighted the pervasive effect of the peer group (Jenkins, 1982). One implication of this seems to be young people are tying themselves into socially and geographically restricted networks through their contacts and that this background is shaping their world view. Talking to employers or visiting training providers comes some way down the list of sources of labour market advice. However, where such contacts are made, their usefulness tends to be rated relatively highly.

Table 3 shows the mobility characteristics that the respondents bring to the labour market. These include access to transport, experience of travelling outside their home areas, claimed willingness to travel to work, and the location of their family/friends. Year 12 Pupils do not have personal access to cars or have driving licenses so their mobility (unless relying on others to provide transport by car) is necessarily restricted by their life stage and age.

⁵ Note that the reference in the questionnaire is to 'jobs of this kind'.

⁶ Such information is more highly rated than an assessment in a brochure, etc.

However, the trainees appear to have poor access to private transport and to have possible mobility problems. Only a quarter have a clean driving license and just over a third say they have personal access to a car/van. The picture is somewhat better when household access to transport is considered as the proportion of respondents with this rises to over 80 per cent. The only drawback of this is that given the complexity of modern flexible working patterns and life styles there could be considerable demands on this transport from other household members, such that not all competing demands can be satisfied. Indeed, focus groups including young people who had had some experience of employment emphasised the importance of access to lifts in determining where it was possible for them to work. One had quitted a previous job because two of his mates who worked there left so he no longer had a way to get there. He indicated that he “*would work anywhere where mates work in*” [i.e. who could provide him with transport]. Over half of respondents reported that they leave their area three times or less during an average week, so they do not appear to be at present highly mobile and this is reinforced by the claim by the majority that their friends live in the same area as them. Yet, when asked about their willingness to travel for work-related purposes, there appears to be a preparedness to travel substantial distances from home – about a third of respondents say they would make a bus journey of up to 30 minutes. It is notable that in a number of household surveys conducted in London in the mid/late 1990s (Hasluck et al., 1995, 1998) a similar pattern of relatively long potential travel horizons emerged. In Belfast, these statements are at odds with information on the mental maps of young people (described below) and with their responses to other parts of the questionnaire which asked about their spatial knowledge. Particularly in the outer areas, complaints about the irregularity and unreliability of buses emerged from focus group discussions. In other areas, some focus group participants displayed a lack of knowledge of bus routes, expressing surprise that some buses went on beyond the city centre. For many of the young people interviewed, black taxis were an important means of transport in their everyday lives, and experience of using public transport was relatively limited.

The left-hand panel of Table 4 shows the order in which pre-specified job locations on Figure 1 are ranked as job locations⁷ by Year 12 Pupils; (the lower the value of the ‘mean’, the more important the area was rated as a jobs location). On the whole, the perceptions are realistic. The city centre receives the highest ranking as the location with most jobs – and this is very much as would be expected given the ‘objective’ picture presented in the Census of Employment data. The following rankings also make sense in that large numbers of industrial estates are identified. However, the mid-place rankings for Orangefield and Shankill are more difficult to explain by reference to the location of jobs. It is likely, instead, that these reflect the spatial structure of the sample – with individuals ranking locations near where they live as being job rich. The rankings of Trainees shown in the right-hand panel of Table 4 are similar. The low ranking of Stormont is noteworthy. It is one of the highest ranking areas within Belfast in terms of the number of jobs in it but its low ranking by the Trainees might reflect the types of jobs there – typically clerical and administrative civil service posts – that might not impact upon many Trainees. Perhaps they do not see these jobs as being ‘for them’, so they discount them to some extent. It is also interesting to see that Laganside is understood by young people in many different parts of the city as a location where there are jobs. Theoretically this should mean it is an attractive location that could have a high TSN impact by drawing labour from all parts of the city.

Table 5 shows how controls can be made to examine the effects of geographical location on perceptions of labour market opportunities. The perceptions of pupils from two schools are compared – Boys Model in the West (left-hand panel) and Orangefield in the East (right-hand panel). Both are Protestant, so location rather than religion is the main difference between them. The information in the table indicates which areas are seen as possible

⁷ The lower the value of the ‘mean’ in Table 6, the more important the area was rated as a jobs location (i.e. respondents were asked to rank the most important job location as ‘1’).

employment locations for the respondents *themselves* (i.e. not where jobs, as in Table 4, are located in the abstract). Both the rankings themselves provide useful information on perceptions, as do the numbers of respondents selecting specific locations. Thus, a lot of pupils choose the top rated city centre location, but few choose (and even these rate lowly) the bottom-most places on the ranking. There are some important similarities – the city centre is seen as a favoured location by both sets of pupils – but there are also major differences. The Boys Model pupils, for example, rank the Shankill highly as place they would like to work in. Orangefield pupils, in contrast, rate the Shankill lowly as somewhere that seems undesirable. This is a clear case where the effects of religion are outweighed by geographical location, with respondents favouring locations close to their home area.

The importance of ‘location’ is supported by the qualitative evidence that was collected by the project, and underlines the localised outlooks of young males in Belfast described by Jenkins (1983, 14) twenty years earlier: *“The fact that most working-class young people live in a relatively small sphere of personal face-to-face contacts, has a definite effect on how they see the world. There is no doubt that they live in physically smaller ‘life-worlds’ than even their immediate social neighbours in the lower middle-class”*. The typical mental map of the Shankill respondents, see, for example Figure 6, was very localised and tightly bounded by the Ardoyne and the Falls as areas that were seen as dangerous and attached little weight to the city centre. Nearly all started with ‘the road’ in a very linear fashion. Within the Shankill itself the most obvious landmarks are the Shankill Estate and the Ulster Rangers. The city centre was only included as a small box or as an arrow and was thus not given much perceptual weight. Where it was included Castle Street and York Street were marked as being dangerous. The East and South of the city were not included at all in any of the maps showing that knowledge ‘stopped short’ on the Western side of the city centre. The mental maps from the East contrasted with this. They often covered much wider geographical areas – Protestants in the East are in a larger and ‘safer’ territorial block which is not so tightly bounded as the Shankill – but maps of the respondents who lived in the East tended not to include the West. This indicates that Protestants living in the East of the city had little knowledge and/or experience of Catholic or Protestant areas in the West. Mental maps drawn by respondents from Suffolk were by far the least insular of those drawn in any location. Mental maps drawn by respondents in Twinbrook (a neighbouring ‘outer’ area) were far more localised than those for Suffolk. The Suffolk maps illustrate a tendency to identify with areas that are geographically more distant but psychologically closer. The Twinbrook respondents, by contrast, were geographically proximal to other areas to which they were also psychologically close.

An attempt to control for the effects of religion is made in Table 6 by comparing the locational preferences of Protestant Trainees (left-hand panel) and Catholic trainees (right-hand panel). The results are indicative, as some of the preferences shown may reflect the fact that most Catholics tend to live in the West of the city and Protestants the East. The high ranking of the city centre by both groups is especially interesting. It suggests that this area might be seen as a ‘neutral’ location. However, it is also noteworthy that Catholics tend to rank areas with high proportions of Catholic residents as being areas in which they would like to work. This picture is in accord with that described by Shuttleworth and Anderson (2002). There is evidence for greater mixing in workforces in the 1990s and the ability of certain employers or geographical concentrations of employment to recruit workers from both sides of the community.

However, for some people and some communities’ labour markets remain highly localised and territorialised on religious/community grounds. This contention is supported both by the mental maps constructed by young people and comments made in focus group discussions. Mental maps constructed by people in the Falls, for example, were highly spatially constricted and showed a strong awareness of surrounding communities, peacelines, and state security infrastructure. Comments from some of the Shankill respondents:

Interviewer – “What areas would you not work in?”

Respondents – “The Falls, Anywhere that’s too far away; Ardoyne; any other fenian areas” give quite a good summary of the types of remarks that were made. Similar comments highlighting a preference for local areas, and a distinction between ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ areas were also given by Catholic respondents. Together, the mental maps and the comments made in focus groups resonate with Kaplan’s (1973, 77) observation of a tendency “*towards oversimplification, toward prejudice and toward going off half cocked*”.

Interviews with a student counsellor and employment liaison officers give additional insights into the effect of religion. They reported that some trainees would not take placements far away or in areas of the opposite religion. While acknowledging that some of this may be due to genuine fears, the employment liaison officers also considered that in some cases fear is used as an “*excuse*”, since many trainees are “*extremely localised*”, such that going to new areas for a work placement becomes a “*real barrier*”. A student counsellor also indicated that isolated incidents or stories about attacks on trainees spread very quickly, were often exaggerated,⁸ and then became an excuse not to go to certain areas.

The data show that young people have quite accurate basic knowledge of the location of employment opportunities in Belfast as they correctly identify the city centre as having the largest concentration of work. In this, the findings here differ from those of Ihlanfeldt (1997) who found that residents of Atlanta, Georgia had poor geographical knowledge of local labour market opportunities. The city centre is also perceived as a place where there are ‘jobs for them’. This might have implications for job location if TSN considerations are to the fore.

In general, the young people interviewed were realistic that their lack of skills meant that they were disadvantaged in the labour market (see also Willis, 1977). The fact that they were able to identify concentrations of jobs in some other areas “*doesn’t really matter cause it’s mostly people from the University that have them*”. There are, however, significant obstacles to movement to other places than the city centre. Despite claims that they would be prepared to be mobile, many respondents indicate that most jobs ‘for them’ are in their immediate neighbourhood. When asked in focus groups about ‘jobs being in places they could not go to’, a constant refrain of respondents was “*cause they are too far away*”. Many have only limited aspirations anyway, in terms of jobs and training, and then serve to restrict their opportunities still further geographically. Segregated residential patterns mean that residents of some areas have a strong ‘sectoral’ perceptual geography of Belfast, not seeing the whole, but instead viewing a slice along a major arterial road to and from the city centre as their activity and perceptual space. Such patterns were evident in work in Los Angeles (Department of City Planning, 1971). Quinn’s (1986) ground-breaking work on knowledge of bus routes amongst young people in Birmingham also showed a similar arterial pattern. More recent mental mapping work undertaken with children in Liverpool has suggested that the spatial awareness of young people in the Pathways areas (i.e. areas of most intense social deprivation) was less developed than those of their non-Pathways counterparts (Meegan et al., 2002). Consideration of the Belfast mental maps drawn of areas that were used, known/unknown, feared/safe also suggested that wider opportunities in the urban area may simply escape the attention of some inner-city residents. The East was a geographical blank slate for Shankill residents and the same applied in reverse – the West was largely unknown to individuals from the East, whether Protestant or Catholic. It is interesting to note that some focus group participants who considered that they had a relatively good knowledge of different areas in Belfast attributed this to reasons such as “*playing football and all, going to different football grounds*” and “*going to parties, meeting girls, going down the town for clothes.*” This indicates how non-work/education related activities can expand

⁸ Yet in a focus group context, trainees readily admitted that “*the media twists things and exaggerates*”.

geographical horizons and help shape knowledge and perceptions. As Orleans (1973, 177) noted: “*the greater the range of contacts, the more comprehensive (thought not necessarily the more detailed) will be one’s imagery.*”

Conclusions and implications for policy

As indicated above, most of the young people surveyed had a reasonable picture of the locations of the major concentrations of job opportunities in Belfast – with the city centre, in particular, identified as the foremost concentration of jobs, and Laganside also emerging strongly. However, there is clear scope for improving such knowledge. Although the mental maps of people in different areas varied, the majority of maps were highly localised. There was an obvious tendency for people to focus on their home area, but the geographical extent of the maps varied, with those in outer areas tended to be more spatially extensive. In terms of the association between skills and labour market prospects, there was an objective realisation that those with fewer qualifications were disadvantaged in the labour market.

From the mental maps and focus group discussions it is clear that area perceptions and social constraints serve to create subjective opportunity structures that are a subset of all objective opportunities. Hence, the young people surveyed do not consider all of the available training and employment opportunities. Therefore, they restrict their options and chances of employment by discounting training and employment openings in areas that are accessible, yet unfamiliar. Some respondents reported that they were unwilling to travel to training centres beyond their immediate local area if there were insufficient of their mates to go with. For those young people without their own transport, a reliance on lifts means that there is a structural tendency to follow existing concentrations of where family, friends and neighbours work. This may serve to reinforce tendencies towards segregation, holding all other factors constant, so leading to ‘concentrated disadvantage’ in some instances. Perceptions and behaviour are not formed in a vacuum. Rather, they are shaped by, and overlain on, existing patterns of residential segregation and mobility patterns, and on a historical legacy of labour market differentials and conflict.

In the Northern Ireland context the role of religion is an important factor in policy. A key issue is whether the ‘chill factor’ that discourages trainees and workers from studying/working in or travelling through the ‘opposite’ community is entirely real, or whether it is to some extent an ‘excuse’ to cover for a lack of confidence in venturing further afield. Here it is worth highlighting that research in urban and rural areas elsewhere in the UK amongst young people with no or few qualifications has highlighted how limited travel horizons, lack of confidence and low aspirations tend to be mutually reinforcing (Pitcher and Green, 1999). In the Belfast context, it is apparent that to some extent fears are extremely localised and time-specific. It is also clear that while some fears are real, others become exaggerated, and yet impact on behaviour – so restricting opportunities for work placements, etc. Yet those with some experience of employment in different areas, or with a somewhat wider knowledge of the geography of Belfast, seemed willing to consider a wider range of opportunities and to travel further afield, so gaining greater experience of mixing with a wider range of people. Their larger ‘life-world’ impacted on their labour market aspirations and behaviour.

Different factors of limited mobility, lack of confidence and religious factors intertwine, in complex ways, to limit perceived opportunities and to provide a *post hoc* rationalisation of behaviour. In this way, a job that is located in, or close to, an ‘unsafe’ area⁹ is ‘inaccessible’ – whether or not it is possible to travel there. In the terminology of the social capital literature, this highlights the paucity of ‘bridging’ social capital, which has been recognised as being of special importance in enhancing links to the labour market, relative to ‘bonding’

⁹ Whether an objective or subjective definition of ‘unsafe’ is used is immaterial in this context.

social capital (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002). So, spatial behaviour and local social capital shape life chances and involvement in employment. As a result, prevailing behaviour may lead to greater spatial competition for available low-skilled jobs, such that spatial restrictions compound social ones.

In conclusion, the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses show that geography does play a role in shaping access to employment and training opportunities. While locating employment and training opportunities in or near socially disadvantaged areas may help facilitate access, it may not be sufficient. Research elsewhere in the UK points to the porosity of local labour markets and emphasises that co-location of workplaces and residences does not necessarily lead to local people filling jobs available nearby. Moreover, in an extensive review of evidence from North America and Europe, Granovetter (1995) highlights the importance of networks, as well as geographical contiguity, in facilitating job entry. A policy of provision of suitable training opportunities and jobs close to where socially disadvantaged people live does not encourage residents to extend their travel horizons or raise their aspirations. In practice, trainees tend to place spatial restrictions on their choice of providers, and an associated unwillingness to take placements in unfamiliar areas, means that they may leave their course with comparatively localised spatial horizons. Hence, while recognising the barriers faced by some people, there is a role for policies to enhance the mobility of disadvantaged people in the labour market, such that they become more experienced and confident in using available public transport and in venturing into new areas.

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Table 1: Case study neighbourhoods

<i>Location</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Catholic</i>
'Inner West'	Shankill	Falls
'Inner East'	Lower Newtownards Road	Short Strand
'Outer West'	Suffolk	Twinbrook
'Outer East'	Tullycarnet	n/a

Table 2: Career aspirations of respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Year 12 (%)</i>	<i>Trainees (%)</i>
<i>Desired job</i>		
Professional	29.9	10.1
Associate professional	15.0	18.0
Clerical	5.1	6.9
Skilled manual	39.3	53.3
Low-skill service	9.4	8.8
Unskilled manual	1.3	2.6
<i>Post Year 12 aim</i>		
Study for int. GNVQ	14.2	-
Study for adv. GNVQ	5.6	-
Get a job after training	30.2	-
Study for A Level	37.9	-
Study for other qual.	0.9	-
Get a job asap	11.2	-
<i>Rationale for choice of desired job</i>		
Good money	71.4	52.9
Good career prospects	41.0	44.4
Plenty of jobs about of this kind	11.1	24.2
No other options	0.9	6.5
Friend/relative does this work	13.2	19.6
It is secure	20.1	28.4
It is interesting	66.2	65.7
No quals. needed	7.7	12.7
I know someone who can get me in	8.5	6.2
Other	3.0	3.6
<i>Number</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>306</i>

Table 3: Mobility characteristics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Year 12 (%)</i>	<i>Trainees (%)</i>
<i>Clean driving license</i>		
Yes	-	25.2
No	-	74.8
<i>Access to car/van</i>		
Yes	-	34.7
No	-	65.1
<i>Household access to car/van</i>		
Yes	80.7	83.2
No	19.3	16.8
<i>Maximum distance prepared to travel</i>		
Walking distance	7.8	10.8
Short bus ride	17.7	15.1
Public transport up to 30 minutes from home	35.8	34.8
Public transport up to 60 minutes from home	14.2	12.8
Longer than an hour	17.2	18.0
Move from home	7.3	8.5
<i>Where do friends live?</i>		
Same local area	59.2	55.7
On the same side of the city	12.0	14.4
All over the city	21.9	19.3
All over NI	0.9	10.2
<i>Where do family live?</i>		
Same local area	39.9	37.2
On the same side of the city	6.9	13.5
All over the city	36.9	31.2
All over NI	13.7	14.5
<i>How many times do you leave your home area per week</i>		
Rarely	6.7	11.0
1	21.2	11.0
2	20.7	20.3
3	18.4	14.2
4	8.4	9.3
5	7.3	10.6
6	3.9	4.9
7	13.4	18.7

Table 4: Perceptions of employment locations

<i>Year 12 pupils</i>			<i>Trainees</i>		
<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>
City centre	3.01	227	City centre	3.23	285
Lisburn Rd/Boucher Rd	5.84	224	Balmoral	5.73	281
Harbour estate	6.57	221	Harbour estate	6.41	268
Duncrue	6.95	223	Duncrue	7.32	278
South city centre	7.88	216	South city centre	7.83	259
Laganside	8.53	190	Laganside	8.09	222
Orangefield	8.68	222	Dundonald	8.34	273
Shankill	8.78	224	Abbey centre	9.25	269
Abbey centre	8.91	223	Mallusk	9.31	269
Dundonald	9.46	227	Forestside	9.39	272
Mallusk	9.79	222	Orangefield	9.46	274
Forestside	10.25	223	Holywood	10.06	269
North city centre	10.51	207	Stormont	10.77	262
Holywood	10.67	222	North city centre	11.40	255
Stormont	11.28	222	Falls	11.49	285
Andersonstown	11.59	213	Andersonstown	11.51	263
Twinbrook	12.73	221	Shankill	11.83	270
Falls	12.81	222	Twinbrook	12.48	271

Table 5: Desirable employment locations - Protestant Year 12 Pupils from different geographical locations

<i>Boys Model Year 12 Pupils (north-west)</i>			<i>Orangefield Year 12 Pupils (east)</i>		
<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>
City centre	2.40	90	City centre	2.86	28
Shankill	3.52	89	Dundonald	3.28	25
Duncrue	4.28	58	Stormont	4.40	15
Harbour estate	4.83	53	Orangefield	4.45	22
South city centre	5.10	51	Lisburn Rd/Boucher Rd	4.50	12
Mallusk	5.59	66	Harbour estate	4.65	23
Laganside	5.70	46	Laganside	5.05	20
Lisburn Rd/Boucher Rd	5.94	52	South city centre	5.36	14
Abbey centre	6.50	60	North city centre	5.92	12
North city centre	7.47	38	Forestside	6.30	23
Holywood	7.65	40	Duncrue	8.08	12
Orangefield	8.10	41	Mallusk	8.17	6
Dundonald	8.85	41	Holywood	8.93	14
Forestside	10.37	35	Shankill	10.00	6
Stormont	11.21	29	Andersonstown	10.33	6
Twinbrook	12.34	29	Abbey centre	11.14	7
Andersonstown	12.69	26	Twinbrook	14.50	2
Falls	13.76	29	Falls	15.25	4

Table 6: Desirable areas for employment identified by Protestant and Catholic trainees

<i>Protestant trainees</i>			<i>Catholic trainees</i>		
<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Number</i>
City centre	2.74	118	City centre	2.61	88
Orangefield	3.69	94	Falls	3.65	89
Dundonald	4.82	92	Andersonstown	4.40	70
Harbour estate	5.11	81	Lisburn Rd/Boucher Rd	4.72	68
Forestside	5.15	80	Twinbrook	5.06	70
South city centre	5.34	67	South city centre	5.22	49
Lisburn Rd/Boucher Rd	5.43	80	North city centre	6.12	49
Shankill	5.90	67	Harbour estate	6.20	51
Laganside	6.53	59	Laganside	7.03	36
Duncrue	6.74	69	Mallusk	7.60	43
Stormont	6.77	62	Duncrue	7.72	32
Hollywood	7.63	63	Orangefield	8.09	32
Abbey centre	7.78	59	Stormont	8.77	31
North city centre	8.43	47	Forestside	9.00	32
Mallusk	9.51	53	Hollywood	9.12	33
Falls	10.34	32	Dundonald	9.23	31
Twinbrook	10.92	39	Abbey centre	9.80	30
Andersonstown	11.32	31	Shankill	10.48	29

Figure 1: Areas in Belfast

Mark from 1 to 17, the boxed areas that you think have the **most jobs**, with 1 meaning it has the most jobs and 17 meaning the least. You may add extra boxes if you think that there are other employment areas not shown on this map.

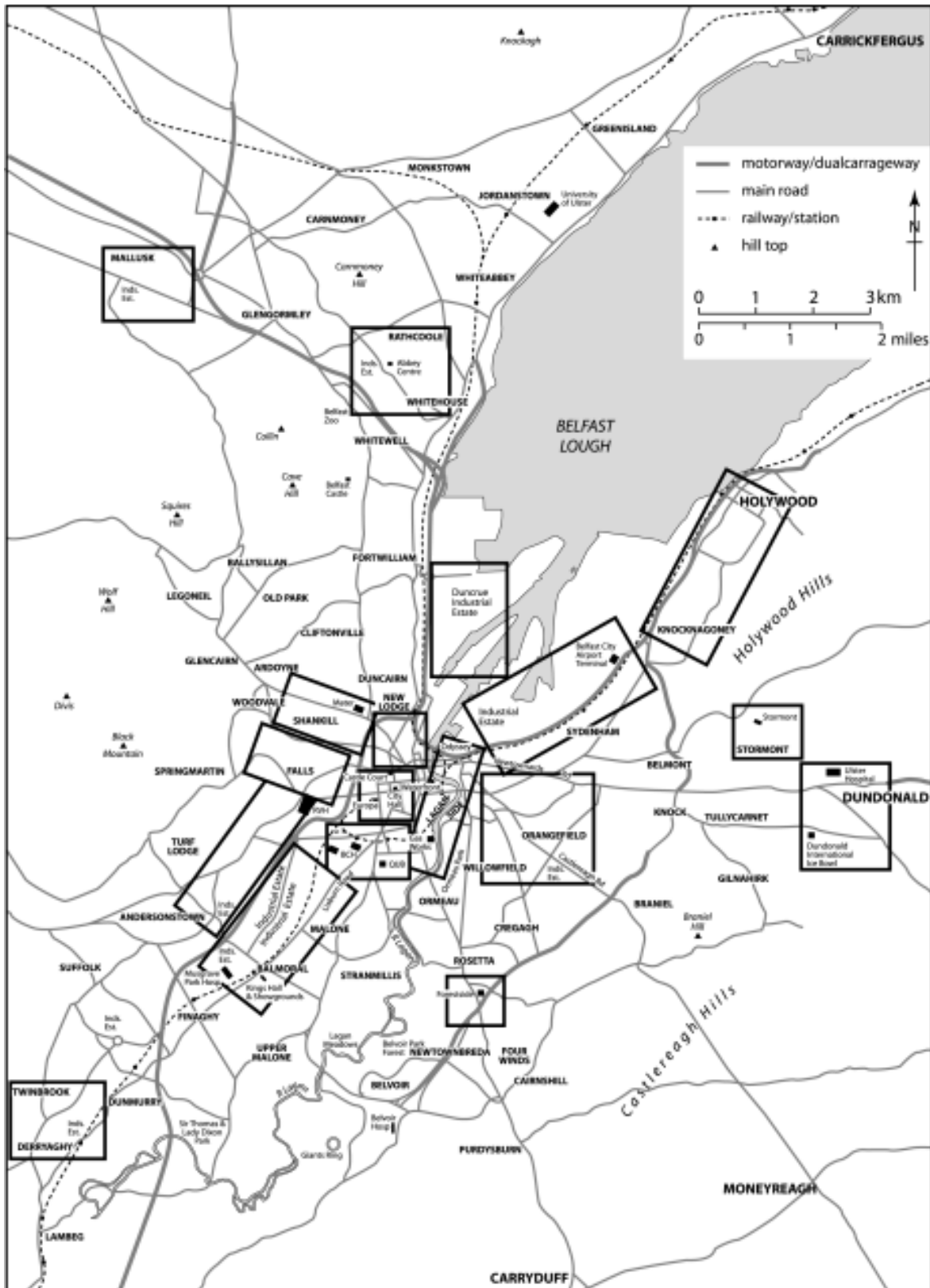
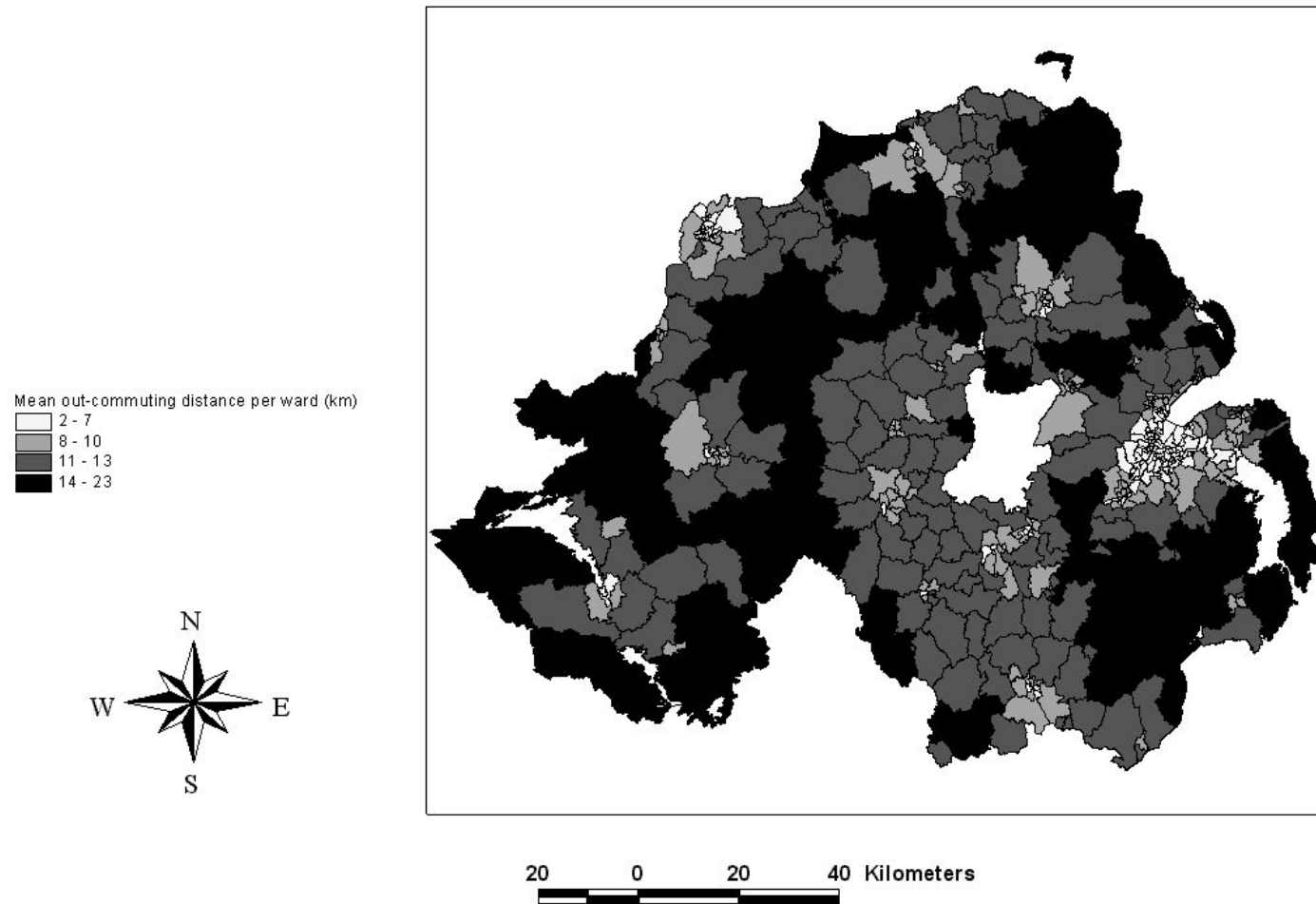
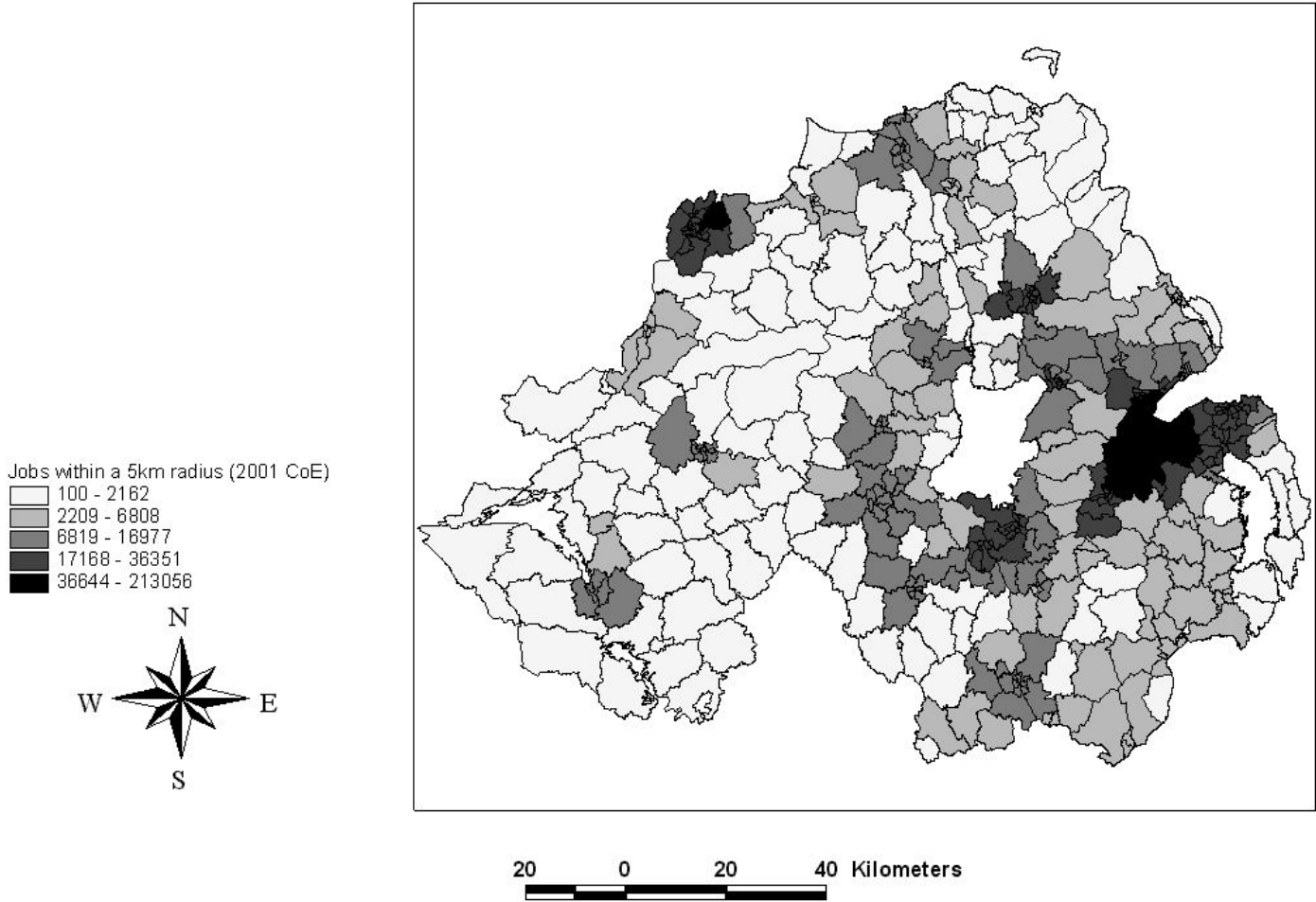


Figure 2: Mean Travel-to-Work Distances in Northern Ireland 1991



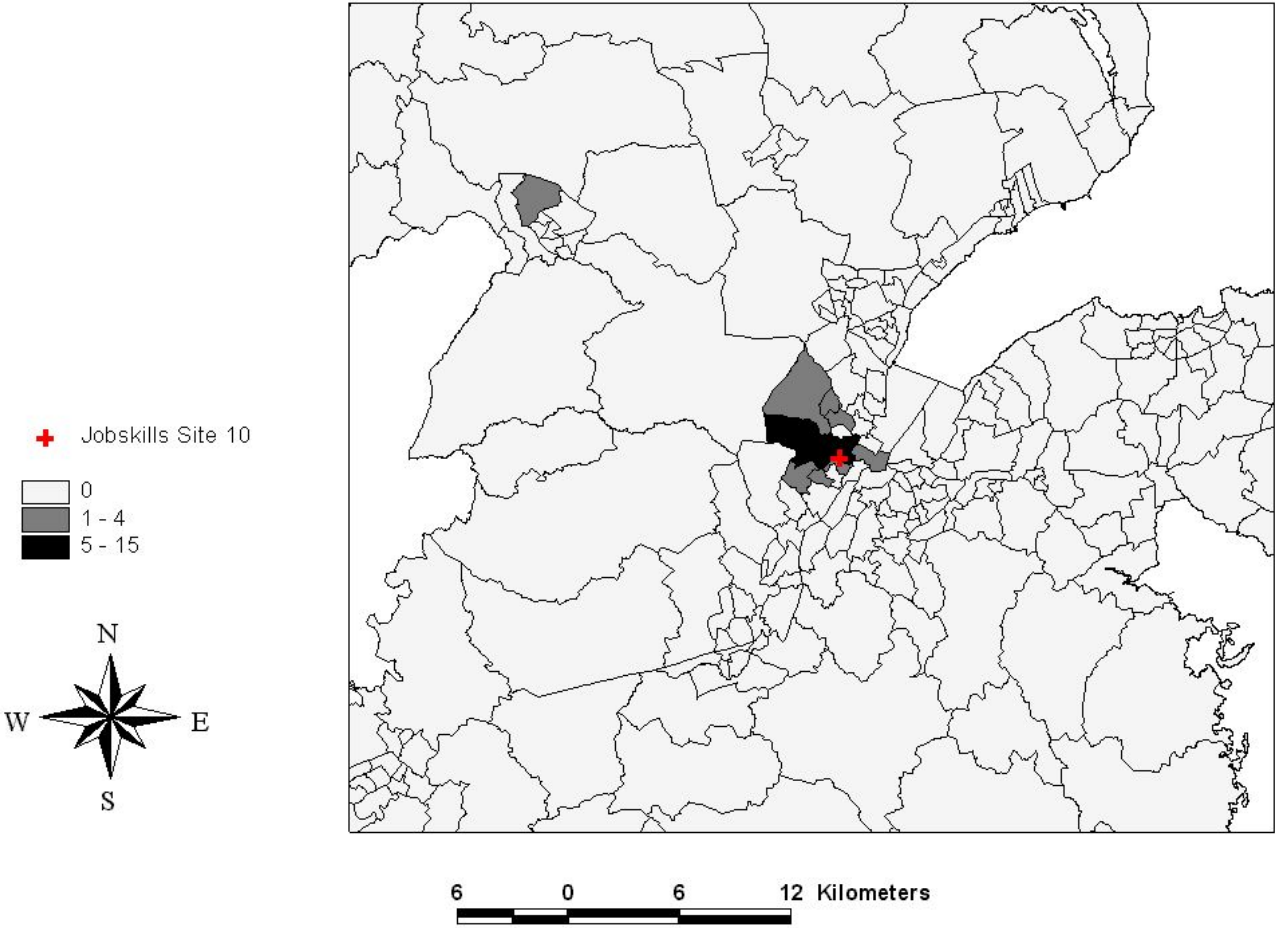
Source: 1991 Census of Population

Figure 3: Jobs within a 5km Radius



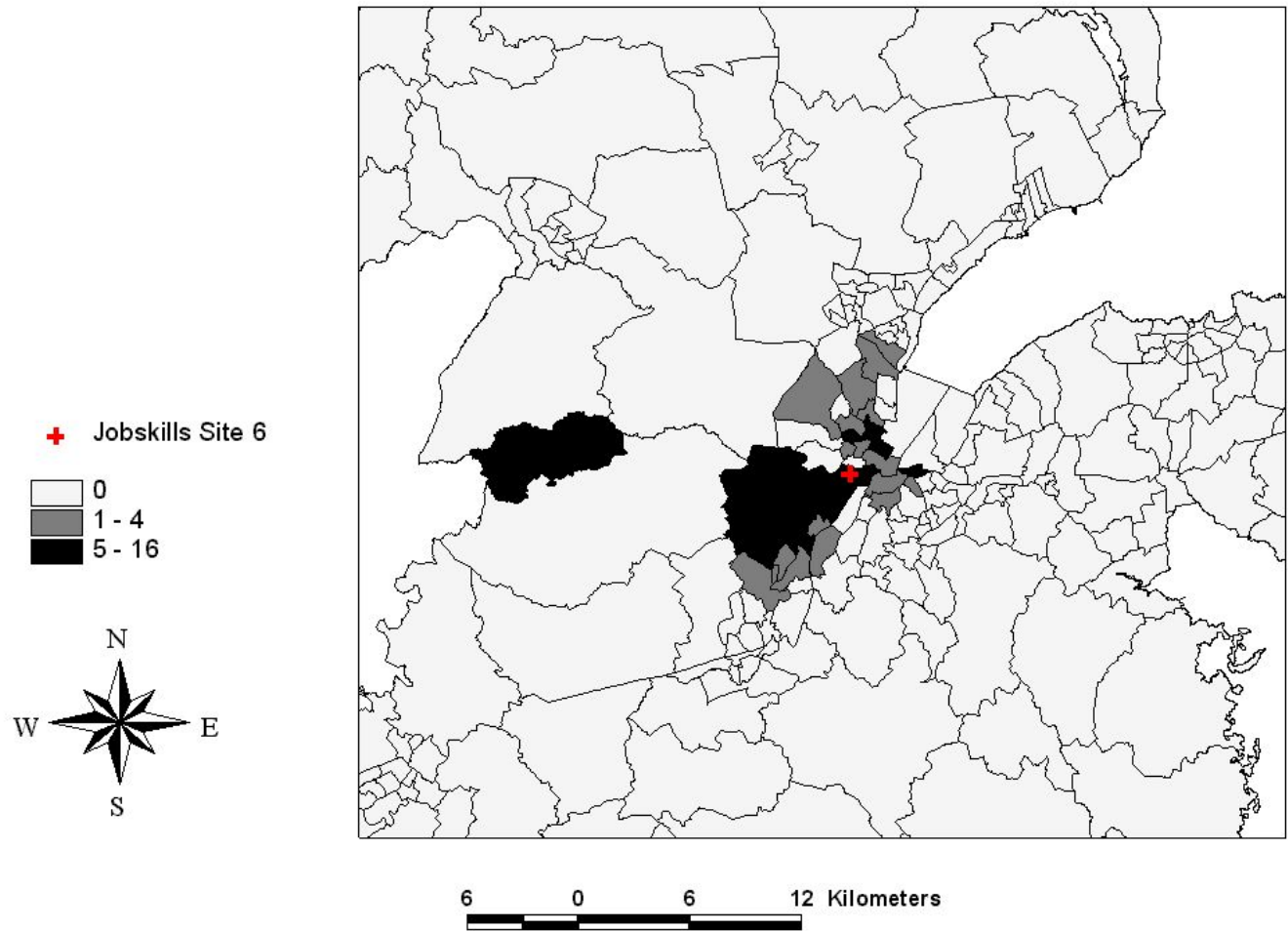
Source: 2001 Census of Employment

Figure 4: Catchment for Jobskills Provider A



Source: DEL

Figure 5: Catchment for Jobskills Provider B



Source: DEL

Figure 6: Mental Map of Shankill Respondent

