Contested Space, Peacebuilding and the Post-conflict City

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Contested space, peacebuilding and the post-conflict city

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Abstract

The physical renaissance of Belfast, with new waterfront developments, shopping precincts and tech-led industries are potent signifiers of how far the region has come since the Good Friday Agreement. However, the effects of regeneration have been socially and spatially uneven and sites of modernity sit uncomfortably close to communities still affected by poverty, division and violence. This paper identifies a range of competitive discourses on contested space, each one attempting to frame the problem in preferential but inevitably partial ways. The analysis concludes by emphasising the centrality of economics in peacebuilding, especially in the places left behind in the new post-conflict order.

Key words: Belfast; contested space; discourse; interface; segregation; territoriality

Introduction

The two decades since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement have seen significant developments in the Northern Ireland economy with growing inward investment, new jobs in high growth sectors and a considerable expansion of tourism, creative industries and consumption. These are the material gains of peace and evidence of a broader social transformation, confidence for investors and visitors and more open and pluralist relations as migrant workers are increasingly attracted to the region. This is reflected in socio-spatial restructuring as a burgeoning professional class extended mixed housing markets and new investment sites, especially in south and east Belfast as well as the central business district. These were encouraged by the devolved administration via a range of neoliberal policies to deregulate the property market, incentivise elite development projects, shift the balance of the economy from the public to the private sector and a push to reduce the region's tax base. The emergence of these shared spaces and the elision of sharing, economic modernity and peace emerge as a powerful, if unstable signifier of the post-conflict order. Running alongside these sites of modernity are places that are increasingly poor, divided and violent, not least, given the resilience of extant paramilitaries, crime and anti-social behaviour.

The paper argues that peacebuilding remains largely shaped by an identity crisis misleadingly posited as a civilian clash between distinct 'tribes' in which better community relations would ultimately dissolve difference. This devalues the extent to which conflicts are constantly reconfigured and demands a more reflexive, normative understanding of how to embed peace beyond the political elite. The main part of the analysis describes six discourses on the post-conflict city, presenting overlapping but also contradictory narratives on how to manage change. The paper argues that these approaches have marginalised a more explicit economic narrative in evaluating conflict, spatial segregation and the prospects for peacebuilding.

Drawing on a case study in west Belfast, it suggests that community relations practice that is built into local economic development has the capacity to change divided places just as the market has transformed the commercial core.

Ethnocsapes, identity and conflict

In his work on poverty, violence and ethnicity, Luckham (2017) points to the remarkably fluid nature of identity, especially when it responds to the positive as well as the punitive effects of globalisation. Similarly, Brubaker (2002, pp.167-8) argued that group categories and the empirical convenience of stratification undermine the inconstancy of ethnic identities and how they spatialise:

> This means thinking of ethnicity, race and nation not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events. It means thinking of ethnicization, racialization and nationalization as political, social, cultural and psychological processes. And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the "group" as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable.

Space is important because unstable and irregular *ethnoscapes* embed and reinforce power relations, maintaining solidarity within the group through uneven processes of competition and cooperation, while at the same time creating conflict with other groups and territories (Fainstein, 2010). Here, power centres on identification, which is necessary to spatialise via myth, symbols and rituals in order to assert its legitimacy and replicate its authority (Gaffikin and Morrissey, 2011). Socio-cultural power is characterised in the subjective 'we', which is not sufficient for violence but does enable ethnic groups to pursue inclusionary and exclusionary practices at the local level (Grichting, 2017). What actually binds the in-group is often more imagined than real but as Gunder and Hillier (2009) argue, the representation of space and how it is socially constructed is as important as its visible characteristics. Place

becomes a resource in which to form and mobilise identities, symbolically and materially challenge outsiders and entrap communities in strategies of survival and protection. Similarly, place detachment weakens solidarity and bonds of identification and exposes, challenges and reconfigures a thinly held collective sense of 'community' (Sandercock and Attili, 2009).

Group identities are therefore constructed and reconstructable over time and place as new processes stimulate different relations and interpretations of the other. They are not fixed in a primordial way, genetically transmitted from one generation to the next but are negotiated, subjective and open to both local and global influences. For Amartya Sen (2011, p.24), modernisation and globalisation has progressively undermined the idea of a 'civilian clash' between fixed geo-political identities in the North and South, arguing that identity is far more instrumental and selective. Similarly, Yiftachel and Ghanem (2004, p.647) see contested cities as fluid spaces that are constantly renegotiated around the differential pull of 'ethnocracy, capital and governance'. Governance, in the form of state regulation, laws and policies are nodes of influence for a range of economic, ethno-national and global actors and interests. Where the state bolsters liberal peace, ethnocratic regimes can be marginalised in favour of accumulation, more efficient forms of urban connectivity, competitiveness and growth. Where ethnocracy is able to assert itself or merely survives as a remnant of conflict, resource mobilisation, competition and group logics reinforce divisions, both hierarchically and spatially. In post-conflict conditions, these processes are worked out in more complex and incomplete ways, leaving fragments of ethnocracy alongside spaces of modernity where liberal (and increasingly neoliberal policies) push out sectarian rivalries.

Flyvbjerg and Sunstein (2016) show how professionals manipulate cityscapes, impose ideological effects through the regulation of the built environment and embed beliefs,

behaviours and normative values in policy systems and outcomes. These outcomes rely heavily on the capacity of interests to shape the discourse and privilege one way of knowing over others in which rhetoric and selective knowledge is a major part of social construction (Gunder and Hillier, 2009). The deployment of narratives, tropes and constitutive storytelling are central to placemaking, asserting actor's desires as well as controlling others behaviours. Gunder and Hillier argue that communitive action brings into being social relations, where interests compete for attention and permission in competitive, agonistic ways and where hegemonic rhetoric shapes and reshapes social reality in order to shore up ideology as acceptable truth. Rydin (2003) uses a rhetorical frame to show how professionals deploy *pathos, ethos,* and *logos* to form such a dominant position or master signifier of planning problems and policy options. Similarly, Gunder and Hillier draw on Lancan's four discourses to show how knowledge is used, desires are created and conformity enforced in policy routines and structures of governance. These overlapping frameworks help to identify four discourses in placemaking:

- A *master* discourse emphasising commanding, controlling and governing by authority and multiple claims to legitimacy in speaking for a collective and agreed dominant interest;
- The second is an analytical discourse and aligns with traditions of rhetorical *logos* and the superiority of rational ideologies, systematic decision making and normative knowledge;
- Third, is a hysteric discourse characterised by protesting, complaining and forms of *pathos* that appeal to emotion, tradition and the formation of crises; and
- A fourth discourse centres on *ethos* by employing ideas of morality, rectitude and integrity in establishing the credibility of the speaker (Based on Rydin, 2003; Gunder and Hillier, 2009).

Table 1 below attempts to summarise, inevitably incompletely, some of the key discourses on contested space and how these have evolved in the two decades since the Good Friday Agreement. They are clearly multifaceted, overlapping and contradictory but show how rhetoric compete to problematise space and how it should be managed. It also helps to identify what is excluded, denied or marginalised and the way in which the economics of poverty is

crowded out in debates about interfacing, sharing and community relations. The first suggests that smart growth, normalising the labour market and retrofitting the city are the ultimate signifiers of post-conflict transition and to some extent, they are. It is also a partial explanation of how *part* of the city has changed but draws attention to the uneven effects of urban restructuring as opposed to discursive strategies that emphasise the moralities of sharing, efficiency and rationality and dire warnings of the impact of desegregation. The final discourse also emphasises a hysterical trope, claiming that the 'hidden hand' of the security forces has carved up the city and shunted the public to more controllable spaces and still does.

Table 1 Discourses and contested space

No	Discourse	Emphasis	Spatial implications
1	Liberal peace	(Neo)liberal peace stresses growth, (private) accumulation and connectivity as drivers of cosmopolitan space. A *master discourse* privileging economic rationalities and logics.	Shared space emerges as successful commercial space in new investment sites, university precincts, urban *quarters,* business districts and elite (often gated) housing markets. Selective spaces are signifiers of post-conflict normality and an outward facing imagery of the city.
2	The moralities of segregation and sharing	Interfacing is a relic of conflict that can no longer be tolerated on ethical or moral terms.	Community relations work based on localised single identity and bridging approaches to reconciliation, trust and interdependence. Removing walls, barriers and security apparatus aims to normalise conditions on a locally negotiated basis.
3	Pathos and hysteria	Communities assert their un-readiness for change and underscore the imagined apocalyptic effects of removal strategies.	Segregation is reproduced as well as a 'will of the people' bolstered by attitudinal surveys, local elites, ethnic entrepreneurs and bloc political interests. Pathos emerges as a signifier of territory as resource mobilisation and intra- as well as inter-community competition.
4	Bureaucratic logos and rational analysis	Interfaces are ineffective in peacebuilding terms and inefficient in the use of urban assets and the performativity of the city.	Desegregation is a business case and a necessary strategy to address deprivation, poor health, risk and opportunity costs. Technocratic planning regimes are promoted but limited evidence of their capacity to respond to contested space.
5	Rights, segregation and sharing	An ethos based approach prioritising rights enshrined in equality law and policy systems.	Unresolved tensions between the rights of people to live in segregated areas and policy desires to create mixed communities. A focus on research allocation rather than resource scarcity, especially in social housing.
6	Securitising risky places and peoples	A version of pathos in which military interests securitise the city, police it in its own interests and continue to manage defensive spaces.	Urban infrastructure, especially roads, are technologies of regulation, surveillance and control. Peace lines and buffers manage risk as the 'conduct of conduct' in policing deviant communities.

Discourse 1: From liberal to neoliberal peace

Ruane and Todd (2014) place a particular emphasis on the shifting interests of the British state, institutional reforms and demographic change in altering the fundamental character of the Northern Ireland conflict. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and in particular, intercommunal violence, the rise of militant Republicanism and incapacity of the Stormont government, required more comprehensive management beyond security imperatives. Direct Rule was introduced, troops were brought in but administrative reform underpinned a more ambitious strategy to remove the sectarian inefficiencies of Unionist ethnocracy. Strategic, expensive and contentions functions were centralised, professionalised and effectively removed from local political control (Murtagh and Ellis, 2011). New agencies and government Departments were established to upgrade infrastructure, legislation introduced to professionalise land use planning and economic development and critically, to tackle discrimination in an increasingly dysfunctional labour market. Similarly, the state sought to radicalise consumption by revamping health and social care, standardising education and most importantly, social housing with a new integrated agency (the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) and massive investment in slum clearance and urban renewal. Housing conditions improved, especially for the Catholic population who, encouraged by fair employment legislation, deindustrialisation and emerging opportunities in the service and public sector, experienced comparatively rapid social mobility. Ruane and Todd (2014, p.22) showed that in 1971, 27% of Catholics had a degree level qualification or higher but by 2011 that had increased to 46%; the percentage in top civil service positions increased from 7% to 30% in the same period; the unemployment differential decreased from 2.6 to 1.6; and most significantly, the demographic ratio declined from 37-63 to 45-48 (Catholic to Protestant).

This also had important spatial effects, especially in high value sectors of a growing private housing market (McCord et al., 2013). Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2013) show that the Dissimilarity Index for Northern Ireland increased from 0.56 in 1971 to 0.66 in 1991 but by 2001 it had increased only marginally to 0.67 and by 2011, it had declined to 0.58 (0.00 would be a state of complete integration and 1.00 complete segregation). However, they also show that the Index on Housing Executive estates in Belfast was 0.90 in 2001, which had changed little in the previous 20 years and more peace lines were constructed in Belfast in the 10 years since the Agreement than in the decade years before. Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2013) also identify modest rates of desegregation on Housing Executive estates but suggest that this appears to involve new migrants moving into mainly Protestant neighbourhoods, while segregation in high demand Catholic estates remains stable.

Desegregation is thus concentrated in middle-class housing markets, with gentrification and studentification expanding elite developments and new forms of social, rather than religious segregation (Murtagh, 2011). Here, capital is winning and in Belfast, distinctly neoliberal urban strategies and market incentives have bolstered new centres of investment in the former docks, shipyard and the city centre. As Brewer (2010) observed, the city is 'post-violent' rather than 'post-conflict' with a toxic mix of territoriality, poverty, paramilitarism and intensifying segregation in the most disadvantaged housing estates. Amit and Yiftachel (2016, p.145) argued that these 'gray spaces' are not fully incorporated into formal planning processes but are securitised and managed in an always temporary state of being:

> While officially they are referred to as temporary, buffer zones remain in place for decades, if not generations. Buffer zones produce new sociopolitical relations in the divided city often leading to the 'darkening' of disempowered populations, involving attempts to economically and physically exclude them, and at the same time to the "laundering" of empowered populations, which thereby enhance their legal and economic status even further.

Here, conflict resolution fails to connect with, let alone alter, the local and as Pugh (2011) noted, pro-market Western peace interventions can navigate around gray spaces in a process of creative destruction to enable new modes of accumulation and profit. Here, shared space is commercially successful space in which distinct social groups have the freedom and the income to move, mix and live together. A new form of social segregation has displaced an inherited ethnoscape and in doing so, offers the spectacle of progress and engagement with a more cosmopolitan way of life. Interfaces are increasingly presented as deviant and dangerous relics in a process in which some people and places simply fail to catch-up or embrace the opportunities presented to them by peace and economic modernity. The Stormont Executive persistently lobbied for a reduction in Corporation Tax, a lower rate of VAT on tourism services and the removal of airport passenger duty to compete more effectively with the Republic of Ireland. How this new fiscal regime filters down to communities with few assets, skills and educational underperformance is rarely articulated with any conviction.

Discourse 2: Community relations and the moralities of sharing

What these communities do get is considerable investment in community relations, capacity building measures and *soft* (rather than actual) infrastructure. This second discourse suggests that conflict can be resolved through mutual understanding, contact and experience of the other. This has led to a range of programmes, projects, research and evaluations that support a deeper appreciation of the 'self' and a negotiated accommodation of alternative cultures and traditions. A belief in collaborative capacities and methods to dissolve difference and flatten disagreement to arrive at consensus is familiar territory for liberal conflict management strategies (Richmond, 2017). But, Richmond also shows how power is multi-layered in peacebuilding from international organisations and donors, to the sovereign state and local communities, each working to different and often contradictory legitimacies and rationalities. In reality, conflicts

are more likely to be 'strife' laden and 'agonistic' and not reducible to agreement let alone dissolution, especially where territory fixes disputes on material assets and space as a resource (Richmond, 2017).

McGrattan (2016) criticised reconciliation policy in Northern Ireland for its lack of definition, multiple and selective interpretations and confusion about whether it is a *process* or an *output* - an end to be reached. He unpacks the flimsy conceptual and methodological basis of community relations within the EU PEACE Programme and the lack of attention of power, the centrality of dissensus and what counts as evidence in disputing claims and competing versions of the past. Etchart (2016) traces community relations policy to the crises of the early 1970s and the attempt by the Direct Rule administration to transfer British race relations approaches to Northern Ireland. The focus on mutual understanding, contact and challenging stereotyping, emphasised tropes of forgiveness and trust at the expense of more locally based, community development methods. Once established, path dependency 'locked-in' policy around a narrow form of identity politics and 'locked-out' alternative forms of community activism with more explicit economic and structural aims. Etchart points out that in the early 1970s, cross-community work had developed and embedded a range of economic and educational projects:

> Locally-led initiatives mushroomed. Cooperative businesses were set up, so were training centres in interface areas and education courses for adults. There was a strong desire to create alternative options … In some neighbourhoods community work had become part of the way they lived. (Etchart, 2016, p.580)

Over time, the assemblage of government departments, agencies, officials, peripatetic Minsters, international experts, NGOs and local (highly grant dependent) groups, academics and think-tanks reproduced community relations policy and practice around important reconciliation objectives but in a way that that increasingly marginalised explicit economic interpretations and responses. In such conditions, single identity work found expression as a

conceptual strand of community relations as well as in dedicated funding streams and projects. McManus (2017) shows that this bolstered self-identification, legitimised sectarian identities and reproduced *otherising* especially at the local level. Consociation strategies focused on the elites, disconnected conflict transformation from the local level but integrationist approaches also placed too much emphasis on social and economic reforms well beyond the reach of the poorest communities. Group identities are privileged and blocks (especially young people) are reducible to common intervention programmes, cultural learning and contact schemes. But this risked reinforcing the very problem it aims to address:

> Reifying groups is precisely what ethnopolitical entrepreneurs are in the business of doing. When they are successful, the political fiction of the unified group can be momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice. As analysts, we should certainly try to account for the ways in which - and conditions under which - this practice of reification, this powerful crystallization of group feeling, can work (Brubaker, 2002, p.167).

However, socio-spatial relations are, as illustrated earlier, being reshaped around class and this is reflected in the reorganisation of housing markets and the more complex use of urban space. Nagle (2016) has shown that many collectives and interests refuse sectarian confinement and express their relations spatially in alternative LGBT, environmental and housing tenant movements. McDowell (2008) also demonstrates the importance of gendered spaces in the Troubles and the struggle for recognition in the post-conflict city and older people are increasingly shunted from the urban core to the suburbs as a result of the same neoliberal youthification strategies that preference high-priced apartment developments and student precincts (IPH, 2017).

Discourse 3: The pathos of necessary division

In this context, the socio-spatial separation of ethno-religious communities has enabled them to be better policed, managed and ultimately de-risked but not re-formed. In this separating

out, gray spaces become things in and off themselves and subject to different policy regimes, accepted legitimacies and rules and obligations:

> In certain working-class nationalist communities, there exist a network of dissident republican organizations that enjoy meaningful and growing support and evidently harbor substantial military ambitions. On the other side of the communal divide, moreover, there is growing evidence that ostensibly disbanded loyalist groupings continue to recruit and possess the appetite and ability for at least intermittent acts of violence. (Shirlow and Coulter, 2014, p.717)

The 'conduct of conduct' thus extends well beyond the state as extant paramilitaries, ethnic entrepreneurs and politicians seek to secure bloc votes, opportunities for criminality, petty accumulation as well as local legitimacy. Halliday and Ferguson (2016) show how the flags dispute in east Belfast reflected wider economic frustration among the Protestant working-class but was also, in part, manipulated by paramilitaries to reinforce group identities and ethnic loyalties. The aversion to desegregation was recently reflected in support for UVF flags by the DUP MP for south Belfast in a newly planned mixed religion housing estate with the farcical assertion that local people had few objections to their presence (BBC, 2017). These sectarian tropes are represented as logical reflections of the community's un-readiness for the peace lines to come down, dressed in the pathos of apocalyptic warnings, threats and admonition. Yet materially, interface communities are residualising, have the poorest levels of health and educational performance, are disconnected from services and the labour market and their functions, 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement are more performative than real (Gaffikin et al., 2016).

Moreover, research on interfaces, how it is variously produced, consumed and in particular, feeds into policy outcomes is critical in assembling discourse. Attitudinal data has been prioritised in understanding walls as artefacts rather than their social and economic performance and their connection with restructuring processes in the wider spatial economy.

The Department of Justice (DoJ) tracked opinions on the peace lines in 2012 and 2015, concluding that attitudes had hardened to their removal, especially among proximate communities. The 2015 survey was conducted by post and achieved a response rate of 10% but was augmented by face-to-face interviews to reach a final response rate of 27% (n=1,021 achieved) (Byrne, et al., 2015a). However, the problem, is not so much the many valuable insights into the experiences of local people it revealed but how the results are interpreted almost as a plebiscite on how the existence, modification or removal of walls should proceed. The data becomes the defining criteria in the management of spatial relations and in these locales, space itself, is epistemologically problematic. MacGinty (2013, p.24) makes the point that peacebuilding interventions seek positivist certainty, reliable and especially quantitative metrics and an aversion to more nuanced ethnographies, with distorting effects:

> Much of this peace and conflict data may be termed "precisely wrong". That is, the information is collected to precise and recognised methodological standards, but it does not always accurately reflect the richness of the situation on the ground.

The data takes on a teleological life of its own in which the precision of the indicator and its continuity over time offers spurious validity on a referendum on what 'the people' think and want. This form of 'local trap', tears the interface from its socio-cultural and crucially economic moorings in order to be treated as a separate, essentialist spatial reality (Purcell and Brown, 2005). The production of poverty, fatalism and alienation are read within the contours of a dysfunctional hinterland rather than the out-workings of uneven growth and its evident inequalities. Because interfaces are complex socio-spatial reproductions, considerations about their future raise all sorts of implications, risks and contingencies. On what terms, how, what will replace them, what opportunities and relations might be revealed and how these spaces connect to the rest of the city are potentially reduced to survey variables and 'binary choices' - remain or remove - without consideration of these entanglements and contradictions

(Coakley, 2015, p.49). Byrne et al. (2015b, p.4) emphasise that the idea of consent in interface areas which is itself problematic, not least because a 'community veto', enforced by paramilitaries can simply obscure valid opinions and distort participatory planning processes. For Brewer (2016, p.3), a different ethic is needed in conflict research, which 'involves trying to do some good, of helping to transform the conflict, promote peace and improve the lives of people in the midst of conflict or emerging from it.' Such 'good' should clearly locate routines of local power, how they are used and in particular, how they reproduce forms of exclusion and oppression (Richmond, 2017). For Richmond, whether it is the structuring effects of economics or the agency of paramilitaries, politicians and self-appointed community leaders, surfacing the relationship between power, place and ideas of community all need to be part of any empirical approach to contested space.

Discourse 4: Bureaucratic logics and rational analysis

Policy makers also struggle with these 'wicked problems' and rely on rational certainties and professional ideologies to maintain a sense of objective and capacity to act (Murtagh and Ellis, 2011). As space has been subjectively produced in more complex ways, urban policy has objectivised the problem within managerialist strategies and bureaucratic systems. The Ulster University (2016, p.5) suggest that the cost of segregation in Northern Ireland is between £404m and £834m with most of the expenditure in security; providing dual services in education, health and housing; and the need for dedicated community relations programmes. There is a business case to counter the inefficiencies of segregated living, modernise infrastructure, cut unnecessary revenue spending and represent the city as ready for inward investment, skilled workers and tourists.

The *Regional Development Strategy* (RDS) for Northern Ireland did attempt to satisfy both segregation and mixing in a Strategic Planning Guideline (SPG-SRC) 3 that aimed 'to foster development, which contributes to better community relations, recognises cultural diversity, and reduces socio-economic differentials within Northern Ireland.' It set out a dual approach to 'facilitate the development of integrated communities where people wish to live together; and promote respect, encouragement and celebration of different traditions and encourage communication and social intercourse in areas where communities are living apart' (DRD, 2001, pp.34-35). When the RDS was revised in 2012 (under a Sinn Fein Minister), a more general statement on *Strengthening Community Cohesion* did not identify religion specifically but instead offered a more expansive policy to 'encourage mixed housing development. Neighbourhoods with homes in a range of sizes and tenures will allow heterogeneous populations to live together. Diverse populations lead to more stable communities and can help reduce social isolation' (DRD, 2012, p.38).
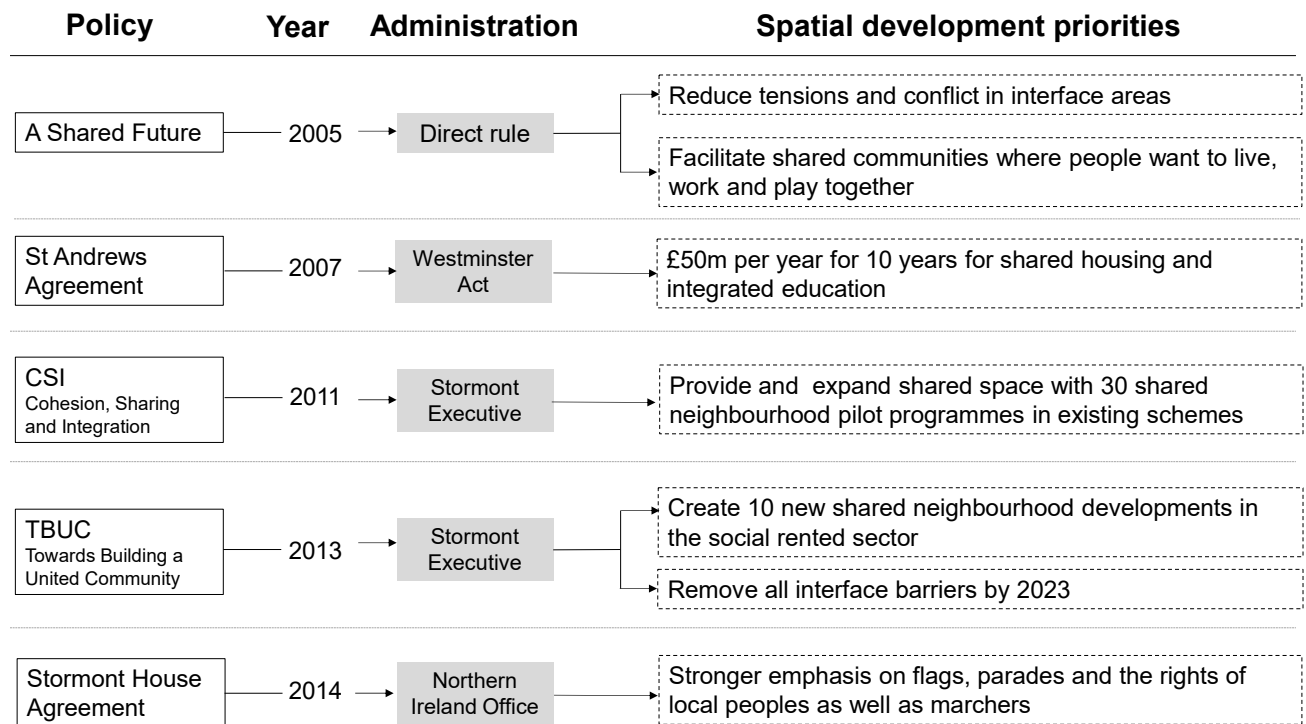
However, there are limits to the approach. First, it is hard to see where these commitments go beyond rhetoric and how an ethnically sensitive and inclusive planning regime would be different, especially in the context of Belfast. Interfaces are not given equivalent regulatory status of the waterfront, Titanic Quarter or Cathedral Quarter with direct capital payments, preferential loans, land assembly and special use zonings. Second, the approach does not identify or direct investment in interfaces in a coordinated way or link with specific regeneration programmes, infrastructure planning or transport management. Finally, it fails to provide strategic guidance on opportunities for mixed housing, integrated communities or shared services or even what these terms mean within the policy system (Gaffikin et al., 2016). A colour-blind, technocratic regime is reproduced in which connections with neighbourhood actors, community relations practice and anti-poverty approaches are rarely developed. O'Neill

and Murtagh (2016) show that few Development Plans address the issue of segregation, that they adopt a perfunctory approach to Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) and argue that planners lack the skills to manage contested space within largely technocratic policy processes and institutionalised regimes.

Discourse 5: Rights, housing and sharing space

This disconnect between land use policy and the spatial realties of a segregated cities is, in part, reinforced by the way in which shared space has evolved in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998). In S75 (1) 'the public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have *due regard* to the need to promote equality of opportunity (a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; (b) between men and women generally; (c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and (d) between persons with dependants and persons without. Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have *regard* to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.' (Northern Ireland Act 1998, Section 75, author's italics). The tension between these approaches to rights is mirrored in more explicit political strategies to nudge the peace process along and consolidate the provisions of the Agreement. Diagram 1 maps out how shared and segregated space is prioritised in five key documents as well as the recurring tropes around respect, rights, sharing and equality.

Figure 1 Political agreements, community relations and space

Policy	Year	Administration	Spatial development priorities
A Shared Future	2005	Direct rule	Reduce tensions and conflict in interface areas
			Facilitate shared communities where people want to live, work and play together
St Andrews Agreement	2007	Westminster Act	£50m per year for 10 years for shared housing and integrated education
CSI Cohesion, Sharing and Integration	2011	Stormont Executive	Provide and expand shared space with 30 shared neighbourhood pilot programmes in existing schemes
TBUC Towards Building a United Community	2013	Stormont Executive	Create 10 new shared neighbourhood developments in the social rented sector
			Remove all interface barriers by 2023
Stormont House Agreement	2014	Northern Ireland Office	Stronger emphasis on flags, parades and the rights of local peoples as well as marchers

The *Shared Future* policy, launched in 2005 by Direct Rule Ministers during an earlier suspension of the Assembly, committed government Departments and public agencies to a more explicit integrationist approach, particularly in education, housing and employment (OFMDFM, 2005). The strategy proposed to strengthen the good relations duty of the 1998 Act by extending the scope of Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) to evaluate the effects of policy on promoting community relations as well as preventing discrimination. It also considered legislating for an exemption to Section 75 to enable the planning, development and allocation of mixed social housing schemes as a specific policy category. The Campaign for the Administration of Justice (CAJ) argued that this would contravene allocation on the basis of need, lead to indirect discrimination against Catholics and undermine the good relations it was intended to support (CAJ, 2013).

Ultimately, the proposal was not legislated for, overall progress was slow in developing firm *Shared Future* proposals and there was weak evidence that these translated into area based projects in particular (Knox, 2016). The restored Executive later launched its own consultation framework for *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI),* which repeated the need to address interfacing, promote shared neighbourhoods and eliminate the waste caused by the duplication of services (OFMDFM, 2011). Wilson (2017, p.113) argues that the very fuzziness of these policies enabled both communities to interpret them differently, so instead of an agreed understanding of community relations it has 'sustained its polarisation with many "unionists" unwittingly articulating the assimilationist model (as political representatives of ethnic majorities always do), with many "nationalists" in contradistinction making multiculturalist claims (as political representatives of ethnic minorities always do").' For unionists, sharing means retreat and the loss of territory and for nationalists it means relegating their rights to housing based on objectively defined need.

Knox (2016) was critical of the financial allocation to CSI, the lack of connection with mainstream policies and the weak evidence that the two main political parties were ever committed to moving from consultation to actual delivery. The transactional nature of the approach to shared space was also a feature of the attempt to reboot community relations in both the St Andrews and Stormont House Agreements as the administration came under increasing pressure from the UK, Irish and US governments to stabilise political institutions and agree measures to deal with segregation and the past. Dedicated finance was made available, especially in education and housing and built into a package of reforms that required desegregation to be treated as a more significant political priority. In 2013, the Executive published *Towards Building a United Community* (TBUC) (OFMDFM, 2013), which committed the administration to the removal all interfaces within 10 years and to broaden the

range of mixed religion housing schemes across the social rented sector. It again suggested enhancing community relations powers including the implementation of an augmented Good Relations Impact Assessment to support existing provisions for EQIAs. CAJ (2013, p.i) repeated their concerns that 'good relations duty would be harnessed by the opponents of rights and equality to obstruct equality initiatives' and pointed out that the Northern Ireland Act (1998) deliberately subordinated the good relations duty to its equality counterpart. The implications for housing were clear:

> This, it was hoped, would be sufficient to prevent equality initiatives, for example new build housing provision rightly likely to benefit one section of the community more than another due to greater objective need, being derailed on the grounds that they could lead to 'community tensions'. There was also the risk that special measures for minorities would be objected to by a more powerful political constituency and be hence deemed bad for 'good relations' and discontinued. (CAJ, 2013, p.ii)

Moreover, CAJ argued that the EQIA concept draws heavily on established concepts in non-discrimination law, defining for example 'adverse impact' in a similar manner to concepts such as discriminatory detriment (whilst the term 'good relations' was not defined under any part of Section 75). They concluded the problem is that 'the term "good relations" is one not found in international human rights or equality instruments and hence, unlike key equality concepts, an international body of knowledge cannot be readily deferred to for definition' (CAJ, 2013, p.22). This effectively limits responses to residential segregation and sharing to a narrow legal test and a restrictive understanding of the complexities of conflict transformation processes. Moreover, as McCrudden (2004, p.21) makes clear, 'community relations activity that is not based on a notion of tackling inequality is community relations built on sand. For those who argue thus, the idea that community relations is, in some way, in constant tension with equality is a dangerous notion'. Here, the issue is not who gets what houses but why there is an insufficient supply in the first place as cuts in public spending, the rundown of the Housing

Executive and privatisation create stresses for the most vulnerable and poor, no matter what their religion.

The *Shared Community* theme of TBUC resulted in a joint programme between the Department for Communities (DfC), the Housing Executive and a number of housing associations to create 10 purpose-built mixed religion neighbourhoods. The scheme first selects projects that pass a viability test in terms of their capacity to support a shared demographic and they receive a top-up payment of 10% on capital funding from the Department. This is followed by a programme of housing allocation, management and training to produce a *Good Relations Plan* for the selected area. This Plan involves the establishment of community participation structures, a voluntary good neighbourhood agreement and a community development programme to address sectarianism and strengthen cohesion. Agreement of the successful Plan then releases a further 10% grant aid resulting in a financial uplift of one-fifth of the DfC capital investment in any individual scheme. The programme started in early 2015 and there are clearly issues about how *shared space* is understood in practice, the extent to which behaviours can be enforced and the vulnerability of schemes to paramilitaries as well as political hypocrisy. The use of fiscal instruments, managing allocations within the constraints of the selection scheme and designing an intensive community support represents an important attempt to deliberately create alternatives to segregation. However, the tension between good relations and the rights of legally defined equality groups is largely unresolved and unresolvable, not least as both fix in on predefined and mutually exclusive social categories. This, then, focuses the discourse on how best to allocate scare resources (housing) and how one set of bureaucratic-legal-policy imperatives should trump another. All of this deflects attention away from what is happening to state housing along with other social goods and why and how the rundown of collective consumption most affects the poor and powerless.

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Discourse 6: Security planning

Shirlow's paper in this *Special Issue* sets out the complex role of the state in the conflict but also the lack of a clear or agreed understanding of the truth of violence or how it can ever be properly revealed and evaluated. This has left space for multiple and contradictory interpretations of the past via myth, apologue and the pathos of claim and counterclaim. Events, scripts and even urban infrastructure are carved from their context and re-presented without the need for authoritative evidence as versions of reality (Gunder and Hillier, 2009). This process of symbolic and imagined signification is constitutive of place-making and past-claiming, which because they are ideological are believed or not believed independently from logics, rationalities and ethics. For example, Cowan (1982) argued that the security forces were able to engineer and enforce segregation by imposing peace lines, moving people across the city and containing and enclaving entire communities. Security interests play into urban surveillance in Belfast and in most cities and CCTV, private policing and regulating the public realm all form part of conduct of conduct regimes (Peck et al., 2010). The point is not that the state polices the city through various policies, decision making arenas and resource allocation systems but why and with what effect in particular cases.

Cunningham (2014) draws on a government report prepared in 1970 (Joint Working Party on Processions, CAB/1634/1) to argue that the security forces planned the urban motorway in order to displace Catholics and Protestants across the city; built peace lines to segregate communities; provided playgrounds to contain Nationalists; and demolished flats to securitise trouble spots. Ron Weiner's (1980) powerful analysis of urban planning in the 1960s and 1970s shows that the Belfast Urban Motorway was part of the modernising project in the post-war period, linked to new towns (principally Craigavon), an attempt to decongest the inner-city and overhaul the region's economic base. He distinguishes the new mercantile Unionist class from

the old agrarian landowning power base to show how port infrastructure, new towns, redevelopment and motorways were critical to an accumulation regime that also eschewed the inefficiencies of discrimination, unfit housing and a poorly educated labour market. Production interests lay, as they often do, behind the roads programme and Weiner (1976) showed how the *Westlink* unified (in a short-lived campaign) communities in the lower Falls and Shankill to resist its construction. Motorways were not built in other security sensitive locations and many of the proposals in the paper that Cunningham quotes (buffer zones in east Belfast for example) never materialised. There is little empirical evidence offered about the capacity of a group of civil servants (motivated in this instance by keeping the peace by separating communities) to deliver actual projects and it devalues the campaigns of residents on redevelopment as well as the relationship between economic interests and class in determining spatial outcomes. It thus shifts the focus of analysis away from the production and consumption of urban space to see the dead hand of the military everywhere, including the Titanic Quarter waterfront development as further evidence that 'the pattern of defensive planning that was laid down in the early 1970s is still being repeated' (Cunningham, 2014, p.245). The emergence of truncated labour markets, precarious work (especially among migrants), city boosterism and the rundown of social housing can be read straight off a neoliberal script that punishes the poor and secures opportunities for speculation that divides the city, not along neo-colonialist lines, but between economic winners and losers (Peck et al., 2010). The processes of creative destruction that hollowed out the industrial heartlands of east Belfast shattered the Protestant working-class but underlined company profits, at least until the instabilities of deregulated credit, caught up with the Dublin-based developers behind this particular 'consumerist maze of fiction and fantasy' (Neill, 2011, p.70).

Counternarratives and sites of hybridity

Pugh (2011, p.315) argues that even in the most contested conditions, 'sites of hybridity display resistance, traditions, and customs where alternative forms of everyday life are respected. In their encounters with the foreigner, subalterns accept, adopt, subvert, resist, mimic, and mock the interventionism'. As has been shown, territorial boundaries are not fixed and have significantly loosened in the last 20 years, primarily in response to labour and housing market restructuring. But alternative regimes also emerge outside gentrifying neighbourhoods, paramilitary control and elite developments and demonstrate a different trajectory of community relations and how it connects with the 'everyday lives' of poor and divided communities. Suffolk is a small Protestant housing estate of 800 residents surrounded by mainly Catholic Lenadoon neighbourhood in outer west Belfast. The area experienced internecine violence, intimidation and rapid population shifts in the early 1970s, with both Protestants and Catholics abandoning their homes around the interface for safer territorial heartlands. Suffolk continued to decline, deepened by its geographic isolation, residualisation and the construction of a peace line around two-thirds of the estate. Protestant communities are generally characterised by lower than average family sizes, lower fertility rates and a more ageing demographic, while the Catholic population is younger and growing, adding further pressure on the waiting list and the need for land. The demographic differential and how it works through the local housing market is critical to the construction of territory and the need to hold material gains in the form of buffer zones, gates, symbols and rituals.

Contacts between the two communities began in the early 1990s with women's groups concerned about road safety and after a joint protest including disrupting commuter traffic, pedestrian lights and vehicle calming measures were introduced. The contacts and competencies they gained, enabled a degree of trust to develop and for the participants to

identify other planning priorities for the wider area. The gendered nature of the work is significant as the groups explored a range of actions including: the regeneration of a derelict block of houses, commercial property and land owned by the Housing Executive on the interface; the need for jobs and re-skilling for women; and initiatives to take children away from interface violence.

The housing authority indicated their willingness to transfer the block and related lands to the community at 'nil value' on condition that they would be used and managed on a cross-community basis and that funding could be put in place to develop the asset. To encourage the process, the Housing Executive and the Department for Social Development (DSD), then responsible for urban regeneration, supported the community to develop a strategy for the area. This enabled them to draw in the American-based Atlantic Philanthropies who, along with the EU, had identified shared space as an investment priority. Seed funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies helped to recruit facilitators and the NGO *Community Places* to provide technical assistance to prepare the plan and agree a joint structure, the *Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG)* representing Community Forums within each neighbourhood. A cross-community mobile phone network helped to identify and avert violence between young people at the interface, workshops focused attention on the retail block and the need to create business capacity as well as shared governance structures. The groups persistently faced down intimidation, especially from Loyalist paramilitaries disturbed by the potential for compromise:

> These women were all very vocal and made themselves very unpopular with some of the things that they said and some of the things they did, but they were prepared to step out and try something. (Protestant community worker in Suffolk, quoted in Hall, 2007, p. 26)

It took nearly a decade of patient community work to produce a *Local Peacebuilding Plan* that set out how the interface would be redeveloped as a shared resource, remove sectarian symbols,

flags and murals and exclude potential anti-social uses including betting shops and off-licences. A social enterprise (the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project (SRRP)) was created to deliver and manage the complex and this was administered by four members of the Lenadoon Community Forum, four from the Suffolk Community Forum and four independent members recruited for their expertise in business and urban regeneration. Ownership of the asset enabled SRRP to lever significant grant aid to develop the site for ground-floor retail and commercial uses and the upper story for offices and a community space. More than half the finance for phase 1 (£475,000, 52%) came from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI); with £260,000 (29%) from the EU PEACE II Programme; and (£168,000, 19%) from DSD. The first phased opened in 2001 and the accumulation of rental income provided reserve funding to generate further grant support for phase 2, which opened in 2007 as a 50-place child care centre and two additional retail units.

In 2014/15 SRRP (2016) made a profit of nearly £100,000 which created a community investment fund of £30,000 for each Community Forum for a range of local projects including training and education, support for children under-performing at school, welfare advice and youth diversion to reduce conflict at the peace line. Under the constitution of SRRP, one-third of any surplus made by trading is allocated to each Forum and one-third is retained by the company. The complex now supports: 90 full-time-equivalent jobs, 78 of which are from both local communities; creates £1.5m in salaries annually; 12 new shops and services; and recycles spending within neighbourhood economy. The organisation now owns fixed assets (valued at £2m), which generates £1.7m in recurrent rental income, enabling a substantial reserve to be reinvested in future projects. The child care centre provides both employment and opportunities for women returners to work and this is now one of the most profitable elements of the overall business.

Knox and Quirk (2016) showed that the scheme had a positive effect on local support for cross-community contact, further development of the interface and the need to address poor educational performance of children under 11. Violence at the interface declined as the number of recorded incidents fell from an average of 30.1 per month in 2001 to 0.6 per month in 2004 and has remained persistently low. Suffolk and Lenadoon are still divided but the project indicates the 'use value' of the interface as asset for both communities. Painstaking and high-risk relationship building; technical support and mediation; courage, especially among women in Suffolk; access to land, property and development finance; and the formation of a social business all underscore the relationship between community relations and local economic development. The sense that community relations practice had a material outcome also emphasises the importance of assets, surplus and local money to offer alternatives to sectarian, neoliberal or state hegemonies. It is equally important not to romanticise the initiative or the curative qualities of community businesses but the evident connection between poverty and the interface as *commons* is a discourse that needs more formal recognition, support, replication and scaling in the context of peacebuilding.

Conclusions

Of course, ethno-religious differences matter but in that are inscribed spatially via segregation, territoriality and interfacing, they are also socially constructed. They are not primordial, fixed or coherent and other spaces shaped by gender, sexual identity, social class and age reveal a more fluid and variegated urban landscape. The primary motor for these changes is economic and where it fails to connect, as Amit and Yiftachel suggest, *gray space* remains in which petty ethnocracy, resource competition and formal and informal policing regulate their existence and their reproduction. In the gray city, different realties compete with each other in which myth,

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data and ethics offer opposing versions of the authentic 'real'. John Brewer's call for a 'new ethics' for conflict research is telling, not just because he highlights the need for responsible data gathering but for greater attention on what it is for. This suggests the need for stronger analytical explanations of the causes and consequences of ethnic violence, surfacing different circuits of power and how they work together and independently from each other in the reproduction of spatial inequalities.

This is not to prioritise research and critical analyses but to place a normative focus on contested places and how they are managed. The Suffolk case is important because local people identified an asset they could use, shifting the emphasis away from deprivation indicators, need and dependency on outsiders. The community relations that underpinned the Peacebuilding Plan had purpose, an outcome to work to and a material effect on participants and the wider community. The shift in emphasis from *difference*, seeing groups as distinct, spatially locked-in categories to what communities define as *commons* – jobs, training, education and new services is an important one for community relations more broadly. The peace line is reframed from a discarded gray space to an asset that has use value and while it is still an interface, the approach has the potential to rethink the relationship between materialist approaches to conflict transformation and how it is spatialised. There is a clear challenge to scale and connect these, still isolated, examples of alterity and to see where they are going in terms of desegregation, the economics of the commons and the mobilisation of social movements around poverty and exclusion. Good projects cannot be simply replicated around the ethnic map but if economic modernity is a driver of some form of sharing and if poverty is the hallmark of segregation, then economics deserves to be a more meaningful component of conflict management and peacebuilding.

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