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## Contested heritages and cultural tourism

Brendan Murtagh (a), Philip Boland (a) and Peter Shirlow (b)

**Abstract:** The fascination with death and disaster has encouraged the development of distinctive tourism markets, the rediscovery of sites and places of past conflict and all accompanied with uneasy narratives about what they mean and how they should be consumed. The increasingly stratified tourist economy and the interplay between demand and supply has also stimulated a complex set of ontological, socio-political and indifferent responses as places and interests compete to project often selective or stylised claims for recognition. This paper reviews the experiences of tourists visiting Derry/Londonderry, the UK's first City of Culture and how they make sense of the competing interpretations of the past in museums, rituals and artefacts. The 17thC walled city, the city of violence and the post-conflict renaissance city are spatially and socially reproduced but rarely connect with each other to help make sense of the past for the present and critically, for the future. The paper concludes that the discursive content promised by the City of Culture was a missed opportunity to debate these places and events and critically, the problematized and reified narratives they each project.

Key works: dark tourism; City of Culture; heritage; violence; discourse; museum.

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Corresponding author: Brendan Murtagh ([b.murtagh@qub.ac.uk](mailto:b.murtagh@qub.ac.uk))

(a) Brendan Murtagh is a Reader in the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering, at the Queens University Belfast, UK. [b.murtagh@qub.ac.uk](mailto:b.murtagh@qub.ac.uk).

(a) Philip Boland is a lecturer in the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering, at the Queens University Belfast, UK. [p.boland@qub.ac.uk](mailto:p.boland@qub.ac.uk).

(b) Peter Shirlow is a Professor at the Institute of Irish Studies in the University of Liverpool [p.shirlow@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:p.shirlow@liverpool.ac.uk).

## Introduction

On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013, Derry/Londonderry became the United Kingdom's (UK) first City of Culture (CoC) following on the European model and in particular, the successful experience of Liverpool as EU *Capital of Culture* in 2008 (Boland 2013). The award offered the authorities the opportunity to reposition a city that suffered from deindustrialisation, isolation and the violent effects of the Northern Ireland conflict (termed the Troubles, from 1969 to 1996). It also allowed the city, as promised in the bid document, to debate the notoriously slippery concept of 'culture' and to use the year to redefine its meaning in an accommodative way that enabled multiple readings of identity, history and place (DCC 2010). This was to be achieved by a process of *Purposeful Inquiry*, which would include a range of interests and communities in defining and debating the traditions, histories and heritage that mattered most to them. Certainly, there is evidence of significant effects on visitors, with numbers almost doubling between 2012 and 2013 but they dropped off rapidly after 2014 and there is comparatively limited evidence of local multiplier effects or the discursive processes designed to debate contrasting local understandings of heritage.

The early 17thC, completely walled town, was a critical part of the *Planation of Ulster* by the English government, nervous about the strengthening alliance between the Gaelic Ireland and Catholic Spain (Bardon 2011). It emerged as a prototype for the Grand Colonial model of British plantation planning but it is a deeply contested heritage, especially as a mainly Catholic city struggles to narrate its meaning for culture, urban branding and how to remember the conflict (Home 2013). Backed by finance from the Guilds in the City of London, the small settlement at Derry was renamed as Londonderry, via a Royal Charter and defended by Protestant settlers against rebellions and sieges, especially in the last part of the 17thC. These events are now remembered in annual Orange parades and in a new Siege

museum that relates the experiences of the Protestant settlers to their uncertain place in the contemporary city.

This paper examines the way in which the City of Culture responded to this history, its material legacy and in particular, how the Plantation competes with local interpretations of the Troubles in understanding the past. The paper begins by setting the city in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict, which raises connected issues about how to accommodate memories within a City of Culture process. It focuses on how identity is reproduced and consumed as a heritage experience and in particular, how tourists understand the way in which the past is politicised in the various museums and memorials that were created or refurbished as part of the year-long event. A survey of 424 tourists was supported by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with heritage and tourism managers, as well as community representatives. The paper concludes by suggesting that Purposeful Inquiry has discursive possibilities, not least to challenge the sectarianized, partial and competitive narratives embedded in the production of dark tourism.

### **Whose culture?**

The planned 17thC settlement of the northern part of Ireland by largely Protestant English and Scottish settlers; rebellion by the disposed Catholics; the flight of the Gaelic elite to Spain and France; and the struggle to maintain the Plantation as an economic and political project remain central to the Northern Ireland conflict (Bardon 2011). The Plantation underlines the significance attached to territory, the recursive need to remind the 'other', in symbols and rituals, of their place and shows how far the past reaches in seeking an accommodative understanding of nearly three decades of violence. When Ireland was divided after the *War of Independence* from the British in 1921, Derry/Londonderry remained in

Northern Ireland under the control of the new Unionist parliament in Stormont, Belfast. The Gerrymandering of political boundaries, electoral franchise based on property ownership and discrimination in housing and employment helped to maintain Protestant (unionist and British) control of a largely Catholic (nationalist and Irish) city (McKittrick and McVea 2012). By the late 1960s, Derry/Londonderry was at the centre of the cross-community Civil Rights movement that campaigned primarily about housing and jobs, rather than the constitutional future of the region or the island.

However, reforms by a more progressive Unionist regime were too limited to prevent the escalation of street protests into violence; the resurgence of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) who aimed to reunify Ireland; and the ultimate collapse of the Stormont administration (Aughey 2005). Direct Rule by the Westminster government was brought into Northern Ireland and the British Army deployed as the region sunk into internecine violence that left 3,532 dead and 47,541 injured (McKittrick and McVea 2012). For Derry/Londonderry, a pivotal moment was *Bloody Sunday*, when on the 30th January 1972, British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians, leaving 14 people dead, during a protest march against internment without trial in the Bogside area of the city. The Free Derry museum depicts these events as well as life in the area when Republicans effectively excluded state security forces from a self-governing 'free' neighbourhood. The Widgery Tribunal, which was set up to investigate Bloody Sunday, largely absolved the army and it was not until the publication of the 12 year long *Saville Inquiry* in 2010, that the British administration accepted the innocence of the protestors. The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, subsequently apologised on behalf of the government to the families and the police have since interviewed former soldiers in what is now a murder investigation (Murray 2011).

The signing of the Belfast Peace Agreement in 1998 brought an end to large scale violence, established a new power-sharing Assembly and enacted legislation on equality and community relations, supported by investment from the United States and the European Union. However, whilst the peace has held, the past, historic inquiries into the role of state security forces in violence and lack of trust between the main political parties leaves a degree of uncertainty running parallel with attempts to modernise the economy and in particular, attract inward investment (Knox 2016). Tourism was to be one of the undervalued sectors to lead the new economy as the regions natural resources, culture and heritage and proximity to a booming visitor economy in the Republic of Ireland would be capitalised in the more connected, welcoming and stable post-conflict order (McDowell 2008). And this happened, although the tourism offer stayed rigidly close to traditional natural attractions and assiduously avoided the more obvious markers and memorials that told of the region's violent past (Leonard 2011). Ndletyana and Webb (2017) highlight the tension between inherited colonialist artefacts and local expressions of place which involves the erasure of such totems to enable conflict processes to move on. Lay aesthetics and nostalgias find it hard to compete with the hegemonic narratives of heritage experts but they are capable of expressing complex associations and embedded meanings in the apparently ordinary and mundane. However, there are also tensions *within* these expressions of the local and what (and how) community memories are validated and legitimised and what are marginalised or erased altogether. As Knox (2016) emphasises, the past, commemoration, parading and the display of symbols have been largely unaddressed, yet contain the potential to disrupt community relations, at least in the poorest and most divided neighbourhoods. The failure to deal with the past, how to narrate the conflict, how to even define the victims and how state violence should be prosecuted, explain the deep fragility of post-conflict Northern Ireland (McGrattan 2012).

## **Tourism, memory and heritage**

For Harvey (2001), the emergence of the heritage industry is a response to global restructuring, the shift to a service economy and tourist commodification linked to the intensification of neoliberalism. However, Graham and Howard (2008) also argue that postmodern *heritageisation* accompanied a set of complex cultural and social transitions, including increased leisure time, diverse information flows and the emergence of more critical consumers as well as new producers, of the past. The heritage industry has been increasingly portrayed in parasitic ways, exploiting, reifying and corrupting real histories for spectacle and profit (Moshenska 2009). Heritage districts, museums and interpretation are now critical to urban regeneration strategies as cities attempt to reposition themselves in an increasingly competitive global economy (Boland 2013). The ethics and authenticity of these managed pasts in the service of the present (and the future) have also attracted critical attention. Neill (2011) showed how Belfast attempted to shed its violent image by excavating the memory of the Titanic, which was built in the city and taking advantage of the Hollywood blockbuster released in 1997. A major waterfront development, *Titanic Quarter*, used the industrial archaeology of the former shipyard to fashion a mixed use development of apartments, hotels and offices. The crass deployment of memory of 1,517 lost lives ‘trivializes and overly commercializes the Titanic of representation, such that its profound mythic status in Western culture is debased. This reality in a “post-conflict” city, where an ethnic war of attrition between competing identity claims still forecloses mature cultural dialogue must be regretted’ (Neill 2011, 84). Hardly surprising then that neutral symbols and histories resonate with planners and heritage managers wanting to move on from a wicked and impossible past; as Colombino and Vanolo (2017) observe, forgetting is as vital to community reliance and adaptation, as remembering.

Indeed, such approaches are not particular to Northern Ireland as post-conflict strategies globally have become increasingly concerned with the normalisation of markets and de-risking investment, which plays into branding strategies and a desire for cultural normality (Richmond 2011). But, they can also be limited and even harmful where places cannot be narrated, planned and designed in abstract or reductive ways. This is especially the case where conflict is territorialised and space becomes both a material and non-material resource to be claimed, fought over, won and lost (Till 2012). Even when hostilities have ended and some form of accommodative politics emerges, *space* remains a potent reminder of what conflict was for and how central it remains to enabling or disabling peace processes (Simone-Charteris et al. 2013).

However, producer behaviours are only part of the explanation and the emergence of 'dark tourism' can also be understood as a fascination with death in an increasingly stratified industry. Foley and Lennon (1996, 198) focused on the relationship between tourism and death and especially the increasing importance of the interpretation of war and atrocity, defining dark tourism as the 'presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster.' However, memory and especially dark memory, needs to become material and visible to be intelligible to a wider set of publics. Ultimately, they must pass what Lefebvre calls a 'trial by space', where 'ideas, representations or values, which do not succeed in making their mark in space ... resolve themselves into abstract descriptions or mutate into fantasies' (Lefebvre 1991, 416-17). Only when it becomes objectified in physical realities and artefacts can the subjectivities of what is being remembered be satisfactorily asserted, disputed or agreed. However, such place making is itself a complex process that involves its own logics and contradictions. Foote (quoted in Hartman 2013) argues that the processes of materialising dark events in memorials and museums are not linear but emerge



from an unpredictable interplay of place, time and politics. *Rectification* involves repairing and reusing the site as a place to visit and is necessary for its *sanctification* as a sacred, separate and dedicated memoryscape. However, it can also be simply *designated* but not sacralised and even obliterated to efface any memory of shocking or distasteful events. Stone (2012) sets out a spectrum of supply and suggests that political and ideological influences are critical in determining the intensity with which darkness is rendered. The darkest sites have a shorter timescale to the remembered event and enjoy 'locational authenticity' by connecting to the places where suffering and death actually happened (Eschebach 2011).

What makes heritage sites, museums and walking tours dystopian and who valorises one set of histories over another, is critical to how the past is understood, especially in Northern Ireland. For example, McDowell (2008, 406) argues that political tourism projects in Belfast invariably lead 'to the international legitimisation of sectarian politics and sectarian landscapes'. This raises more questions than it answers: Should we not offer any understanding of these places and events? How do they in practice, transmit sectarianism rather than understanding; What is actually untrue? And are visitors really so susceptible to such narration? McDowell points out in her own research that tourists on a Republican walking tour were well aware that their guide was not always telling the truth but providing a selective version of personal experiences. Moreover, as Leonard points out in her evaluation of the same ex-paramilitary tours, they do have their own authenticity, based on the experiences of the events that they helped to create:

The discourses provided by tour guides who have been personally affected by the Troubles provide opportunities for tourists to experience brief encounters with 'authentic' others. The heartfelt stories drawing on personal memories expose tourists first-hand to the volatile political realities of divided cities and enable each group to present a biased version of a shared history where certain discourses are privileged at the expense of others but since the competing accounts emerge from real experiences, their 'authenticity' is enhanced (Leonard 2011, 124).

Crooke (2010) admonishes the ‘singular narrative’ of the Free Derry museum, yet it does hold an archive of all the deaths in the area, including those perpetrated by Republicans. Innocent children were killed by the security forces with plastic bullets; Republicans killed innocent Protestants; and the IRA brutalised young people in their own communities. Who decides what is unassimilable and what can be used and how these different processes (to validate, ignore or celebrate), are largely left unanswered. In this respect, heritage becomes a political resource to bolster identity and a connection to a cause, especially where it can be ‘concretised’ in material artefacts, museums and sites in what Till calls ‘wounded cities’ (2012, 3). Place is thus inextricably linked to memory, memorialising and identity; it is the ‘most serviceable reminder of what has happened in our past, what is happening right now and what may come in the future’ (Lowenthal 1979, 110). Sites and artefacts thus help to reconstitute an ‘imagined community’ that bind people and place in the service of contemporary politics, ideological hegemonies and in the marginalisation of a disagreeable ‘other’ (Anderson 1983).

As such, places are open to an infinite number of interpretations, becoming ‘a palimpsest of overlapping multi-vocal landscapes’ that can readily slide into contested and contradictory narratives about history, victimhood and victory (Saunders 2001, 37). Monuments may no longer represent the ‘right memory’ but can become a collective social symbol with the ability to encapsulate and perpetuate ethno-national identities and claims (Schramm 2011). The temporal aspects of heritage sites are thus critical as *time* enables a shared experience to be mobilised in which people are connected to events both physically and emotionally. *Post-memory* is just as critical, by handing down through the generations, a version of events that reproduces identity and anchors memory in the site of the most intense experiences (Greenspan 2005). In short, paramilitarism, state deaths and pogroms cannot just be

dismissed as base sectarianism because they happened, they are ontologically experienced and socially constructed and because they still matter in the unresolved politics of post-conflict settlement (Shea, 2010).

However, Graham and Howard (2008) argue that such site-fixated heritage risks fetishising place and obscures a wider social memory capable of accommodating different recollections and interpretations, a broader timescape and the importance of intangible social markers and events. Graham and Howard warn that, just as social memory needs to be 'placed', the tangible can only be interpreted through the intangible. 'Material heritage sites may comprise no more than empty shells of dubious authenticity but derive their importance from the ideas and values that are projected through them' (Graham and Howard 2008, 3). These ideas and values can be dissonant and reject official historical narratives to present an alternative reading of place and memory. The problem with 'dissonance arises because of the zero-sum characteristics of heritages, all of which belong to someone and logically, therefore, not to someone else. The creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning attending that heritage' (Graham and Howard 2008, 3).

However, because heritage belongs to someone and not to someone else does not, on its own, make it problematic and such a binary over simplifies both the production and consumption of heritage and especially dark tourism. A number of scholars argue that insufficient attention is paid to consumption, the motivations of users and how tourists can mediate or challenge meta-narratives integral to sacralization. Taking a thanatological perspective, Stone and Sharpley (2008) show that secularization, desacralization and the gradual decline of religious ritual have, in turn, redefined our understanding of death at both an ontological and social

level. The individualization and medicalization of dying have effectively removed death from public space, rendering it 'absent' in socially unsustainable ways:

Accordingly, dark tourism may offer a revival of death within the public domain, thereby de-sequestering mortality and ensuring *absent* death is made *present* transforming (private) death into public discourse and a communal commodity on which to gaze (Stone and Sharpley 2008, 588).

Stone (2012, 1576) develop this aspect of dark tourism by emphasising its propaganda value as the dead are filtered through tourism information, museums and artefacts. Importantly, he also points out that it can be educational about events and people; can serve as entertainment and spectacle; can remind us of our mortality; and provide moral instruction about how to avoid the mistakes of the past. Dark sites are thus critical in transferring social memory from one generation to the next:

When memory is not first hand, it evolves into remembrance and as time transpires into memorialisation and eventually into history. Remembrance and historical representation through dark tourism are all ways of relating to and mediating with the Significant Other dead and/or contemplating their deaths (Stone 2012, 1579-80).

Moreover, where memories of death are 'aesthetically whitewashed', they have the potential to create a dystopian response, interest in taboo behaviours and more a complex interest in death and dying (Podoshen et al. 2015, 323). Subterranean, socially clandestine and subaltern identities and experiences thus focus attention on the reception as well as the production of dissonance heritages, especially given the centrality of the blood sacrifice in Irish Republican imagery (Welch 2016). Golańska (2015, 774) argues that such experiences go well beyond their discursive meanings to 'absorb us also at the affective, bodily level, which sometimes happens regardless, or even in spite of our critical or resistant attitudes towards the meanings they convey.' Dualistic interpretations of dark attractions as authentic or fabricated; manufactured or merely existing (or do not exist at all in a material sense), are too simplistic

because emotions, attitudes and past perceptions produce non-spiritual, real-time corporal responses.

## **Research methods**

The multiple and complex responses to dark sites, from the existential to the biotic, has strengthened methodological diversity and interdisciplinarity in tourism research (White and Frew, 2013). Visitor attitude and perception surveys are well established, especially to reveal real-time responses to places and events (Chan and Chan, 2010). Chan and Chan argue that, far from being instrumental and reductive, surveys can build a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between variables, subtexts and causality, especially using multivariate scaling techniques and statistical analysis. Indeed, Dwyer et al. (2013) call for such a three dimensional understanding of consumer experiences in order to go beyond empathy versus horror or good versus evil, to reveal the intensity of responses and critically, the complex mix of motives and perceptions that make up the visitor experience. Here, however, quantitative surveys clearly have their limitations, most importantly as they cannot capture visceral reflexes and ultimately tend to encourage objectivised responses bounded by normative scales and calculations (McNaughton et al., 2016).

McNaughton et al. argue that it is important to delve deeper into the actual places, artefacts and modes of remembrance (materials, stories and customs) and representations (displays, interpretative documents and claims) made on various sites that purport to authentic particular events in time and place. Table 1 summarises the main data gathering instruments used in the present research. First, tourist responses are assessed using a quantitative survey of 424 visitors to the city in the summer season immediately after the CoC event, in order to evaluate their attitudes to the various facilities, museums, narratives and sites. This was

complemented by an analysis of the city's four main museums using in-depth interviews with curators and managers; documentary analysis of leaflets and information boards; and site visits to evaluate the narratives embedded in displays, information videos and interpretative displays. Finally, 17 in-depth interviews were held with politicians, tour operators, community workers and officials to set the context but also to explore how the CoC facilitated or disabled heritage development and especially the role of Purposeful Inquiry in shaping the debate about what and how to remember (or forget) the city's various histories.

**Table 1 Research design**

Method	Instrument	No. interviews
Tourist survey	Interviews distributed	600
	Completed surveys	424
	Response rate	71%
	Sampling points	3
	Error rate on (p) 20% estimate	+/- 3.8%
Case study museums	Derry City Museum	3
	Siege Museum	2
	Free Derry Museum	4
	Colmcille Museum	1
In-depth interviews	City Council officials	2
	Political parties	3
	Community workers	5
	Tourist operators	3
	Heritage managers	2
	City of Culture officials	2

### **Producing heritage**

The CoC (2010, 34) bid document expressed the hope that the event would celebrate the diversity of the city but also reach a new understanding of culture itself. *Cultural Codebreakers* encouraged participants to 'become actively engaged in researching and investigating their own communities, towns and cities'. A parallel process of *Purposeful Inquiry* would enable these representations of identity to be presented and debated in forming

a distinctive but also more agreed understanding of what makes the city culturally distinctive. This would not only allow alternative, ignored or hidden stories to be uncovered but would also enable the others version of events, heritage and culture to be respectfully considered. The Purposeful Inquiry strand did not, however, become a significant feature of the 2013 programme, partly because the methodology for delivering the process was far from clear and partly because of the 'sheer urgency and effort involved in delivering so many events across the city in a fairly short time period' (City Council official). For managers, there was an acknowledgement that it was a lost opportunity, particularly to contextualize the programme of events and leave a legacy about culture and how it might be managed and accommodated within a diverse community. A series of public seminars organised by the *Walls 400* group did address the contested meaning of the Plantation but the conversations were not sustained as a critical engagement and failed to feed into a wider debate about post-colonialism, violence and how both weave into a contemporary understanding of the city. Fundamentally, there was limited debate about what issues needed to be prioritised and how stakeholders were identified and validated. The city's industrial history, women shirt makers, the old docks community and the 'peripheral housing estates were all important ... but there were no rules about who would be at the Inquiry, never mind how it would be run' (Community Worker Derry/Londonderry).

Some heritage managers were critical of the sterility of the debate around the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the walls and in particular, the Plantation exhibition set up in the Guildhall to describe their development. A Sinn Fein politician charged that 'this city did not start 400 years ago ... there were people here well before that' (Interview with heritage industry representative). This has created a chronological 'reaching back' to the Gaelic order and the excavation of the monastic tradition in pre-Plantation of Ulster with a particular focus on St

Colmcille, the saint who led a mission from Donegal to Christianise the west coast of Scotland in 560. The *Return of Colmcille* was one of the flagship events of the 2013 with a flotilla of ships bringing back the eponymous saint to the city. A small museum telling the story of Christian Celtic society was opened in 2014 and provides educational material, interpretative boards and reproduced artefacts of 6<sup>th</sup>C monastic life. The lack of a space to consider these related timescapes or to help organise a debate between them meant that they simply coexisted in a 'take-it-or-leave-it offer for the tourist to pick' through (Tour operator). The governance of Purposeful Inquiry was never fully explained and for CoC officials the issue simply became 'too hot to handle ... no one was ever going to come to agreement about religion, Bloody Sunday or the Apprentice Boys' (Derry City Council Official). True, but the purpose was not to agree nor dissolve difference but to question, authenticate and validate and to create a discourse that challenged as well as legitimatised alternative versions of the past. As noted earlier, two other museums were awarded government grants of £3m each for refurbishment linked to the CoC. The Siege museum dealt with the defence of the Apprentice Boys against Catholic armies in 1688; and the Free Derry museum, in the Bogside area, centres mainly on the events of Bloody Sunday but also on periods in the early 1970s when Republicans effectively excluded the police and army from self-governing parts of the Catholic city. Twelve large murals depicting scenes from the period were also painted on gable walls by a local artist group called the *Bogside Artists* (see figure 1). This, self-styled 'Peoples Gallery' has created tensions within the neighbourhood about the content, placing and approval of the paintings and what they say about alternative readings of the local history.



**Figure 1 Wall murals in the Bogside**



The main city (Tower) museum, operated by the local authority, has seen numbers decline since 2013. The museum has the *Road to Participation* exhibition that provides alternative explanatory boards describing both Unionist and Nationalist understandings of the same political, social and economic events. Visitors are left to interpret these positions and make up their own mind about how to read the city's development and in particular the Troubles, in its contemporary context. More recently, the Council has developed plans for a £10m Maritime museum on the former British army base at Ebrington, now a major mixed use regeneration project accessed via a new pedestrian Peace Bridge that crosses the river Foyle. The post-conflict narrative, opening investor opportunity and speaking to a more neutral maritime legacy, presents an alternative future orientated narrative for the city. The Ebrington

site makes room for outdoor events and festivals, hotels and restaurants and cultural space, potentially to include a new art gallery. The ‘peace city’, how it achieved accord and created a progressive economic imagery is layered, spatially, on the iconography of the bridge and its unifying properties.

### Consuming heritage

Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) to the tourist survey ‘knew something’ about Irish history and only 18% stated that they knew nothing at all before they visited the city. Table 2 shows that it is the historic walls that attracted most tourists (73%), although 61% were also interested in the Troubles and their role in the city’s history. Irish music (35%) and Orange culture (8%) were not as significant and less than one-third (29%) were attracted by the legacy of the City of Culture event itself. A total of 83% stated that they enjoyed the walls *a lot*, 66% enjoyed the old town and 52% the Guildhall, also in the city centre. The premier attractions that produced the most positive experiences were clustered around the Plantation city and its material heritage (Figure 2). However, the post-conflict city also revealed a comparatively high degree of both interest and satisfaction. Seventy per cent enjoyed the new riverfront promenade and Peace Bridge and although it is still undeveloped in services and visitor numbers, 26% of tourists said they enjoyed Ebrington Barracks *a lot*.

**Table 2 Visitor motivations and attractions in the city (%)**

Statement	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Not sure	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don’t know	Total
I wanted to visit Derry/Londonderry because its history in the Troubles seemed interesting	24	37	11	12	11	5	100
I came to the city mainly because it was the City of Culture 2013	7	22	18	17	22	13	100
I wanted to visit Derry/Londonderry because of the historic walls	27	45	8	7	7	6	100
I mainly came for the Irish music and culture	10	25	17	25	15	8	100
I mainly came to see the Orange parades and culture	5	3	9	22	49	12	100

Base = 424 respondents

**Figure 2 Figure 2 Bishops Gate on the city walls**



By contrast, the museums fared less well, with the proportions enjoying the Apprentice Boys (19%), Free Derry (24%) and the Tower museum (25%) being significantly lower than city centre attractions. About half the respondents (49%) enjoyed the Bogside area and the representations of the conflict *a lot* and although this is less than the walled heritage, the Troubles and its legacy are important for a core group of visitors. For example, table 3 shows that 74% felt that they gained a deeper insight into the Troubles, 75% that museums and murals are a necessary part of interpreting the violence and 56% that they were moved, at an emotional level, by sites of conflict. As Podoshen et al. (2015) argue, these experiences involve primitive, socio-psychological as well as somatic responses that are not easily swayed by the thin proselytism and propaganda tactics of the alternative museum sector. Just over one-third (36%) felt that it was immoral to commercialise the violence, 30% that perpetuating images of the conflict were at odds with the peace process and 21% that the murals and the representations of the Troubles were personally intimidating.

**Table 3 Interpreting Derry/Londonderry (%)**

Statement	Strongly agree	Mostly agree	Not sure	Mostly disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
I feel I have gained a deeper insight into the history of Northern Ireland because of my visit	27	47	13	6	2	5	<b>100</b>
I find the murals and visiting areas of conflict a little intimidating	6	15	16	28	27	9	<b>100</b>
Sites of conflict such as murals and Free Derry Museum help to interpret the Troubles	22	50	14	3	3	9	<b>100</b>
I found sites of conflict emotional and evocative	16	42	17	10	5	12	<b>100</b>
It seems strange seeing the murals and political symbols as a tourist when there is still conflict	8	22	18	28	18	7	<b>100</b>
It feels like they are just trying to make money out of violence instead of trying to promote peace	5	10	15	27	38	6	<b>100</b>
It is wrong and immoral to make money from the conflict	15	21	23	20	16	5	<b>100</b>

Base = 424 respondents

Clearly, there are complex and contradictory trends in attitudes and behaviour in the data and *Principal Components Analysis (PCA)* was used on 14 variables in the survey to identify subsets of tourist types and especially how they relate to representations of the Troubles, modernisation and 17thC history. PCA identifies clusters of respondents who share similar attitudes on the multiple dimensions measured as set out in table 4. These subsets account for 52% of the variation in the data and so do not suggest that everyone interviewed fell into the discrete categories, only that there are distinctive subsets who are distant from each other. The difference, rather than the size (measured in variance), matters most in understanding the relationships tourist cohorts have with local cultural attractions and their various narratives. Four clusters are significant:

- *Troubles tourists* account for 19% of the variation and were attracted by the legacy of the conflict and its interpretation as well as its educational potential. They tend to be

younger, spend less than other groups and are primarily in the professions or full-time education.

- *Critical cynics* dissociate themselves from the political images and museums, identify more with Orange culture and are critical of the ethics of 'terror tourism'. They are the second largest subgroup (17%) and tend to be visiting friends and relatives or on short term holidays and are in general, older than the Troubles tourists.
- *Celtic consumers* are a minority interest (8%) who engage with Irish music and traditional culture but are less motivated by Troubles related heritage. The City of Culture sponsored the *Fleadh Cheoil* the major Irish dance and music festival that attracted 300,000 visitors to the city in August 2013. They are the oldest cohort, are moderate spenders, tend to be in skilled professions and are mainly visiting friends or relatives or on holiday.
- *Heritage travellers* emerge as a significant sub-set on the variables measured (10%), are most interested in the walled heritage and 17thC *altstadt* experience and are less motivated, although not uninterested, in the Troubles. They are mainly professionals, are the highest spending group and tend to be older than the other clusters.



**Table 4 Sub-sets of tourists**

<b>Component Matrix<sup>a</sup></b>				
Factors extracted	<b>Component</b>			
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	Troubles tourists	Critical cynics	Heritage traveler	Celtic consumer
Variance	19%	17%	10%	8%
I wanted to visit Derry/Londonderry because its history in the Troubles seemed interesting	.609	-.229	.360	.226

I came to the city mainly because it was the City of Culture 2013	.434	.243	.560	-.085
I wanted to visit Derry/Londonderry because of the historic walls	.345	.098	.727	-.066
Visiting Free Derry memorial and seeing the political murals is all part of the local experience	.615	-.224	-.066	.011
I find the murals and visiting areas of conflict a little intimidating	.053	.698	-.165	-.131
I mainly came for the Irish music and culture	.249	-.033	-.040	.710
It seems strange seeing the murals and political symbols as a tourist when there is still conflict	.332	.593	-.258	.340
It feels like they are just trying to make money out of violence instead of trying to promote peace	.014	.758	.013	.198
I feel I have gained a deeper insight into the history of Northern Ireland because of my visit	.546	-.089	-.261	.065
I think that tourism on the Troubles should be developed more as part of visiting Derry/Londonderry	.603	-.189	-.190	.027
It is wrong and immoral to make money from the conflict	.113	.615	-.049	.064
Sites of conflict such as murals and Free Derry Museum help to interpret the Troubles	.636	-.194	-.262	-.271
I found sites of conflict emotional and evocative	.542	.107	-.286	-.392
I mainly came to see the Orange parades and culture	.117	.514	.133	-.380
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
a. 4 components extracted.				

### **The value of Purposeful Inquiry**

This mix of visitor experiences highlights the complexities of consumption as well as the politics of production but it does show that visitors are interested in the conflict, are critical of its ethics and wary of its economic value. In her review of tourism and peacebuilding in Cyprus, Scott (2012, 2116) argued that:

The occasions for contact offered through tourism often do not result in improved perception or understanding of others, particularly in the case of traditional enemies and in some cases can result in a worsening or hardening of opinions.

Moreover, as Causevic and Lynch (2013) showed, the assumption that the presence of tourists in contested regions somehow creates trickle-down economic effects, deeper understanding or respect for the other, is flawed. They argue that the increase in visitor numbers to Bosnia-Herzegovina had limited effects on social relations because the nature of peace itself was incomplete and there is little evidence that the tourist economy created new durable contacts. They point out that tourism could be an arena for rapport between divided communities but that we lack the techniques and practices to process information in a way



that avoids reductive sectarian competition over the past. Drawing on institutional theory, Healey (2010) emphasised the importance of shared knowledge, trust and argumentation as a basis for a less adversarial and competitive approach to place making. Similarly, Innes and Booher (2010) argued that communicative rationality and discursive practices are at the heart of a more consensual approach to place making where cities, resources and ideologies are deeply divided.

Critics charge that these approaches fail to challenge existing power relations and simply enable the reproduction of a rhetorical status quo in which fundamental positions and hierarchies are unaltered. For example, Gunder (2005) pointed out that stakeholders, how we define them and their discursive tactics are always power laden. Speech and knowledge is distorted to reproduce a hegemonic reality that bears little relationship to real conditions, inequalities and contests. Gunder (2003) is also interested in the 'dark' side of place and how dissensus and agonistic practices can form the basis of a more authentic and moral didactic. The task is to acknowledge and domesticate 'antagonism' (irreconcilable conflicts and interests) into 'agonism', recognising the inevitable competition in ideas, resources and claims (to the past) that will ultimately impact upon the quality of life for the 'other' (Hillier, 2003). Creating a competitive space in which interests bargain for recognition, precedence and acclaim does not mean that differences will disappear but it could provoke new ways of thinking about the nature of 'strife' in power relations. Strife is 'the expressive form of agonism' and places an emphasis on discourse and how meanings and interpretations can affect people, places and wider communities (Pløger 2004, 75). Pløger advocates participatory processes that stress openness, temporality, respect for difference and the need to live with inconsistencies and contingency as a way to progress. Ways of achieving it in practice include open-ended processes, politically autonomous yet responsible institutional

design, a plurality of discourses and an ongoing mutual and critical dialogue between interests and stakeholders (Pløger 2004, 87). To deliver this, Flyvbjerg (2004, 295) argued that planning processes and methods should ‘focus on values, get close to reality, emphasise little things’, as well as studying cases and their contexts, including their socio-political meaning and how place is variously used as an economic, cultural and material resource.

Healey draws these arguments together in proposing a methodology for implementing discursive practice to move urban politics beyond elite interests and powerful groups. Her Institutional Audit unpacks the circumstances, settings and routines which might reconstitute agonistic, strife-driven relations into progressive local politics, bargaining and agreement. Here, she suggests that we need to work through a set of interconnected questions including: Who are the *stakeholders* with a legitimate interest in the quality of places? In what *governance* arenas do discussions take place? Who has access and who controls membership? What is the *style* of the discussion, for example, is it technical and procedural or open and accessible to a lay audience? and Whose *discourse* dominates and who is silenced or marginalised and what options are there for redress? (Healey 2010).

Clearly, such frameworks do not in themselves offer a solution to contested heritages but they do focus attention on the processes of consumption and production, especially where the past is mobilised as a political resource. Stakeholders and their claim to have a *stake* in heritage is itself a deeply problematic issue in the City of Culture. For example, the Bogside Artists present their 12 murals ‘for the people’ but at no stage were the people consulted about how their gable walls would be rendered with the selected images. This is one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Western Europe with high rates of intergenerational unemployment, welfare dependency, low incomes and poor educational performance. How

the community, as a stakeholder, is involved in deciding neighbourhood aesthetics has not been part of the wider debate about what they think is needed, where investments should go or why some events are privileged at the expense of others.

*Arenas* for debate and argumentation, such as in the Walls 400 seminar series, raised the importance of heritage governance and how it can move beyond site management and curation to engage a wider discourse about what memories are recorded and recognised and which are not. The informality of such conversations gave local people, including school children, as well as heritage experts an opportunity to say what the 17thC walls ‘mean to you’ and surfaced the different relations the communities have with their representation. Some resented the way in which they were ‘claimed’ or interpreted as a symbol of enduring colonialism, stressing that they are used and shared across the city, inevitably embody different memories and experiences but which could ultimately become ‘a transformative symbol and resource for a change in attitudes mind sets and psyche of all citizens’ (Holywell Trust 2012, 14).

The discursive *routines* of community heritage are now increasingly dominated by competitive claim and counterclaim and emphasise that subversive responses have the same potential for distortion and erasure as official narratives and branding strategies. Official policy *discourses* emphasise the city’s 17thC heritage, yet still struggle to accommodate ‘terror tourism’ and its implications for the British state. But, it also demonstrates that the search for some agreement is not just confined to the *content* of what is on offer, but on how to argue and debate in an agonistic sense. For some arts groups the need to challenge and even reject the commodified version of culture as part of urban branding strategies was as important as the inter-community dialogue about the city’s contested history. This is

especially the case for women's groups keen to recognise the history of the shirt factories and the gendered nature of the industrial workforce at a time of high male unemployment. The social and economic status of women and their wage power in the textile economy offers an alternative but largely silent narrative in the distinctive culture of Derry/Londonderry.

## **Conclusions**

Gender history has still been largely marginalised by the dominant discourses presented by the heritage city, the politics of the violent city and the economic power of the post-renaissance city. In their own way these are important and legitimate stories that visitors are motivated to read, piece together and critically evaluate. The plurality of narratives, messages and museums that were stimulated by the City of Culture are not in themselves problematic. Indeed, the ability to assert a community memory of events such as Bloody Sunday that had been 'aesthetically whitewashed' in official inquiries, is a healthy political response to a place coming out of conflict. Critics are wrong to assert that local depictions of historical events, filtered through tourist experiences, local museums and walking tours are invariably or inevitably sectarian. Similarly, the experiences of resistance in the city at the time of a 17thC Siege is an important resource for Protestants, increasingly insecure about their social and cultural status in the peace politics of Northern Ireland and the changing demography of the city.

The problem for the City of Culture is that these various projects, locally important in their own right, have not transformed our understanding of culture, how it might help interpret violence or more importantly, build a genuinely accommodative and stable peace. We are left with memory competition in which events are wrenched from their time-place context to bid for recognition and tourist approval. Their partial, incomplete and often distorted versions of

history and their failure to connect with each other has limited the capacity of the City of Culture to contribute meaningfully to transformative peacebuilding. The year-long programme and even the successful implementation of *Purposeful Inquiry* were never likely to reach consensus on the past or its value as tourism collateral but it could challenge, falsify, authenticate, debate and re-form the way in which identity and violence are understood and narrated in relation to the other. Simply reproducing the same zero-sum politics, but without violence, offers its own instabilities in an uncertain peace.

Tourists are interested in the city's dark events and subaltern expressions of memory but they also see through the propaganda and questionable ethics that created so many blatantly partial renditions of the past. However, it is not just the implications for consumption that is at stake, even though visitor numbers and hotel occupancy declined in 2014 and 2015, potentially signalling some problems with the tourism offer. A dialogic process, shaped by the claims of stakeholders, the evidence they offer, the potential to discursively challenge and agree or disagree holds no guarantee of success but could at least, shift the debate beyond the sterile rivalries of heritage and its misuse in the service of urban culture.

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