# Out of the Shadows: A one day investigation of the politics of architecture explored through the lens of post-conflict, Belfast

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# Out of the Shadows

*A one day investigation of the politics of architecture explored through the lens of post-conflict Belfast*

Facilitated through Queen's University Belfast
School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

Queen's University
Belfast

# Background

This booklet covers the itinerary and some of the findings of a day-long visit to Belfast on the 7th November 2014 by Peter Oborn; Vice President International of the Royal Institute of British Architects. His visit was in response to a motion  submitted to the RIBA council (19.05.2014) calling for the suspension of the Israeli Association of United Architects from the International Union of Architects. Despite members of council speaking against the motion it was carried; 23 members voting for, 16 against, and 10 abstentions. Subsequently the RIBA came under considerable pressure to consider its position in such critical contexts. This visit to Belfast was part of a wider  fact-finding mission and evidence taking. At its heart was the question:

> 'Is it appropriate for the institute (RIBA) to engage with communities facing civil conflict and/or natural disaster and, if so, how it can do so most effectively.'

The visit was facilitated by Ruth Morrow, Professor of Architecture, School of Planning, Architecture & Civil Engineering, Queen's University Belfast, and Martin Hare, Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) president.


December 2014

02   Morning

Itinerary of investigation

## Morning
08:30 – 14:00

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## Afternoon
15:00 – 17:00

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## Reflection
07/11/2014 - 3/12/2014

# MazeLongKesh
## 09:00-10:00

## Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Kyle Alexander | MazeLongKesh Development Corporation |
| Martin Hare | RSUA President 2014 - 2016 |
| Peter Oborn | RIBA |
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |

MazeLongKesh lies twelve miles south of Belfast, located on a major road system that links Belfast to the West and South of Ireland. It is the site of the notorious former Maze prison- with its connections to 1971 'Internment without trial', the H-Blocks, and the 1981 Hunger Strike. Prior to its use as a prison site it was a World War II airfield and military camp. As such it is a large expansive site - 350acres: twice the size of Belfast's Titanic Quarter, and four times the size of Canary Wharf in London. The site embodies the political sensitivities of Northern Ireland and rests uneasily in the general public's psyche. Following the peace agreement it became the focus of development proposals including the now-shelved multi-purpose sports stadium.

The MazeLongKesh Development Corporation's vision is to move the site from 'peace to prosperity'. It's an arduous task with much investment in consultation across all sectors and layers of Northern Irish society. To date agreement has been gained to preserve some parts of the prison site and relocate a large annual agricultural show to its location. Considerable progress was also made on plans for the Peace-building and Conflict Resolution Centre, designed by Daniel Libeskind Studio in association with McAdam Design (Martin Hare's practice). However despite significant funding being put in place, political support was withdrawn in August 2013 and the building has been put on hold. There's little doubt that this is a significant site for Northern Ireland- and whilst its only one building, the process to bring it to this stage has released significant learning - perhaps the remaining challenge is to spread the good news of the relationships emerging through the process to a wider audience, building belief and trust in a conflict-free future.

"What gives [this project] its international significance is its transformational element"

# Forum for an
# Alternative Belfast [FAB]
## 10:30-11:00

## Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Declan Hill | FAB |
| Mark Hackett | FAB |
| Martin Hare | RSUA President 2014 - 2016 |
| Peter Oborn | RIBA |
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |

Declan Hill and Mark Hackett from the Forum for Alternative Belfast hosted this meeting in their offices on Lombard Street, Belfast. The seeds of the Forum lie in a campaign that ran 10 years ago, when Mark, Declan, local businesses/organisations and other individuals based in the Cathedral Quarter of Belfast opposed development plans. They used analytical, visual and design skills to effectively critique and improve upon the development proposals. In 2009 FAB; an architecture/planning/community interest company, was established by Mark, Declan, Ken Sterrett, Ciaran Mackel and Karen Keaveney, with Mark and Declan acting as full-time directors. They have purposefully set out to expose the underlying structural problems of the post-conflict city, using visual methods and offering alternative, viable proposals to engage directly with decision makers and concerned parties. One of their chief strategies is to run an annual summer school, which engages with young professionals, students, politicians, city councillors, government and city officials, non government organisations and most importantly neighbourhoods, in addressing a given theme. The outcome of the summer schools, is further shaped within their publications, presentations and exhibitions, and used as a potent and growing body of evidence around the state of the city and its potential futures. Their critiques are succinct and direct – embodied in such project titles as; 'The Missing City', 'What if I could live in the city?', 'Streets not Roads', and 'Co-ordinate and Connect'. Funding their activities is always a challenge, nevertheless their influence and engagement continues to grow.
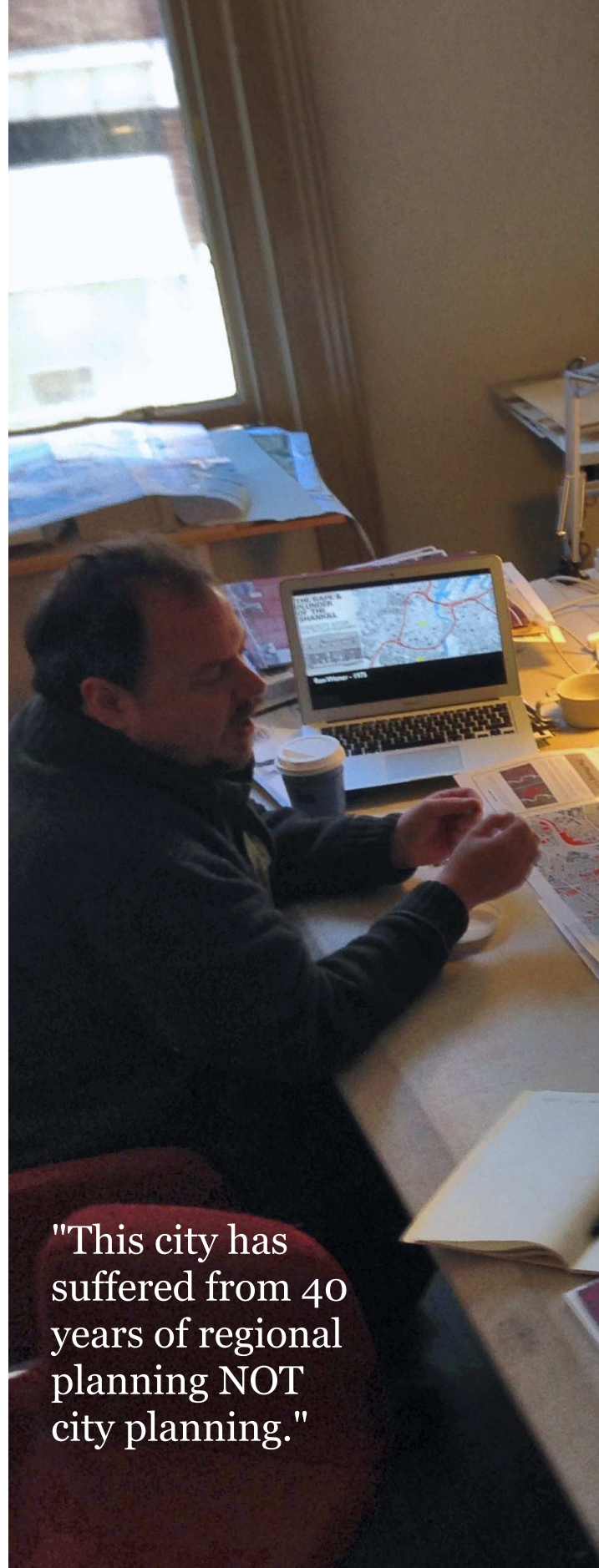


"This city has suffered from 40 years of regional planning NOT city planning."

# Peacewalls / Interfaces
## 11:30-12:30

## Participants

| Martin Hare | RSUA |
| Paul Bower | QUB |
| Peter Oborn | RIBA |
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |

Since the peace agreement in 1998 the number of barriers that separate communities in Belfast has increased by approximately a third in number to the January 2012 total of 99 (BIP, 2012). The barriers come in various forms; empty 'buffer' zones, closed roads, solid walls, or fences. More than 50% of the barriers are built/owned by the Department of Justice and the remainder by the NI Housing Executive, various public and a few private bodies.

The most striking example of a 'peace wall' runs alongside Cupar Way. Images of Belfast's peace walls are now globally recognised, manifestly representing its past and on-going tensions. They intrigue visitors, discourage investors, and continue to divide and isolate the disadvantaged communities on either side. In response, the *Northern Ireland Executive's committed in its strategy Together: Building a United Community (May 2013), to reducing and removing all interface barriers by 2023.* However, as yet, no one body has developed a strategy for their reduction/removal and we are rapidly running out of time.

"Reduce and remove all interface barriers by 2023"

# Twaddell Avenue
## 12:45-13:45

## Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Martin Hare | RSUA |
| Paul Bower | QUB |
| Peter Mutschler | PS2 |
| Peter Oborn | RIBA |
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |

"...shortly after the 12th of July 2013 annual parades in Northern Ireland, political campaigners set up a 'civil rights camp' at Twaddell Avenue, North Belfast. Located on a small patch of derelict land next to a roundabout, the organisers; mostly men, use a caravan and container as operational centres. Decorated with all the insignia of pro-British imagery, it serves as shelter and meeting place. The surrounding fences are covered by British and Northern Irish flags, protest banners and messages of support: 'Respect our Culture', No Surrender', 'British and Proud'.

The reason for their on-going protest is a stretch of road that the Orange Order, a masonic style organisation and defenders of Loyalist/Unionist/Protestant tradition, were and still are not allowed to parade. The civic right they campaign for is to make the home-ward march along a traditional route, which includes a short section of street through a Republican area; one of many interface zones in Belfast and Northern Ireland, where Protestant and Catholic communities border and are still entrenched in sectarian segregation and polarisation. A walk of six minutes which was stopped by anti-parade protestors at the 12th of July parade in 2013, was followed by days of violent clashes with police and rioting on both sides of the community. Since then, every evening, the Twaddell protesters march with banners and flags towards the 'demarcation line' in an attempt to complete their parade. And every evening they are prevented from passing by a cordon of police, trying to avoid a reoccurrence of the clashes. [It is reported to cost more than £35K a night to police the Twaddell Avenue Encampement.]

It is by now a well-choreographed daily routine; here the protesters, there the police; both sides framed by pro- and anti-march supporters and spectators. In the language of Northern Ireland's peace policy, the protest is part of a well-managed conflict repertoire." (Mutschler, Morrow, *'Architecture from the Dogs'*)

"In the language of Northern Ireland's peace policy, the protest is part of a well-managed conflict repertoire"

# TIRG Seminar
# Translations
*Architecture / Improvisation*
## 13:00-14:00

## Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |
| Timothy Waddell | QUB |
| TIRG Audience | |

This lunchtime seminar series has been running since September 2013 in QUB. It is one manifestation of the cross disciplinary group: Translating Improvisation Research Group (TIRG). Both Ruth Morrow and Timothy Waddell are members of the group. Ruth's involvement is motivated by the engaged spatial practice that she conducts as part of PS2, a voluntary arts organisation based in central Belfast. PS2 focuses on curating people, place and creativity in the post-conflict context of Northern Ireland, purposefully locating projects in locations with low levels of cultural, economic and community resources. Ruth was drawn to the research group as a way to help frame and better understand this practice within the concept of improvisation and socio-spatial rehearsals.

Timothy Waddell began his PhD research on Situated Practice in September 2014. The aim of his research; as presented in the seminar, is to explore improvisation as an architectural ethic. Having a background as both jazz musician and practicing architect; the translation of improvisational practice to architectural praxis became of interest while studying architecture in Sheffield. Timothy's thesis project investigated a collaboratively emergent architecture within Picton, Liverpool. The hope is that his PhD research will lead to other support modes of spatial operation, especially on those sites where territory is deeply contested and where conflicts and tensions have the potential to bring out both the worst and the best in people.

formal- major

subsidiary

informal- minor
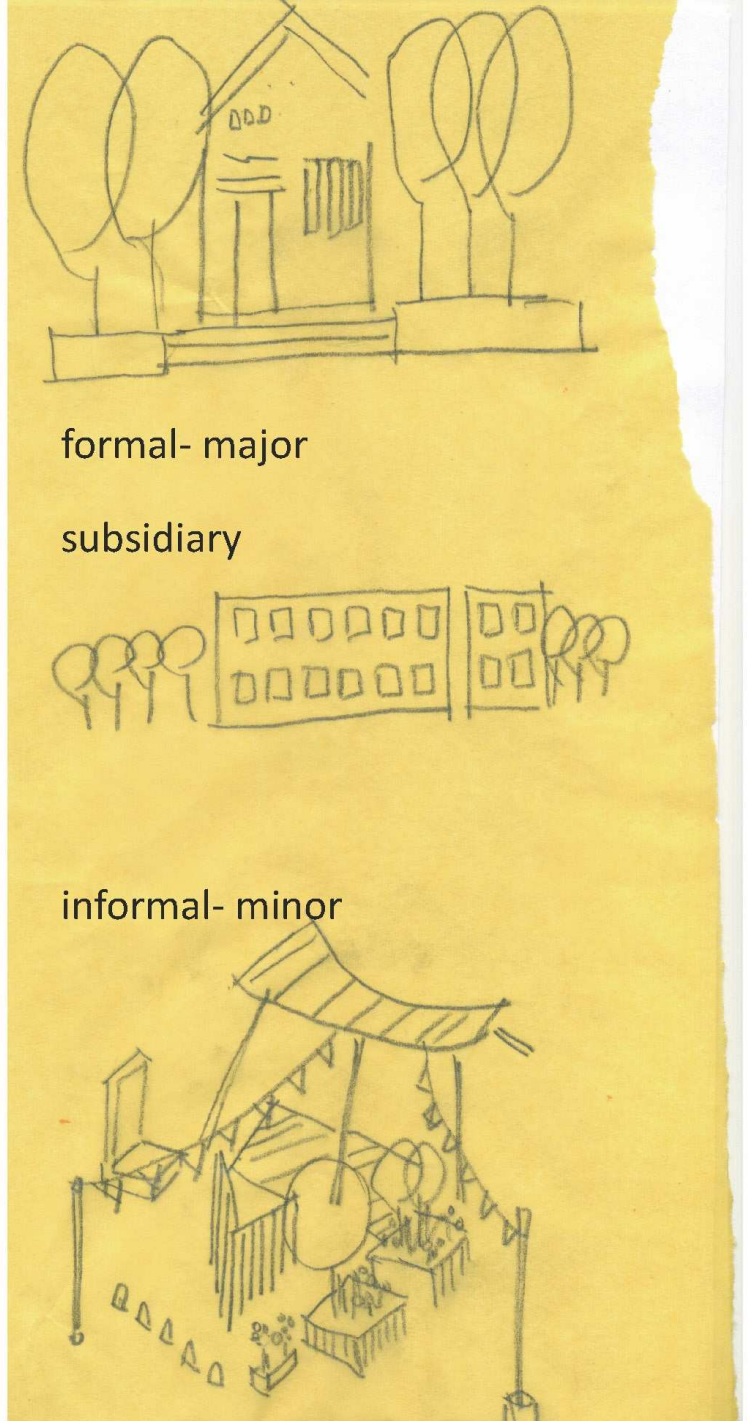
Closed
processes

Open
processes

MORE OR LESS
IMPROVISED

"Architecture is a form of active life; all situated
practitioners actively create architecture through
collaborative emergence."

# Roundtable
## 15:00–17:00

## Participants

| | |
|---|---|
| Paul Bower | QUB |
| Aisling Shannon Rusk | QUB |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ciaran Mackel | UU / ARD Architects |
| Fearghal Murray | MMAS Architects |
| John Fitzgerald | MAG / Fitzgerald and Hannah Architects |
| Michael McGarry | QUB / McGarry NíÉanaigh Architects |
| Peter Oborn | RIBA |
| Ruth Morrow | QUB |

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Christian Karelse
Frank Gaffikin
Gehan Selim
Milena Komarova
Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem
Neil Matthews
Tim Cunningham
Timothy Waddell

This Roundtable, held in the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice, QUB, was facilitated to address the question posed by Peter Oborn, Royal Institute of British Architects Vice President International and Chair of the International Committee:

*"Is it appropriate for the institute (RIBA) to engage with communities facing civil conflict and/or natural disaster and, if so, how it can do so most effectively".*

The roundtable began with brief presentations from Paul Bower and Aisling Shannon Rusk. both architects currently engaged in PhD research in Architecture and Planning at QUB, in the area of conflict and post-conflict studies in the Built Environment.

The presentations were followed by a two-phased debate; firstly a round-table of practicing architects and then with a wide audience of academics and researchers with expertise and /or interest in the area of conflict.

Paul Bower

## Beyond 'Post-conflict' Architecture:
*Visualising the Role of Architectural Practice and its Profession in the 'Post-conflict' City of Belfast, Northern Ireland*

Paul presented his research on the impacts and legacies of conflict on architectural practice; and the position of its profession within contested and divided territories in a 'post-conflict' city. His interest in Belfast and its 'post-conflict' condition began as a Master's student in 2005, where he produced a design project called 'Reprogramming the Wall', looking at future(s) for peace walls and interfaces. In his presentation he noted how architecture, both building and practice, in Northern Ireland remains largely characterised in the British media by its recent violent past and patronised by outside perceptions. At times, the profession in Northern Ireland has too been guilty of not talking directly about the highly contested nature of space in the city and how the profession might engage more effectively 'post-conflict'. 'Post-conflict' architectural projects of note have faced many challenges including hyper-bureaucracy, lengthy lead time, relationship building and reliance on pro-bono services. In addition he spoke about how developing a visual methodology necessary in such contexts to reveal the unsaid and prompt responses beyond received wisdom. Ultimately, in an attempt to reveal 'the elephant(s) in the room', namely the conflict known as the Troubles.
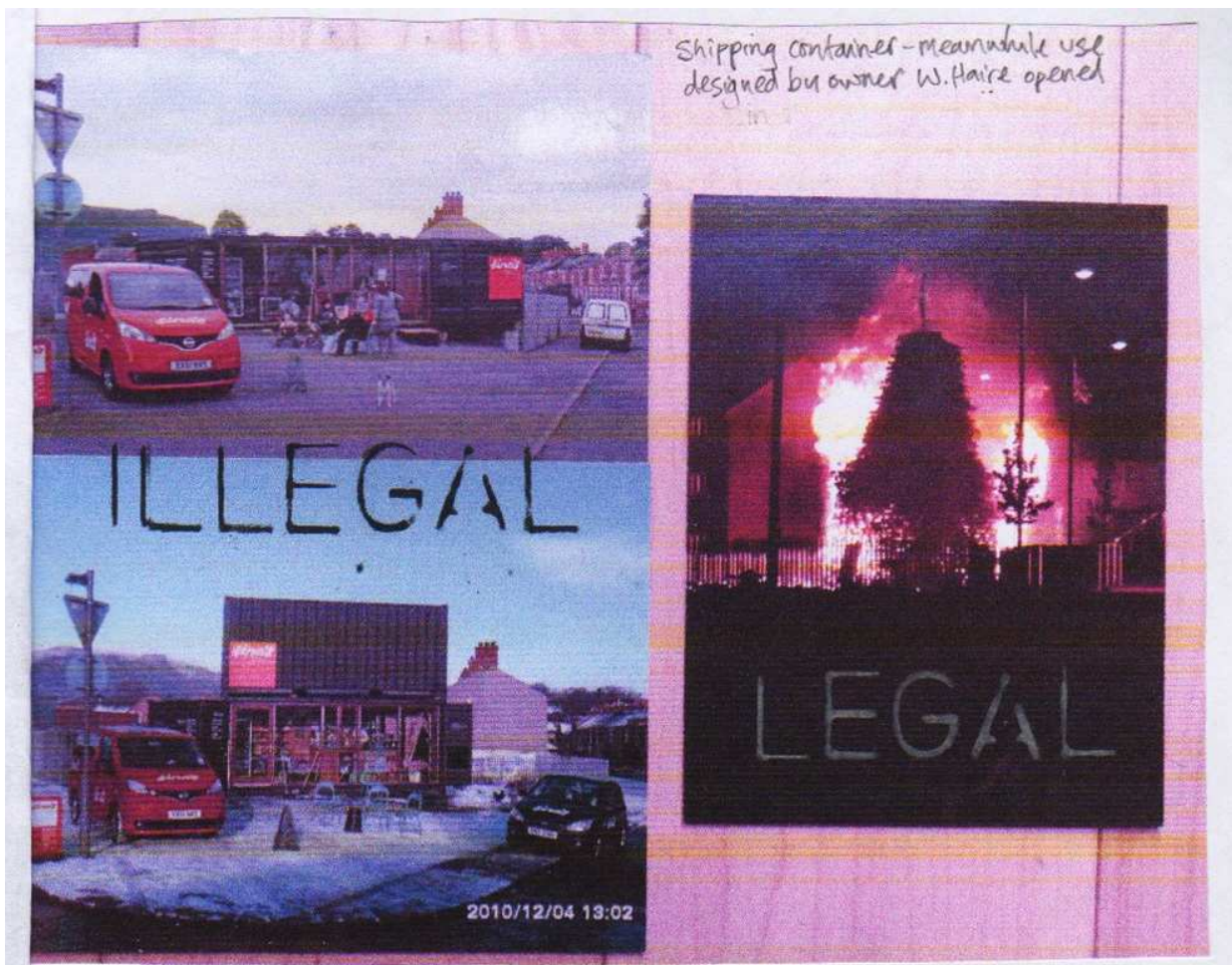
# Aisling Shannon Rusk

## *The Politics of Shaping Space:*
*Architects in Israel/Palestine*

Aisling presented some of her current research on spatial praxis in Israel/Palestine, using examples from her empirical research to talk through three conceptual directions architects take in divided and contested contexts. They either: (i) (problematically) see the shaping of space as apolitical; (ii) see it as political but think architecture can provide simple solutions; or (iii) acknowledge the political nature of the shaping of space but also its social dimension and its complexity. Examples of the latter included architects engaged in co-producing representations of West Bank refugee camps alongside refugees; those using heritage as an indirect form of political resistance; and others taking a human rights approach to planning activism. Aisling suggested that there are questions we might ask about how we avoid simply seeking to influence what happens in places of conflict, which could raise post-colonial questions, but also reflect on how, in engaging with these places, we could also learn from them, to influence our practice back in the UK.





"I think that [architecture] can and does produce positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom."

Foucault, M (1984)
*The Foucault Reader:*
*An Introduction to*
*Foucault's Thought.*
New York : Penguin

# Roundtable Discussion

Notes from the discussion follow. No names are attributed to the comments. The text simply captures the dynamics of the discussion:

___*Housing in Belfast over last 30-40 years has undoubtedly been political.*

___*Architects were, to varying degrees, complicit [in the process of developing segregated communities]*
*Maybe now we need to be more reflective on that process.*

___*Quite a few architects workied pro-bono for communities throughout the 'troubles' and post-conflict.*

___*Little incentive for profession to engage with communities now that 'framework consultants' have been put in place.*
*All projects will soon go through Central Procurement Directorate and Northern Ireland will end up within only 3 Architectural Practices who fit the framework.*

___*What are we doing to celebrate and support diversity within the profession?*

___*In these islands we have always worked on the basis of social relationships – now more than ever we need to build strong, tolerant relationships – but how can we do that given that the procurement system fundamentally mistrusts and devalues relationships?*

___*We need to recognise the true economic value of pro-bono work. We need to mentor practices to survive / succeed.*

___*Most professionals think that if you say something that it would be seen as 'taking a side', not 'taking a position' – it meant that when people did/ do take a position they suffer abuse.*

___*Do we act politically? Absolutely! To act is a consequence of being a citizen before being a professional.*
*Politics is played out in practice.*

___*The model of the 'Institute' (architecture) is still a community based on self-interest. But the collective model of the Institute has to develop or it will remain an ineffectual body with less and less influence.*
*To my mind the Institute is in crisis. I would welcome that we become more political.*

___*And it goes back to everything being procedural based – and nothing to do with relationships. So procurement processes may be outwardly equitable but manifestedly stupid; resulting in poor, mediocre architecture.*

___*When we grew up we didn't feel like it was abnormal, it felt normal. If you stayed out of 'certain' places you were fine.*

___*RIBA never showed any concern for the profession in Northern Ireland when we are actually in a time of conflict – so why now? Political issues are divisive. After all politics is about disagreement. The RIBA should be protecting its members – is it promoting architects or architecture?*
*So in response to the question put at the start of the roundtable – the answer is 'no!'.*

The discussion turned at this stage to include the surrounding audience of academics and researchers.

___*I was surprised by the RIBA's decision* [supporting the motion on Israeli architects]. *If you ask the question of Israeli architects, should you not also be asking it of Palestinian architects?*

# Emerging Thoughts

___Space is at the heart of most conflict.

___The consequences of conflict are largely unseen.

___Society and the architectural profession cope largely by adopting normalizing tactics, or as Neil Hanlon writes, we 'put our heads down and carry on.'

___Given that space is territorial, it is difficult to act apolitically...Is it ethical?

___Clearly some people do not want to engage with political issues and others do. The profession needs to allow all voices to emerge.

___There is a clear link between ethics and economics in such contexts.
This is echoed in Maze/Long Kesh business plan which moves the concept of 'conflict to peace', further along to become: 'peace to prosperity'.

___The visual documentation and communication skills of architects are vital to uncovering existing values, visualising the problems and proposing transparent spatial developments for the future.

___Over-bureaucratisation of public processes is a significant challenge in post-conflict contexts.

___The public procurement system needs unravelled to ensure that quality remains at its heart.

___Pro-Bono work seems to be one way that some architects actively support communities. This has both extensive social and economic value but it has yet to be effectively calculated and valued.

___Individual architects and practice are active and doing their best to raise concerns and act positively in respect to post-conflict context – How can RSUA and RIBA best support such activity?

___To what extent does the RSUA lobby politicians? and what evidence do they have to hand of the value architects bring to society?

___Perhaps one solution to influence decision making at the highest level is to elect architects as political representatives.

___The architecture community is a fragile one.

___There remains an undercurrent of fear that conflict might return...

___How do you eat an elephant? – one mouthful at a time.

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# Image References

Cover    Waddell, Timothy (2011) Townsend Street, Belfast
Page 1    Waddell, Timothy (2011) Cupar Way, Belfast
Page 2    Waddell, Timothy (2011) Lanark Way, Belfast
Page 4/5   Still Burning, View From Tower (2005) At: Flickr  (Accessed on 30.11.14)
Page 6/7   Morrow, Ruth (2014) Forum for Alternative Belfast
Page 8/9   Morrow, Ruth (2014) Cupar Way, Belfast
Page 10   Mutschler, Peter (2014) Twaddell Avenue Protest Camp
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Page 12   Top: Morrow, Ruth (2014) Degrees of architectural practice
Page 12   Bottom: McNeilly, Kathryn (2014)  At: Twitter  (Accessed on 30.11.14)
Page 13   Waddell, Timothy (2014) More or Less Improvised
Page 14 /15  Waddell, Timothy (2014) Architects With or Without Frontiers Roundtable
Page 16   Bower, Paul (2011)
Page 17   Top: Activestills (2012) At:972mag (Accessed on 30.11.14)
Page 17   Bottom: Shimrit, Lee (2011) At:Wordpress: גשר צר מאד (Accessed on 30.11.14)

# Roundtable Participants

## Ciaran Mackel

Senior lecturer at UU (University of Ulster), Belfast. Owner of ARD architects, Belfast, and RSUA past president (2002-2004). Ciaran qualified in 1981. Even as a kid he was involved in community activism since 1969. He actively works with both communities.

## Fearghal Murray

Fearghal qualified in 2009. He studied in Belfast and Bath and is co-founder of a young studio practice, MMAS Architects, in inner city Belfast. He also works pro-bono for community organisations.

## John Fitzgerald

Architect and managing director of Fitzgerald and Hannah Architects, Northern Ireland. John qualified as an architect in 1989 and worked in Dublin for 5 years before returning to Belfast. He describes himself as a 2nd generation architect, with his father partner of a well regarded local practice. John is currently advisor to Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment.

## Michael McGarry

Professor of Architecture at QUB (Queen's University Belfast), and partner of the award winning practice, McGarry NíÉanaigh Architects, Dublin. He qualified in 1978.

## Peter Oborn

RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architects) Vice President of International Relations.

## Ruth Morrow

Professor of Architecture at QUB (Queen's University Belfast), co-owner of Tactility Factory, and curatorial adviser of PS2 (inter-disciplinary arts organisation in Belfast).

# [a]Round-room Participants

## Christian Karelse

PhD student at Queen's University Belfast, researching Neoliberalism and the Contested Urbanism.

## Frank Gaffikin

Professor of Planning at (Queen's University Belfast). Franks has an extensive international profile and published research in the area of contested cities.

## Gehan Selim

Lecturer in architecture at QUB, cofounder of the multi-disciplinary, 'Spaces of liberation' research project.

## Milena Komarova

Research fellow of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice. Her primary research interests are ethno-national and urban conflicts, collective identities and place, discourse analysis and visual research methods.

## Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem

Lecturer in architecture at QUB, cofounder and lead Investigator of the multi-disciplinary, *Spaces of liberation' research project:* spacesofliberation.org.uk

## Neil Matthews

Owner of Neil Matthews architects, and co-founder of Arcex (A newly established, private, School of Professional Practice in Architecture providing an ARB approved Part 3 programme).

# Presenting Participants

## Tim Cunningham

PhD student at the University of Ulster, researching the impact of urban regeneration on addressing group inequality and segregation.

## Paul Bower

PhD student at QUB (Queen's University Belfast), researching the impact and legacy of social conflict on architectural practice in 'post-conflict' Belfast.

## Aisling Shannon Rusk

PhD student at QUB (Queen's University Belfast), researching the ethical engagement of architects working in contested space and divided societies.