Precarious spaces and urban change in post-conflict Belfast

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PRECARIOUS PEACEBUILDING

Exploring New Research Agendas

The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm, Sweden
1 - 2 October 2013

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Precarious spaces and urban change in post-conflict Belfast

ABSTRACT

The Northern Ireland conflict is shaped by an ethno-national contest between a minority Catholic/Nationalist/Republican population who broadly want to see the reunification of Ireland; and a majority Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist one, who mainly wish to maintain the sovereign connection with Britain. After nearly three decades of violence, which intensified segregation in schooling, labour markets and especially housing, a Peace Agreement was signed on Good Friday 1998. This paper is concerned with the peace process after the Agreement, not so much for the ambiguous political compromise, but for the way in which the city is constitutive of transformation and how Belfast in particular, is now embedded with a range of social instabilities and spatial contradictions. The Agreement encouraged rapid economic expansion, inward investment, especially in knowledge–intensive sectors and a short-lived optimism that markets and the neo-liberal fix would drive the post-conflict, post-industrial and post-political city. Capital would trump ethnicity and the economic uplift would bind citizens to a new expression of hope based on property speculation, tourism and global corporate investment.

The problem for peace is that capital is selective and was attracted to fairly limited geographies in the south and central business district of Belfast where anchor institutions, especially the universities incubated the new economy. This stimulated processes of residential mixing, gentrification, gating and commodification, best expressed in urban renewal projects in Titanic Quarter, the Cathedral Quarter and the University precinct itself. Yet, these circuits are economically and spatially self-contained, leaving the poorer and segregated city largely untouched by modernity as evident in physical 'peace lines', the intensification of poverty and internecine violence. The reassertion of Republican dissidents, Loyalist protests over perceived restrictions on their culture (flags and parades) and a failure to agree how to deal with the past (including whether to have a South African style Truth Commission) highlight the inherent vulnerabilities in this 'twin-speed' city. Yet again, the solution has been outsourced, this time to the US diplomat Richard Haass, who will hold cross-party talks to agree how to deal with the past, victims of violence and cultural practices including traditional parading. The paper locates these issues in Belfast and maps out both the progressive and regressive aspects of change, arguing that peace building, which fails to deal with the economics of transition, will always be precarious. It concludes by identifying emerging cross-community practices around social economics that offer the most disadvantaged some measure of resilience, a capacity to adapt and political expression based on exclusion and poverty; not just ethno-national identity.

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Draft and not for circulation

Introduction

Northern Ireland has been held up globally as a success story in peace building, conflict resolution and establishing democratic institutions in a place characterised by ethno-religious violence, fear and economic decline (Aughey, 2005). In many ways, it is, and deserves praise and recognition for these successes. The end of violence, the difficult but fairly secure consensus and stable institutions signify material progress in politics as well as in social relations. But, it is also precarious and this paper is concerned with the interplay between peace building and economic change and how the vulnerabilities of the peace process are especially linked to the lack of material benefit for those most affected by the conflict.

There have been a number of critical accounts of the Northern Ireland peace process. For some, it was deliberately ambiguous to enable all sides to 'interpret' a political gain from what ultimately resulted in *The Agreement* signed on Good Friday 1998 (Knox and Carmichael, 2005). The document left multiple and even contradictory interpretations over a range of fundamental issues about disarming paramilitaries, how to deal with victims and 'the past' and how to accommodate various cultural practices, especially the flying of flags and (primarily) Loyalist parades. A second theme is that the Agreement is problematic because it reinforced the very sectarianism that it aimed to resolve and built on consociational ideas that bolstered segregationist politics and reduced opportunities for alternative expressions of identity (Dixon, 2012). The main political parties have agreed to further talks (started in September 2013) chaired by the US diplomat, Dr. Richard Haass, to address the unresolved issues including parading, responsibilities to victims and how to deal with the past, including the value of a Truth Commission. However, concern remains about whether ethnically segregated political parties have an interest in the concept of spatial sharing or a more recent commitment to take down the peace lines, despite the commitment to dialogue under Haass (Knox, 2011).

A third critical narrative does not see the process just concerned with the politics of peace building but argues that it is intimately connected with a wider set of economic, class, labour market and policy changes. This is not new in global peace building processes with some interventions using market mechanisms to reward or discipline protagonists often in favour of emancipatory, rights-based approaches that prioritise social justice and welfare redistribution (Richmond, 2011, p.6). But the instabilities, evident in the Haass talks, are not just the product of intercommunity rivalries but in the way in which peace has produced every uneven socio-spatial effects. It brought a decade of economic progress, some of it the same hollow, credit-based property speculation as the rest of the global North, but some also centred on increased Foreign Direct Investment, growth in high value sectors, such as, informatics, food technology and R and D and labour and housing market mobility, for the most skilled and best educated. These were boosted by aggressive regeneration policies designed to create new spaces for such accumulation but often based on flimsy logics about urban quarterisation, faith in the market and a dubious attempt to find cultural signifiers, principally the Titanic ship (built in the city), that would appeal to (or at least not frighten) foreign investors, workers and tourists.

This paper draws on a range of projects to suggest that simultaneous processes of segregation and mixing have accompanied peace and that the theoretical and empirical understanding of contested cities cannot rely solely on the study of ethnic, racial or religious differences and how they are spatially expressed. A deeper analysis of the interplay between segregation, gentrification and class restructuring is needed to understand urban strategies of dispersal and disaffiliation. Even in cities such as Belfast, where ethno-religious violence has intensified decades of territoriality, global and national economic change has an impact on spatial restructuring and relative rates of mixing and concentration. The next section sets the analysis in a short historic context by looking in particular at the pattern of ethno-religious segregation across time and place. It shows territoriality is not being dismantled but it is restructuring. Yiftachel (2009) showed how processes of desegregation and assimilation are conditioned by global economic shifts filtered through housing and labour markets, planning and land supply and different forms of welfare provision. In the 15 years after the Northern Ireland ceasefires these processes work more freely to separate out the privileged spaces from the residualized and the paper uses multivariate analysis to describe these patterns across the city. Within this context, survey data and a brief analysis of children's perceptions of their neighbourhood enable a more nuanced understanding of urban restructuring and how this impacts differentially on segregated and integrated neighbourhoods. The paper concludes by emphasising the possibilities of alternative social economics to reconnect the divided to each other and the wider spatial economy. It suggests that strategies of local consumption, wealth retention and social enterprise development have *some* potential in addressing the precarious nature of peace building practices. They need to be better understood and evaluated, especially via a stronger commitment to more normative research, in a Northern Ireland context at least.

Identity, conflict and peace building

Boal (2002) maintains that the Northern Ireland conflict stems from competing national ideological versions of the constitutional future of the region. These are not pure 'ethnic' differences but they are characterised by binary religious politico-cultural histories and claims. For Boal there are two primary ethno-religious blocs: one Unionist, Loyalist and Protestant intent on maintenance of the union with Britain; and the other, a Nationalist, Republican and Catholic identity demanding re-unification with the rest of Ireland. The establishment of the Northern Ireland state in 1921 had inbuilt instabilities reflected in episodes of Republican violence that culminated in the outbreak of 'The Troubles' in 1969 (Aughey, 2005). Associated with these processes is what Boal (2002) termed the *segregation ratchet* whereby the rate of segregation increased rapidly at times of violence but rarely returned to their pre-conflict levels. 'Rampant ethnonationalism' characterized the 1970s and 1980s, as Protestants and Catholics scattered to their respective heartlands, secured and policed by new physical 'peace lines' especially in the inner city.

Segregation thus rose steadily between 1971 and 1991 but declined in the last inter-census period. Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2009) showed this was both tenure and place specific as the areas that experienced the greatest level of stability and integration tended to be high value, home owning neighbourhoods to the south of the city, while social housing estates in the north and west became poorer and more

divided. However, the explanation of segregation as a largely internal response to identity difference and violence no longer hold true in the uncertain process of post-conflict transition. The global effects of capital, culture and technology, of course, impact on how places change and to some extent risk and uncertainty insulated Northern Ireland from what Peck and Tickell (2002, p. 381) term the 'viral effects' of neoliberalism. However, it is argued in this paper that peace, a comparatively well educated labour force and a determination to re-engage the new world order saw the city re-formed and twin processes of mixing and segregation reflecting very different social and economic currents.

Peck and Tickell (2002) described the features of neoliberalism in: the promotion of growth first strategies; the naturalization of market logics; deregulation; a withdrawal from welfare; and a preference for privatization. Moreover, it is 'rolled out' and 'over' national economies, national boundaries and is indifferent to welfare regimes or sovereign regulation. Critics argue that this analysis is too simplistic and the current crisis renders neoliberalism largely redundant as a theoretical or political construct (Clark, 2008). For Peck *et al.* (2010) however, neoliberalism is simply adjusting, a 'crises driven makeover' and can adapt and reform with its ideologies and practices left largely intact. Castree (2009) argues that it has always been *path-dependent* and conditioned by the institutional, cultural and regulatory frameworks in each particular context. It is, in Brenner and Theodore's (2002, p. 349) terms, 'actually existing neoliberalism' and in post-conflict Northern Ireland, urban renaissance, elite commercial projects and (over) speculation in the housing market were important signifiers of normalcy and a warped version of progress.

Atkinson (2006, p. 820) showed that these processes are best reflected in housing markets, which facilitate a preference for social homogeneity in 'havens' of middle-class mixing. He identified a process of self-imposed disaffiliation as higher status groups insulate and then incarcerate themselves behind gated communities, security buffers and CCTV systems. When they do move they operate in discrete 'urban bubbles' linking separate housing space, elite developments and consumption sites in which they rarely encounter deviant places or people (Atkinson and Flint, 2004). In Belfast, as will be shown later, these *bubbles* are tightly defined in the south of the city and the Central Business District and have been reinforced by the presence of the main university, the graduate economy and the impact of student districts on the housing market. Chatterton (2010) showed how knowledge based growth and gentrification are by-products of expanding student precincts and this a growth trajectory that is also encouraged by state policy aimed at making cities more competitive, culturally enriched and entrepreneurial (Lees, 2009).

One strategy has been to subdivide Belfast into urban 'quarters' with the aim of creating neutral images of the past and in order to construct new sites for tourists, investors and moneyed residents. Many of these evoke the city's prudent industrial past with the Titanic Quarter and the Linen Quarter joining the Cathedral Quarter and the University Quarter to create connected, if at times unauthentic zones of navigable and safe places. Here ethnicity and race are urban assets; a resource to be commodified rather than a problem to be treated (Boland 2007). Urban regeneration has flanked this spatial realignment by subsidising major investments including the private sector development in the former Harland and Wolff shipyard at Titanic Quarter (Nagel, 2009). The *quarterisation* of the city replicates the standard

kit of city rebranding but in Titanic Quarter 'the crassness of commercial exploitation of a memory lodged deep in the household consciousness of western culture rankles' (Neill, 2006, p.115). It is a 185 acre site that includes proposals for 7,500 apartments, 900,000 sq mts of business, education, office and leisure space that will take 15 years and £5bn to complete (Neill, 2013). With the scheme struggling in the property recession the government stepped in with a £53m investment in the Titanic Signature Project, a museum and banqueting suite as an anchor for the development. For Neill (2013, p.66) this has emerged as a 'consumerist maze of fiction and fantasy', drawing on the memory of the ship to construct the present as neutral, industrial and ultimately safe.

The crass indignity of this selective memorialisation is intensified in more contested sites such as the attempt to develop the former Maze Long Kesh (MLK) prison where most paramilitaries were held and where 10 Republican prisoners died on Hunger Strike (for recognition of their status as political prisoners) in 1981. For Republicans this is Robben Island, the ultimate signifier of the long struggle against British rule in Ireland and the ability to mobilise the past to bolster the present (political project) is critical in the sacralisation of the site. For unionists, such sacralisation will inevitably result in a 'shrine to terrorism' and the development of the *peace building interpretative centre* (not a museum) along with the prison (H) blocks, the hospital where the hunger strikers died and the administration building has now stalled in further political wrangling. Daniel Libeskind (responsible for the Ground Zero plan and the Holocaust Museum in Berlin) was the chosen 'stararchitect' presumably to evaluate the site beyond the local, but even his minimalist, striped back attempt to narrative the site is caught in zero-sum resource competition. Here, capital could not trump ethnocracy, but as Dr. Haass attempts to unravel the past, the other city moves on in the social spaces that are increasingly disconnected from the tribal ones (O'Dowd and Komarova, 2011).

Mixing in the other city

In the nearly three decades of conflict (approximately 1969–1998) the rate of residential segregation between Protestants and Catholics accelerated to its highest level, but between 1991 and 2001 it largely stabilized and between 2001 and 2011 it was significantly reversed (Shuttleworth and Lloyd, 2007, 2009; Nolan, 2013). Areas of *ethno-religious* mixed housing have expanded but these were concentrated in middle-class areas, especially to the south of the city. Deindustrialization, the rise of the service economy, fair employment legislation and increasing public sector jobs helped to expand the middle class both socially and spatially. Gating and gentrification accelerated a particular form of disaffiliation as the emergent consumption class re-colonized apartment developments in the city centre and in a re-branded waterfront. In reality, Belfast has caught up with the neoliberalization of urban space familiar in other late capitalist cities but in more selective and potentially unstable ways. As mixing increased in the south of the city, segregation and periods of inter-communal violence intensified in the north and west where the 'new' economy and the high skilled jobs it demanded, left little imprint. These neighbourhoods have become more deprived and disconnected from a spatial economy being re-shaped well away from risky areas. Moreover, interfaces or the physical structures, often termed as 'peace lines', which separate Protestant and

Catholic neighbourhoods have been strengthened to the point where there are now forty-two in the city, mainly in north and west Belfast (McAlister, 2010).

This process of 'splintering' is evident in the changing levels of ethno-spatial segregation in Belfast and especially in how they intersect with class and tenure. For example, Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2009) showed that the *Dissimilarity Index* for Northern Ireland rose from 0.56 in 1971 to 0.66 in 1991 but only to 0.67 by 2001 (1.0 would be complete segregation and 0 would represent complete spatial integration). However, their most recent calculations from the 2011 Census show that the Index had declined substantially in the last decade to 0.58, partly caused by an increase in the Catholic population, characterised by comparatively higher fertility rates and average family sizes (Nolan, 2013). Catholics now make up 45% of the Northern Ireland population (1.811m) and Protestants 48% but ethno-religious *identities* are breaking down with new economic migrants, a degree of security (especially for Catholics) in the post-Agreement state and it is argued here, the impact of class. Wilson (2012, p.1) also noted similar transformations in American racial structures, especially in the economic and social transformations associated with post-Fordism and 'now life chances of individual blacks have more to do with their economic class position than with their encounters with whites'. This process of labour market restructuring and class restratification have also reshaped space, social relations between Catholics and Protestants on the mixed sites and growing competition in poor neighbourhoods.

Place Restructuring and South Belfast

In the last 2011 Census, Catholics were significantly less likely to associate themselves with distinctively *Irish* notions of identity and for an increasing number of Protestants, concepts of *Britishness* were also redundant. The extent, to which a new regional identity is forming, socially or politically, is questionable but it is certainly not what it was. This section uses *Principal Component Analysis (PCA)* to examine the spatial distribution of mixed religion wards in the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA) to examines the very specific spatial effects of these changes and in particular their connection to economic modernisation on the one hand and marginalisation on the other. It draws upon data from the 2011 Census of Population and the Multiple Deprivation Measure (MDM). The MDM is a synthetic index of ward based deprivation across Northern Ireland, with 1 being the most disadvantaged and 582 being the least disadvantaged electoral ward. Community Background is a 2011 Census variable that asks the religion in which the respondent *was brought up*, providing a stronger reading of ethno-religious identity than the pure *religion* count.

Boal (2002) suggested that in highly ethnicized cities communities can reach a tipping point at which the minority will exit, leaving the majority to saturate a neighbourhood. The table below sets out the main spatial demographic changes between 2001 and 2011. It shows that there has been a comparatively modest increase in the number of 582 Electoral Wards where no community has a majority of over 50% from 13 (2.2%) to 18 (4.8%) but a substantial decrease in the number of *single identity* wards (where one community has more than 80% of the ward population from 55.5% of all wards to 37.1%.

In other words, the most segregated areas have remained broadly segregated but already mixed areas, appear to have become more integrated. Strait and Gong (2012, p.1) identified the 'redistributive behaviour of whites' to explain the process of segregation and desegregation in post-Katrina New Orleans and there is evidence that part of the movement seen in Northern Ireland is a mutual spatial adjustment between Catholics and Protestants to remain a degree of autonomy or simply avoid the 'other'. This process of otherisation is best expressed in the enduring effects of the peace lines but these bound the most intensely segregated neighbourhoods, which are also the poorest. Evans (2010) pointed out how rational choice behaviours in the city are increasingly disrupted by new forms of disconnectedness, which further marginalise vulnerable ethnic groups in particular. The data presented here demonstrates the increasing disconnection, not between Catholics and Protestants seeking to avoid each other, but between the rich and poor and the socio-economic circuits that simultaneously reproduce and self-contain them.

Table 1 Residential segregation and mixing in Northern Ireland 2001-1011

Either religion	2001 wards		2011 wards	
	No	%	No	%
Less than 50%	13	2.2	28	4.8
50-59%	88	15.1	98	16.8
60-69%	94	16.2	106	18.2
70-79%	93	16.0	134	23.0
80-89%	146	25.1	153	26.3
90%	148	25.4	63	10.8

Source: Nolan (2013, p.120)

Mixed wards were filtered out and subjected to Principal Component Analysis based on eighteen variables. The variables were selected to reflect a range of socio-economic and demographic conditions. Table 2 shows that three factors explain 81.78 per cent of the variance in the data and each one describes a different type of mixed housing environment in Northern Ireland. Factor 1 explains most of the variance (45.52 per cent) and this broadly reflects mixing in rural areas and smaller settlements outside Belfast. Factor 3 accounts for 9.04 per cent of the variance, has a weaker structure and tends to be concentrated on new, low-cost suburban housing in larger towns. Factor 2 explains 27.19 per cent of data variance and is the most spatially concentrated, reflecting the expansion of middle-class neighbourhoods, especially in the Belfast Metropolitan Area.

The structure of the three components is explained in greater detail in table 3 and it shows that high levels of mixing cut across tenures and income groups and have a negative correlation with the deprivation variables in factor 1. These areas tend to be characterized by a concentration of the private rented sector, low rates of home ownership, older people and family break up, evidenced in the coefficient for lone parent families. Lloyd (2010, p. 1193) made the point that across Northern Ireland there are regions where there are 'neighbouring areas with large proportions of people from the same community background but with variable unemployment levels, while in other areas the first case holds true but unemployment levels are consistently low'. It is clearly not the case that segregation safely determines or is determined by levels of deprivation and there are neighbourhoods, especially with concentrations of newly built starter homes, where a degree of mixing survives (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006). As noted earlier, factor 3 reflects newer, low-income

neighbourhoods with decent environment, that still experience deprivation but not with the same intensity as factor 1.

Table 2 Total variance explained in component extraction

Var	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.193	45.518	45.518	8.193	45.518	45.518
2	4.894	27.189	72.707	4.894	27.189	72.707
3	1.633	9.074	81.781	1.633	9.074	81.781
4	0.803	4.459	86.241			
5	0.586	3.254	89.495			
6	0.537	2.983	92.478			
7	0.346	1.922	94.400			
8	0.264	1.469	95.869			
9	0.225	1.248	97.117			
10	0.129	0.717	97.834			
11	0.117	0.650	98.483			
12	0.100	0.555	99.038			
13	0.056	0.312	99.350			
14	0.042	0.235	99.585			
15	0.032	0.178	99.763			
16	0.024	0.135	99.899			
17	0.018	0.101	100.000			
18	0.001	0.001	100.000			
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						

Table 3 Component Matrix by factor

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
Deprivation Income Rank	–0.565	0.758	–0.106
Deprivation Employment Rank	–0.406	0.769	-0.193
Deprivation Health Rank	–0.560	0.704	-0.155
Deprivation Environment Rank	–0.551	0.209	0.485
Deprivation Crime Rank	–0.701	0.142	0.453
Social class SCAB %	0.321	0.819	–0.326
Social class SCC1 %	0.526	0.794	–0.172
Social class SCC2 %	0.355	0.293	0.771
Social class SCD %	0.934	0.097	0.210
Social class SCE %	0.880	0.077	0.051
Age under 18%	0.466	0.593	0.501
Age 18–65 %	0.593	0.706	0.016
Age over 65 %	0.592	0.580	–0.158
Household separated %	0.931	0.157	0.132
Household divorce %	0.914	0.201	–0.029
Household lone parent %	0.701	–0.442	0.059
Owner Occupied %	–0.817	0.399	0.150
Private rented %	0.817	–0.399	–0.150
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			

In this analysis factor 2 is more socially and spatially significant. The correlation coefficients are high on social class and owner occupation and low on deprivation and family break up. The spatial distribution of the factor is described in figure 1 which shows that two clusters can be identified in outer north Belfast in a traditionally wealthy suburban neighbourhood and in a wedge running from the Central Business

District (CBD) to the suburban southern fringe of the city, facilitated by successive breaches of the greenbelt in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The paper now examines the reproduction of this space, the characteristics of its residents and whether there is a material difference in every day experiences of the city.

Figure 1 Spatial distribution of Factor 2 in greater Belfast
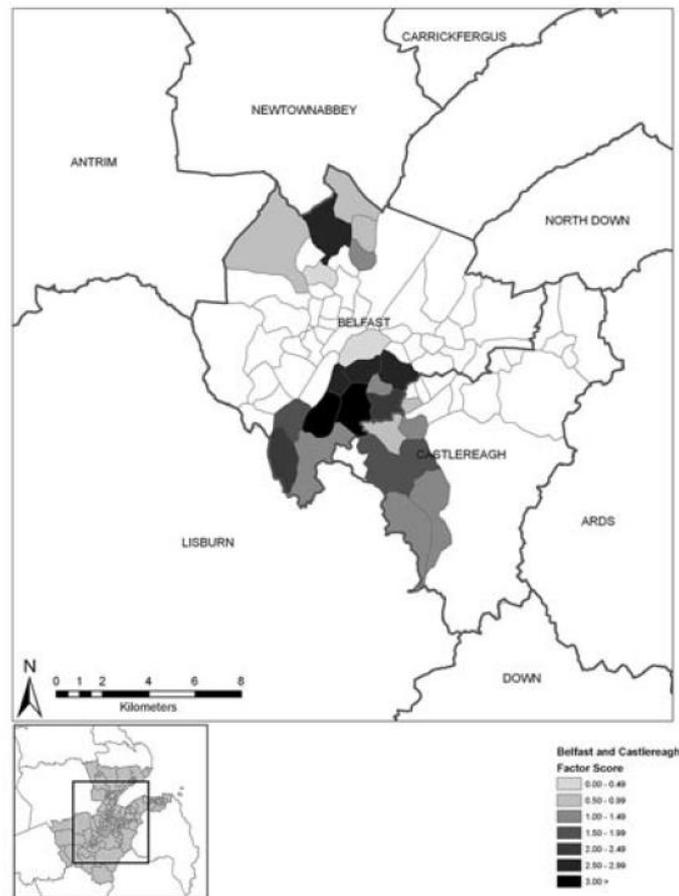
The *privileged* city

The process of class realignment can be traced to the early 1970s as the British state sought to contain violence and a legitimation crisis in which Catholic grievances about discrimination and civil rights prompted a series of reforms. These included fair employment legislation, the expansion of public sector jobs and massive investment in social housing. The impact of these changes was accelerated by de-industrialization that negatively affected traditional *Protestant* labour markets at the same time as the service sector attracted Catholic graduates now guaranteed access to third level education. The Catholic middle class had purchase in the housing market and were increasingly attracted to the mixed and safe neighbourhoods to the south of the city. As the knowledge economy accelerated, housing and labour sub-markets re-defined this area as a distinctive socio-cultural space. Thus, the labour market became tighter as disadvantaged areas were economically marginalized and as higher status commuters enjoyed greater mobility in the metropolitan area (Shuttleworth and Gould, 2010). Here, O'Hearn (2008) showed that the post-conflict economy left disadvantaged areas largely untouched as inward investment, government assisted projects and employment were

concentrated in more prosperous sites. He pointed out that of the seven inward investments in west Belfast since 1997 only one remained by 2007, employing just twenty-seven people.

Table 4 shows the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of residents lining in new apartment developments in the city centre and whilst it may not reflect the revanchism seen in other European cities, it does show that they tend to be professional, well-educated and transient (QUB, 2008). Most have come from outside Northern Ireland (53 per cent), live in private renting (70 per cent) and intend to move away in the near future (62 per cent). Importantly, 62 per cent of the respondents are living in a mixed religion apartment block although as the QUB (2008) report pointed out, high-density housing layouts actually reduced the prospects for chance encounters between residents. They may appear mixed but this does not necessarily mean that people interact in any meaningful way. Rousseau (2009, p. 770) makes the point that medium sized, northern European, de-industrialized or what he terms 'loser towns' mimic the behaviours of more developed global cities in order to compete. They lack the capitalization and service base to maintain transformative, full-on neoliberal urban strategies and the problem for Belfast and places like it is that the transience of these processes undermines this very model of development.

Table 4 Occupants of city centre apartment blocks in Belfast

Variable	Percentage
Third level qualification	79%
Employed	83%
Employed in a Professional job	46%
Born outside Northern Ireland	53%
Living in property for less than one year	64%
Intend to move away in the next five years	62%
Private renting	70%
Living in a mixed area	62%

Source: Based on QUB (2008)

The region's main university is pivotal in these processes, not just because it is vital in the reproduction of the knowledge economy but because it also stimulated studentification in the housing market. This has driven a high degree of mobility and mixing in the student precinct and produced a ready supply of graduates for the private rented as well as first time buyer housing market. Similarly, the other main university (of Ulster) is relocating its out of town campus to the Cathedral Quarter, reinforcing its status as an arts led and youthful place in which culture is unproblematically defined around hipster lifestyles and interests. The University has been supported to develop sites formerly zoned for social (state owned) housing and related infrastructure (and investors have also been successful at overturning such designations to provide student housing around the campus). O'Mara (2012) has plotted the realignment of university-municipal relationships in the US and argued that since the 1960s, universities have played a critical, if uncertain role in managing urban crises. New alliances, which effectively bypass formal local government structures, ease and even subsidise campus developments, essential to the reformation of the metropolitan economy, especially to bolster or de-risk wider speculation in places such as the Cathedral Quarter. Framing education in this way is a belief that 'individual effort and entrepreneurial and personal accountability are
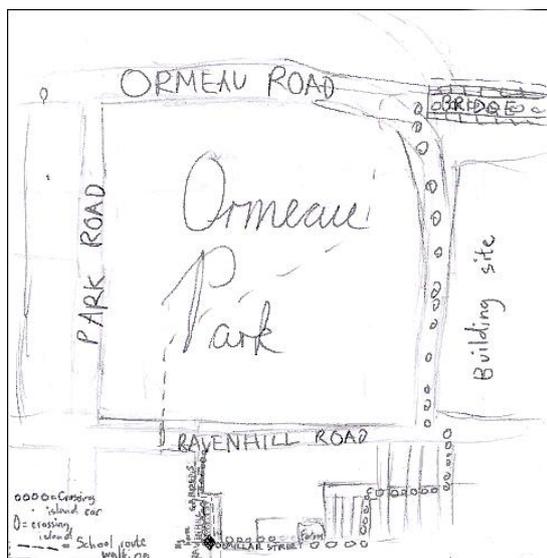
the paths to success. This paves the way for cultural explanations of poverty and race neutral policies and favors market solutions and disinvestment in public spaces' (Lipman, 2011, p.14).

Survey work in the south Belfast housing market also shows that a new, young, graduate, professional and disproportionately Catholic population has increasingly displaced an established working-class community in the mid-city area (Murtagh and Carmichael, 2008). This was aided by property speculation, private renting and new consumption and employment sites. The data showed that 8 per cent of Protestants lived in the mid-south area for less than a year compared with 16 per cent for Catholics. In Northern Ireland as a whole 5 per cent of households earn more than £40,000 per annum compared with 22 per cent of Catholic households in mid-south with the figure for Protestants the same as the regional total (5 per cent). Moreover, 38 per cent of Catholic household heads are under 35 years old compared with just 16 per cent for Protestants but the survey indicated that the mid-south population are more likely to hold multiple identities and to have friends and relatives from the other religion. Overall, 52 per cent of people stated that their friends are drawn from both religions and this is shared by Protestants (49 per cent) and Catholics (47 per cent) living in the area. The Northern Ireland figure is 35 per cent overall, 30 per cent for Protestants and 38 per cent for Catholics (QUB, 2010). This suggests that labour market expansion, especially in high-value sectors has registered in the housing market, at least in middle-class areas. While it has resulted in a degree of mixing, reliance on the housing market as a driver of dispersal is ultimately fragile and uncertain. What it has produced and left intact are islands of privilege where experiences of place are formed very differently from in poorer and segregated areas left largely untouched by post-conflict transition. This is especially evident in the attitudes and behaviours of children in different ethno-social territories.

Research on inter-community attitudes and spatial behaviours among 11-year olds in an inner-city interface area and a mid-city, middle-class community, demonstrated the comparative mobility of more wealthy children (Murtagh and Murphy, 2011). They had more assets to use, especially parks and playgrounds, could move within and between neighbourhoods relatively freely and had generally positive attitudes to their local environment. They also had more frequent encounters with people from the other religion, displayed tolerant attitudes and had a stronger choice of religiously integrated schools. Working class children had limited contact with each other and a number indicated that they were involved in interface violence. They were also constrained by major road and railway networks as well as the city airport and had comparatively limited understandings of the world outside their neighbourhood or the rest of the city. These are shown in a drawing exercise depicting the journey from home to school, which identified constraints in the Catholic enclave (walls and other borders) and the more expansive assets (urban parks) in the middle class neighbourhoods.

Figure 2 Childhood neighbourhood maps

Middle class school   **Inner city interface school**
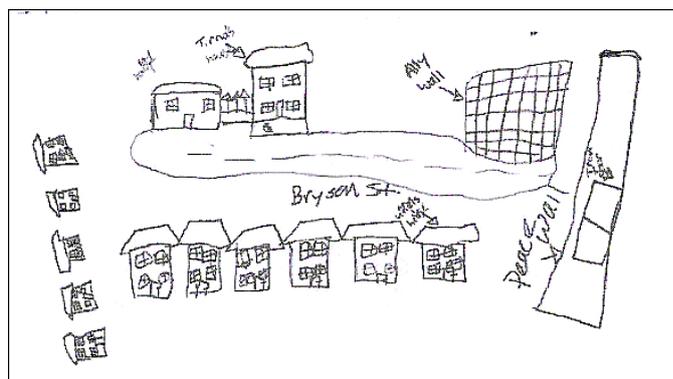
Social economics and local resistance

In the context of precarious peace building, the issue for the most disadvantaged and divided places is how to resist, adapt and sustain alternatives to the hegemony of the market, sectarian politics and boosterist urban policies. Interface work has been slow to develop into a coherent conceptual discipline and has been, almost inevitably, reactive and concerned with management rather than transformative change. The dominant narratives are that these are spaces that need to be securitised and better policed, especially with more effective dividing strategies using the built environment as a buffer to separate communities. They are deviant, there to be safely contained and prevented from infecting the growth economy in the 'good' city. This enables them to be written down in policy terms although their value as a voting bloc for Nationalists and Unionist parties is also important.

However, there are practices of resistance to the market, sectarianism and segregation especially in the form of social economics. The social economy has been traditionally strong in Belfast, supported by community based credit unions, a culture of self-help (especially linked to the Catholic church) and service provision, particularly social care. Capital flight and welfare displacement has left a space for communities to expand services and grow profitable business. For some this has implicated social enterprises in the same neoliberal welfarism they purport to resist but for others it has radicalised local services, enabled social profit and created new circuits of neighbourhood production and consumption (Bridge at al, 2013). If economics, at least in part, explains life chances in segregated neighbourhoods, then local assemblages of accumulation and (re) distribution is an option worthy of further exploration, especially where poverty, fatalism and ethnicity intersect in a 'wicked' urban mix (Murtagh, 2013). However, recycling resources, preventing leakages and strengthening local multiplier effects require scale and in such strategies, segregation *needs* to be re-negotiated in business terms as social-catchments to be strengthened and social-market share to be developed.

The social economy is not, on its own, an answer to segregation but it can strengthen community relations around material self-interests, which many *contact* schemes tend to under value. They build meaningful connections, trust, a necessary reciprocation and most importantly assets, resources and services that count in the everyday. The opportunity to build on such practices across the city, regionally (and even globally), it is suggested, is an important area for research in the context of precarious peace building. One successful model, and there are not many, is a social enterprise formed recently on a west Belfast interface.

Suffolk is a small Protestant housing estate surrounded by the greater west Belfast Catholic housing market, formed as the population shifts of the 1970s left residualised pockets of minority enclaves bounded by physical peace lines. Initial contacts between the two communities centred on the need for traffic lights across the Stewartstown Road, which formed part of the interface but this stimulated a debate, especially between women's groups, concerned with child safety. The gendered nature of the work was important and focused attention on a range of related problems such as childcare places, women returners to work and the need to draw children away from interface violence. Against this backdrop, a community group in Protestant Suffolk and another in Catholic Lenadoon agreed a *Peace-building Plan* for the interface zone in 2007, supported by the US based Atlantic Philanthropies. Relationships remained delicate with inter-community conflict flaring up at times of heightened political tension, such as during the dispute over Orange Order marches in the 1990s. The impact of this wider context was explained by a Protestant community worker:

> Even though things eventually did die down it looked as if the whole interface initiative was finished. People were interviewed in the media, saying that after what they went through how could they ever be expected to trust the other side. So it did look as though the whole thing was near to collapse (quoted in Hall, 2007, 21).

After a period of 'cooling off', tentative meetings were resumed but with the risk that issues such as parading had the potential to destabilise relationships. As a result, a mobile telephone network was established among community workers. Here, any signs of violence were identified and dealt with by activists on both sides of the interface, which consolidated trust building between a wider group of community workers. A joint statement helped to prepare both sides to handle disputes and laid the foundation for further cross-community dialogue. This re-engagement led to the formation of the *Suffolk-Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG)* to deal with two very specific issues: the need to address the physical environment of the Stewartstown Road interface; and the development of durable cross-community governance structures.

A company was formed called the *Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project,* managed by four members of the Lenadoon Community Forum, four from the Suffolk Community Forum and four independent members recruited for their expertise in urban regeneration. The company focused on a single project to rebuild a two storey block of shops and offices on the Stewartstown Road. Retailing on the ground floor generated commercial rent whilst the upper storey was allocated for offices for the community groups and local businesses. The development of the project was

supported by an external facilitator to help address the legal, financial and constitutional aspects of the project, which also set out rules on the use of symbols, flags and emblems and processes for dealing with inter-community conflict.

The next challenge involved bringing the wider communities on board using public presentations of the plans on both sides of the divide. The SLIG group again highlighted the role of women in this activity, especially in Suffolk, where they negotiated with Loyalist paramilitaries and a fairly fatalistic community, often at considerable personal risk:

> 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, 26).

Despite these reservations, a public meeting produced almost unanimous support for the project as a win-win solution to local development needs. Funding for the project came from the government and the International Fund for Ireland and when implemented, the new centre completely reshaped the interface, physically and socially. The police reported a significant drop in interface violence, the rental units were fully occupied and commercial confidence was reflected in the construction of a new retail store on an adjacent site on the Stewartstown Road. The project gained additional momentum with a new 50 place childcare centre supported by EU PEACE funding. This lead to the Peace-building Plan as a physical statement agreeing the use of contested spaces and development priorities: 'The Plan will respect the positions and values of each community while specifically seeking to:

- Identify shared spaces that can be accessed by both communities;
- Identify activities that are required to provide security and build confidence within and between communities; and
- Identify and respect that some activities, services and spaces will not be addressed in the short term but may form part of future options.'

Several mutual advantages were advanced to both communities to gain endorsement for the project, with an emphasis placed on potential mutual benefits:

- The redevelopment would help to ensure the longer term sustainability of the Suffolk community and a survey with teenagers showed that the majority of young people planned to leave the estate as soon as they could;
- The redevelopment would secure existing services (a grocery store and post-office) and provide much needed new services;
- Job opportunities and investment would result from the redevelopment of the site; and
- Community ownership and gain so that any profits generated from the social enterprises would be reinvested equally between the company and each community forum.

The project focused on addressing deprivation in the area through the regeneration of the Stewartstown Road with the aim of improving the social, physical, economic and cultural conditions of the area, while also providing safe and shared services.

The first phase of the project opened in 2002 and comprised of a mix of commercial, retail and community uses: 4 shop units including a Post-Office, Convenience Store, Pharmacy and Restaurant and Tea Shop; Health and Social Service Trust provision including Childcare and Counselling services; and affordable community meeting space.

As noted, funding was secured from the US based International Fund for Ireland, Atlantic Philanthropies, DSD and EU PEACE Programme to take forward a second phase which was completed in 2008. This comprised of: additional retail and commercial units; additional office space; and purpose built child care facility as a separate social economy business. In 2010 the project generated a profit of just over £100,000 this was shared equally between SRRP and the Suffolk and Lenadoon community forums enabling each forum to support a range of community projects. The Stewartstown Road is still an interface and this part of Belfast is still segregated. But the experience of the project and the opportunities to scale and replicate it are significant, especially because it focuses on common-cause issues and the deprivation in services and facilities that segregation both reproduces and is reproduced by.

Implications for research on precarious peace building

This paper sought to evaluate ethno-religious segregation in Belfast and the implications of an end to violence for post-conflict urban transition. Traditional understandings of residential segregation have relied heavily on sociological, geographical and anthropological accounts of the internal structuring of social distance, fear and a preference for ethnic clustering. Much of this work has usefully described: the processes of segregation; the impact on behaviours and the reproduction of sectarian attitudes; and how different groups, including children have been disadvantaged by the experiences of enclosure.

However, these accounts treat residential segregation as internally driven, primarily by competition between two largely fixed ethno-religious blocs. In Northern Ireland, the peace process was accompanied by an intensification of segregation in some places and greater mixing in others but it is the impact of capital and not just identity differences that dictates the nature and pace of spatial change. Life for young professionals, graduates and the children of the middle class is improved by jobs, education, urban assets and by greater mobility. In the segregated city, communities are increasingly disconnected from such opportunities and experience deepening levels of poverty and sectarian competition. This should not suggest that mixed communities are by necessity integrated or successful. Indeed, there is a danger that commodifying mixed spaces for tourist or retail value or selling expensive residential *quarters* will not make for a more just or inclusive city.

How far these processes can be challenged or changed is also questionable. Agency is limited but there are spaces in the city that demonstrate a degree of hope and possibility and in addressing the nature of precarious peace building there are also research possibilities, especially, it is suggested here, around the role of the social economy:

- Can projects such as SLIG be replicated or scaled and what types of intermediation are required to do this;
- What is the relationship between local community relations interventions, contact schemes and local economic regeneration;
- Has community based economic development worked in other divided places. There is certainly evidence of good practice but can we define the critical success factors and learn across conflicts, countries and disciplines (see CinC, 2013);
- Is it ethical and is there a downside in relation to the marketization of public services and allowing the state to escape from its commitments to divided, under-invested communities;
- What skills are needed and how do the capacities in social enterprise management relate to the competencies needed by town planners, urban regeneration professions or housing managers; in other words, how does it get into the policy mainstream; and
- How far do (or can) these projects and practices connect to each other, to politics, to broader social movements and even global struggles to counter the hegemony of capital and sectarianism in places such as Belfast.

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