

Shared Space

*A research journal on peace, conflict and community
relations in Northern Ireland*

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Northern Ireland Community Relations Council

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Any views expressed in *Shared Space* are those of the authors of the articles and do not necessarily represent those of the Community Relations Council.

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Notes on Contributors

Natalya Boujenko is an independent consultant with Intermethod, Adelaide, Australia.

Ralf Brand is Senior Lecturer at the Manchester Architecture Research Centre in the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester. He is also an experienced consultant (primarily for the Sustainability Performance Group) and helped communities develop and implement a local sustainability strategy, called Local Agenda 21.

Roz Goldie is the lead consultant for Roz Goldie Partnership on research, policy and practice in equality, good relations, governance and community development. She has been a Research Associate for Queen's University Belfast.

Ulf Hansson is Research Officer at the Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast.

Peter Jones is Professor at the Centre for Transport Studies, University College, London. He is a transport and sustainable development specialist. He was formerly director of the Transport Studies Group at the University of Westminster and has also acted as a consultant to Transport for London.

Ruari-Santiago McBride is a research associate with the Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast.

Nick McCaffery is based at the School of History and Anthropology at Queen's University, Belfast, and is a research associate with the Institute for Conflict Research.

Brid Ruddy is an Equality and Good Relations consultant who has held management roles in the public and voluntary sector.

Introduction

The title of this journal, *Shared Space*, reflects the concept of a place where people, traditions and ideas are able to connect together in a safe way that will respect diversity and acknowledge interdependence. For a society like ours emerging from several decades of violent inter-communal conflict and political turmoil, it is an appropriate title for a research journal which explores ideas and analyses useful to both policy makers and community relations practitioners in trying to build a more shared society.

The first three articles in the current issue look directly at the concept of shared space as an alternative to the segregated environment which for many is still the daily reality here. Professor Peter Jones and Natalya Boujenko begin with an outline of the main recommendations of a report in 2008, commissioned by Belfast City Council, on how transport and improved connectivity could help reduce sectarian tensions and the isolation experienced by some in both communities.

Despite the peace process and the development of Belfast city centre as a shared public place an increasing number of people continue to live in segregated areas, many of these still separated by physical interface barriers. As Jones and Boujenko make clear in their article Belfast needs to expand the number and range of its 'shared spaces' and if this is done it has the potential to be the catalyst for unravelling some of the long standing issues confronting the city.

The article outlines 24 recommendations. Many of these comment on the public transport system; they urge the consideration of new bus routes that traverse the different communities and challenge the sectarian segmentation of the city. Routes might also be developed to new and emerging shared space destinations. The report suggests the organisation of community events or neighbourhood festivals on arterial routes that will attract a wide range of public groups, thus helping to transform the routes from boundary lines to shared spaces. For city planners and developers of transport policy there is much here to consider.

Urban planning is also the subject of the second article by Ralf Brand from the Manchester Architecture Research Centre. Specifically the author looks at the nature of the urban environment in four cities, Belfast, Berlin,

Amsterdam and Beirut and explores how this can play a role in perpetuating or reinforcing community divisions. But while warning of the dangers of top-down social engineering interventions the author found that attempts to facilitate friendly encounters between communities by creating shared spaces could work if local communities were fully participative in the process. The key point for urban designers is the involvement of and consultation with local people in both the design and subsequent management of the shared space, and this is at least as important as the design content.

The third article, by Roz Goldie and Brid Ruddy, draws attention to the developing good practice in promoting shared space in Belfast's interface areas. Based on interviews with key people from the statutory, voluntary, community and academic sectors, and independent agencies, the research notes the progress that has taken place in moving from conflict management and 'fire-fighting' to conflict transformation. The mobile phone network for interface workers has been important in defusing community fear and tension when violence and unrest threatened. In the long term cross-community dialogue and greater inter-agency approaches at the local level, in consultation with local people, are the key to breaking down the segregation and creating shared spaces at interface areas. Much of this dialogue and inter-agency co-operation is already happening and the researchers note that there is a public and a political will to move towards creating shared spaces. What is needed now are practical pathways to put policies into practice.

The last two articles look at the issue of young people and how they might be better engaged in the peace process. Nick McCaffery and Ulf Hansson, from the Institute for Conflict Research, draw from research commissioned by the Community Relations Council on young people's understanding of the past. The alarming finding is that for many young people the Troubles have not finished yet and ongoing segregation and sectarianism are visible examples of the legacy of the past. The past is often seen as a time when 'others' committed acts of violence against their community.

Despite some good work taking place in schools to develop an informed and balanced understanding of the recent past, young people also draw their understanding from informal sources such as films and community memory conveyed by family members and the wider community. There are great dangers in allowing one-sided interpretations of the past to go unchallenged. If we are to build a future that is better and more peaceful than the past we must support educators and community workers in ensuring that our young people are well informed and aware of a range of interpretations of the past.

Youth attitudes are also the subject of the final article, also based on research from the Institute for Conflict Research in partnership with Public Achievement. Ruari-Santiago McBride's article looks at young people's relationship with the police. The research on which the article is based found that the majority of the young people surveyed are interacting with police officers in a potentially confrontational setting, 'on the street'. This was true of those from both Protestant and Catholic community backgrounds. Protestant youth were however more likely than Catholics to report having social/educational contact with police in neutral settings. The lessons here for the PSNI is that they need to continue to increase and improve forms of engagement with young people from both communities, particularly in neutral settings. This is essential if young people are to be encouraged to play a positive and active role in rebuilding our society and to avoid being dragged back to the violence, confrontation and division of the past.

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