

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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Dedication

This Special Issue of Shared Space is dedicated to the memory of Professor Ed Cairns who died tragically in a road traffic accident in February 2012. Ed was an internationally renowned peace researcher who over his lifetime contributed extensively to research into group conflict and improving community relations in Northern Ireland. He is fondly remembered and sadly missed by his colleagues in Ireland and across the world.

Notes on Contributors

Jonny Byrne is a Lecturer in the School of Criminology, Politics and Social Policy and is a member of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of Ulster.

Ed Cairns was Professor of Psychology and Leader of the Peace and Conflict Research Group at the University of Ulster. This special issue is dedicated to his memory.

Tom Fraser is Emeritus Professor of History and Honorary Professor of Conflict Research, INCORE, University of Ulster.

Kenneth Houston completed his PhD in Politics at the University of Ulster in 2009. His original research examined the tensions between religious institutions and liberal democratic governance in the context of the European Union. He will join the faculty of Webster University, Thailand in May 2012 teaching international relations.

Gráinne Kelly is Policy/Practice Coordinator at INCORE, the International Conflict Research Institute, based on the Magee campus, University of Ulster.

P.J. Kitchin is a Lecturer in Sports Management at the Ulster Sports Academy and is a member of the Sport and Exercise Sciences Research Institute at the University of Ulster.

Shelley McKeown recently completed her doctoral research at the University of Ulster, and is a Lecturer in Psychology in the School of Psychology, University of Hertfordshire.

Maurice Stringer is a Professor of Psychology and the Director of the Psychology Research Institute at the University of Ulster.

Introduction

The Inter-Institute Peace and Conflict Cluster (IPAC) instigated by INCORE (International Conflict Research Institute) in 2010, seeks to bring together researchers at the University of Ulster working on peace and conflict-related research. IPAC creates opportunities for collaborative work aimed at increasing research impact, quality output, and the vitality of the research environment. Currently, IPAC brings together over 30 academic staff from many of the University of Ulster's dedicated research institutes, including those focused on the arts and humanities, social sciences, psychology, sport and transitional justice. In 2012, an inaugural seminar series on the theme of *Peacebuilding Approaches After Violent Conflict* was launched by IPAC at the University of Ulster and has attracted large audiences of academics, policy makers, practitioners and students to its regular events. This Special Issue of the *Shared Space* journal is another initiative aimed at disseminating the research of academics from the University to a wider audience of researchers, practitioners and policymakers with an interest in themes of peace, conflict and community relations in Northern Ireland, through the presentation of work in an accessible format. The six articles in this Special Issue represent the multi-disciplinary nature of peace and conflict studies, with contributions from academics working in the fields of sociology, political science, psychology, history and sports science.

All six articles look at different aspects of community relations and/or broader questions of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. Jonny Byrne explores the persistent issue of segregation in the city of Belfast, which is most starkly represented by the erection of physical barriers which divide communities. His piece begins with a prescient quote from a senior civil servant in 1971, in which he cautions against short term decisions to physically separate communities, as they may result in the laying down of 'a pattern of life' for decades to come. Byrne puts the use of walls and barriers as a policy response into international context, referring to the surprising range of examples of separation barriers which have been erected since the 1960s, in cities as diverse as Beirut, Nicosia, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro. He then brings the discussion closer to home, outlining the various challenges associated with so-called 'peace lines', not least the challenge of identifying how many there are in Belfast and who has responsibility for their erection and their possible, future dismantling. Based on Byrne's extensive doctoral

research, he analyses the significance of Belfast's peace walls from five key perspectives and concludes with a warning for both political leaders and communities: that they must work together to address the issue, lest they become an embedded and permanent visible manifestation of the conflict for more years to come.

Kenneth Houston's thought-provoking article on the long-term impact of the power-sharing structures established by the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998, challenges the reader to contemplate the question: What next? Drawing on the experiences of the Lebanon following the Ta'if Accord of 1989, Houston outlines some of the, perhaps unintended, consequences of power-sharing as they relate to the salience of ethnic cleavages, and explores the possibility of Northern Ireland moving into a 'post' power-sharing phase. This article seeks to consider the barriers to the creation of a 'normal' society, not least through what he calls '... the relentless reproduction of the sectarian divide in small ways every day'. He concludes positively with the promotion of an alternate future strategy for the region, based less on substantive identity politics, and more on a notion of functional commonality.

The third article in this issue, by historian Tom Fraser, looks at the topical issue of commemoration and memorialisation in Northern Ireland, placing it within both historical context and contemporary expression. This piece draws on the work of a three-year project based on the dedicated Northern Ireland conflict-focused CAIN website (www.cain.ulst.ac.uk). The article maps some of the key issues to consider in this regard, including the tradition of parading, upcoming anniversaries of notable events in Irish and British history, victims/survivors and memorials to the dead. Fraser concludes with a reminder that the past, while tragic, painful and uncomfortable, still requires acknowledgment and confrontation, for the sake of a shared and reconciled future for the region.

This challenge of progressing reconciliation is the focus of the fourth article by Gráinne Kelly. Summarising the findings of a recently completed qualitative research study which aimed to make a contribution to the identification of future good relations priorities, this study notes the importance of the articulation of a clear vision and direction of travel for Northern Ireland, at both policy and practice levels. The research documented twelve key areas requiring immediate attention over the next five years, including greater cooperation between relevant funding streams, a clearer identification and articulation of effective methodological approaches to address inter-communal division, and a consolidation of the roles and

responsibilities of local councils to deliver on reconciliation objectives. At the time of writing, a re-drafting of the *Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* policy document, first issued for consultation in July 2010, is still awaited, and it remains to be seen if the issues identified in the research study chime with the priorities identified in this new strategic framework for reconciliation in this society in transition.

Effectively evaluating the impact of peace and reconciliation focused projects is the thorny issue grasped in the fifth article by Paul Kitchin. Focusing on the use of sport for peace objectives, this article locates the local experience of Northern Ireland within a growing international discourse on the effectiveness of sport in addressing insidious problems of conflict and development in a range of diverse societies. Drawing on his own personal reflections of evaluating PEACE-funded sports projects, he proposes a new, adaptable methodology to refine the task of measuring the effectiveness and impact of such peacebuilding projects.

Appropriately for this particular journal, in the final article, psychologists McKeown, Stringer and Cairns, pose the question: Is shared space really *shared*? and argues, through three examples of empirical evidence, that the sharing of physical space does not necessarily guarantee meaningful interaction. The research results, drawn from studies of young people in three mixed settings in Northern Ireland, indicate that, at an intergroup behavioural level, worrying patterns of segregation can continue to manifest themselves. Interestingly, these behavioural patterns do change when meaningful group interaction is demonstrably encouraged – an important finding with implications for community relations policy and practice interventions in the future. This issue of shared space is dedicated to the memory of former University of Ulster colleague Professor Ed Cairns – co-author of this article – who contributed so significantly to our understanding of the role of contact theories and practices and the role they play in relationship-building at inter-personal and inter-group level. He will be sorely missed.

Finally, we are grateful to the Community Relations Council for the publication of this special issue of *Shared Space* and for the opportunity to disseminate this research and scholarship to a wider audience.

Gráinne Kelly (Guest Editor)

INCORE