New Spaces and Old in ‘Post-Conflict’ Belfast

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Editorial note
This invited Working Paper is a valuable contribution to the Belfast Workshop being held on the 26th of September 2008 as a part of the Conflict in Cities and the Contested State research project. It illuminates the concerns of several of the Belfast Modules.

Biographical note
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Abstract

Belfast has changed remarkably in the last fifteen years with sustained economic growth, net in-migration and rising house prices reflecting a buoyant post-conflict economy. Rates of ethno-national/religious segregation have also stabilised and new consumption spaces and elite developments further reflect the city’s engagement with globalisation and economic liberalisation. This paper explores the spatial impacts of these forces not least as gentrification has created new layers of residential segregation in a city already preoccupied with high rates of ethno-religious territoriality. A case study of housing change in South Belfast connects these shifts to the production of new mixed-religion neighbourhoods. These have the capacity to reduce the relevance of traditional binary identities; but at the same time new spaces produce new forms of segregation centred on tenure and class. The paper concludes by highlighting the implications for policy makers as new forms of segregation, create deeper exclusions for those in old spaces largely untouched by the peace dividend and economic modernity.

Key words: segregation; urban planning; gentrification; consumption; class restructuring.

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Introduction

Municipalities, property developers, architects and a rapidly changing legion of consultants routinely claim that today’s urban regeneration is creating city spaces that will be more balanced, more attractive, more socially inclusive, more aesthetically harmonious, more environmentally sustainable and generally much better all round (Lovering, 2007, 344).

For Lovering, urban regeneration is a ‘floating signifier’ which ‘in practice does not float very far’ 2007, p.344) as policy has been directed at reducing urban costs and risk and is thus rooted strongly in a liberal economic position. A standard model of development reflects a form of ‘urban cloning’ in which town and city centres look more and more alike with the same multiple retailers, flagship projects, cultural quarters and aesthetics being filtered through a branded localism, designed to draw on indigenous identities and histories (Ideopolis, 2007). In Belfast, these processes have distinctive appeal in the attempt to reposition the city as a neutral, modernising place that has left its parochial sectarianism behind. In the most recent analysis of the State of Belfast, Michael Parkinson (2007) showed
that: Gross Value Added (GVA) was £25,236, second only to Edinburgh in comparison with regional UK cities; the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 4 plus rate was 40%, again second only to Edinburgh; and unemployment had declined in the last 10 years from 9.3% to 3.9%. New elite investment sites have emerged in the central business district, in Laganside and more recently in developments such as Titanic Quarter and Sirocco Quays. The property consultants CRBE (2007) showed that there is presently planning permission for 186,000 sq mts of office space in the city centre and that office take up in Northern Ireland exceeded 40,000 sq mts per annum in both 2005 and 2006.

These changes have an impact on the changing distribution of residential segregation and integration. Shuttleworth and Lloyd (2006) have shown that the Dissimilarity Index for Northern Ireland rose only very slightly from 0.66 in 1991 to 0.67 in 2001. However, their analysis of the Index (with 1.0 being total segregation and zero indicating complete integration) on public sector housing estates in Belfast recorded the high figure of 0.90, which had changed little in the previous 10 years (Shuttleworth and Lloyd, 2007). Similarly, the Government's review of poverty in Northern Ireland showed that of households in the bottom and second quintile of low income, 81% were living in Housing Executive property (in 2005/06), an increase from 73% in 2002/03 (DSD, 2007). A twin speed city has emerged in the last decade in which those with education and skills are doing well in key growth sectors whilst those without resources are increasingly corralled in 'sink' estates, stratified by poverty, segregation and fear. Thus, new interface separation barriers have been built in the last ten years at the same time as new mixed housing spaces have developed in the high value end of the housing market especially in the south of the city.

Deloitte (2007) suggested that the diseconomies of segregation could amount to £1.5b in direct, indirect and opportunity costs, in terms of 'lost jobs (27,600 from 1983-2000), investment (£225 million GVA) and tourism (£1,461 million at 2006 prices)' (Deloitte, 2007, 90). The Portland Trust (2007) also highlighted the economy as the major driver in improving community relations, closing the differential between Catholics and Protestants and increasing the prospects for integration. Residential integration is thus presented as a moral, rational and political project in which material prosperity will overwrite tribal allegiances in the creation of new social and physical spaces. In 'the good city', this is worked out via the housing market or what Squires and Kurbin (2005) called 'diversity by circumstance', whilst 'the recalcitrant city' slips further into social disadvantage, fatalism and competition for scarce resources.
This paper seeks to locate this restructuring within wider shifts in property capital, gentrification and local labour markets. Yiftachel and Yacobi (2003) argued that the ‘ethnocratic city’ is shaped by a complex interplay between capital, governance and ethnicity. Where ethnicity prevails and the state bolsters the dominate group, segregation is reproduced. Where capital is attracted to new investment sites and when the state incentivises the property economy to challenge spatial sectarian inefficiencies, ethnic structures become less relevant. The analysis suggests that these three drivers are configured differently in different parts of Belfast and it sees value in linking gentrification with processes of gating, studentification, elite investment sites and heritage planning as part of a wider process of post-conflict normalization and urban competitiveness. The analysis concludes by highlighting the dark side of Belfast boosterism, especially for communities largely untouched by economic progress and where ethnicity still matters in space and politics.

**Post-conflict adjustment and class restructuring**

In their evaluation of the slow pace of desegregation in the post-Apartheid city, Lemon and Clifford (2005) criticized the political emphasis on economic growth, infrastructure and humanizing the townships at the expense of more ambitious deconstruction initiatives. Reintegration has been most successful for the Coloured and Asian population fueled by their relative labour market mobility and purchasing power in the housing system (Christopher, 2005). Reliance on the private sector for housing supply and a planning regime that values the pragmatism of market solutions is part of the problem (Turok, 2001). Ultimately, as Lemon and Clifford note, it is the slow pace of labour market restructuring that accounts for the speed and spatial distribution of desegregation. Urban areas have been characterised by ‘re-segregation within a process of desegregation’ whereby new socially segmented spaces simply overlay stubborn patterns of racial segregation (Lemon and Clifford, 2005, 8).

In Northern Ireland, this restructuring is more dynamic as the rise of a new middle-class population, disproportionately Catholic, has colonised suburban neighbourhoods, already established wealthy areas, and the gentrified middle-city. These places are connected, especially within a discrete housing and labour market in South Belfast. Yiftachel and Ghanem (2004) explained the reproductive capacity of the ethnocratic city where the state deploys land use instruments to ensure the hegemony of the dominant ethnic group. But as noted they also point out that ethnocracy is fluid and that it is the interplay between ethnicity, governance and capital that will ultimately determine the socio-spatial structuring of
segregated cities. Capital, economic modernisation and materialism have always been deployed as part of the state strategy for managing the Northern Ireland crises. Shirlow, for instance, saw the development of the public sector and fair employment as deliberative tactics to grow the 'middle ground' and challenge atavism:

This aim has been pursued through a policy of socio-political normalisation and the adoption of practices whose primary goal is to secure the construction of a set of social relationships which, it is hoped, will transcend sectarian hostilities and engender socio-economic normality (Shirlow, 1997, 99).

An expanded public sector and sub-vented economy characterised government funding, even during the free market economics of the Thatcher period. Comprehensive fair employment legislation and social mobility among Catholics has removed them from the experience of labour market discrimination. Using time series data on labour mobility, Miller concluded that unlike the past generations in 1973/74 data, if Catholics and non-Catholics began their working lives in 1996/97 with the same levels of education and first job, their mobility through their careers will not be directly advantaged or disadvantaged by religion (2004, 63). Nearly one-third of the jobs created in Northern Ireland between 1990 and 1995 were professional, managerial or administrative positions. The Catholic share of new employment grew by a third between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s and over 70% of the successful applicants for new positions had third-level education and came from the middle-classes (Shirlow, 1997).

These changes also reflect wider labour market restructuring in the region and the impact of a globalised economy. Traditional industries in heavy engineering, textiles and shipbuilding which primarily benefited Protestants, haemorrhaged jobs in the 1970s and 1980s as a service economy drew more heavily on Catholic graduates who were disproportionately competent in the communicative skills demanded by the sector (Osborne, 2004). The growth in further education and the traditional value placed on education in Catholic households expanded the Catholic middle class from a narrow base to one mainstreamed in both public and private markets (Miller, 2004). Labour market mobility, social mobility and housing mobility saw this cohort progress spatially into high value neighbourhoods to the south of the city:

The speed with which Catholic lawyers, doctors, accountants, and entrepreneurs of various kinds have developed access to political decision-making and their way into an economic mainstream, once closed to them, has left nerves jangling inside the Catholic community and beyond it (O’Connor, 1993, p.16).
Graham and Shirlow (1998) argued that class mobility created an increasingly discordant material set of experiences for middle- and low-income Catholics and that the more affluent tentatively embraced a degree of rapprochement towards the British state. Similarly, the Protestant middle-class have also been affected by social mobility. In cultural terms they have tended to remove themselves from the Orange Order and Masonic lodges and are free to pursue their interests in civil society and church related activity (Elliott, 2002). Thus, whilst traditional binary identities have not disappeared they are less materially relevant for the consumption class that has emerged in the last decade. Moreover, as they are spatially de-coupled from segregation by religion, new opportunities, lifestyles and interests are shaped in a realignment of residence, work and entertainment. These processes are hardly new, but their lateness and imprint on Belfast’s development are distinctive, opportunistic and also problematic.

Place restructuring and consumption

In his analyses of post-modern urbanism Michael Dear identified multiple forms of spatial restructuring including the emergence of the Dual City.

One of the most persistent themes in contemporary urban analysis is social polarisation i.e. the increasing gap between rich and poor; between the powerful and the powerless; between different ethnic, racial and religious groupings; and between genders (Dear, 2000, p.160).

Dear drew on the work of Mike Davis who noted how the Californian obsession with insecurity in work, space and residence has deepened social isolation and segregation. Physically, gated residence reinforced by ‘space policing’ has produced realignment between the poor and destitute sequestered in low rent districts from the affluent living in fortified neighbourhoods (Davies, 1990). Other advanced western cities have been reshaped by deindustrialization, the shift to a service economy and the global flow of capital and knowledge (Soja, 2000). Class realignment, the insecurities of labour and housing markets and everyday practices of segregation propel a desire for social homogeneity and the safety it has the potential to offer.

The result is socio-spatial segregation as groups cluster together based on their income but also key aspects of social identity, stage in the life-course and household type … This kind of ‘dynamic segregation’ is facilitated by information technologies and changes in transport as well as housing and urban policies that seek to create havens for investment by removing or making available, low-income neighbourhoods (Atkinson, 2006, p.820).
Atkinson (2006) identified three types of middle-class self-imposed disaffiliation in the city: insulation; incubation and incarceration. The stages are often interlinked with *insulation* reflecting household preference for status neighbourhoods connected to personal expressions of identity; whilst *incubation* describes a move along the urban hierarchy in order to achieve higher degrees of personal and familial security. Here, sanctuary is important and afforded by the presence of people who share economic positions, mores and values. The third, and most extreme form of disaffiliation is *incarceration* reflected in gating, surveillance and the absence of public sector housing, itself deployed as a marketing tactic to draw in suitable socio-demographic buyers. Fear of crime, in particular, characterises the way in which communities are fortified by security booms, environmental buffer zones and cul-de-sac designs.

Atkinson and Blandy (2005) reviewed a range of perspectives on gentrification from definitions that stress the need to focus on housing dynamics to others who see fortified neighbourhoods as part of wider processes of urban restructuring and colonisation. Bridge (2007), for instance, argued that gentrification is a component in the production of a revanchist city in which political and social forces reclaim central areas for the upper social classes. Graham and Marvin (2001) also argued that the process of gating is part of a wider disengagement strategy in which elite factions circulate within and between secure residential, workplace, education and leisure destinations. This form of ‘urban bubbling’ (Atkinson and Flint 2004) see prosperous households moving within and between insulated domestic, employment and leisure districts and in the context of the emerging habitus of south Belfast these connections are important. Gating in suburban neighbourhoods, gentrification in the middle-city, new high density apartments on the edge of the city centre all reflect the restructuring of spatially well defined housing markets.

It is therefore useful to see the processes of gentrification along with other drivers of urban restructuring aimed at reinforcing the elite character of safer places. Smith and Holt (2007) showed how student-led gentrification in Brighton and Leeds is linked to the wide scale promotion of knowledge based societies and economies. Oberti (2007) similarly deployed the concept of ‘circuits of education’ to demonstrate a connection between educational space and neighbourhoods where skills and knowledge essential to the growth economy are prized. Policy makers have understood the potential of these processes to create dynamic,
exiting and ultimately, marketable places. Thus, Lees (2003) argued that urban policy in Britain brings together ideas about sustainability, livability and town centre living that are remarkably close to visions of gentrification. Atkinson notes:

The need to develop ‘lively cities’ with a distinctive ‘buzz’ to them, as spaces of spectacle, excitement and ‘livability’ is clearly designed to attract young and affluent groups back to or retained in these cities (Atkinson, 2006, p.826).

For a city whose recent imagery has been built on violence, peace lines and fear, the formation of low risk, glitzy and speculator investment sites has been a vital strategy in normalization and place marketing. Belfast has been ‘quarterized’ in order to create neutral images of the past and create new sites for tourists, investors and moneyed residents. Much of this has evoked the city’s solid and 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).

McNeill and Tewdwr-Jones (2003) pointed to the use of architecture and public art to bolster a ‘banal nationalism’ as devolved regions seek to assert themselves in a re-territorialized Europe. The Cardiff Bay development centered on media services features strongly in the re-branding of Wales or a certain version of Welshness in contemporary Europe.

In this sense we might argue that ‘local’ identities compete with their respective nation-state elites, which then respond with their own strategies of banal imaging (McNeill and Tewdwr-Jones, 2003, p.742).

In Belfast, the local and the nation state are problematic, forcing a deeper banality on public space and design. Minty (2006) showed how part of the reconstruction project in South Africa involved symbolic reparations and restitution in which ‘independent producers of non-governmental cultural projects, critically engage with issues of geography, memory and transformation’ (p.422). In modernising Belfast, difficult territories and pasts are sanitized with the zoning of new quarters that tell of a different social economic history. Even that, however, is contested. The adoption of Titanic Quarter instead of the area’s traditional
name of Queens Island, may help veneer over aspects of the shipyard’s unsavory past in terms of discrimination and poor working conditions. The fact that the ship, itself, never actually made it anywhere seems to be a minor point of detail given the global recognition of the brand, bolstered by the Hollywood blockbuster. Fortification, studentification, quarterisation and the promotion of new investment sites play into each other in the reproduction of south Belfast. For Minty, conflict transformation needs to be a story of ‘reconciliation authenticity’ about places and their memory which can open ‘a whole set of new narratives linked to previously marginalized stories and histories and its imaginings for a better future’ (2006, p.438). As we show in the next section, it is the construction of a new set of modernist narratives that most characterises the formation of south Belfast and it is the housing market, in the form of vigorous gentrification, that provides the dynamic for change.

Case study: The south Belfast housing market and mixing

This section summarises research into the recent performance of the south Belfast housing market in the context of ‘mixed’ religion communities. Methodologically, it consists of three components including: secondary data analysis of mixed religion areas in Northern Ireland; a survey of households in the mixed ward of Ballynafeigh and a series of in-depth interviews with local housing actors and community representatives.

Mixed wards in Northern Ireland

It was noted earlier that there have been a number of authoritative studies on the changing nature of spatial segregation in Northern Ireland and the problems with inter-census comparison, the level of spatial analysis and data reliability (Shuttleworth and Lloyd, 2006). The analysis presented here is less concerned with the temporal or spatial distribution of segregation and more with the structure of areas that are not dominated by one religion or the other. Drawing on research on tipping points and institutional capacity (Boal, 1996) the analysis categorised Northern Ireland’s 582 wards into: segregated Protestant (where the P population is >70%); Roman Catholic segregated where the RC population is >70%; and mixed where the population of P and RC was <70%). The analysis of the 2001 Census showed that of all 582 wards, 236 (41%) were Protestant segregated, 154 (27%) were Roman Catholic segregated and 192 (33%) were mixed. In order to understand the structure of mixed neighbourhoods, 15 socio-economic variables were
subjected to Factor Analysis, which is a data reduction technique aimed at producing summary variables from a larger array of indicators (see table 2 for a list of the variables). When the mixed ward data were analysed, two summary factors emerged and these are shown in the factor structure table, which together account for 68% of the variation in the data.

Table 1 Total variance explained

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of variance</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.605</td>
<td>50.700</td>
<td>50.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.602</td>
<td>17.344</td>
<td>68.045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 1 is strongly correlated with social housing and poverty sensitive variables including: unemployment; receipt of Income Support; receipt of Housing Benefit; being a lone parent; and having a Long Standing Illness. It is also negatively correlated with owner occupation, higher social class, and car ownership. Neighbourhoods that score highly here include wards in regional towns that have a tradition of shared space including Limavady which contains a number of wards with high coefficients in this factor. Areas that score highly in this factor also include some middle-city communities such as Botanic in Belfast and Ebrington in Derry/Londonderry.
Table 2 Factor structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work as Manager</td>
<td>-.478</td>
<td>.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more cars</td>
<td>-.850</td>
<td>-.386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically active</td>
<td>-.310</td>
<td>.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Class 1+2</td>
<td>-.484</td>
<td>.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner Occupation</td>
<td>-.857</td>
<td>-.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detached house</td>
<td>-.657</td>
<td>-.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>-.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long standing Illness</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>-.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own a BMW</td>
<td>-.452</td>
<td>.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime rate</td>
<td>.529</td>
<td>.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing benefit</td>
<td>.946</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Support</td>
<td>.860</td>
<td>-.200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Education</td>
<td>-.598</td>
<td>.203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Housing</td>
<td>.913</td>
<td>.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone Parent</td>
<td>.813</td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 2 clearly reflects a more middle-class distribution, evidenced by the comparatively high coefficients for social class, occupational status and ownership of up-market cars. The most recent estimates from the Noble Index of spatial deprivation (DSD, 2005) show that these areas, in the main, are the least deprived in Northern Ireland. The table below shows that there were 14 wards with a coefficient greater than 1.5 and of these 10 were in the outer south Belfast area, including Ballynafeigh and a cluster of wards in Castlereagh, which are, Beechill, Cairnshill, Galwally, Knockbracken and Newtownbreda.
Table 3 Wards with a coefficient >1.5 on factor 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>District Council</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Study area catchment</th>
<th>Noble Rank 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballynafeigh</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malone</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranmillis</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>554</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Malone</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beechill</td>
<td>Castlereagh</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairnshill</td>
<td>Castlereagh</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galwally</td>
<td>Castlereagh</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knockbracken</td>
<td>Castlereagh</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newtownbreda</td>
<td>Castlereagh</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Portrush</td>
<td>Coleraine</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallusk</td>
<td>Newtownabbey</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holywood</td>
<td>North Down</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loughview</td>
<td>North Down</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next strongest cluster was Malone, Upper Malone, Windsor and Stranmillis. It is argued latter that Ballynafeigh performs a pivotal role in linking housing markets in these areas as a transitional neighbourhood offering a bridge from the wider University district to housing in south east of the city in particular. Moreover, it is important to see Ballynafeigh nested within a wider coherent spread of mixed housing in this part of Belfast as shown in the map below. The conditions to maintain and reproduce mixed patterns are still strong in Ballynafeigh, albeit that they are both social and tenure specific.
Figure 2 shows Ballynafeigh in the context of south Belfast and here, context is all important. The area is surrounded by open space, parkland and a river, which itself has become a focal point for waterfront investment. The relative topographic porosity of the area, with especially strong public transport connections, contrasts with the high levels of segregation in the west and north of the city. It is also physically well connected to the Central Business District and new elite investment spaces in the former gasworks site, which was the last major project of the Laganside Development Corporation.
Importantly, the area is contiguous with the University precinct and as noted, studentification has displaced an established working class community in the Holy Lands and pressure is mounting on the small Nationalist community in the lower Ormeau. Interviews with a local estate agent also suggested that a ‘graduate population has moved big time into Ballynafeigh’ as the nearest cheapest district to the high rent Malone and Stranmillis areas (interview with estate agent A). The questionnaire survey involved a random sample of 287 households of the 2,538 in Ballynafeigh ward. It records the changing socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the area, especially linked to the arrival of younger, professional, single person and primarily Catholic households. Of the households who have lived in the area less than 5 years, 49% were Catholic, 26% were Protestant and significantly 68% were Mixed religion, suggesting that Ballynafeigh offers a retreat space for the later group. The majority of households have moved to the area from the wider University housing market (71%) and the data showed comparatively little penetration from more working-class neighbourhoods in the lower Ormeau or Ravenhill. Protestant households were more likely to be Older Person (33%) than Catholics (13%), with
the latter more likely to be Single Person (25%) or Smaller households (22%). Similarly, Catholics earned higher incomes than either Protestant neighbours or the Northern Ireland population as a whole. Thirty percent of Catholic households in Ballynafagh earned more than £20,000 per annum compared with 18% of Protestant households in the area and 21% for all households in Northern Ireland as a whole.

The data also showed that the residents of Ballynafagh were much less concerned with the state of community relations, more optimistic about the peace process and enjoyed stronger social closure than the rest of the population. For instance, 46% of Northern Ireland households said that they were concerned about community relations between Catholics and Protestants, whilst 33% of Ballynafagh residents felt the same way. Similarly, the data showed that Catholic networks of association tended to be more aspatial with Protestants more likely to participate in locally based voluntarism, community work and neighbourliness when measured against a range of social indicators. Only 32% of Catholics felt that their ‘local community felt like home’, compared with 40% for Protestants, whilst 35% of Catholics ‘had lunch or dinner outside the neighbourhood’ in the last week compared with just 21% of Protestants. Forty two per cent of Catholics described themselves as Nationalist and 40% of Protestants called themselves Unionist. Catholics, in particular, were more likely to express multiple identities although relatively even numbers of Protestants and Catholics asserted that their primary identity was that of a parent (21%) and 21% of all households said that they did not identify themselves with either traditional political category.

Evidence of these demographic shifts were reinforced in interviews with estate agents, letting companies and mortgage providers operating in Ballynafagh. The interviews highlighted the dynamic nature of recent change and in particular, rapid house price increase, the attraction of the area to investors and the restructuring of tenure, linked in particular to the growth of the private rented sector. The two largest estate agents suggested that half of all sales in the last two years have been investors, although the market has cooled in the first quarter of 2008. Part of the attraction to investors has undoubtedly been the stability and growth in the market and ‘the way it (Ballynafiegh) has a good image as being safe, neutral and attractive to renters’ Interview with Estate Agent A). One estate agent pointed out that the Ormeau area has developed a distinctive image, which is appealing to and is reinforced by the arrival of young professional people:
The area has a certain cache – it has replaced Stranmillis which has been ruined – its all renting and people have been put off by the prices and number of rented properties. Ten years ago you wouldn’t go into a pub in the Ormeau Road and now there are fancy restaurants and niche shops – it’s a good place to hang out (Interview with estate agent B).

The displacement effects of Stranmillis on investors are mirrored in the behaviour of renters. In general, estate agents were able to identify three sources of demand:

- Students graduating from the University find the Stranmillis and Malone areas too expensive and are priced out to cheaper but familiar markets in Ballynafeigh. Linked to this, a number of agents suggest that people working in Belfast and moving from outside the city find its cost and neutrality attractive.
- There are also young two person and new forming households who both rent but more especially purchase in the apartment sector. Interestingly, a number of agents identified this cohort (together with investors) as contributing to the affordability problem for indigenous households. Local people can be active and enthusiastic at the start of the bidding process but are ‘quickly out-bid by people from outside the area’ (Interview estate agent C).
- Migrant workers, principally from eastern Europe find the area safe, especially in the context of rising racial attacks across Belfast. One estate agent highlighted the role of Ballynafeigh in assimilating new, wary and uninformed migrants into the city. ‘They use texts and e-mail back home to Poland and Latvia telling people where it is safe and unsafe to live. Some houses will accommodate 12 people until they get sorted. They like it because they get no hassle’ (Interview estate agent D).

People who are selling tend to be: older households looking to downsize; families cashing in on house price increases; and people selling to go back to their ‘home place’ outside Belfast. Estate agents suggest that households who sell and stay in Belfast, migrate up the Ormeau Road to Four Winds, Cairnshill and Carryduff. The Bell Towers, which was built in the upper Ormeau Road is shown in figure 3. Interestingly, the development is on the site of an old convent and the high surrounding walls have been retained as a design feature but are now complemented by a gated security system and restricted access to reinforce insulation.
Figure 3 Bell Towers, Upper Ormeau Road

The lead estate agent for both the Curzon site (figure 4) and the old Ormeau Bakery development suggested a similar profile in each case. In the Bakery, a planning application has been made for 145 ‘loft’ apartments together with ground floor retailing. Estate Agent B pointed out that these three sites, in pivotal locations, will reinforce the changing character of the area and will have spill over effects on the socio-demographic profile of South Belfast. As the area was increasingly populated by small, young and primarily professional households new shops, bars, restaurants, gyms and speciality food outlets displaced the areas traditional retail structure. The re-imaging of Ballynafeigh also affected contiguous housing markets and one estate agent noted that the changing social and religious character of the area had impacted on the Ravenhill Road, with Catholic buyers now prepared to spot purchase in a traditionally Protestant neighbourhood. This trend was also identified in the Housing Executive’s study on Affordability in the Private Sector in Northern Ireland, which indicated wider search patterns for first time buyers in particular:

Estate agents also suggest that although there is a strong tendency for first time buyers to stay and buy in their own community, circumstances are changing due to house price inflation with an increasing willingness to shift beyond traditional locations (NIHE, 2001, p.85).
Policy and change

The encouragement of mixed tenure and affordable housing development and the creation of sustainable communities suggest an engagement with the idea that social diversity at the neighbourhood scale is an important aspect of long term success. However, these moves run counter to what has been viewed here as deeply embedded social requirements that are antagonistic to social integration between different social strata and identities (Atkinson, 2006, p.831).

In Belfast, these contrary policies are delivered in an increasingly confused and complex way. The proliferation of agencies and governance structures to manage spatial planning has, in particular, reduced the capacity for connected and concerted attempts to direct or extract some gain from the new economy (Tyler, 2004). Certainly, land use policy in the broadest sense, has tapped into the need to address ethno-segregation and its relationship to social need. The Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy has set Strategic Planning Guideline (SPG) 3 with the twin aims of addressing the worst effects of segregation and interfacing whilst at the same time promoting neutral space and mixing where practicable (DRD, 2001). However, it is difficult to see where or how this objective is being translated
into deliverable programmes or actions in area Development Plans. For instance, the Equality Impact Assessment for the current Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (2015) identifies 408.97 hectares or one-third of all residential zonings that could support mixed religion housing, yet there is nothing in the Plan to suggest how this could be achieved or what planning regime might incentivise integrated developments (DOE, 2004).

The region’s housing agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, also introduced a Community Cohesion policy aimed at removing sectarian graffiti from its estates, supporting community projects at interfaces and developing mixed religion housing (NIHE, 2005). One pilot mixed estate of 20 houses in Enniskillen has been built, although the agency failed to get derogation from Waiting List policy that operates on a strict needs based points system. The derogation would have allowed the Housing Executive to manage allocations and transfers to achieve and maintain a balance of Protestant and Catholic households. Northern Ireland’s main urban regeneration strategy in disadvantaged areas, Neighbourhood Renewal (DSD, 2003) targets integrated development programmes in the 30 most deprived places. It also acknowledges the role of segregation in deepening exclusion and the need to deal with the legacy of territoriality in the context of local development.

However, few of these commitments appear in District Housing Plans or Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plans, which guide financial resource allocations and programme management. Part of the reason is a lack of skills to translate high level commitments to operational practice but the shift in politics and policy toward the market has increasingly marginalised the priority attached to community relations and dependency programmes. The re-formed Northern Ireland Assembly’s Programme for Government and associated Budget signalled a fundamental shift from the public sector to the market as the main driver of growth (OFMDFM 2008a; 2008b). The new Executive, dominated by the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, drawing support mainly from working class Protestant and Catholic communities respectively, enthusiastically dispensed the neo-liberal medicine for a dysfunctional economy, too reliant on subvention, state jobs and complacency. Enterprise and innovation are at the heart of a modernising strategy in which infrastructure will play its role in making the region more globally competitive. This was underscored in the US Investment Conference, held in May 2008 as one of series to stimulate interest in corporate America in Northern Ireland as a ready, profitable investment opportunity, which was already well on the up:
When America’s corporate elite – in Belfast for the Northern Ireland-US investment conference – draw back the curtains of their hotel rooms they will see a city skyline dominated by cranes. Not the great yellow Samson and Goliath cranes of the shipyard, but the work-horses of the construction industry that is rebuilding the city. There is barely a street corner where there is not some concrete evidence of the peace dividend that the city, and indeed the whole province, has reaped in the past decade. From luxury riverside apartments to prime office space, from new retail outlets to leisure facilities this is a boom time Northern Ireland (White, 2008, p.25).

The Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (2015) provides direction to this new spatial economy and has recommended that 70% of residential development should be located on Brownfield sites and that four new Major Employment Locations (MELS) in Lisburn West, Mallusk, Purdysburn and Titanic Quarter will dominate industrial zonings. Titanic Quarter is especially important in the city’s rehabilitation with a vision ‘as a high profile development firmly rooted in the history and character of Belfast acting as a driver for high quality investment and development in the city’ (http://www.titanic-quarter.com, accessed May 2008). The project is presented as ‘Europe’s most exciting waterfront’ on a 185 acre site involving the construction of: over 5,000 apartments; 180,000 sq mts of business, education, office and Research and Development floor space; and a mix of bars hotels and leisure facilities totalling 40,000 sq mts. The private sector led development of £1billion is expected to create 20,000 new jobs in the next 15 years.

How these places fit with the broader economic geography of disadvantage is far from clear. The spatial and skills mismatch experienced by the most disadvantaged communities is accentuated by deeply structural segregation and the level of competence required in the high value service labour market. The accessibility of car borne, highly connected, educationally mobile classes is guaranteed, not least given the juxtaposition of two MELS to the wider south Belfast population. The case study highlighted the emergence of affordability in transitional housing markets and despite a wide ranging review of the issues (Semple Review, 2007) progress has been slow in delivering practical measures to secure balanced communities. There is no equivalent of Section 106 Agreements (which mandate a minimum proportion of social and affordable housing in new schemes) and despite a review of Planning Policy Statement 12 on residential development, planning gain is rarely used to lever affordable or social housing outcomes. Given a policy history in which any investment was prized, there seems to be a certain reluctance to intervene with risk adverse commercial
and residential projects. Whilst this caution may be understood in the context of violence, it is less explicable in the contemporary growth economy. Whatever the rhetoric about neutral spaces and mixed religion housing, the local policy discourse is preoccupied with creating an enabling environment for growth and property renewal.

**Conclusions**

Yiftachel and Ghanem (2004) argued that ethnocratic cities are reproduced when the state deploys policy and resources, directs capital and maintains the hegemony of dominant political groups. In Belfast, governance, capital and ethnicity are dynamic and fluid but the relationship between them is becoming increasingly spatially differentiated. The British state traditionally sought to deploy capital as an instrument of crises management and normalisation during three decades violence. The post-conflict economy has grown selectively both sectorally and spatially. South Belfast in particular is shaped by a concentrated and connected set of processes as the property economy has responded to labour and housing market restructuring. This has brought with it new investment, jobs and wealth but its wider effects are problematic for conflict transformation in the city.

The DUP and Sinn Finn have distanced themselves from the more explicit sharing agenda introduced by Direct Rule Ministers. The latest Programme for Government and associated budget has downgraded the assault on sectarianism and segregation in education, work and residence proposed in the Shared Future approach. The political extremes have negotiated a consensus around the limits to cross-community investment; it is hardly in their political interests to do otherwise. But whole areas and communities have been left behind by a decade of modernity, creating new resentments about who paid most during the Troubles and benefited least during the peace (Aughey, 2005). The city is characterised by new forms of disconnections as social disadvantage and the frictional effects of segregation further exclude the west and north from the economic optimism of the south. Two-thirds of all deaths in Belfast during the Troubles occurred less than 500mts from a peace line and the most segregated wards are also the poorest (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006, p.73). Immobility is a key index of disadvantage as those with the skills, purchasing power, transport and easy access to employment and consumption are differentiated from those trapped in the sink estates in the inner- and outer-city. This highlights three possible areas for policy
development especially to capitalise on growth in a way that is more socially and spatially inclusive.

First, there needs to be a new approach to understanding the role and modes of public transport needed to open opportunity for areas with the highest rates of transport poverty and segregation. The city’s bus system operates along radial routes feeding the city centre but pays little attention to the way in which segregation mediates movement and creates distinctive mental maps that marginalise engagement with the wider city. Flexible and demand responsive transport has been difficult to develop because of financial and legal operating constraints but with devolution the resolution to build a genuinely shared society must find its way out of community relations programmes into mainstream policy domains. Desegregation in north, east and west Belfast is unlikely to happen quickly or easily, thus opening opportunity around access via forms of transport that respond to peoples lived experiences of the city, may help in the short term.

Second, connectivity relates to urban labour markets as well as spatial movement. Northern Ireland benefited from considerable investment in the social economy with intermediate labour market interventions enjoying particular success with hard to reach groups (Morrissey, 2005). This investment has been dramatically reduced, especially as the EU PEACE funds have been depleted, undermining the start-up investment made in establishing schemes for the city. Traditional skills based programmes are unlikely, on their own, to attract the most marginal and interventions that combine training with patient community development approaches need to be recognised. Specific programmes aimed at interface areas might be one way of assisting in that process. The complex nature of exclusion experienced in these places might invite a generic spatial response in interface planning, matched with the policy enthusiasm and resources that have regenerated Laganside, the Gasworks, city centre and Titanic Quarter. The Belfast Interface Project provides training, support and funding for groups working in peaceine neighbourhoods and is one illustration of innovation and risk taking in difficult circumstances. However, the experience of the project and lessons for mainstream policy and practice has not been capitalised, especially in political circles.

Third, in Britain, the Egan Review redefined the skills set required to develop and maintain Sustainable Communities (Egan, 2004). There has been no equivalent in Northern Ireland
but it is clear that a sharper set of competencies to do with managing segregation, connectivity and planning gain are urgently required. This needs to be located within a clearer and simpler policy framework that places the legacy of segregation and exclusion at the heart of urban planning and regeneration. Belfast’s renaissance will be put at risk if the city simply displaces one form of segregation with another. The lateness of these processes and an understanding of experience and practice in other places may provide an opportunity to rethink the purpose and nature of spatial planning in the post-conflict city.
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