

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: Queen’s University Belfast</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: History</p>
<p>Title of case study: Civic Culture and Identity Practices in Belfast since the late eighteenth century.</p>
<p>1.Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Research on the history of Belfast from the late eighteenth century has had a direct impact over the past eight years on the efforts of the municipality and the devolved government to formulate a policy on parades, flags and other disputed identity practices, to develop a strategy for managing the politically contentious issue of anniversaries, and to promote a shared sense of heritage in a divided city (impact no. 1). The research has also had an impact in two other areas: civil society (impact no. 2) and public discourse (impact no. 3).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research had two phases. The first was an interdisciplinary project, “Imagining Belfast” (2005-8). This brought together: (a) a historical review of identity practices in Belfast over the past two centuries, including the creation of a database of recorded crowd events at intervals across the period; (b) an ethnographical survey of contemporary identity practices, and of public policy towards the regulation of public space. The second (2009-12), leading to the publication of the collaborative volume <i>Belfast 400</i>, involved a more broadly based survey of urban development, but retained a particular focus on the long term development of civic identity and its representation in ceremonial and commemoration, as well as on patterns of belonging and exclusion as determined by religion, class, gender and ethnicity.</p> <p><u>Key findings</u></p> <p>The central thrust of the research was to move away from a narrow focus on the long term origins of Belfast’s political and religious divisions, conceived of as a zero sum conflict between clearly defined and irreconcilably opposed identities. Key findings relevant to the impact claimed are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complex and multidimensional character of identity in Belfast, based on shifting combinations of ethnicity, religion, civic localism and class. This has provided an important underpinning for impact no. 1: policy recommendations stressing the need to move beyond the simplistic notion of adjudicating between the claims of two competing, historically grounded traditions. • The need to understand recent and current disputes over identity practices in a historical context. Modern urban development replaced private spaces, whether the gentleman’s demesne or the inner city court, with public ones: squares, public parks and arterial roads. These new spaces had then to be controlled, by police, bye laws and new codes of behaviour. They also had to be given an identity, with street names, flags and statues. Meanwhile, suburbanisation created a novel division between residential and non-residential districts. These findings, emphasising the changing character over time of public space, and the extent to which its use has always been subject to negotiation, have provided essential underpinnings for impact no. 1: policy recommendations stressing the need to define concepts of citizenship and the civic. • It was central to the research design that <i>Belfast 400</i> should not be a sanitised history: a substantial chapter examines patterns of exclusion and inequality in terms of class, religion, gender and ethnicity. At the same time the overall narrative, emphasising the complexity and fluid nature of identity, explicitly challenges aspects of both nationalist and unionist master narratives of the city’s history, offering instead an alternative, more inclusive vision of its past (impact no. 3). • A new perspective on the history of Belfast as a city participating in the master narrative of both British and Irish urban development, but fully belonging to neither. This approach has become central to a strategy of developing the four hundredth anniversary of the city’s

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charter (**impact no. 2**) in ways consistent with the city's commitment to developing a cross community focus for civic identity, and will thus help to set the tone for a forthcoming succession of more politically charged anniversaries (the Easter Rising, the Government of Ireland Act, partition).

Key researchers

The research for *Imagining Belfast* was conducted by S.J. Connolly, Professor of Irish History, and Dr Dominic Bryan, reader in Social Anthropology, assisted by Dr Gillian McIntosh (Research Officer 2005-7) and Dr John Nagle (Research Officer 2006-7). The research for *Belfast 400* was by S.J. Connolly, assisted by Dr Gillian McIntosh (Research Officer 2010-11).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Outputs

Connolly, S.J. "Like an Old Cathedral City": Belfast Welcomes Queen Victoria' *Urban History*, 39/4 (2012), 571-89. Listed in REF 2.

Connolly, S.J. 'Belfast: The Rise and Fall of a Civic Culture?', in Olwen Purdue (ed.), *Belfast: The Emerging City 1850-1914* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2012), pp 25-48. Supplied by HEI on request.

Connolly, S.J. (ed.), *Belfast 400: People, Place and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). Connolly is author of chapter 5 and joint author with McIntosh of chapters 1 and 7. Bryan is author of chapter 9. Supplied by HEI on request..

Connolly, S.J. & Bryan, Dominic, 'Identity, Social Action, and Public Space: A Belfast Case Study', in M. Wetherell (ed.), *Theorizing Identities and Social Action* (London: Palgrave, 2009), pp 220-37. Supplied by HEI on request.

McIntosh, G., 'Portraiture and the Mayoralty in Mid-Victorian Belfast', *Urban History*, 35 (2008), 363-81. Supplied by HEI on request.

Nagle, J. [with Mary-Alice Clancy], *Sharing Society or Benign Apartheid: Understanding Peace Building in Divided Societies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Supplied by HEI on request.

Grants

(i) ESRC 2005-8: £146,485

PI : Prof. Sean Connolly

Title: *Imagining Belfast: Politics, Rituals, Symbols, and Crowds*

(ii) Belfast City Council 2005-6 £5,000

PI: Dr Dominic Bryan

Title: Evaluating the Good Relations outcomes of the St Patrick's Day Carnival in Belfast

(iii) Leverhulme Trust 2010-11: £58,149

PI: Prof. Sean Connolly

Title: *Belfast: An Urban History*

Evidence of Quality

The ESRC project 'Imagining Belfast' was graded 'good' by two external assessors and 'outstanding' by a third. Published outputs are in refereed journals and books from university presses.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Narrative

Considerations of impact were from the beginning central to both parts of the research. "Imagining Belfast" (2005-8) was developed as part of the ESRC funded programme on Identities and Social Action. One of the aims of the programme was to "address the links between identity processes and three particular areas of practical concern: (i) community cohesion,

(ii) political participation and (iii) social exclusion". In line with this priority it was from the start envisaged that "Imagining Belfast", through the collaboration with Dr Bryan, would have a contemporary as well as a historical dimension, and that the results would feed into Dr Bryan's ongoing work as an adviser to public bodies in Northern Ireland on policy relating to parades, emblems and other identity practices. The successful completion of this project led Belfast City Council, in partnership with Liverpool University Press, to commission a book that would provide a historical context for the forthcoming anniversary celebrations. The agreed specifications for the volume were that it should bring together the results of the most recent academic research on every aspect of the town's history, but in a form that would be accessible to a broad non-specialist readership. The project thus proceeded as an exercise in public history, and involved close collaboration with the city council's Heritage Office.

Impact 1. Policy making

The findings outlined above relating to the status of definitions of public space and of the civic sphere as historically contingent, rather than as given absolutes, have formed the basis for a series of interventions that have had a direct impact on the formulation of policy at municipal and government level.

- Belfast City Council, the Community Relations Council and the "Imagining Belfast" project team arranged a one day seminar (29 January 2008) entitled *Developing Shared Spaces in Belfast* intended to involve all the major policy stake holders in the area. The seminar was attended by senior civil servants, council and agency chief executives and senior police officers, as well as local NGOs and property developers.
- Following on from this seminar Dr Bryan worked with Caroline Wilson, Conflict Transformation Project Manager in Belfast City Council, on an 'agenda for action' deriving from the seminar proceedings and from a series of reports undertaken for the council by consultants.
- Bryan has been a member of the Community Relations Council Roundtable Marking Anniversaries panel to offer advice on how the decade of anniversaries might be approached.
- Since 2007 Connolly and Bryan have been members of a working party established by the Heritage section of the City Council to consider policy in this area.

Impact 2. Civil Society

The research outlined above has been completed at the commencement of a decade that will be dominated by the issue of commemoration. A succession of forthcoming anniversaries – the campaign against Home Rule, the 1916 rising, the Irish War of Independence, the establishment of Northern Ireland as a devolved political unit, the creation of an independent Irish state – present major challenges in a society deeply divided along religious and political lines. The council's adoption of *Belfast 400* as a major part of its plans for the commemoration of the charter anniversary thus puts the research at the centre of the development of a strategy for dealing with these issues of commemoration and reconciliation. The city's Culture and Heritage Officer has written to confirm the Council's view that the book 'can change how people connect to and understand Belfast, repositioning relationships into the future ... We believe it has the potential to be transformative in how people relate to the city. It is also reassuring to feel that the relationship is an ongoing one, and reflects a genuine commitment to partnership on both sides.'

Impact 3. Public Discourse

Belfast 400 is an attempt to communicate to a broad audience a comprehensive overview of the most recent research on the development of the town and city. The public history function is acknowledged in the sponsorship of the volume by the City Council and Queen's University, each of which contributed £15,000 towards the cost of producing a well-designed book at a price accessible to a mass readership. In addition to dissemination through sales of the volume (1,983 to 1 May 2013) this impact has been achieved through the participation of Connolly and other contributors in a range of public events built around the anniversary commemorations:

- Public launch of the volume, Belfast City Hall, 24 January 2013

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- Belfast 400 Forum in collaboration with Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies, Waterfront Hall, Belfast, 16 March 2013
- Public lecture and exhibition, Belfast 400 Easter Festival, Belfast City Hall, 30 March – 2 April 2013. Total attendance at the festival was over 16,500.

The core content has also been made available in a form suitable for use in schools through publication of four colour posters based on the book in the *Belfast Telegraph* on 22-25 April 2013.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)*Impact No. 1*

1. Former chief executive, Community Relations Council
2. Executive officer, Good Relations Unit, Belfast City Council.

Impact No. 2

Heritage officer, Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council, Strategic Policy and Resource Committee, Minutes 19 Feb. 2010

(<http://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=8505>). See also

<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfast400/events.asp> for the subsequent public launch.

Impact No. 3

The book *Belfast 400* has been favourably received. Professor Marianne Elliott (Director, Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool), reviewing it in the *Irish Times*, 22 Feb. 2013, testified to its status as a contribution to public history: 'In format and content it is high-brow-meets-coffee-table and the illustrations and maps are quite stunning. *Belfast 400* takes us from prehistory to the present, and there are masterly historical overviews by Sean Connolly and Gillian McIntosh.' The *Ulster Tatler* (February 2013) praised it as seeking 'to get to the heart of Belfast's story in all its complexity'.