Peace by piece

Why is urban development and planning essential for peacebuilding efforts in Belfast?

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Executive summary

This thesis explores the role of urban development and planning in peacebuilding efforts in Belfast, focusing on the impact of initiatives like Urban Villages in fostering cross-community engagement and reconciliation. Through a combination of qualitative research methods, including ethnographic data collection, informal conversations and interviews, and observational analysis, the study investigates how urban planning can influence social cohesion in a post-conflict city.

The research reveals that urban development, when integrated with peacebuilding objectives, can significantly contribute to reducing sectarian tensions and promoting unity. Initiatives such as Urban Villages, which aim to improve the physical environment and foster positive community identities, have shown positive outcomes in enhancing community relationships. However, the study also identifies challenges, including persistent socioeconomic disparities and resistance to change in some communities. These factors highlight the need for tailored, context-sensitive approaches in urban planning.

The findings suggest that a mixed approach involving both local actors and broader stakeholders is crucial for success. Effective peacebuilding through urban development requires ongoing collaboration, strategic planning, and attention to the unique needs of diverse communities. The thesis concludes that while progress has been made, continued efforts and adaptive strategies are essential to address remaining issues and further improve cross-community engagement. This research underscores the importance of incorporating peacebuilding goals into urban planning and provides a framework for future projects aimed at fostering unity in divided cities like Belfast.

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Acronyms/Abbreviations

- CNR - Catholic-Nationalist-Republican community.
- IRA - Irish Republican army.
- Ionad na Fuiseoige - the name of the community centre run by Theresa Brady. Direct translation from Irish to English: Community of the Lark.
- PSNI- Police Service of Northern Ireland.
- PUL - Protestants, Unionists, and Loyalist community.
- Turas - The Irish word for ‘journey’ and the name of the Irish language project run by Linda Ervine MBE.
- UDA - Ulster Defense Association.
- UV - Urban Villages, the department in which I carried out my internship.
- UVF - Ulster volunteer force.

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Since moving to Belfast at the beginning of March, I have learned so much more than I anticipated in just an 18-week period. Being in Belfast and fully immersing myself in the field, using ethnographic data collection methods, proved to be incredibly valuable. I am deeply grateful to everyone at Urban Villages who helped me settle into my internship and provided me with the platform to complete my data collection. Your support and hospitality made my research experience both productive and enjoyable.

To my friends and family, your unwavering support has been invaluable. Whether offering words of encouragement, lending a listening ear during challenging times, or simply being there when I needed a break, you have all played a crucial role in my journey. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and constant belief in my abilities. I couldn't have done this without you, and I am forever grateful for your presence in my life.

Introduction

After decades of sectarian conflict, Belfast stands as a city in transition, attempting to find peace and reconciliation while addressing the effects of ethnic and political turmoil. Amidst this backdrop, urban development and planning have emerged as pivotal concepts for fostering social cohesion, building sustainable peace, improving the physical space and addressing historical grievances. In Belfast, a city characterised by enduring sectarian divisions and spatial inequality, this thesis investigates how urban development projects may support attempts to promote sustainable peace. By examining the intersections of urban planning, community development, and conflict transformation, this research aims to shed light on innovative approaches and best practices that can harness the built environment and public space as a tool for reconciliation and healing. Issues of unheard voices, a lack of social cohesion, underdeveloped physical space and a serious lack of cross-community engagement have all been barriers to achieving striving communities in Belfast and across Northern Ireland. A brief overview of Belfast's communities: West Belfast is predominantly Catholic and largely associated with nationalist identities, while East Belfast is primarily Protestant, reflecting unionist traditions. In contrast, North and South Belfast feature a more balanced demographic composition of Catholics and Protestants. Later chapters will provide a more in-depth exploration of these communities and their unique characteristics.

Although sectarian violence has significantly decreased over time, it has not completely disappeared. The period between the 1960s to the late 1990s known as "The Troubles" was when this conflict was at its worst, with over 3,500 people being killed (Rifai & Emekci, 2022). The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 was a turning point to the violence, as paramilitary groups committed to decommissioning their weapons as part of the peace process. This is the particular time period in focus, from the 1960s to the present day. The construction of the peace walls began in 1969 by the British army, originally intended as a temporary, military response to sectarian violence and disorder (Byrne & Cathy Gormley-Heenan, 2014). In this case, urban development was first being used as a method of segregation and separation, albeit an intended temporary response. We know that this intended temporary measure has changed to permanent

structures in many areas, showing no signs of going anywhere anytime soon. Peace lines are large structures that separate Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Often in the form of walls and metal structures, many of the peace lines are 10 metres in height (Joe O'Donnell, 2017). The biggest in Belfast standing at over 13 metres separating the Falls and Shankill roads in West Belfast. There are a lot of factors to consider when considering the removal of any peace lines in the city. The one I found important over any other factor, is what Urban Villages' Local Coordinator for the North Belfast area, Joe Hinds, told me during a tour of North Belfast on the first week of my internship with ' Urban Villages' back in March. Joe Hinds, and many other of my colleagues at Urban Villages (UV) provided me with the platform to build this thesis. Giving me the necessary contacts, data, and walking tours to shape my ethnographic research. The Urban Villages Initiative is a headline action within Northern Ireland's Executive's Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) Strategy and is overseen by the Executive Office. UV create and oversee projects with the aim of fostering positive community identities, building community capacity and improving the physical environment. Projects have been introduced all around Belfast and in Derry too. These three key objectives are a common goal of T:BUC. Joe explained to me that in many instances, there is no appetite for the peace walls to be removed, so they are likely not going to be taken down in the near future. There must be an appetite from both sides for these structures to be removed. Making people feel unsafe and threatened in their own homes has the potential to spark conflict and leave the situation worse than before.There are still over 40 barriers still in North Belfast to this day, the most of any other area, with a number of those being built since 1994 (Coyles et al., 2023). These walls, barriers and fences continue to dominate the landscape in urban, working class communities across Belfast. The continued need for high structures to separate the two communities is a stark reminder of the continued sectarian conflict in Belfast (Dawson, 2016) and how the effects of this conflict are still clear to see in Belfast to this day.

The importance of residents' voices being heard and their participation in the growth and improvement of their communities cannot be overstated. It is crucial for people, especially in post-conflict settings, to feel at home and content with the amenities surrounding them, which ties in with the point that barriers cannot be removed if there is no appetite for it. The impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland on people's daily lives and the prevalence of unheard voices

within communities are crucial issues that have persisted over the years. A significant aspect of the debate revolves around community participation and decision-making. To go back to the late 1980s and 1990s you can see first-hand the effect that the conflict and actions involved, killings for example, had on people. Lorna McGarry was left a widow after her husband Spence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary was killed on the 6th of April 1991 by a bomb planted by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) under his car (McLaughlin, C, 2009). This is just one example of the long lasting effects of this conflict. Other problems which are being dealt with today are difficulties in cross community engagement and intergenerational trauma. People continue to grapple with the issue of unheard voices in Belfast. To shed light on this problem we can refer to Sophie Long's review of an event in April 2015, where the residents of East Belfast gathered to discuss local politics, community needs, and more. During this meeting, representatives from East Belfast Football Club emphasised the benefits of sports for young people. However, they lamented the challenge of securing state funding. A young club member in attendance expressed the desire for "something to do" on the other five nights of the week when they aren't playing football (Sophie Long, 2015). This highlights the lack of options for young people in the area and the insufficient funding for essential community programs. It is so often the case that when teenagers and young kids are causing problems that there is a serious lack of amenities and options for them in their local community.

While not the focus of my research, it is essential to acknowledge the implications of Brexit on life in Northern Ireland. This is another complication in the storied conflict with significant political and logistical ramifications, particularly regarding border issues. One emerging concern is the possible need to revisit the Good Friday Agreement Act of 1998 which contains references to EU policies and frameworks. Brexit must surely require the removal or the revision of references to the EU in the Good Friday Agreement. With one of the signatories exiting the EU, it's uncertain how the commitment to 'implement EU policies and programs and consider proposals within the EU framework' can be upheld.'(Jonathan Tonge, 2017)**.** Up to 30,000 workers are 'cross-border' in that they live and work on different sides of the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland border and would be directly inconvenienced by border checks as a result of Brexit (Jonathan Tonge, 2017). This is just one of the reasons why avoiding a hard border between the Republic and Northern Ireland is so important. Many individuals on the

island of Ireland would suffer greatly in their day-to-day working lives if a hard border were established and it would risk exacerbating tensions and undermining the delicate balance of peace and cooperation achieved in recent decades.

To provide a broader perspective, this thesis will examine the research problems from several angles. Sports and the Irish language being a focus. Cross community engagements with children from a young age is vital for the next generation to live in harmony. It is essential to address and remove the divisive mindset that separates communities. The theoretically desirable idea of creating an integrated community in which people will be perfectly happy to live in the same streets as those who have different political and religious views (Komarova & Svašek, 2018), poses significant challenges. Can this vision of harmonious coexistence truly become a reality in Northern Ireland? In light of the aforementioned objectives, this research endeavours to explore the multi faceted impact of community-driven initiatives on creating positive social changes, revitalising local communities, and ultimately if urban development can boost the overall well-being of urban communities for every person. This study aims to fill a research gap in understanding how urban development initiatives can contribute to or hinder peacebuilding efforts. By investigating efforts aimed at bridging societal divides and enhancing living conditions in these urban areas, this research aspires to offer valuable insights into fostering unity and harmony in communities grappling with the legacies of The Troubles. As a result, the central question of this thesis emerges: *Why is urban development and planning essential for peacebuilding efforts in Belfast?*

In order to explore different facets of the main themes of this thesis, such as urban development and peacebuilding, I formulated four guiding subquestions.

1. A) Who/What are Urban Villages and how do they work?
   B) What is their vision?
2. How do the people and communities react to projects, initiatives, and urban development in their areas?
3. What communities in Belfast are resistant to change? Who are these communities, and why are they resistant?

4. A) In what ways can urban development negatively contribute towards peacebuilding?
   B) Are there examples of this seen in Belfast?

The approach of this thesis is to begin by contextualising the efforts of Urban Villages over the past eight years. Their positive impact on communities in Belfast and Derry is evident, and examining their successes and challenges will provide valuable insights. By investigating what has worked well and what could have been improved, we can develop a framework for future urban development projects. This context will help address the central question: Why is urban development and planning essential for peacebuilding efforts in Belfast? In addition to examining the role of urban planning in fostering peace, this thesis also explores how sectarian divides are being addressed through methods of social engagement. For instance, initiatives centered around sports and the Irish language are analysed in later chapters as examples of how shared activities can bridge divides and promote a sense of community. These case studies underscore the importance of non-physical dimensions of urban development in fostering meaningful connections across traditionally divided groups.

Identifying and examining communities that are resistant to change in Belfast helps understand on a deeper level the grievances of the conflict that remain to this day and what the root causes are. Understanding that all areas and communities are different is important. A one dimensional, one size fits all approach will not work in any post conflict society. Targeted strategies at specific areas is a better approach to take by understanding the unique perspectives and concerns of said communities, ensuring their voices are heard, tailored interventions, initiatives and projects can be made to promote social cohesion. My last sub question aims to provide a holistic picture of urban development in post conflict Belfast. Of course, there are certain negative aspects of urban development in relation to peacebuilding and my aim is to delve into some examples of this, ensuring a holistic approach to my central research question.

<u>Relevance</u>

This research situates itself at the intersection of (participatory) urban planning, post-conflict studies, and urban development, contributing to the broader discourse on rebuilding socially divided cities. Urban development has historically oscillated between top-down approaches and bottom-up approaches that emphasise local agency and participation. While top-down strategies

often deliver standardised infrastructure efficiently, they frequently overlook the social and cultural complexities of specific regions (Ankitha Gattupalli, 2023). Conversely, bottom-up approaches, while fostering community ownership and identity, can face limitations in scalability and coordination. This thesis argues that in the unique context of post-conflict societies, such as Belfast, and Northern Ireland as a whole, bottom-up approaches are not only viable but essential. By focusing on the persisting societal divide between Catholics and Protestants, this research highlights the importance of participatory planning in addressing the psychological and social legacies of conflict. It builds on existing literature by exploring how deeply divided communities can co-create urban spaces that promote trust, reduce segregation, and foster long-term social cohesion.

The troubles have had noticeable impacts on issues like underachievement and behavioural adjustment (Muldoon & Trew, 2000). While factors such as gender, poverty, and deprivation also contribute to these issues, this research seeks to establish connections between these challenges and the lingering effects of sectarian conflict, ultimately addressing a significant social issue from an urban planning perspective .Insights gained through my internship with the Urban Villages Initiative underscored the importance of identifying the areas most affected by these problems and fostering positive community identities. By examining past initiatives highlights the value of providing communities with genuine opportunities to participate in shaping their residential and professional environments. Empowering residents to express their priorities and influence development fosters stronger social bonds, enhances local facilities, and ensures that financial investments align with community needs. Finally, the long-term sustainability of community-led projects is emphasised as a critical component for achieving lasting peace and harmony between divided communities.

To illustrate the significance of reaching such a stage, and how it can happen I will reference an interview with Rosaleen Petticrew. Rosaleen (Catholic, from Ardoyne) was interviewed last year regarding the removal of bits of the peace wall in Belfast (Rory Carroll, 2023). Rosaleen also spoke about how her daughter fell in love with a Protestant in 2015. It came as a shock to her, and questions arose such as: Was he a bigot? Was my daughter safe visiting his area? Was he safe visiting ours? However, the two stayed together, saw past these barriers, and now have their children. Rosaleen spoke of the love she has for Stuart and how she “You just realise, we’re all

the same" (Rory Carroll, 2023). This narrative underscores the potential to create a shared sense of belonging, foster reconciliation and bridge divides in post-conflict settings.

Readers guide

The findings of this thesis are organised into several key sections, each shedding light on different aspects of urban development, peacebuilding and community dynamics:

1. **Broken Windows Theory**: This section will explore how the physical condition of neighbourhoods influences social behaviour and community cohesion. Through detailed observations and interactions, I examine the impact of environmental cues on crime and social disorder, testing the applicability of the Broken Windows Theory in the context of Belfast's Urban Villages. A comparative analysis of how communities in Belfast react to urban development initiatives/projects and how the communities in Derry react is carried out in this chapter too.
2. **Resistance to Change**: Here, I delve into the various forms of resistance encountered during urban development initiatives. By understanding the historical, cultural, and social factors that contribute to this resistance, I aim to uncover the underlying causes and propose strategies for more effective community engagement and change management.
3. **Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Sports**: This part investigates the role of sports as a tool for fostering peace and reconciliation. By participating in and observing local sports events, I highlight how sports can bridge divides, build trust, and promote social cohesion among diverse community members.
4. **Reconciliation through the Irish Language**: Focusing on the cultural dimension of reconciliation, this section examines how the promotion of the Irish language serves as a medium for healing and bridging gaps between divided communities. Through participant observation and interviews, I explore the significance of language in identity formation and community integration.

Through this multifaceted lens, my findings contribute to a deeper appreciation of the challenges and opportunities inherent in fostering sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban communities.

Theoretical Framework

To examine the interplay between peacebuilding, urban development, and reconciliation in the context of Belfast, several aspects need to be considered. It is imperative to delve deeper into the conceptual underpinnings of each component and to then examine how these concepts intersect with one another and what links are present between these concepts in existing literature. Duress also plays its part in this thesis. Firstly, an explanation of the concepts individually.

Peacebuilding

The concept of peacebuilding was first introduced after the cold war during the United Nations Agenda for Peace in 1992 by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). It is an ever evolving concept but this is still used as a reference to this day. This quote further describes what peacebuilding is: "activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (Brahim Report on Peacekeeping Reform, 2000). The last part of this quote is exactly what is important in Northern Ireland today. "More than just the absence of war". It involves not only the absence of violence but also the presence of justice, equity, and social cohesion. Since the turn of the century, conflict in Belfast has fizzled out and what is important now in peacebuilding efforts is fostering positive community identities and creating community capacity, peace acting as a foundation for all of this. The notion of peacebuilding encompasses multifaceted processes aimed at fostering sustainable peace, often involving structural, societal, and psychological dimensions. It involves not only the absence of violence but also the presence of justice, equity, and social cohesion. Conflict sensitivity/transformation, on the other hand, pertains to strategies and approaches that acknowledge and address the underlying causes and dynamics of conflict, seeking to transform relationships and structures to prevent violence and promote peace. In the 1990s, there was a tendency to overlook the importance of local contexts. Consequently, in the early 2000s, a new wave of international peace operations emerged, focusing more explicitly on empowering local communities and fostering ownership. Advocates often argued that by prioritising local involvement, peacebuilding endeavours could achieve greater efficiency and long-term sustainability (Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021). By attentively listening to the people who live in

each area, this method creates good community identities, social cohesion, and cross-community interaction. Without involving the Protestant and Catholic groups, any attempt to improve community engagement is unlikely to be successful as it runs the danger of creating resistance and alienating locals. Without thorough consultation, these initiatives run the risk of creating mistrust and undermining their ability to result in long-lasting, constructive change.

Peacebuilding efforts occur all over the world in any conflict affected setting and the interest here in this thesis is how it can be influenced by urban development. It is a long term process, which takes many years. It is the process of normalising relations and reconciling differences between all the citizens of the warring factions (The Catholic and Protestants of Northern Ireland, and Belfast in this instance). Closely linked with peacemaking and peacekeeping, it is the final step of the three processes. Starting with peacemaking, this is where a settlement is forged between both sides (Heathershaw, 2008). A ceasefire in this case and in 1998, the Good Friday Agreement. Peacekeeping aims to prevent any further conflict, by putting some kind of barrier like soldiers to act as peacekeepers, or erecting structures to separate the two sides like we see in Belfast to this day. Peacebuilding processes are no doubt made more difficult when such extreme peacekeeping measures were put in place, albeit necessary. Many people believe that peacebuilding is just one liberal peace rhetoric. However, peacebuilding is not homogenous. Instead of examining a single worldwide peacebuilding effort, we need to investigate several liberal peace ideologies. To put it briefly, we need to change the focus of our analysis from peacebuilding to peacebuildings (plural) (Heathershaw, 2008). Heathershaw distinguishes three ‘basic discourses’ which constitute ‘the main structural positions’ within the debate in the International Community, and I will explain the relevance to the case of Northern Ireland, and Belfast.

Peacebuilding-via-democratic reform: Placing a strong focus on advancing liberal democratic institutions and principles as a way to bring about and maintain peace. The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 is a prime illustration of this strategy in Belfast. The deal addressed the underlying political grievances that drove the conflict by establishing power-sharing governance institutions, guaranteeing protections for human rights, and providing democratic decision-making mechanisms. In Belfast, power-sharing administration entails the establishment

of a devolved government with ministers chosen from nationalist (mostly Catholic) and unionist (mostly Protestant) political parties. This approach encourages inclusivity and representation for all societal segments by requiring cross-community cooperation and consensus-building on important issues. The second discourse references peacebuilding-via-civil society (‘civil society’), which is especially pertinent to my thesis because it focuses on the role civil society organisations play in fostering social cohesion, peace, and reconciliation. In Belfast, community organisations at the grassroots level and peacebuilding programmes have been essential in reducing rifts within groups, encouraging communication, and addressing the psychological and social effects of the violence (Heathershaw, 2008). The Urban Villages approach addresses issues such as those mentioned above. Initiatives that focus on community development projects, peace education initiatives, and intercommunity conversation groups have helped the city's different inhabitants develop a sense of common identity and mutual trust. The representation of community interests, the expression of concerns, and the promotion of inclusive and participatory development strategies are frequently carried out by civil society organisations, which include community groups, non-profits, and grassroots projects.

Peacebuilding-via-statebuilding is the third discourse and this one emphasises how crucial it is to create state institutions that are reliable and efficient in order to establish peace and stability. A key component of the peace process in Belfast has been the reform and fortification of governmental institutions, such as the courts, public administration, and the police force ‘PSNI’ (Police Service of Northern Ireland). In order to foster inclusive governance and increase public trust in the state, policies including police reform, power decentralisation, and initiatives to address issues of inequality and discrimination within state institutions have been implemented. These approaches as described by Heathershaw only represent a small portion of all available strategies, but they do demonstrate the great range of ways that can be used to carry out peacebuilding. I felt it important to include these descriptions as it highlights the context in which I intend to use peacebuilding in this thesis. Specifically, I aim to examine peacebuilding and reconciliation through the lens of their interconnected theories, focusing on their application in initiatives involving sports and the Irish language.

Reconciliation

Thirdly, reconciliation denotes a process of healing and rebuilding relationships among individuals and communities affected by conflict or division. It involves acknowledging past injustices, fostering dialogue and understanding, and promoting mutual respect and cooperation to create a shared future. Reconciliation involves bringing people together, rebuilding relationships and creating the necessary dialogue to generate empathy and gain an understanding of the roots of conflict. A shared and peaceful future is the goal. Reconciliation can also be understood as the development of positive intergroup relations after violent conflict, and thus primarily concerned with psychological, relational, and identity change, rather than institution/state building, though these are interrelated. (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Lederach 1997). I believe this is more relevant to the case of Northern Ireland as we are seeing efforts to improve cross-community engagements between Catholics and Protestants through the work of Urban Villages, for example. Positive intergroup relations are exactly what would be at the heart of communities in Northern Ireland in an ideal world. However, according to Mitchell & Miller, the term is variously defined and the concept has faced criticisms: that it is too vague and/or impossible; that it is solely religious and/or culturally contained to societies with a Christian heritage and in turn blames the conflict on individual attitudes rather than structural conditions. This term suggests that conflict is pathological and resolvable when it is in fact inevitable and must be managed (Mitchell & Miller, 2019). Using this description of reconciliation in the case of Northern Ireland seems as if it may face criticism by some scholars however is relevant to this thesis. In the Stormont House Agreement (Northern Ireland Office 2014), intended to deal with outstanding peace process issues, promoting reconciliation was noted as one of the guiding principles. Thus, the term is used in this article to refer to the goal and process of stabilising peace though undermining politico-cultural polarisation and fostering attitudinal change towards inclusion and respect for difference (Mitchell & Miller, 2019).

Four processes through which reconciliation can be promoted are identified and discussed by Höglund & Sundberg: the application of sport policies to create fair representation, the breaking down of stereotypes and negative attitudes through inter-communal sport initiatives and

individual development. The utilisation of symbols and symbolic acts of reconciliation are the last process and the use of symbols and symbolic acts are seen on a yearly basis in Northern Ireland, and often do not bring both sides any closer to reconciliation. More depth on this will be seen in the ‘Resistance to change’ chapter. In this way we move away from a definition of reconciliation, which focuses mainly on truth seeking, forgiveness and justice in the relationship between perpetrators and victims. Instead, we adhere to a definition that incorporates the restructuring of a larger set of relations in societies shattered by violent conflict. From such a perspective reconciliation is understood not only as a process of forgiveness at the political level, but also as integration of separate racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups. It is necessary to recognise that sport carries a potential for conflict and division (Höglund & Sundberg, 2008), as will be discussed in the ‘Truth, Discipline, Respect’ chapter. This is the case regarding sport, but the same can also be said for urban development initiatives in the community, language learning and many other aspects which are central to my thesis. What is vital is that care is taken when approaching sports, urban development initiatives in hopes of contributing to peacebuilding, and any other thing. While there is a potential for increased conflict and division, there is greater potential for positive outcomes when done right.

Compromise is a crucial component of reconciliation because it involves mutual concessions and finding common ground. Conflicting parties need to make concessions to move forward and rebuild relationships. It can be difficult to bring forth healing and reconciliation in social and cultural relationships, in part because it is challenging for former adversaries to compromise with one another on an interpersonal level. The conflict-resolution process's ambiguous nature is picked up on by lay discourse. Common sense views compromise in one of two ways: as either a virtue or a sin belonging to Hades or the angels (Brewer & Wahidin, 2021). There are endless ways in which people can attempt to foster these positive relationships I mentioned above and strive for reconciliation across communities. This thesis is going to focus on reconciliation through sports and reconciliation through language learning.

Furthermore, exploring examples of urban planning and development initiatives at the local level in Belfast provides valuable insights into how these processes unfold in practice. Examining community reactions to such initiatives, particularly under conditions of duress, illuminates the complex dynamics at play and underscores the importance of considering local contexts, power

dynamics, and community agency in urban interventions. Crucially, this theoretical framework also emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependencies between these concepts. By elucidating the intersections and linkages between peacebuilding, urban development, and reconciliation, we can better understand how interventions in one domain may impact outcomes in others. For instance, exploring how urban development initiatives may either facilitate or hinder peacebuilding efforts highlights the need for integrated and contextually sensitive approaches to fostering sustainable peace and development. By critically engaging with these conceptual dimensions and their interrelationships, this theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the complex dynamics of urban transformation and peacebuilding in Belfast. Through empirical investigation and theoretical synthesis, we can contribute to a deeper understanding of how urban interventions can contribute to or impede efforts towards reconciliation and sustainable peace in conflict-affected settings.

Conflict Transformation/Sensitivity

Conflict transformation in action is the development of projects that transform the social and economic environment in which people live in a more sustainable way (Bryan & Gillespie, 2005). It is a concept that is often closely linked with conflict management and conflict resolution. Transformation is of course the focus here and as Kreisberg describes, it is the final step of the three concepts. Conflict management leads to conflict resolution, eventually progressing to conflict transformation (Louis Kreisberg, 1997). Northern Ireland in 2024 is at the stage of conflict transformation. By addressing the main research question of this thesis, examples can be found of how attempts are made at transforming the social environment in Belfast through urban development initiatives and urban planning such as the Girdwood Community Hub which there will be more detail on later. Conflict sensitivity is an important tool to ensure conflict transformation is carried out effectively.

Conflict sensitivity refers to an approach that conducts an analysis at a local level (Norman & Mikhael, 2023) and has emerged as a principle of aid delivery in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and in post-conflict settings such as Belfast. In recent times we have seen the inclusion of locals and the actual communities themselves in an attempt to be more inclusive of the people

in need of aid, ensuring a holistic approach to providing aid and delivering projects. Thomas (Louis Kreisberg, 1997). Weiss emphasises the importance of sensitive and ethically informed approaches to aid and peacebuilding. Political factors can greatly influence these approaches (Weiss, 1999) and careful consideration of the potential impact of these projects on different communities, particularly in terms of access to resources, distribution of benefits, and perceptions of fairness is required. If one area receives more aid or more focus in terms of development initiatives than another this may fuel a conflict. Conflict sensitivity is closely linked to the 'local turn' in peacebuilding that we have seen since the turn of the century. In the introduction, I briefly explained the issue of unheard voices across communities in Belfast. By incorporating conflict sensitivity into efforts of conflict transformation in a post-conflict setting, this issue can be addressed more effectively. Conflict sensitivity ensures that the concerns of locals are heard and addressed, allowing them to raise issues that are important to them in regards to regenerating their communities. This empowers residents and promotes a more inclusive way of community development.

In Belfast, this could mean assessing how urban redevelopment efforts in certain areas might inadvertently reinforce existing spatial divisions or perpetuate inequalities between communities. Conflict sensitivity also necessitates inclusive decision-making processes that involve meaningful participation from all stakeholders, including marginalised or disenfranchised communities. This could mean consulting with residents from both loyalist and nationalist neighbourhoods to ensure that their perspectives and needs are adequately represented in urban development plans, again, prioritising the voices of the people and building good relations between stakeholders and locals. The theories of Conflict transformation and sensitivity are closely linked with Duress as they are directly concerned with the impact of external pressures (or duress) on communities and individuals. The people of Belfast have endured the conflict known as "The Troubles" for many decades now. So much so that in some aspects it has become normalised. It should not be normal to go outside your house and see a 10 metre high structure separating you from others, but many of these peace lines have been there for over 50 years. Over time it does become 'normal'. Bruijn and Both state that decisions made in duress have a significant impact on the social and political structures of society (De Bruijn & Both, 2018).

The concept of Duress contains three elements: Enduring and accumulating layers of hardship over time. The normalisation of this hardship, and A form of deeply constrained agency (De Bruijn & Both, 2018). The concept of duress is used as a lens to understand the lives of individual people and societies in Central and West Africa that have a long history of ecological, political, and social conflicts and crises (De Bruijn & Both, 2018). The enduring experience of hardship, in the form of layers of various crises, can become deeply ingrained in a society, and people can come to act and react under these conditions as if they lead a normal life. The concept of duress is extrapolated from a juridical context. Duress, in a juridical context, refers to threats, violence, constraint, or other actions used to coerce someone into doing something against their will or better judgement. In the context of this thesis, what threats, violence or constraints did people in Belfast experience? When were they coerced into doing things against their will? I will use it as a lens through which to view and clarify the experience of acting under enduring hardship. People acting under duress helps to explain the actions of people to this day. For sub question #3, “Are there communities in Belfast that are resistant to change? If so, who are these communities, and why are they resistant?” The concept of duress can help to explain why there is still some resistance to engage with and normalise interactions with ‘the other’ side. Past experiences have likely shaped this, especially for the generations that lived through the conflict pre Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The final element, as described by Bruijn and Both, a form of "deeply constrained agency" captures the long-term struggles that Belfast's citizens endure in the aftermath of the conflict. Social divides continue even after the violence has stopped, limiting prospects for social mobility and limiting relationships between communities. Many neighbourhoods are affected by economic deprivation, which raises unemployment rates and restricts access to resources. The psychological scars from the Troubles continue to affect people's mental and physical health. Attempts to promote reconciliation and create a more united society are hampered by political instability, which adds still another layer of uncertainty. Duress, the internalisation of enduring hardships, has practical outcomes: in action, in realities of daily life. However, it is difficult to study duress as such if it is “an invisible gash”—a black box that is difficult to open. While we are addressing enduring hardship here, the “entailments" and continuous presence thereof are not

always obvious: “Duress rarely calls out its name. Often it is a mute condition of constraint” (Stoler, 2016). Not everyone would be aware that they are acting out of duress.

Urban planning and urban development

Interest in urban planning/development has significantly increased worldwide over the last two decades. Urban development is the act of improving living conditions, which are necessary for rest and for labour, and for health and education facilities. Urban development facilitates various exchanges and provisioning, and ensures the efficient movement of people between their homes and workplaces (Kouamou & Pettang, 2008). The effectiveness of urban development, social cohesiveness, and quality of life are all factors that should be considered while making decisions on urban growth. Urban development and planning are integral components of the built environment, encompassing policies, practices, and interventions aimed at shaping the physical, social, and economic aspects of urban spaces. Urban development involves the strategic allocation of resources and infrastructure to meet the needs of communities, while urban planning entails the systematic process of envisioning, designing, and managing urban spaces to achieve desired outcomes (Kouamou & Pettang, 2008). Kouamou & Pettang note that the participatory process in urban development involves a diverse array of actors, including government entities, network providers, non-governmental organisations, community associations, researchers, and the financial sector. This process is inherently complex because actions taken in one area can affect others. Each actor can make decisions at strategic, tactical, or operational levels. It is crucial for their efforts to be coordinated to avoid conflicts and ensure cohesive interventions (Kouamou & Pettang, 2008). The inclusion of various different ways of explaining peacebuilding by Heathershaw highlights the complexities of urban development in any setting, not even a post-conflict city like Belfast specifically. In addition to what Kouamou and Pettang have described, conflict sensitivity and other practices must be included in regards to urban development in Belfast. It is by no means a straightforward approach.

Urban planning, as it intersects with peacebuilding, involves skilfully orchestrating the layout and management of urban spaces and resources to navigate, defuse or prevent conflict. Understanding how our neighbourhoods, symbols and economic opportunities can either

exacerbate tensions/contribute to reconciliation (Cunningham & Byrne, 2006). By crafting policies and interventions that directly engage with the underlying political and social dynamics of conflict, urban planners can play a crucial role in cultivating unity, addressing grievances, and forging lasting peace within polarised cities such as Belfast (Cunningham & Byrne, 2006) Belfast, a city historically marked by sectarian divisions, presents a vivid example of how urban planning can impact peacebuilding efforts. Many interfaces in the city are physically blocked off by barriers, creating cul-de-sacs and transforming once-connected streets into isolated pathways. These changes reflect the heightened tensions and safety concerns that have shaped the urban landscape over the years (Rifai & Emekci, 2022).

Photograph: Donovan Wylie. (Coyles et al., 2023)

For instance, the image above shows a residential passage now blocked off, a clear indicator of the physical and social barriers that have developed over time. The rear aspect of dwellings from an early 1980s cul-de-sac development in east Belfast, for example, has been crudely placed on top of a former through-street, illustrating how urban modifications have reinforced segregation. This physical restructuring of urban spaces not only symbolises the historical conflicts but also presents challenges for current peacebuilding initiatives. Structures like these can limit cross community engagement but in these next chapters you are going to see some impressive examples of initiatives that are greatly improving the engagement of Catholics and Protestants.

Methodology

In order to answer the research questions posed in this thesis, the main methodological approaches used were interviews and informal conversations, participant observation and walking tours and data analysis. A comparative analysis between Belfast and Derry was also used, comparing how communities in Belfast react to urban development initiatives/projects and how the communities in Derry react. This analysis was included to try and understand the bigger picture of Northern Ireland as a whole, instead of just Belfast, in terms of the current state of peace and the general reactions to urban development initiatives. The data I obtained was qualitative. The hardest part of this methodology for me was meeting the first person, doing the first walking tour. After I got over this hurdle it became a lot easier to get out there and speak with people, and be more confident in asking questions. I knew it was important to push myself to be as inquisitive as possible whenever I engaged with people regarding this thesis, as the information I would give my chapters a vital level of depth. The task seemed a lot less daunting after doing it once and my work started to flow after doing it for the first time. It was as if doing it once proved to myself that I did have the ability to gather all of this data, and gave me much needed confidence. Through six key people outside of the Urban Villages Initiative, I formed my findings. In the next chapters you will read about Dominic Bryan, Linda Ervine, Billy Murray, Theresa Brady, Rachael Davidson, and Tom Dinnen, and the great impact they are having on the lives of the people of Belfast.

The approach of participative observation was done through my internship (11th of March 2024 until the 14th of June 2024) with the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) based in the Stormont Estate in Belfast. Working in this initiative allowed me to see first hand different initiatives and projects being planned and implemented, and this also ties in with the walking tours. Here I acquired the knowledge necessary to answer the pressing questions of the thesis through value insights and a platform to carry out my ethnographical methodical approach. On these walking tours around Belfast I engaged in conversations with people working with Urban Villages initiatives, like Linda for example, documenting my observations and insights. Gaining first hand experience of how communities interacted with these initiatives and with the public spaces in general enriched my analysis and my findings of the community reaction to urban development projects. Urban

Villages were most helpful to me enabling me to carry out my methodology effectively through these walking tours and the data analysis. With their four different local offices in (North, West, South, and East) Belfast it gave me a thorough insight into how urban development was received in all of Belfast, what communities are resistant to change, and the reasons for this. I was brought on a walking tour of each area by the local coordinators and this helped me gain a visual understanding of what was going on in each of the areas. Having data made available to me by UV was no doubt a massive help to me but I felt like I gained a deeper level of understanding by seeing the various projects in person. Having the expertise and knowledge of the local coordinators and support officers on the walking tours was an excellent addition as they would bring us in and let us see some of the capital projects, and talk to people involved on a day to day basis. Listening to well respected members of their communities such as Linda Ervine and Theresa Brady speak with such pride about their respective projects showed me more than ever the great impact that UV has had. Even being in the main UV office on a day to day basis allowed me to grasp the scale of the work being done in this initiative. It gave me great experience of working an office job and this positive experience will influence what line of work I want to work in after university. Being able to see the various pieces of an office team working together highlighted the complexities of carrying out an initiative as big as Urban Villages. The capital team, revenue, communications and central teams all coming together with management to produce such successful initiatives was a joy to witness.

Walking tours and observation were a central part of my methodology. I wanted this as a central part due to the immersive nature of walking tours. Staff from UV were a key help here. Being able to gain an on the ground perspective of the communities and urban development projects, as well as interacting with the public space. Public space has been at the centre of the conflict and the peace in Northern Ireland (Bryan, 2011). In the context of urban regeneration, public spaces can play a pivotal role and also in the creation of sustainable and cohesive communities, and in fostering interactions across diverse ethnic cultural boundaries (Komarova & Bryan, 2014). They serve as vital platforms for social cohesion and community engagement, and have the potential to promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging. In Belfast they play a central part in peacebuilding efforts. It is of paramount importance that public spaces are used to their full potential, and careful planning and research is needed to achieve this. By exploring public spaces

through walking tours, an insight can be gained into how these spaces contribute to community dynamics and social interaction, thus enriching our understanding of the broader impact of urban development initiatives.

For me it was the most inspiring part of this whole process. Getting out on the ground, hearing the local coordinators or whoever guided me speak about the areas with such knowledge and skill was this thesis' best contributing factor. It enabled me to observe murals across the city each with their own meaning and portrayals. When I first started my internship with Urban Villages and I began analysing data supplied to me there, it helped me gain a certain level of understanding for North, South, East and West Belfast respectively. What areas received the work done by Urban Villages well for example and what communities were more resistant to change. Getting to go out on the walking tours with the local coordinators provided a much deeper understanding to me. Seeing completed revenue and capital projects in person made what I read beforehand become much clearer. It allowed me to expand my knowledge. For example, going through the tour in East Belfast it's overwhelmingly clear how the majority of people that live there are PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist). My own observation helped me realise that in the East, there would not be as much of an appetite for cross-cutting projects as there may be in other areas. It was through speaking with the people involved in these initiatives that I got answers on many 'why?' questions. Why exactly is there a resistance to change and a lack of desire to engage with 'the other' side? Linda Ervine, who works with the East Belfast Mission on their Irish language project Turas told me about the taboo surrounding this project and the Irish language in general in the area. Giving examples of teenagers turning up to some classes, and making it clear they did not want their parents finding out, knowing it would not be received well. It became clear to me that this resistance to change came from the older generation. This of course would make sense to me, as the the people who have lived through The Troubles may have more of disliking to the other side. This disliking is caused by duress and many other factors.

Informal conversations and interviews alike broadened my knowledge on Belfast as a whole. Oftentimes, I found the methods of walking tours and interviews/conversations being done side by side. Professor Dominic Byran for example, former co-chair of the FICT (Flags, Identity,

Culture and Tradition) commission was kind enough to meet me on numerous occasions and share his vast knowledge of Belfast with me. In particular he brought me on tour of North Belfast, his homeplace, and let me see the Girdwood facilities first hand.These interviews and the walking tour happened simultaneously. I placed great focus on Girdwood in my findings section as an area that highlights positive examples of urban development contributing to peacebuilding efforts in North Belfast. The land it is built on was an old British Army Barracks site for years but today is host to sports for people of all ages and backgrounds. The geography of the area interested me due to there being catholic and protestant areas surrounding it.

Moving on to the comparative analysis. One main reason for the inclusion of this comparison was to give a wider overview of this conflict. Specifically a comparative analysis of how communities in Belfast react to urban development initiatives/projects and how the communities in Derry react. What are the underlying factors? Is there a difference in reaction? Why? The troubles had different impacts in different cities. Derry and Belfast experienced different tragedies. One major difference between both places is the presence of peace lines. There is only one peace wall in Derry compared to 100+ around Belfast. Derry is a majority Catholic (Nationalist) city so this is another factor in the vast difference of peace walls, however both are not without their fair share of divide. The Catholic majority in Derry has been rapidly rising in the last 100 years (Dr Henry A Jeffries, 2010). My intention originally was to focus on Belfast alone but when I started with Urban Villages I realised this would be useful to add Derry as a case study.

Finally, data analysis began right at the start of my internship with Urban Villages. On my first day a range of data and reports were made available to me, and I began with Legacy reports. These reports, one for each local office and geographical quadrant of Belfast (North, East, West, and South), consist of interviews with locals, key learnings and a look toward the future. They intend to capture the legacy that UV has left in each area and examine whether their projects will have long lasting effects. The qualitative nature of the data allows for a nuanced exploration of key research themes, including the impact of Urban Villages on both single identity relationships and cross-community relationships, as well as the successes and challenges encountered in the delivery of Urban Villages projects. Through the analysis of participant perspectives and

experiences, this research aims to gain comprehensive insights into the dynamics and effectiveness of Urban Villages initiatives in fostering social cohesion and community development. The data analysis process involves thematic analysis, wherein patterns, themes, and categories are identified within the interview transcripts. This method enables the researcher to uncover recurring themes and extract meaningful interpretations from the rich qualitative data obtained from the legacy reports. In the introduction I briefly mentioned the issue of unheard voices and how important it is for residents to be heard. They are the core of the community after all. Through legacy reports such as these, it allows an investigation to take place into how people are reacting to urban development initiatives, and answers questions that highlight these reactions to projects and developments. Is community capacity being built? Are positive community identities being fostered?

Ethical considerations

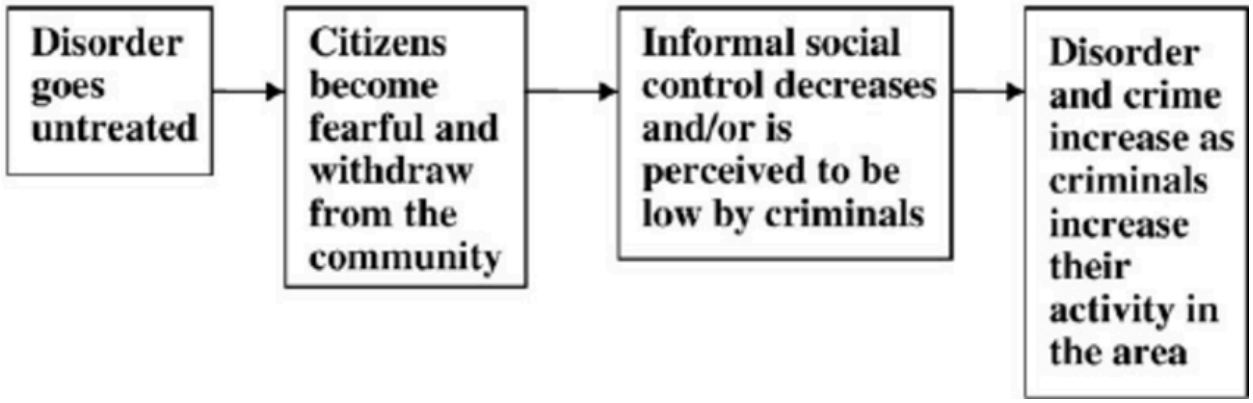
In undertaking this research, it's imperative to acknowledge how my own positionality as a Catholic from the Republic of Ireland will inevitably influence the data collection process and subsequent analysis. Given my background, it's important to recognise that my positionality introduces biases into the research process. Reflexivity, which involves considering how our social positions or positionality influence our entry, interactions, and conversations within the research field, is a fundamental principle in qualitative research (Reyes;Reyes, 2018). For instance, my cultural and religious affiliations (though I do not consider myself a devout, practising Catholic) may lead to certain predispositions or interpretations of the data. I continually make reference to Derry as such for example, though the official name is ‘Londonderry’. The vast majority of people from the Republic do this and even the football club from Derry are called Derry City F.C. ‘Londonderry’ does not sound Irish. Perhaps this speaks to my passion for Irish culture and language which you will read about in later chapters.

It's crucial to approach the research with self-awareness and reflexivity, recognizing and critically examining how my own perspectives may influence the research findings. Moreover, it's crucial to consider the perspectives of the participants in our study. For instance, when examining the impact of Urban Villages on community relationships, taking an emic perspective means actively listening to the lived experiences and narratives of the residents. This might

involve conducting in-depth interviews where participants share their personal stories, feelings, and perceptions of how Urban Villages initiatives have influenced their interactions with neighbours from different backgrounds. In contrast, adopting an etic perspective allows us to complement these personal accounts with broader observations and analyses. For example, we may examine statistical data on community engagement or assess the physical development and infrastructure of Urban Villages projects. These objective measures provide a more external viewpoint, helping us to contextualise and validate the qualitative insights gathered from participants. By integrating emic insights, such as participant narratives, with etic analyses like statistical data, this research aims to honour participant voices while ensuring analytical rigour. In this research, while recognizing the importance of understanding the emic perspectives of the participants within the context of Belfast's sectarian divide, it's essential to also maintain a degree of etic perspective to ensure objectivity and rigour in the analysis. Striking a balance between these two perspectives will be critical in capturing the complexity and nuances of the research topic while minimising the influence of personal biases. To address these considerations, rigorous methodological approaches will be employed, including transparent data collection methods, reflexive analysis, and triangulation of findings from multiple sources. While reflexivity and triangulation aim to minimise biases, it is important to acknowledge that my interpretations, as shaped by my positionality, may not fully represent the diverse perspectives of all communities involved.

Broken windows theory

The broken windows theory, conceptualised by social scientists James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982 and built upon earlier work by Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo, offers insight into the deterioration of neighbourhoods. It suggests that the presence of visible signs of disorder and misconduct within an environment (A broken window, or derelict buildings for example) can catalyse further instances of such behaviour, potentially escalating to more serious criminal activity. (Jiang et al., 2018). In criminology, the broken windows theory states that visible signs of crime, antisocial behaviour, and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages further crime and disorder, including serious crimes.



Source: *Hinkle, J. C., & Weisburd, D. (2008). The irony of broken windows policing: A micro-place study of the relationship between disorder, focused police crackdowns and fear of crime. Journal of Criminal Justice, 36(6), 503-512.*

The theory explores how environmental disorder can shape crime levels and people's perceptions of an environment. This theory does focus heavily on crimes but in the way I want to use it for this thesis ,I am focusing on the effects that disorder and a badly kept neighbourhood can have on someone's mentality. How in turn it can affect mental health, and how it can actually close people off, and make them less likely to participate in cross community engagement. This is why I stress the importance of improving the physical environment so much throughout this thesis. Disorder delivers subjective social clues that the community is not under control. Disorder has been shown to induce deviance/crime and lead average citizens to withdraw, causing neighbourhoods to decay and quality of life to decline. Order-maintenance policies are often referred to as an important crime deterrence pathway. The theory also seems to suggest that

disorder influences people's perceptions of safety. Disorder is the major cause of people's fear of an environment, more than actual crime rates or victimisation risks (Jiang et al., 2018). Creating an environment where additional transgressions grow more frequent and look acceptable is a scary idea, not an environment in which you would want to be in every day. Kelling & Wilson, who first developed the Broken Windows Theory suggested that untended disorder makes residents fearful as they conclude that social control has broken down in the neighbourhood. Thus, residents eventually withdraw from the community, lowering the level of informal social control (George L. Kelling & James Q. Wilson, 1982). This too can lead to a lack of trust and so much more. This insight underpins the significance of maintaining the physical environment in urban areas. Projects that transform derelict or vacant properties play a crucial role in preventing this cycle of fear and withdrawal. By revitalising these spaces, communities can foster a sense of pride and security, reinforcing social cohesion and preventing the perception that the neighbourhood is neglected or unsafe. Such transformations can counteract the deterioration that leads to social disengagement and can help maintain a higher level of informal social control, contributing to overall community well-being and resilience.

In the 'Truth, Discipline, Respect' chapter, I discuss how community development projects, such as Prokick Gym, have successfully transformed vacant properties into valuable community resources. This project not only had its benefits in creating a place for people to workout, gain a sense of belonging and so on but all these projects contribute, sometimes in a small way, to improving the physical environment in areas. It makes the area look better and removes the eye sores in the community which may contribute to this theory of broken windows. By acknowledging and remedying these visible signs of neglect, projects and initiatives such as Urban Villages can help cultivate an environment that fosters feelings of security, encourages social participation and cohesion, and ultimately promotes the maintenance of order and well-being. The broken windows are a metaphor for any sort of eye sore in the community, or signs of neglect/crime. I had seen examples of these eyesores in Derry too during my walking tour with Local Coordinator Maureen Fox and this is when the theory was explained to me. It underscores the significance of addressing even seemingly minor instances of disorder within a community or organisational settings. Later in this chapter there is also a comparative analysis between Belfast and Derry comparing the effects of Urban Villages' initiatives in both counties.

First I want to show efforts to improve the look of communities in Derry. Attempting to reduce the effect of the Broken Windows Theory.

(Images taken by author, 07/05/2024)

The above image was taken by myself during a walking tour of Derry, in The Fountain. At a second glance of these buildings it took me by surprise when I realised the doors and windows of the two houses you see are actually not real, but painted, including grey curtains and lovely red roses in the windows and some other flowers in the downstairs windows. The doors too look so real, dark brown and navy colours. When you so realise, it does become somewhat obvious but this was a great example of an attempt to brighten up the community, instead of having boarded up doors and 'broken windows'. The image I captured in Derry vividly illustrates the transformative power of community projects aimed at addressing physical disorder. These artificially brightened facades are a testament to the community's effort to combat the negative perceptions associated with derelict buildings. Such initiatives not only improve the aesthetic appeal of the area but also play a crucial role in altering the psychological and social dynamics within the community. By replacing the unsightly and often intimidating presence of boarded-up windows and doors with visually pleasing alternatives, communities send a powerful message of care and attention. This proactive approach helps to mitigate the fear and anxiety that can arise

from signs of neglect and abandonment. It fosters a sense of pride and ownership among residents, encouraging them to participate more actively in their community.

Moreover, the impact of these improvements extends beyond immediate visual benefits. They contribute to a positive feedback loop where enhanced physical environments lead to greater social cohesion and increased informal social control. This, in turn, can reduce crime rates and discourage antisocial behaviour, creating a safer and more welcoming community. The implications of such projects are profound for urban resilience. By maintaining and improving the physical environment, communities can build their capacity to withstand and recover from various social and economic challenges. These efforts highlight the importance of integrated community development strategies that address both the physical and social aspects of urban life. I have learned the strong links that exist between physical and social aspects of life in the past few months. The physical environment has such an effect on our lives.

In the broader context of my research, this case study underscores the necessity of holistic approaches to urban development. Initiatives like Urban Villages demonstrate that addressing physical disorder is not merely a cosmetic solution but a fundamental component of sustainable peacebuilding and community resilience. By prioritising the maintenance and enhancement of the physical environment, you can create more inclusive, vibrant, and resilient urban spaces that foster a sense of belonging and collective well-being. Shared spaces that encourage people from any religion or background to use the space and feel safe there, are necessary components of a thriving, integrated community.

Comparative analysis

My time with Urban Villages allowed me to engage in the key areas in Belfast and I intended on comparing Belfast with the key area in Derry. I only ended up going to Derry once during my time in Belfast so a thorough comparative analysis as I intended was not possible with data collected myself, but some from Urban Villages allowed me to draw some comparisons and notes. Firstly I want to note once again how apparent it is that the Urban Villages project had a substantial impact on community cohesion in both Derry/Londonderry and Belfast. However, there were noticeable differences in the degree of this impact between the two cities. Just to make it clear, Urban Villages has five key ‘Urban Villages’ areas. One in Derry and the other

four are in Belfast. This survey compares Derry/Londonderry during the years 2018 - 2023 to the average of all areas. 2,187 total participants (Succession Action Plan Derry/Londonderry Urban Village Area) were sent these questions and below are the results.

	Derry/ Londonderry	Average over 5 areas
As a result of taking part in the Urban Villages project, did you meet anyone from a different background?	83%	90%
As a result of taking part in the Urban Villages project, did you experience the culture and traditions of different backgrounds?	82%	86%
I feel more favourable towards people from a different background.	81%	80%
I am more likely to take part in shared groups/activities with people from a different background.	87%	88%
I feel more strongly that the culture and traditions of different backgrounds adds to the richness and diversity of society.	84%	89%

From Succession action plan Derry. In a survey carried out as part of the exit strategy of 'UV1'- Urban Villages phase 1. (Succession Action Plan Derry/Londonderry Urban Village Area).

The survey results show that 83% of respondents in Derry reported meeting someone from a different background due to their participation in the Urban Villages project, compared to the 90% average. This question showed the largest disparity between Derry/Londonderry and the average, and this indicates that while a significant majority in both cities experienced cross-community interactions, the four other areas in Belfast had a higher success rate in fostering these encounters. This disparity could stem from various factors, including differing levels of community segregation or the varying effectiveness of project implementations across the cities. The fact that the largest disparity was 7% does prove that people are reacting similarly to urban planning and urban development initiatives across the board in Northern Ireland. 82% of participants in Derry experienced the culture and traditions of different backgrounds, compared to an 86% average. Although both figures are high, the slight edge in Belfast may reflect more extensive or better-received cultural programs.

Interestingly, 81% of respondents in Derry felt more favourable towards people from different backgrounds, slightly higher than the 80% average. This suggests that despite fewer opportunities to meet and engage with people from different backgrounds, those in Derry who did participate in the project may have had more impactful experiences, leading to stronger positive sentiments. This was the most notable part of the survey: an increase in projects in Derry that allow people to meet others from different backgrounds, and experience their culture and traditions would improve the social cohesion and relations in the city. To bridge this gap, it would be beneficial for policymakers to focus on targeted interventions in Derry. These could include increasing funding for cultural exchange programs, enhancing community outreach efforts, and creating more opportunities for residents to participate in shared activities. Long-term, sustainable investment in these areas could help elevate Derry's community cohesion to the levels observed in Belfast.

When it comes to the likelihood of participating in shared activities with people from different backgrounds, 87% of Derry participants indicated a positive response, slightly below the 88% average. The near-parity in these figures is encouraging and shows that there is no significant difference in this regard between the cities. The previous question, and this one, only had a 1% differential, indicating that both cities are nearly equivalent in terms of willingness to engage in shared activities with people from different backgrounds, and feeling more favourable towards those people. However, the perception that the culture and traditions of different backgrounds add to the richness and diversity of society is where Derry lags more notably, with 84% compared to the figure of 89% . This was a rather significant difference especially compared to the two previous questions.

These findings provide a snapshot of the differing impacts of the Urban Villages project in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast. They suggest that while both cities have benefited significantly, there is room for improvement in Derry to match the levels of cross-community engagement seen in Belfast. Importantly, all of the average percentages were over 80% positive answers so while I have analysed some needs for improvements, figures are impressive as it is. Trends continuing to improve would only future enhance social cohesion around Northern Ireland. Factors such as historical context, social infrastructure, and community readiness likely play a role in these disparities and should be considered in future project planning and implementation.

Hosford Homes is the final inclusion in this chapter. Located in East Belfast. Hosford Homes is a community-led housing project aimed at providing homeless individuals in East Belfast with the support they need to transition into permanent accommodation. Urban Villages has supported the Hosford Health and Wellbeing Hub project, awarding a total of £69,511 in revenue funding to aid their initiatives. Hosford Homes and Urban Villages are currently collaborating on a project which will see the transformation of a vacant property on Newtownards Road, East Belfast, into six new apartments to provide housing for those at risk of social isolation and homelessness. The project, scheduled for completion by the end of the year, is a critical step in addressing housing insecurity in the area. Improving the physical environment again like many other UV projects, this further plays into the 'broken windows' theory. On this main road in East Belfast we will see brand new housing instead of a vacant property.

I took great interest in Hosford Homes and through my internship I was able to get in contact with Tom Dinnen. Himself and manager Aidan were kind enough to meet me for a coffee on the 16th of May. It perfectly highlights the broader issues that are now in play in Belfast, 26 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Now prominent issues include homelessness and refugees. Along with this, there are so many more ethnicities comprising the communities now, which effectively dilutes the percentage makeup of Catholics and Protestants in every area around Belfast. The world is moving on and problems of the past are no longer as prominent. In a way it does take the focus off the sectarian issues that were prevalent for so long in Belfast. Tom, a key figure in the project, explained how they used this business case to attract additional funding from sources like Commonweal Housing in London. Commonweal Housing, an action learning charity, investigates, tests, and champions innovative housing solutions to social injustice, offering crucial funding and support for projects like Hosford Homes. Tom emphasised the importance of leveraging the Newtownards Road property case to secure further funding, which is vital for the ongoing success and expansion of their initiatives. This collaborative approach not only enhances the operational capacity and reach of Hosford Homes but also demonstrates how strategic funding and robust partnerships can create sustainable, long-term solutions for housing and social support. By drawing on the expertise and resources of organisations like Commonweal Housing, Hosford Homes is better equipped to address complex social issues and deliver impactful, community-driven outcomes.

Resistance to change

Rachael Davidson from the Community Walkway Association in East Belfast has a fascinating story that highlights both the historical and contemporary challenges of cross-community engagement in Northern Ireland. Her parents, one Catholic and one Protestant, got married in 1951, a time when interfaith marriages were viewed through the lens of actual religion rather than sectarian conflict. The primary concern was which church they would get married in and how they would navigate their religious practices, not the violent sectarianism and negative connotations that would emerge later. Rachael explained that during the 1950s, there were no significant sectarian issues; it was simply a matter of religious preference and logistics. Had they married a decade later, their union would have been viewed through a much more contentious lens, reflecting the deepening divisions in Northern Irish society. This background instilled in Rachael a lifelong commitment to bridging these divides. Positionality was quite important in shaping Rachaels career. This was an important aspect of my own ethical considerations for this thesis. Growing up, she was familiar with both the West and East of Belfast, which was not common with both areas being so starkly divided. Her unique background gave her a deep understanding of both communities, and this dual heritage has been a cornerstone of her life's work in cross-community engagement.

Rachael's personal experience is mirrored in her professional role. Today, she is in charge of operations at the Community Walkway Association, an organisation dedicated to providing local community development support. The association runs various programs and activities, including youth work, mothers and toddlers groups, women's groups, and senior women's groups. They also collaborate with local nurseries and creche providers to support families, offering a range of services designed to foster community cohesion and support vulnerable members of the community. Their job has been made slightly difficult in the last few years now that they have a permanent home in the Walkway Community Centre. At the end of 2016 a huge opportunity arose as the site near their temporary community centre, which was planned to be turned to a rail line, no longer was. The glider, which is basically a bus, came into East Belfast and was going to be used for public transportation, so the rail lines were no longer necessary, finally enabling the playpark to be built and the community centre that they are in now. The image below is what the

community centre looks like today. A modern, two story hub that caters for the people of East Belfast.

(K Systems. (n.d.). Walkways Community Centre [Photograph]. Retrieved from https://k.systems/projects/walkways-community-centre) Date accessed: 02/06/2024)

The area where this community centre and playpark are located is known as Bloomfield, had also been the venue for Eleventh Night Bonfires, a celebration every year that Unionists took part in, and smaller celebrations still take place at this site to this day. To give a quick overview on what the Eleventh Night Bonfire celebrations are, the PUL community celebrate the triumph of (Protestant) William of Orange over (Catholic) King James in 1690 by attending parades and bonfires.Bonfires are a key part of the culture war which has developed in Northern Ireland, raising vital questions about the role of culture following negotiated settlement in deeply-divided societies more broadly. Northern Ireland's cultural celebrations continue to be battlegrounds for the enactment of identities and the marking of territory—replacing paramilitary violence, and providing displays of strength and cohesiveness that serve to further enforce boundaries between "us" and "them." (Hall, 2023). Politics begins to come into play here. The bonfires are lit on the 11th of July every year and consist of rings of wooden pallets around the outside and rubbish, miscellaneous flammable objects. However the most controversial additions to these bonfires are the irish tri colours, campaign posters of nationalist politicians and/or effigies of individuals from

the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) community which are all burnt. These gatherings are not without controversy or violence: There have been heated debates about the right to fly paramilitary flags in public spaces or to create murals glorifying violence. A new generation has been exposed to conflicting identities as a result of these festivals taken together. Through the use of sectarian concepts and imagery, violent actors are able to uphold community authority, exert influence over formal peace mechanisms, and enforce boundaries between ethnic groups through cultural and communal activity (Hall, 2023).

In order to prevent a relapse into violence, it is crucial to comprehend the role that culture and community play after a mediated settlement. Education and cross-community engagement are ways that this can happen. My particular interest in reconciliation through Sports was partly due to the potential it had in bringing both sides of this conflict together from a young age. I believe that both sides would be less likely to engage in events like this if they had friends/partners/classmates on the 'other' side. Groups have the capacity to not only preserve but also create conflict roles and identities. Below is an example of these bonfires at the Bloomfield play park, right beside the Walkway Community Centre.

(Press Eye Ltd/Shutterstock) Accessed on 02/06/2024.

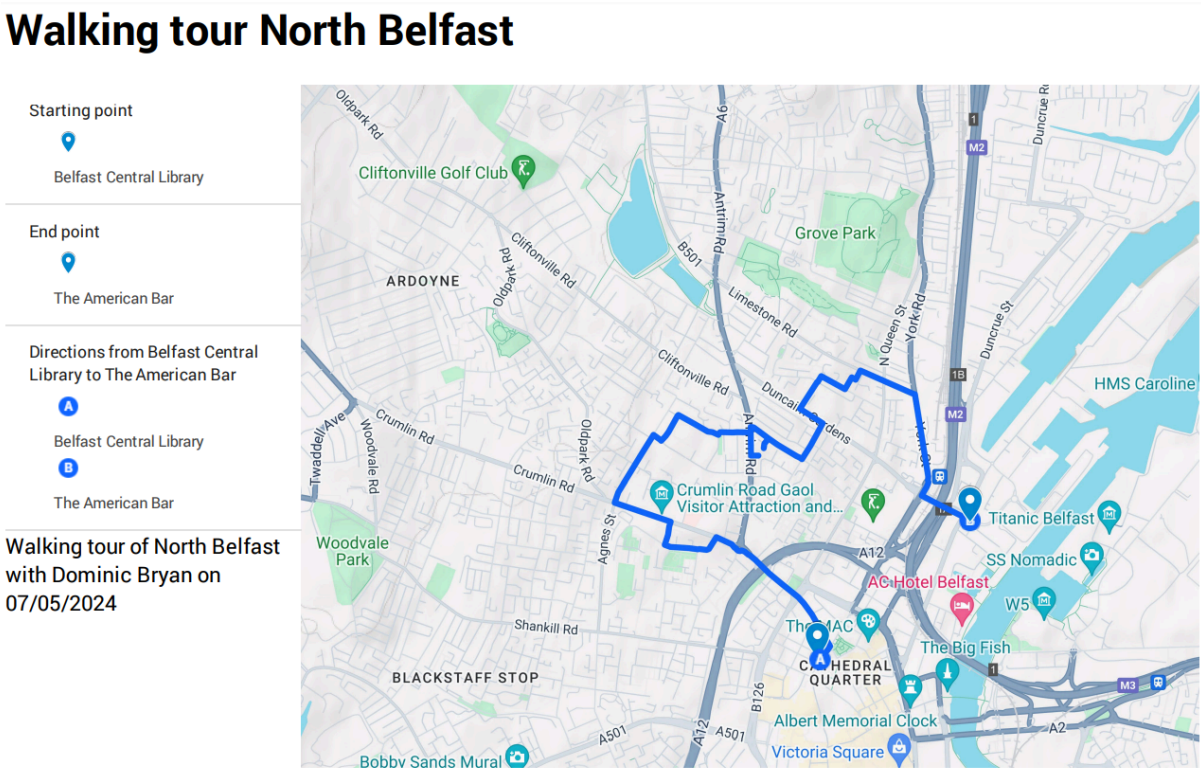
This image shows a fire burning with riot police walking towards the photographer. Roughly 25 metres to the left of this photo is where the Walkway Community Centre is located. Rachael told me that for years beforehand, The Walkway Association along with other members of the community would help out and organise the celebrations of 11th of July. This was in an attempt to key it as safe as possible and try ensure there was no drinking or drug use around the bonfires. Rachael explained that they had an agreement to help with the bonfires but there would be no alcohol allowed. By doing this the celebration still happened every year but the community was safe, in a way it was a win win for everyone. According to Rachael it was their best chance of keeping the celebrations safe every year.

The plans to build the play park on the bonfire site, however, met with significant resistance from some Loyalist community members. For them, the bonfire site was more than just a location for celebration; it was a symbol of their cultural identity and heritage. The proposal to replace it with a play park was seen as an encroachment on this symbolic space. Rachael recalled confrontations with local men who vehemently opposed the plan, asserting their right to continue the bonfire tradition. “You are not going to fucking stop us having this bonfire,” one man told her, encapsulating the intensity of their opposition. This marked a turning point; the working relationship and mutual respect Rachael had built with the community over many years were severely damaged. From 2017 onwards, the relationship deteriorated beyond repair, illustrating the deep-seated resistance to change that can arise when cultural traditions are threatened. The cultures are weaponized in these scenarios. The conflict over the play park project epitomises the broader theme of resistance to change in divided societies. Cultural traditions, especially those rooted in historical grievances and identity, are often fiercely defended.

Despite these challenges, Rachael and the Walkway Association have continued their efforts to support the community. Their programs provide crucial services such as daycare and further education for teen mothers, and this fosters a sense of community and offers stability in an area marked by economic and social challenges. Additionally, Rachael’s efforts to maintain dialogue with both sides of the community, despite setbacks, demonstrate her unwavering commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation.Rachael organises coffee mornings and meet ups with other community centres around Belfast, specifically focusing other groups with young babies and teen parents. The association’s work has also brought them recognition beyond Belfast. The

Walkway Association has visited Dublin, where Rachael has met former Irish President Mary McAleese on several occasions. During one visit, Rachael and McAleese bonded over their shared experiences as mothers dealing with daughters who were struggling with their futures. This conversation highlighted a fundamental truth about peacebuilding: beneath the layers of conflict and division, common human experiences can foster empathy and understanding.

The Walkway Association's experience underscores the importance of strategic, community-focused initiatives in peacebuilding. By providing essential services and creating safe spaces for interaction, the association helps to build trust and reduce tensions. However, the resistance encountered over the play park project illustrates the limits of such efforts when cultural and identity issues are at stake. It suggests that successful peacebuilding requires not only practical interventions but also a deep sensitivity to the symbolic dimensions of cultural practices. Rachael Davidson's story and her work with the Community Walkway Association provide valuable insights into the complexities of peacebuilding in divided societies. The resistance to the play park project highlights the deep-seated nature of cultural traditions and the challenges of negotiating change in such a context. However, Rachael's lifelong commitment to cross-community engagement and the association's ongoing efforts demonstrate the potential for gradual, grassroots-driven progress in fostering peace and reconciliation.



Above is the mapped route of my walking tour of North Belfast which Dominic Byran, who I mentioned in the methodology section, took me on. There are numerous interfaces between Catholic and Protestant areas in North Belfast and we passed through many of them on this tour. Interestingly he said that many of the facilities (shops and so on) are not shared. One of the first interfaces we passed after the bridge near the Shankill area, I asked if it was common for these facilities to be shared and he told me this was not the case at all. The most significant insight I gleaned from this tour was his point on the issue of funding allocation, a concern that has also emerged in my observations of the Urban Villages initiative. In Belfast, government funding for Catholic and Protestant areas is meticulously matched to the exact pound, Dominic told me. Presumably to ensure fairness and prevent unrest. This practice, however, has led to an obsession with the idea of fairness at the expense of funding quality and project impact. My colleagues in UrbanVillages explained to me that this is something which has to be considered when planning any project. What audience will this benefit most? Catholic/Protestants, or both.

In my view, this approach often results in communities prioritising equality of funding over the substantive benefits of the projects themselves. For instance, it seems that communities would prefer receiving a £1 million project, irrespective of its quality, rather than a £5 million investment if it meant that the opposing community received £6 million. This preoccupation with numerical parity can overshadow the actual needs and potential benefits to the community, hindering the development of more impactful and meaningful projects.

A case in point is the Marrowbone area in North Belfast, which underwent a substantial £4.3 million redevelopment in October 2023. This redevelopment introduced several new facilities, including an astroturf football pitch, a pavilion with 128 spectator seats, a multi-use community space, accessible changing facilities, a new play park, a multi-use games area, an outdoor gym, and a community events space. These additions significantly enhanced the local infrastructure and provided a shared space aimed at fostering community cohesion. Despite the positive outcomes, the Ballysillan community raised concerns about when they would receive similar funding, despite Marrowbone being a shared space accessible to all. This reaction underscores a broader issue within the funding framework, where the focus on equal distribution may inadvertently foster a sense of competition and entitlement rather than collaboration and shared progress. It highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to funding, one that prioritises the quality and impact of projects over rigid equality, and that takes into account the specific needs and potential of each community. This could lead to more effective and transformative use of resources, ultimately benefiting all communities involved.

Truth, Discipline, Respect

Sport can be a driver of change, promoting social cohesion and inclusion. However, it can also create conflict and be an arena of discrimination and divide (Morgan & Wilk, 2022). It has the potential to spark rivalries further and grow a further hatred/disliking to the 'other'. During my walking tour of North Belfast Dominic Bryan, a soccer youth team coach himself, told me that one way in which this is being combatted is that referees and youth team coaches are trained to deal with sectarianism on the pitch. He recalled one instance of an opposing member in a game being sent off for using a slur. Addressing the issue at the foundational level, where young athletes are first introduced to the sport and its values is an effective, bottom up approach to dealing with the potential that sport has to spark a conflict. Sports, which is broadly defined as structured, planned programmes of activity, with the aim of improving health or maintaining fitness, have been shown to have enormous benefits on the physical health and well-being of individuals, including reducing risk of non-communicable diseases, and the potential benefits to communities are widely recognised (Clarke et al., 2021).

This chapter sets out to see how sports can be used as a means of reconciliation throughout Belfast and increase cross-community engagement. In this analysis of sports organisations and reconciliation in Australia Morgan & Wilk explain that sport is a powerful vehicle for engaging Indigenous Australians in a variety of positive activities, serving as a catalyst for broader societal benefits. Through participation in sports, Indigenous individuals are provided with opportunities that extend far beyond the playing field and I argue that this too is the case for everyone around the world, and in Belfast specifically. These opportunities can significantly enhance educational attainment, foster meaningful employment prospects, and promote better health and wellbeing. Sports can act as a bridge, connecting Indigenous communities with essential resources and support systems that contribute to their overall development and empowerment (Morgan & Wilk, 2022). Referring back to the definition of Reconciliation I am using- Reconciliation can also be understood as the development of positive intergroup relations after violent conflict, and thus primarily concerned with psychological, relational, and identity change, rather than institution/state building, though these are interrelated (Bar-Tal and Bennink 2004; Lederach 1997) sports have great potential for reconciliation by developing positive intergroup relations. Moreover, the communal nature of sports fosters a sense of belonging and identity (a key aim of

the Urban Villages programme) which is crucial for the personal and social development of Indigenous youth. By participating in team sports and other athletic activities, individuals can build strong social networks and gain valuable life skills such as teamwork, leadership, and resilience. These skills are transferable to other areas of life, enhancing one's ability to navigate challenges and seize opportunities in education and the workforce.

Sports can serve as a platform for cross-cultural exchange and understanding, breaking down barriers of prejudice and fostering mutual respect (Clarke et al., 2021). When the younger generation in Belfast grows up interacting with all members of the community and sharing this mutual respect, it is likely to extend into all areas of life.. Events and programs that bring together Catholics and Protestants in shared spaces also make good use of the physical environment. Since coming here to Belfast I have realised the amount of layers that apply to peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. Keeping to this sports theme, if the physical environment has been improved and there has been sports facilities provided for the community, using sports to bring people together becomes a whole lot easier than if the community was deprived of these facilities. I have also come to learn that the role of Urban Villages can start processes of peacebuilding 10+ years before any results may be seen by the general public. A project such as the Girdwood Community Hub, which I visited during my walking tour of North Belfast with Dominic Bryan on 10/05/2024, is an example of this shared space but was years in the making. Now it is a multi-functional space with pitches and a community centre well used by both communities.As the younger generation train and play together, their parents and guardians also interact during drop-offs and pick-ups, which provides natural opportunities for communication.

What makes this project even more successful is that it transformed a former military barracks into a shared space. Parents' stereotypes about the other community are challenged and altered by these regular interactions. Parents develop a feeling of common purpose around their kids' activities as a result of sharing experiences and having interactions with one another as individuals. This fosters a sense of community and upholds the values of respect for their kids and inclusivity. Over time, these casual interactions have the potential to lead to deeper discussions about community issues, fostering a broader reconciliation process. By focusing on grassroots engagement, this approach ensures that peacebuilding is a lived experience, creating a

sustainable foundation for long-term peace and cohesion within the community. I believe this sort of an approach to peacebuilding also shows people the similarities that exist between one another.

During my walking tour of East Belfast we visited the Prokick gym. Founded by Billy Murray in 1991. Billy, a four-weight world kickboxing champion in his own right now trains and mentors many young people in Belfast, now in a new gym thanks to the help of Urban Villages. The respect that the people have for Billy was obvious, all his students bow to him. It was as if I was watching the Karate Kid movie. This Urban Villages project transformed an under utilised and ageing, existing warehouse facility into a modern, safe and shared space for the local community incorporating state of the art gym and weight areas along with a portable ring and boxing area. There is a kitchen, office space and changing area to boot. 'Truth, Discipline, Respect' is emblazoned across the outside of the gym. Once again being able to change unused, derelict spaces which just look depressing, and do not contribute to a vibrant community, into a shared space for people of the community to make use of. People from any walk of life come to exercise here and the positive effects that this has on mental health cannot be overstated. One project which may seem small in the grand scheme of things can positively contribute to a communities mental health, the physical environment, and cross community engagement. The knock on effect is huge. As well as all of this the broken windows theory which i discussed in a previous chapter comes into play here. I think this sort of an example of one 'small project' can be used as a metaphor for numerous different worldwide issues. Your climate change, water scarcity, social inequalities (just some random examples that popped into my head first) are all issues that seem too large to tackle, but making small changes most definitely make a difference, no matter how little it is. Perhaps if you were to look at the new Prokick gym before it was built, someone with a close mind may say "How is this going to solve the issues in our community?" but it is not magic. These changes happen slowly but surely and when they do, everyone is ecstatic they did from what I have seen. I have realised the significance of each individual project or initiative by Urban Villages, or anyone else fighting the cause.

On Sunday the 28th of April I attended the Champions Fight Night at Prokick Gym. After meeting Billy Murray and getting shown around their new home during my walking tour of East Belfast he was kind enough to invite me to the Fight Night, which saw local Jay Snodden in his

first professional bout. Over 300 people attended to show their support to Jay and to the numerous other fighters earlier on in the evening.

The image on the left was taken by Billy Murray on 17/04/2024. Image on the right taken by me, the Author on 28/04/2024. Both at Prokick Gym in East Belfast.

The above images are at the Prokick gym. Local support officer with Urban Villages, Kathy Anjorin (left) , co-worker in Urban Villages (Matthew Logan), and I (right) are seen in the image on the left during our walking tour of East Belfast. The image on the right was taken when I attended a fight night at Prokick. Before the fight night got underway, the atmosphere was electric and the venue was packed to capacity. Music blared from the speakers, setting an energetic tone as the crowd eagerly awaited the matches.The gym, transformed into a vibrant arena, pulsed with excitement as the event began. Knowing that I was working with Urban Villages, I was treated like royalty by Billy and the other workers there, getting a seat in the front row! I could find no better example of how well regarded UV is in communities across Belfast. Billy was extremely grateful that I came and represented Urban Villages, after they had helped with the funding and the capital side of this gym being built in 2019. Fighters come from the Short Strand (The only predominantly Republican area in East Belfast) and use the facilities at Prokick and Billy emphasised the power that sport has in terms of reconciliation and cross community engagement. One of the judges on the night spoke about getting the opportunity to

become a judge and also referee matches after having to medically retire from fighting. The fact that the new Prokick gym had an area upstairs to host fights helped her do this, after being involved with Prokick in the past while still competing. Community capacity being built in this case has helped people to stay involved, and give them a sense of purpose.

How better to highlight processes of reconciliation than when Mary McAleese, president of the Republic of Ireland at the time paid a visit to Prokick. Mary McAleese was well known for using her time as president to address issues concerning anti sectarianism and reconciliation. On the 19th of February, the Irish president at the time paid a visit to a number of different areas in Belfast on her one day visit to Northern Ireland. This was not the first time the former president visited but this trip where she took time to visit places such as Prokick was a great day of recognition for them. A quote from Mary at London Business School on that day:

“Today Ireland’s economic relationship with Britain, like its political relationship, is one of much healthier balance and much greater variety. We are a very fortunate generation to be living through these times of great and good change, for there is a new-found friendship, respect and equilibrium in our relationships which should make us both proud and hopeful for the future.” (Mary McAleese, 2004)

Twenty years ago, Mary McAleese spoke about the newfound friendship and respect that existed between Ireland and Britain, highlighting a healthier balance and greater variety in their economic and political relationships. While there have been significant strides in cross-community engagement and mutual respect in Northern Ireland, challenges remain. Despite progress, some communities still struggle with deep-seated prejudices. Reflecting on my own background as a Catholic from the Republic of Ireland, I recognize my inherent optimism about these relationships. However, it is crucial to critically assess both the successes and shortcomings of current efforts. In another twenty years, we can hope that people will look back and see even greater improvements, but this will require continuous, dedicated efforts to address ongoing issues. Progress must be sustained and inclusive to ensure it benefits all segments of society.

Increasing emphasis is placed on collaborating with communities rather than imposing projects on them, as there is growing concern about the potential imperialistic or colonial undertones in

many development and peacebuilding efforts (Clarke et al., 2021). The significance of engaging local actors is explicitly mentioned in the review by Clarke et al , ranging from traditional gatekeeper roles to training locals as coaches, and fostering a grassroots approach. Some studies highlight the importance of cooperation with local community groups and encourage semi-organic interactions to ensure authentic local engagement (Clarke et al., 2021). Having a familiar face in the form of local actors is comorting for people engaging in these sporting activities so a mix of local actors and other actors does seem like a successful route to take. Clarke et al identified five key concepts emerging from their review of peacebuilding through sports: sports projects need to be part of broader initiatives. There is a need for local actor engagement. Context is key, sport as a vehicle (i.e., to engagement), rather than a means to an end goal, and the choice of sport can be problematic.

Concepts 1 through 4 are quite closely linked. Sport should be a means to an end goal i.e. as part of broader peacebuilding initiatives and once again I find myself referencing the point that in peacebuilding, every small act or project, when combined, is what will make a successful attempt at peacebuilding. All the projects such as Prokick Gym, the Irish language projects, and cross-community engagement can be part of the broader initiative. Just to note, a broader initiative should include many, many more projects, but these are the focus of my thesis. Number 3 is an important one because in the case of Northern Ireland, points such as where you are organising these events need to be taken into consideration. You need people to feel safe when they attend events so shared spaces would help achieve this. Shared facilities would likely help people as a whole feel more accepted and perhaps hosting some sporting events in both areas could be successful, but I am not sure. The last concept identified is regarding the choice of sport, and how that could be problematic. Clarke et all state that some question the suitability of football, suggesting it may not always be the best choice and that football can sometimes exacerbate divisions or exclusion (Clarke et al., 2021). However, many other sources suggest that the specific sport is less important than its use as a vehicle for broader interventions in fractured or vulnerable communities. These interventions aim to engage targeted demographics in wider peacebuilding efforts, using sports as a tool for social cohesion and development. It should be kept in mind that it is only a tool for peacebuilding and in regard to the doubts surrounding football specifically, the beauty of sports is the vast amount of them that exist. Martial Arts is one such example, just ask Billy Murray over at Prokick Gym.

The Irish Language

As previously mentioned, Linda Ervine MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), founded 'Turas' thirteen years ago after beginning learning the language through a six week course. Linda has been awarded an MBE for her services and contribution as a language activist and is currently in the process of completing her degree in Irish. An MBE is awarded for outstanding achievement or service to the community. 'Turas' is an Irish word which translates to 'journey' and their aim is to connect people from Protestant backgrounds especially with the Irish language. Turas are based on the belief that the language belongs to everyone and that it can be a mechanism of reconciliation. Hearing about the taboo surrounding the Irish language did highlight a resistance to change in East Belfast but this also presents a unique opportunity for peacebuilding and cross-community engagement through this great language. Linda has been awarded an MBE for her services and contribution so far and is currently in the process of completing her degree in Irish. When I first heard about Linda Ervine MBE I knew immediately I had to meet her. Known as an Irish language activist, Linda aims to keep Irish alive, foster cultural identity and diversity.

Reconciliation through Irish is a passion of Linda's and she wants people to stop associating the language with Nationalism. Although there are close links with the Irish and the nationalist movement, it was the first language of everyone on the island from the 6th until at least the 17th century (Mitchell & Miller, 2019). Linda told me various stories of teenagers turning up to some classes, and making it clear they did not want their parents finding out, knowing it would not be received well. There was another story of a married man who attended some online classes during covid but would not attend when they returned to face to face classes out of fear of what his neighbours may think if they found out he was going, citing the safety of his wife and child as too important to risk. Traditionally, Unionists would not associate themselves with the Irish language whatsoever. These online classes continue to this day for reasons like that but Linda said that she is trying to reach out to people outside of Belfast too, who cannot attend in person due to their geographical location. It became clear to me that this resistance to change came from the older generation. This of course would make sense as the the people who have lived through The Troubles may have more hatred to the other side, past traumas or even loved ones lost in the

conflict. The following quote from Linda highlights a willingness to learn and an interest in the history of Ireland outside of religion and past conflict:

“If you don’t have a knowledge of the language, you don’t have a language of what’s around you” - Linda Ervine on the Tommy Tiernan show.

This language was spoken by everyone on the island long before any conflict (Mitchell & Miller, 2019). The taboo surrounding the Irish language today is challenged by Turas and by providing a safe space for individuals to explore their linguistic heritage without fear of stigma or reprisal, Turas constantly aims to break down barriers and promote acceptance of linguistic diversity as a pathway to peacebuilding. Linda has said how she wants more members of the PUL community to embrace the Irish language. As Turas is located in East Belfast, it is faced with the challenge of opening the eyes of people from PUL backgrounds. Apart from the Short Strand, East Belfast is predominantly Protestant. The primary identity groups, typically categorised as Protestant (pro-British and 'unionist') and Catholic (pro-Irish and 'nationalist'), do not have a linguistic divide in their everyday communication, as both groups predominantly speak English nowadays. Nonetheless, the historical context of colonialism and efforts toward Anglicisation, alongside the cultural and political assertions by Irish nationalists, have endowed the Irish language with profound symbolic importance within the conflict (Goldenberg 2002). This table below is outdated, but in the 1990s the vast majority of people speaking Irish were Roman Catholics. Of the 9.4% of people over the age of 3 that had some ability of Irish, this was the breakdown.

Irish-speakers by religion, Northern Ireland, 1991

Religion	*Percentage of Irish-speaking population (%)*
Roman Catholic	89.4

Presbyterian	1.0
Church of Ireland	1.3
Methodist	0.2
Other	1.1
Not stated	5.1
None	1.8

Source: Northern Ireland Census, 1991

The Northern Ireland census 2021 shows that 12.4 per cent, or 228,600 people of the population aged 3 and over had some ability in the Irish language (Northern Ireland 2021 Census, n.d.) (Northern Ireland Census, 2021). Up from 9.4% in 1991. As we thrive towards peace this is an indicator that Irish is being seen less as a 'Nationalist' language now. Linda Ervine and Theresa Brady are contributing to an increase in this figure. Unfortunately there was no breakdown of Irish speakers by religion in this census, perhaps an attempt to remove this 'us' versus 'them' mentality. Although outdated this graph gives an overview of how the Irish speakers are predominately from a Catholic background. I found it quite encouraging to see a 3% increase in people with some ability in the language in 2021 however.

There are many reasons as to why we will have seen an increase in other religious backgrounds speaking Irish. A straightforward one being that besides seeking to `facilitate and encourage' the use of the language in administrative affairs, as well as building working relationships with the Irish-language community, specific commitments were made in the Good Friday Agreement relation to education whereby the British government will: `place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education in line with current provision for integrated education' (Chriost, 2000). The fact that there are more diverse communities today all around the world, and through this statutory duty the 89.4% seen for Roman Catholics will disperse. In relation to Protestant people speaking the language, the work of Linda Ervine, Theresa Brady (who I will write about towards the end of this chapter) and

many others will have no doubt increased this figure and continue to do so. As we move away from the intense, violent times pre-Good Friday agreement, a natural dissociation between Irish and nationalism will occur as it is no longer being used as a “language of resistance”.

In 1893, Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League) was established to promote and revive the Irish language after its use had somewhat diminished. The Gaelic 11 League contributed to an Irish nationalism that was ‘Anglo-phobic and anti-Protestant, subscribing to a theory of the “Celtic Race" that denied the true Irishness of Irish Protestants and Ulster Unionists’ (Foster 1990, 459). There are many reasons as to why Irish as a language can be associated with nationalism and I will explain this later. It is clear that the use and the promotion of the Irish language had different meanings during these times and today it can be used in a completely different way. Turas exemplifies this. By fostering an environment where individuals from Protestant, Unionist, and Nationalist backgrounds can come together to learn and appreciate the Irish language, Turas promotes cross-community engagement and understanding. The taboo surrounding the Irish language today is challenged by Turas and by providing a safe space for individuals to explore their linguistic heritage without fear of stigma or reprisal, Turas constantly aims to break down barriers and promote acceptance of linguistic diversity as a pathway to peacebuilding.

Linda Ervine's leadership and dedication to promoting the Irish language within the Protestant, Unionist, and Loyalist (PUL) community are instrumental in advancing peacebuilding efforts. Her recognition as an MBE underscores the significance of her contributions to bridging divides and fostering reconciliation through language. Acknowledging the historical significance of the Irish language and its complex relationship with identity, nationalism, and colonialism and recognizing the challenges of past associations with Anglo-phobia and anti-Protestant sentiments also allows people of a PUL background to understand the history of the language and how studying and celebrating the language in today’s world has completely different meaning to what it would have in years gone by.

Ionad na Fuiseoige

Much like the great work that is being done by Linda Ervine, this community in West Belfast also does great work in promoting the use of Irish. With the love I have for the Irish language it

was great to meet with these people and have some conversations with them through Irish. The pride I felt from doing this surprised me and seeing the smile on their faces when they realised I too could speak the language put a smile on my face. Being from the Republic of Ireland I do see more people having a grasp of the language than in the North but still the figures are quite low. Theresa Brady told me about all the work being done over at Ionad na Fuiseoige. Among many other things they provide quality early years provision, and they open up the Irish language and culture to all sections of the community and promote equal participation. People from all parts of the community come to Ionad na Fuiseoige and participate in art classes, sewing classes and many other classes while also learning a few words of Irish. This approach appealed to me as it takes the pressure off learning in a classroom sort of setting and is more of a natural way to do it. When Theresa first started in Belfast 24 years ago people had no energy for languages and culture, and she had to break down a lot of barriers. It took time for her to prove to people that this community centre was a positive thing and that coming down and attending would actually help bring people together. It was not even a case of Catholics versus Protestants , Theresa explained that many Catholics (Vast majority of people in West Belfast are Catholic) would not even interact with each other and issues such as poverty and family members being in jail were more important in their lives. There was also a sense from people that they would only be living in West Belfast temporarily. I was told that when many catholics first moved there they had been forced out of other areas all around Belfast and forced to move in there in the height of the conflict. As time went on, people most likely realised this may be more of a permanent situation. When I asked about peacebuilding efforts and if any divides exist in the area, Theresa said “peacebuilding is happening with all people, not just Catholics and Protestants" and this speaks to the fact that there is such diversity in communities today, no matter where they are, and these people need to be accounted for. It begs the question of “should so much focus be put on the divide that still exists between Catholics V Protestants?”.

Theresa Brady and her colleagues over at ‘Ionad na Fuiseoige’ (direct translation into english is Community of the Lark) are also doing great work in promoting the use of the Irish language and are doing so in a different way. Visiting the community centre and being shown around by Theresa I felt a real sense of community. There is a day care centre, small coffee shop and reception for people to come and have a chat. It felt wholesome. People of all ages come here

and it gives them a sense of purpose. This helps build community capacity and is a venue that encourages cross community engagement. This project contributes towards peacebuilding efforts in Belfast. Theresa mentioned that when she first started 24 years ago that there was some level of Irish being spoken in the area, by people who used to be in jail or had people they knew in jail. I found out that this was known as the 'Jailtacht'. To give some background on this, 'An Gaeltacht' in Ireland today is an area, usually now in rural Ireland because they are becoming less and less common, where Irish (exclusively) is spoken. It is traditional for many young teens around the ages of 14-17 to go to the Gaeltacht in the Summer for 3 or so weeks to improve their Irish for academic and cultural reasons. (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2012) examines the origins and development of "Jailic" which is a play on Gaelic, The Irish language, and "Jailtacht" (a deformation of "jail" and "Gaeltacht") in Her Majesty's Prison Maze, a prison in County Antrim which housed paramilitary prisoners from 1971 until 2000. There is a chronology of the evolving relationship between Irish republican prisoners and the Irish language that Mac Giolla Chríost splits into three different phases: Internment (1972 –76), Protest (1976 – 81) and Strategic Engagement (1981 –98).

In the early phase, prisoners organised Irish-speaking huts that, despite low levels of language competence, were critical to acquisition. The learning and speaking of Irish then altered from 1976, both practically and symbolically. The move from the Cages to the H-Blocks and the removal of Special Category Status saw prisoners confined to their cells and without access to Irish-language materials. As prisoners protested against their criminalisation, Irish became "the language of resistance" (Mac Giolla Chríost, 2012). Even in prison, identities are so important to people and the Irish language was a tool to recreate the prison space which they were in, and also their own identities while tackling social issues of group membership and identity. Identities are understood as social processes of continuous 're-writing' of the self and of social collectives (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). Rewriting of social collectives in Northern Ireland would be to break down existing barriers and prejudices. Psychologists have found that the need to belong to a group is so strong in humans, exclusion from groups causes physical distress (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2005). Identification is a phase where group membership provides individuals with a sense of belonging, allowing them to derive self-esteem from their association with the group (Hornsey, 2008).

This is also linked with social comparison, where groups are systematically compared based on a hierarchical standard. Individuals compare their in-group to out-groups and base their self-esteem on these comparisons. The out-groups being the perceived ‘others’. If they perceive their in-group as superior to the out-group, their self-esteem is enhanced, and vice versa (Hornsey, 2008). This inherent need for positive distinctiveness fosters inequality, as feeling better about one's group necessitates perceiving it as superior to others. Thus, group membership significantly impacts individuals' personal well-being, with the need for positive distinctiveness from other groups being crucial for self-esteem. (Hornsey, 2008). In the context of Irish nationalists, the use of the Irish language in prison served not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful tool for establishing a distinct identity and sense of belonging. By maintaining and promoting their language, Irish nationalists could reinforce their group identity, contrasting themselves with their British counterparts and fostering a sense of pride and solidarity. This linguistic distinctiveness contributed to their self-esteem and well-being, underscoring the profound implications of group membership and identity in social contexts. While it did foster a sense of pride and solidarity it would have put a target on their backs as Nationalists.

Referring to sub question #3 “Are there communities in Belfast that are resistant to change? If so, who are these communities, and why are they resistant?” The whole story of the Jailtacht does explain why communities in East Belfast for reference, may have some negative connotations with the Irish language and may think negatively towards those who are expressing an interest in it, and its culture. This points towards reasons why there has been opposition/resistance by some members of the PUL community still today and while I have previously mentioned that the Irish language was spoken by everyone long before conflicts arose, I can see why these associations are in place today. The efforts of activists like Linda Ervine and Theresa Brady highlight the transformative potential of the Irish language as a vehicle for reconciliation and community building in Northern Ireland. Linda Ervine's initiative, Turas, serves as a beacon of hope and progress, working to dismantle the longstanding association between the Irish language and nationalism. By fostering an inclusive environment where individuals from PUL backgrounds can engage with the Irish language without fear of

reprisal, Turas challenges deep-seated taboos and encourages a reimagining of cultural identity. The accounts of opposition to change, especially from older generations who lived through the Troubles directly, highlight how difficult it is to support linguistic variety in a society that has been split for a long time. Theresa Brady's work at Ionad na Fuiseoige shows that community centres can function as focal points for the revitalisation of community relations and culture. Breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of belonging among participants, Ionad na Fuiseoige provides easily accessible and varied programmes that mix language learning with everyday activities. Through encouraging communication and understanding amongst communities, this not only supports attempts to preserve the Irish language but also larger peacebuilding initiatives. The historical context of the "Jailtacht" phenomenon, where Republican prisoners used the Irish language as a tool of resistance and identity formation, provides a poignant example of the language's enduring symbolic power. The evolution of the Irish language from a marker of resistance to a bridge for reconciliation reflects the dynamic nature of cultural identity and the potential for positive change.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how urban development, and planning can serve as powerful tools for peacebuilding in Belfast, addressing deep-rooted societal divides and fostering community cohesion. My research explored the mechanisms through which targeted urban planning initiatives can contribute to rebuilding trust and creating shared spaces, vital for communities that have historically been segregated. My internship with Urban Villages offered invaluable practical insights, enabling me to observe how such theoretical principles are implemented on the ground. These projects demand a multifaceted approach, and it has made me appreciate the work and effort it takes to improve the communities around us between land use and planning permission issues, engagement with local authorities/key stakeholders, and attempting to secure funding for even small-scale developments. While this thesis provided valuable insights into the role of urban planning and urban development in fostering peacebuilding, the scope was limited to specific case studies. Similarly, as with any other thesis, I was constrained by my methodological choices and the focus of my case studies. Additionally, the reliance on ethnographic methods, while offering depth, may have overlooked broader systemic patterns that quantitative approaches might illuminate. Nevertheless, I believe that an ethnographic approach was well-suited to the objectives of this thesis, as it provided a nuanced and contextually rich understanding of community dynamics and urban development and planning.

This experience has had a significant impact on my everyday cognitive process and how I view the built environment. In my everyday interactions with shared spaces, I now find myself questioning the purpose of urban development projects I encounter, asking questions to myself such as, "What is the purpose of this project?" and "How does this development reflect the needs of the community?" or even questioning how a development's planning permit was obtained. My awareness of the opportunities and difficulties in urban planning has improved as a result of these reflections, strengthening my resolve to pursue a profession that puts people and places first. As I now look ahead to the next phase of my career, I am eager to find a postgraduate role that, much like my internship with Urban Villages, is deeply committed to improving the lives of people and their communities. This has always been my ultimate goal, though for years, I struggled to pinpoint how I could contribute meaningfully in this way. When I began my

bachelor's degree in 2019, I considered becoming a primary school teacher, believing it would allow me to help others in a tangible way. However, through my studies and experiences since starting this master's degree, I came to realise that my passion lies in creating positive change on a broader scale. Whether through planning, urban development, or another field dedicated to social impact, I am committed to bringing a community-centric approach to my work. I believe that prioritising the well-being and needs of people is essential for any role aiming to create sustainable and meaningful improvements in the lives of individuals and the spaces they inhabit.

Urban Villages exemplifies the transformative potential of urban development when guided by a clear vision. By focusing on fostering positive community identities, building capacity, and enhancing physical environments, they demonstrate how strategic urban development can serve as a foundation for peacebuilding. My research emphasised how these priorities align with broader urban regeneration goals, addressing issues such as social exclusion and economic inequality. For example, Urban Villages' focus on creating shared spaces has not only improved the physical landscape but also facilitated meaningful interactions across traditionally divided communities. Such initiatives serve as a blueprint for how urban planning can actively contribute to breaking down barriers and fostering a sense of collective belonging. In revisiting the key findings of this thesis, it becomes evident that the relationship between urban planning and peacebuilding is deeply intertwined. The tools employed by organisations like Urban Villages (collaborative design processes, participatory planning, and inclusive decision-making) demonstrate that urban development is not merely about infrastructure. Instead, it is a dynamic process that reflects and shapes the social fabric of a city. Although you may look at a project and see a football pitch being built, many would not realise the level of thought gone into the social and communal effects such a project has on an area. As Belfast continues to evolve, these lessons hold critical importance for ensuring that development projects address not only physical needs but also the psychological and social dimensions of community well-being.

In this context, urban development in Northern Ireland must fundamentally adopt a bottom-up approach, empowering local communities to play a central role in shaping their environments. This ensures that initiatives are inclusive and rooted in the lived experiences, aspirations, and cultural contexts of residents. By prioritizing community engagement, urban planning can foster trust and ownership, addressing the specific needs of diverse groups. However, as the scale and

complexity of projects grow, critical questions arise: At what stage does a top-down approach become necessary to ensure coherence, resource allocation, and policy alignment? Or is there always a need for a dynamic interplay between grassroots participation and strategic oversight? These questions underscore the importance of striking a balance between empowering communities and maintaining broader regional and national development objectives. Ultimately, sustainable and inclusive urban regeneration in Northern Ireland will require this nuanced interplay, blending the strengths of both bottom-up and top-down strategies to build a shared future.

Reading the legacy reports for the five key Urban Villages areas is how I answered the second sub question on "How do the people and communities react to projects, initiatives, and urban development in their areas?". These legacy reports showed me the array of successes that have come with the UV project, while also highlighting some shortcomings. Some of their successes include: the praise for local coordinators and local support officers, who were assigned to one of the five key areas. 'Familiar faces' made a big difference, showing that they cared, and that UV wasn't just another box ticking exercise. It felt to me as though UV did a good job of understanding the needs of each local area and not assuming the same approach would work in each one. UV did not deviate from what they said they would do. Stuck to its vision. I found it difficult to be critical of the UV methodology but I did notice some things, such as: Some of the interviewees in the legacy reports felt that more feedback could've been garnered from local residents with the use of online technologies, online surveys for example. UV could make better use of online platforms to promote the various aspects of their work and engage broader community participation. Another common theme I noticed was that interviewees conveyed a level of cynicism at the term 'good relations' Thought it was old-fashioned and misaligned to the changing dynamics of today. 'Cohesion' and 'promoting stable neighbourhoods' are themes now.

The celebration of the 11th of July, and Rachael Davidson with the Community Walkway Association made for a great section of my findings. Rachael Davidson provided so much information to help me speak about the 'communities that are resistant to change'. In terms of ways in which urban development can negatively contribute towards peacebuilding, the most prominent way in which this happens, from what I have seen after spending so much time in the field in Belfast, are physical barriers at Catholic and Protestant interfaces. Examples are seen all

over Belfast and some of these can be seen throughout the thesis. The ‘piece by peace’ cover photo on page 1 was taken at an interface barrier. All of these questions helped shape the focus of this thesis along with my methodology (ethnographic) and helped me go in certain directions during informal conversations and in what sort of data to ask for at my internship.

In 2024, while sectarian issues remain relevant, other social issues such as homelessness, mental health, and economic disparities have become equally pressing, if not more. It is no longer realistic to focus on two communities in Belfast because like most places in Europe now, there is a wide, diverse range of people living there who cannot be neglected. Addressing these broader issues is crucial for fostering overall community well-being and cohesion. To effectively tackle issues such as homelessness and mental health, a holistic approach that integrates various social services is necessary. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-profits, and community organisations can create a more comprehensive support network. Policymakers should consider broadening the scope of community projects to address these multifaceted issues. For example, urban renewal projects should include components that directly address homelessness and provide mental health support. Ensuring that community members' voices are heard and valued is essential for the success of community projects. Community involvement leads to more relevant and effective initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment. The Urban Villages project underscores the importance of participatory planning and continuous engagement with residents. Engaging community members in the planning and decision-making process ensures that projects meet the actual needs and aspirations of the community. Participatory planning methods, such as community workshops and public consultations, should be standard practice. Establishing robust feedback mechanisms allows for continuous improvement of community projects. Regularly gathering input from residents helps identify issues early and adapt strategies accordingly. Community projects should aim to strengthen social networks and build social capital. Activities that encourage collaboration and mutual support among residents can enhance community resilience and solidarity. Empowering local leaders and community champions can sustain momentum and inspire ongoing community involvement. Leadership training and support can help cultivate a new generation of community advocates.

Enhancing physical spaces such as community centres, parks, and urban infrastructure has proven to positively impact various aspects of life, including safety, social interactions, and mental health. The Broken Windows theory was a great way to show that putting time and effort into projects that improve physical space has so many benefits. The theory has evolved beyond its original focus on physical disorder, such as literal broken windows, to encompass broader signs of neglect or dysfunction in urban settings. In the context of Belfast, this evolution is evident in its application to symbolic divisions, such as murals or interface barriers, which represent deeper societal fractures rather than mere physical disrepair. These elements, while not "broken windows" in the traditional sense, act as visible markers of division that may perpetuate feelings of exclusion or unease. This expanded interpretation of the theory underscores its flexibility but also raises questions about its limitations. If interventions focus solely on removing murals or cleaning up neglected spaces without addressing the underlying societal tensions, the potential for lasting peacebuilding may be diminished. This theory becomes more applicable to improving the physical space around us, and not directly on fostering positive communities identities directly or improving cross community-engagement, even if it helps. Therefore, while the broken windows theory highlights the importance of improving physical spaces, its effectiveness in fostering sustainable community cohesion relies heavily on integrating these efforts with initiatives that tackle systemic and symbolic issues. By applying this theory critically, practitioners can better navigate the delicate balance between addressing visible disorder and engaging with deeper social complexities.

Making use of shared spaces like the Girdwood facilities or Prokick Gym is a great method of enhancing cross-community engagement. Going forward urban planners should prioritise designs that encourage interaction and inclusivity. Spaces that are accessible and welcoming to all community members can help break down social barriers and promote a sense of belonging. Incorporating sustainable practices in urban development not only benefits the environment but also improves the quality of life for residents. Green spaces, energy-efficient buildings, and sustainable transportation options contribute to a healthier and more cohesive community. Urban planners should also adopt a hybrid model that balances top-down strategies for resource allocation with bottom-up initiatives to ensure community ownership. This dynamic interplay can reconcile local needs with regional priorities, fostering more sustainable outcomes.

Elements that once served as barriers, such as the Irish language, can now be leveraged as tools for reconciliation. Promoting shared cultural heritage can bridge divides, and help heal scars or negative connotations with certain aspects of The Troubles, like how the Irish language was used in prisons. Seeing the effort that is being put in by Linda Ervine MBE and Theresa Brady was unbelievably inspiring to me. I mentioned earlier the love I have for the Irish language and speaking with people such as Linda and Theresa is not something I expected I would do in Belfast. The love I have for Irish culture and language is probably how I ended up in Belfast and picked this thesis title if I am to be honest. Being able to combine an area of great interest with an important assignment such as this thesis did make it that bit easier to motivate myself to put in the hours of work.

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