



The
Belfast
Mobility
Project

Mobility, Sharing and Segregation in Belfast: Policy Report

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We hope that the findings offer a valuable insight into how people residing in North Belfast feel about a variety of issues associated with their local area, including: the degree of community segregation that exists in North Belfast and the related way in which people navigate their associated neighbourhoods and facilities.

Foreword

Many elements in the city, and in particular the people and their activities, are as important as the physical parts.
(Kevin Lynch 1960)

Where we sleep is the basic census measure of location. But people spend a great deal of time moving around away from the home base – they go to shop, to school, to work, to visit other folk, for entertainment and much more. When we look at census maps of Belfast, we see patterns of *residential segregation* and mixing. When we look at people's movement, we see varying patterns of *activity segregation* and mixing.

The distinction between residential segregation and activity segregation was the key motivating factor for a study I carried out in 1968 in a small part of the Falls and Shankill areas of west Belfast. The findings of this research were published in the journal *Irish Geography* in 1969. We found that two groups of people (Catholics and Protestants) not only did not live in the same neighbourhoods, they also did not move around in the same areas. Moreover, they had clear ideas about where the boundaries of their neighbourhoods were to be found. It could be said that the people interviewed had mental maps that served like nautical charts guiding their navigation of the area. As the American architect/planner Kevin Lynch put it as far back as 1960, "every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings."

Much closer to home, consider these two quotations and their strong navigational content. First, Belfast poet Ciaran Carson, in his 1989 book *Belfast Confetti*, describing his walk to primary school in the 1950s: "but remember, never go by Cupar Street, my father would warn me." Second, Anna Burns in her 2018 Man Booker Prize

winning novel *Milkman*: "You were left with a curtailed [jogging] route owing to religious geography."

The data for the Shankill-Falls study were gathered by face-to-face interviews with a sample of residents. All the analysis was carried out by hand, the only additional equipment being a small electric calculator. The Belfast Mobility Project (BMP) Report summarises the methods and findings of a survey carried out in North Belfast in 2016, almost 50 years after the Shankill-Falls investigation. There are fundamental similarities between both the methodology and the findings of the two studies. However, there are also important differences. Firstly, BMP has brought to bear a much wider range of techniques (most notably the Belfast Pathways app, reflecting the digital age we now live in and certainly something not available in the late 1960s.) Secondly, BMP has covered a much more extensive swathe of territory than was the case in the earlier study. Thirdly, BMP provides a focus on the city centre that was entirely absent from the Shankill-Falls project. And finally, BMP has a much stronger policy emphasis.

That said, my 1968 study did not entirely neglect policy matters. I think it would be true to say that both studies share an unease about the degree of activity segregation disclosed, but when it comes to suggesting appropriate policy responses that would lead to a reduction in this segregation, I fear that the conclusion I reached 50 years ago still stands. My conclusion took the form of a quote from an American sociologist, Herbert Gans. Writing in 1967 (at least with reference to the US context) he concluded "plans and policies aimed at changing peoples' behaviour cannot be implemented through prescribing alterations in the physical community or by directions aimed at builders; they must be directed at the national sources and agents which bring about the present behaviour."

Fundamentally, in Belfast, it is the residential segregation that anchors and shapes much of the activity segregation. We have made little progress over 50 years in reducing residential segregation. It is therefore not surprising, as the BMP amply demonstrates, that we still experience high degrees of activity segregation. However, beyond the residential spaces, BMP clearly shows the value of the city centre as an arena for cross-community mingling, but one that needs to be carefully nurtured and indeed enhanced. Further, the Report suggests that some lessons from the city centre could, where appropriate, be applied to the activity-segregated neighbourhoods themselves.

So, the bottom line is that the BMP Report provides pointers to possible interventions in urban design and in the management of the visual landscape of our city. These interventions could, at the very least, help underpin and encourage any constructive moves that might (just might) be forthcoming from the overarching political and social environments. Indeed, a bit of mutually supportive positive feedback could achieve a great deal.

Frederick W. Boal

Professor Emeritus of Human Geography,
The Queen's University of Belfast

Executive Summary

In Northern Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement brought an end to the region's conflict, ongoing since the late 1960s. The agreement, ratified by 71.1% of the country's population, included the protection of a number of human rights and equality guarantees. Crucially, it also provided a blueprint for a power-sharing executive – an institution that would seek to bring together representatives from Northern Ireland's leading political parties in an Assembly, which would be tasked with debating and developing future policy initiatives in the region. In the years following the creation of this institution, moderate parties, such as the Ulster Unionist Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, who had played an instrumental role in securing the 1998 agreement, became increasingly side-lined, while the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin quickly established themselves as the two largest parties in Assembly elections. A number of unresolved and contentious issues, left over from the 1998 Agreement, have, however, led to repeated suspensions of the Assembly. In 2015, *A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan 2015*, looked again at dealing with aspects of the past (including parading), but by January 2017 the Assembly was completely suspended. In January 2020, as this report is officially released, the Assembly have sat for the first time in three years and will now attempt to overcome disagreements over a standalone Irish Language Act and other aspects of cultural expression.

It was within this complicated dynamic that researchers involved in the Belfast Mobility Project aimed to assess the nature of segregation between the region's two main community identity groups, Protestants and Catholics. To do so, the research team proposed an innovative methodological framework that would seek to surpass the way previous research has studied segregation, which has commonly been focused on (relatively) stable patterns of

division entrenched within global institutions of residence, employment or education. The Belfast Mobility Project contended that segregation was the dynamic outcome of individuals' routine movements as they travelled their city, using its pathways, amenities and activity spaces, thereby coming into contact with certain kinds of people and avoiding others.

To achieve the proposed analysis, the research team adopted a unique mixed methods approach to describing and explaining patterns of activity space segregation, including:

1. A large-scale survey of residents across North Belfast;
2. GPS tracking allied with GIS methods of data capture, analysis and representation;
3. Walking interviews with selected participants; and
4. Use of Spraycan software.

Recruitment for the study would be focused in North Belfast, an area of the city that features a complicated pattern of residential segregation.

In this report, our key findings are summarised under three headings: North Belfast – A Divided landscape; North Belfast – A Shared Landscape and Belfast City Centre.

North Belfast – A Divided landscape

- Based on analysis of over 20 million GPS tracking points, we found that participants spent most of their time in their own communities and little time in 'outgroup' areas – locations associated with the 'other' community.
- Activity space segregation was marked in 'public' spaces that would ordinarily be sites for mixing. For example, parks are typically conceived as being quintessentially open and inclusive

facilities designed for members of all communities to enjoy freely. However, our walking interview data suggests the use of parks in North Belfast is often organised along sectarian lines, with residents using different access points, and sometimes, avoiding areas associated with the 'other' community completely.

- At this point in North Belfast's development, we would describe its parks and comparable facilities as 'liminal spaces' that are simultaneously public, open spaces and sectarian and divided spaces.
- In their everyday lives, local residents must negotiate this 'in between-ness', as they engage in their ordinary daily activities – such as walking their dogs or bringing their children to local play areas.

North Belfast - A Shared landscape

- Although our tracking data evidenced high levels of activity space segregation in North Belfast, we also found that a proportion of both Protestant and Catholic residents' time was spent accessing facilities located in 'shared' or 'mixed' spaces.
- These visits tended to occur during the afternoon, between 12pm and 6pm. The destinations located in shared public areas, included: leisure facilities, shopping centres, large retail stores and other spaces of consumption.
- Our questionnaire data provided further evidence that residents' attitudes towards sectarian segregation may be changing for the better. Many residents (between 40% and 50% across six survey items) expressed positive feelings about using facilities based in or near areas associated the 'other' community.
- Perhaps surprisingly, a smaller percentage of between 23% and 24% expressed clearly negative feelings, with between 23% and 26% remaining undecided.

- For both Catholic and Protestant respondents, greater self-reported willingness to use activity spaces beyond their own community was predicted by factors such as perceived threat to personal safety and the nature of their past contact experiences with members of the 'other' community.

Belfast City Centre

- A final line of evidence on the potential sharing of space concerns residents' use of Belfast city centre.
- For the most part, the city centre is now treated as a space of inclusion and belonging that has historically improved.
- GPS tracking and survey data for example, suggest that the majority of the city's central spaces and routes are widely used and perceived as shared by members of both Catholic and Protestant communities.
- However, some residents do continue to feel unwelcome in certain areas of the city centre and worry about that they might have negative encounters with members of the 'other' community.

Conclusions

Our findings demonstrate that North Belfast faces two kinds of mobility problems. One is the challenge of encouraging people to feel safe, comfortable and confident as they move through their local area and access resources, which is a complicated landscape full of interface barriers and 'dead-ends'. The other is the need to better understand the characteristics of the small number of 'shared' spaces that exist throughout the area, so that we can attempt to learn the values of these locations. It is likely that these two problems, of understanding the nature of segregation and sharing, are interwoven and only by carefully reflecting on both can we produce more effective and efficient strategies in response to each matter moving forward.

From our research findings, we can draw a number of conclusions in relation to developing future policy related to sharing and segregation in North Belfast.

- **Potential:** Interventions to promote mixing and sharing should be aware of the interrelations between intergroup contact, threat and everyday mobility practices. Our survey data demonstrates that interventions developed to generate positive contact between the two main communities have the potential to shape how people use spaces and facilities beyond in-group territories, as they can reduce feelings of threat related to these locations. In contrast, experiences of negative contact are likely to have the opposite impact, increasing feelings of intergroup-threat and segregation of everyday spaces and pathways in North Belfast.
- **Shopping:** The data from this study suggests that retail and consumption are key drivers in bringing the two communities together in one space. We should probe in more detail what we can learn from this mixing and consider ways of trying to extend it further. For instance, could more interface structures be redeveloped into cross community spaces, which could contain retail and other occasions that were regularly visited by our participants (GP surgery, dentist, etc.)? This type of site has already been developed to good effect in the Suffolk and Lenadoon interface in West Belfast. Although there are examples of this type of investment failing (e.g. Hillview retail park), this should not discount the potential of future sites.
- **Parks:** Our tracking data reveals that participants spent little time in North Belfast's parks and green spaces. What type of activities/events might be promoted in the area's parks, green spaces and associated facilities to create more widespread usage? The Belfast Mela has been an enormous success in Botanic Gardens in South Belfast. Should something similar be held in the north of the city? Or should festivals like the Mela be rotated around the city parks? Or can there be multiple venues for one festival?
- **Mixed Housing:** The promotion of shared housing developments in North Belfast, such as the Felden estate, is viewed as one way of encouraging integration and sharing. But there should be greater awareness of the mixed areas that already exist, and people should not be complacent about their sustainability. There is a risk that some of the existing mixed residential areas may become areas in transition and thus move from one community's 'ownership' to another.
- **Arterial Routes:** The tracking data demonstrates that people spent a considerable amount of time moving along arterial routes. While the value of such mixing can be questioned, the importance of such spaces should not be discounted, as the proliferation of peace walls, industrial buffer zones and cul-de-sacs continue to pose problems for how people navigate the area. There is scope for investment in improving the quality of arterial routes through provision of potentially shared resources that can be used by pedestrians as well as commuters.
- **Further Research:** The approach used for this study generated fascinating insights into how people relate to their environment and understand the context of their community. Further exploration of these methods can facilitate a 'bottom-up' analysis of how everyday spaces in Belfast are perceived and used by residents. Aside from facilitating a richer analysis of segregation than is currently being offered by other methods, such as Census data mapping, it can provide ordinary citizens a sense of ownership and trust regarding the re-design of their fractured landscape.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the establishment of a peace agreement in Northern Ireland since 1998, a complex pattern of segregation exists throughout its capital city, Belfast – between Protestant unionists (who have historically supported British rule in the area) and Catholic nationalists (who have historically sought unification with the Republic of Ireland).¹ Segregation is common within many large cities around the world (Boal, 1978) and has sometimes been intentionally introduced to regulate inter-group conflict, as was the case in Northern Ireland (Boal, 1971). However, it can produce serious and long-lasting damage to the social fabric of a society. For instance, studies have identified how a divided landscape can lead to sustained patterns of social inequality and deprivation (Massey and Denton, 1993), and intensify intergroup prejudice and discrimination (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011).

The nature of segregation in Northern Ireland has been further sustained and reinforced by the brutal violence that characterised the region's recent period of conflict between 1969 and 1998. The distinct rereading and retelling of this period emphasizes the sense of difference between the two main communities (Hamilton et al, 2008).

North Belfast is a microcosm of the broader patterns of division and tension that exist throughout the capital city and the region of Northern Ireland more generally (See Figure 1). There are significant levels of residential segregation (both communal and social) throughout the area, whilst long-term residents also experienced prolific levels of political violence during the peak of the region's conflict – leaving a complicated legacy of 'leftover' paramilitary activity (Sterrett et al, 2019).

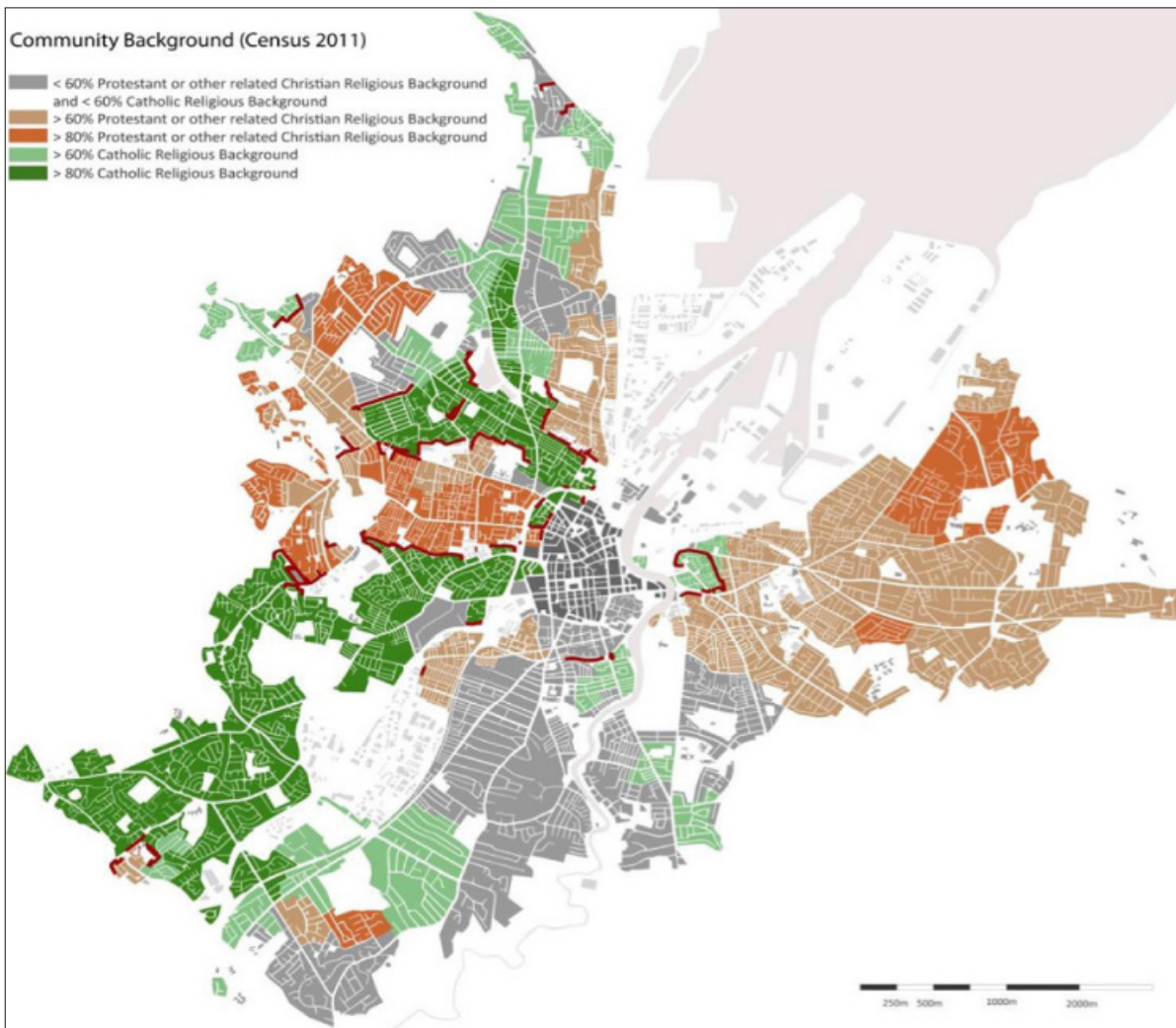
The intense division is reflected in residents' mobility patterns, with Protestants and Catholics often choosing to use different facilities and pathways in order to avoid the 'other' community (Dixon et al., 2019; Hocking et al, 2018). These decisions are made both consciously and subconsciously, as residents make judgements about how they navigate spaces where the two communities intersect (including, arterial routes and spaces of consumption). In some cases, residents may choose a route in reaction to a particular incident or occasion, but equally, decisions may be made simply out of habit and in accordance with the local community's pre-established sense of what is considered 'safe' or 'unsafe'.

Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) explain that there are clear distinctions between the 'chosen' and 'rejected' pathways. For instance, the distinct neighbourhoods are characterised by symbolic markings, such as flags, murals and painted kerbstones, which Komarova and McKnight (2013) suggest have been used to 'enclose' space. Consequently, it is generally accepted that residential segregation and the associated sectarian undertones (Roulston and Young, 2013) have a considerable influence regarding how people organise their daily routines (Hamilton et al, 2008), even if evidence directly examining associated behaviours remains sparse.

Mobility patterns in North Belfast are clearly connected to the issue of community contact, but they are further influenced by the area's related physical infrastructure. Despite North Belfast's striking natural environment, from the Cavehill to the Lough, the 'public space' that exists in North Belfast is often considered to be 'low quality' and 'unattractive' – with a general absence of

¹ We use the terms 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' to describe the broad identities of ethno-political groups, not as a specific reference to religion.

Figure 1. Community segregation in North Belfast



foliage and frequent points of dereliction and abandonment (Sterrett et al, 2019). The physical environment is further impacted by urban design, with transport corridors (such as the M2 and Westlink) and large vacant sites (i.e. Hillview Enterprise Park and the Little Patrick Street area) impeding the area's physical connection to the rest of the city and the general visual look of the area.

Belfast is regularly classified as being in a 'post conflict' condition, but it remains highly territorialized (Hocking et al, 2018). The physical environment of North Belfast is dominated by the presence of a number of physical interface barriers (often locally referred to as 'peace walls' or 'peace lines'), which were initially installed as a temporary measure during the early stages

of the conflict (Gormley-Heenan et al, 2013). Several have also been erected (or increased in size) in the post agreement era, as a consequence of local residents raising concerns about the safety of their property and wider concerns about low-level episodic violence between the two main communities (mainly involving young people).

Methodology

In light of North Belfast's complicated physical landscape and the on-going tension that exists between the two main communities, the Belfast Mobility Project sought to assess how segregation between and among Protestant and Catholic areas impacted on the lives of local residents. The project aimed to analyse how segregation created by the physical separation of the two communities is re-emphasized by the way residents choose to navigate their locality and organise daily routines. Five paired sub-sites were

identified as the primary research area. These were Tigers Bay and New Lodge; Ardoyne and Glenbryn; Glandore and Skegoneill; the Greater Whitewell area; and Ballysillan and Ligoniel (See Figure 2). Each of the sites selected featured distinct pockets of Catholic and Protestant housing, which could be generally easily identified by the associated symbolic landscape (that regularly featured flags, painted kerbstones and murals).

The research project involved a mixed-methods approach, which included (see Hocking et al, 2018 for more details):

Figure 2. North Belfast - BMP Field Sites © OpenstreetMap Contributors 2019



- Survey (consisting of 51 questions)
 - 520 questionnaires were completed.
 - Community background of participants: 238 Catholics, 247 Protestants and 35 individuals who designated themselves as 'other'.
 - Gender breakdown of participants: 306 women, 213 men and 1 individual who designated as 'other'.
 - See Sturgeon et al 2019 for a report on the survey findings and the project's website (<http://belfastmobilityproject.org/index.html>) for the full list of questions used and the complete responses.
- Tracking residents' movements using the Belfast Pathways app
 - 233 local residents downloaded the app for a two-week period.
 - The app ran 'in the background' on each device and gathered GPS data on participants' movement: recording the pathways they took, the time they spent in different areas, and the locations of their destinations.
- Walking interviews
 - 33 residents of North Belfast participated in this strand of the study.
 - Prior to the walk, Interviewees completed a Participatory GIS mapping exercise using Spraycan software (see below) and were then given the following set of instructions: *'Imagine you are a tour guide and we are visiting your community. We want to get an idea of how you use and experience the local environment on a typical day. We are particularly interested in how living in a divided part of the city affects your everyday life.'*
 - Walking interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were recorded and transcribed, while the routes were tracked by the smartphone app. A schedule of the core questions can be found on the project's website, see <http://belfastmobilityproject.org/index.html>.
- Spraycan software
 - The Spraycan software allowed participants to identify and mark specific categories of place, such as shared spaces, mixed areas or spaces to avoid, on a computerised map of their area before embarking on the walking interview.
 - The individual marked maps were then aggregated to generate a collective view of public spaces in both North Belfast and Belfast City Centre (see Huck et al., 2018 for more details).

Further Information

The Belfast Mobility Project was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and ran between September 2015 and the end of January 2018. The formal fieldwork took place throughout 2016. Some participants were recruited via engagement with community groups in North Belfast, but the primary data collection involved door-to-door canvassing of approximately 14,000 doors across the five field sites in North Belfast.

Throughout 2017, the research team analysed the data and presented its initial findings to the project advisory group, other relevant statutory bodies and local community organisations in North Belfast. This process culminated in a policy workshop in December 2017 at the Open University in Belfast, where the research team and key stakeholders discussed how the findings could inform policy development.

A number of papers have also been prepared for publication. These include:

Davies, G., Whyatt, D., Huck, J., Dixon, J., Hocking, B.T., Jarman, N., Sturgeon, B. & Bryan, D. (2019) "Networks of (Dis)connection: Mobility practices, tertiary streets and sectarian divisions in North Belfast." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2019.1593817>

Dixon, J., Tredoux, C., Davies, G., Huck, J., Hocking, B.T., Sturgeon, B., Whyatt, D., Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (2019) "Parallel lives: Intergroup contact, threat and the segregation of everyday activity spaces." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000191>

Dixon, J., Tredoux, C., Sturgeon, B., Hocking, B.T., Davies, G., Huck, J., Whyatt, D., Jarman, N. Bryan, D. (Forthcoming). 'When the walls come tumbling down': The role of intergroup proximity, threat and contact in shaping attitudes towards the removal of Northern Ireland's peace walls.

Hocking, B.T., Sturgeon, B., Dixon, J., Jarman, N., Bryan D., Huck, J., Whyatt, D., & Davies G. (2019) "Place-Identity and Urban Policy: Sharing Leisure Spaces in the 'Post-Conflict' city." In Piazza, R. *Discourses of Identity in Liminal Places and Spaces*. London: Routledge Press.

Hocking, B.T. Sturgeon, B., Whyatt, D., Davies, G., Huck, J., Dixon, J., Jarman, N. & Bryan, D. (2018) "Negotiating the ground: 'mobilizing' a divided field site in the 'post-conflict' city." *Mobilities*, 13(6): 876-893. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2018.1504664>

Huck, J., Whyatt, D., Dixon, J., Sturgeon, B., Hocking, B.T., Davies, G., Jarman, N. & Bryan, D. (2018) "Exploring Segregation and Sharing in Belfast: A PGIS Approach." *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 109(1): 223-241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1480930>

Sturgeon, B., Jarman, N., Bryan, B., Whyatt, D., Hocking, B. T., Huck, J., Davies, G. & Tredoux, C. (2019) *Attitudes and Experiences of Residents of North Belfast to the 'Other' Community, Safety, Visual Displays, Peace Walls and Belfast City Centre*. Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

Outline of the Report

This report offers an overview of the Belfast Mobility Project. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of our data that identifies the degree to which the area can be considered a 'Divided Landscape', before identifying more positive examples of the way in which North Belfast can be described as a 'Shared Landscape' in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reflects on the data related to Belfast City Centre, an area which, even at the height of the region's conflict, was largely considered to be a neutral or shared space, but an area on which very little research has explored how people actually access and travel through it.

Chapter 2: North Belfast - A Divided Landscape

There has been a considerable range of research conducted on urban segregation in Belfast. A landmark publication by Fred Boal in 1969, entitled 'Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls Divide, Belfast', indicated that there was a definite and impactful correlation between residential segregation and activity space segregation, i.e. people were much more likely to stay close to their home and use familiar facilities in everyday spaces. The study established significant aspects of ethno-sectarian immobility, identifying the presence of two very distinct 'territories'. Later, Boal (1971) concluded that class can perpetuate ethno-religious divides, or even create a divide in its own right. In 1996, Boal indicated that the segregation of the region's two main communities during the height of the conflict has had a lasting impact, leaving a lack of opportunities and drivers to bring them together again.

Other studies have come to similar conclusions. For instance, Shirlow and McGovern (1998) noted that the consistent distance between the two main communities has led to a situation where each tended to eulogise their 'own' area and develop a perception that the 'other' community is abnormal, antagonistic and uncompromising. Shirlow (2003) has also indicated that poor inter-community relationships in Ardoyne, (an area in North Belfast that has been the site of tension over parades and inter-community violence), had led to a combination of real and imagined concerns that significantly impact upon where residents are prepared to go. He indicates this has created a *'geography of socio-economic domination and/or resistance, in which power relationships are spatialized and imagined in distinct and observable ways'* and which is played out within a clearly demarcated arena,

dominated by fear, distrust and threat. Leonard (2007) illustrated a concerning connection between the mobility habits of adults in interface area and the subsequent impact this had on the decisions taken by young people from the same area. She found it was common for young people to replicate the segregated pathways used by older relatives and friends.

While the large amount of scholarly and policy-related work already conducted in North Belfast provides us with a varied and valuable body of information on the area, the Belfast Mobility Project aimed to analyse urban segregation and the separation of North Belfast's two main communities in a more dynamic and fluid manner than had previously been achieved. The study sought to assess how division can be created and reinforced by the way in which residents organise their daily routines and make use of activity spaces² beyond an individual's home and over time. The four methodological strands of the study produced different indications of how participants related to their local environment and moved through their neighbourhood and beyond. As such, this section of our report looks at findings associated with the 'Divided Landscape' obtained from the different components of the study's methodology:

- 2.1 Survey Findings - Views on Community Identity, Cross-Community Sentiment, Community Expression, Personal Safety and Interface Barriers;
- 2.2 Participatory GIS - Segregation, Division and Mixing;
- 2.3 Belfast Pathways App - Segregated Pathways, Activity Spaces and 'T-Communities';
- 2.4 Walking Interviews - Chosen and Selected Pathways.

² When discussing the term 'activity spaces', the research team are referring the local areas within which people move or travel during the course of their daily routines.

2.1 Survey Findings - Views on Community Identity, Cross-Community Sentiment, Community Expression, Personal Safety and Interface Barriers

The questionnaire began with a series of questions associated with community identity, which were designed to enable the research team to gain an understanding of how people living throughout North Belfast relate to their local community. Over half of the total number of participants agreed, or strongly agreed that 'community was important to them', that they 'feel a member of their community' and that they have 'strong ties to their community', see Figure 3 (the full results from the survey can be found <http://belfastmobilityproject.org/>).

Overall, Figure 3 reveals that community identity is important to respondents from a Catholic background, who agreed, or strongly agreed at a rate at least 10% higher than Protestants in relation to feeling that community is important to them (65% vs. 49%); that they were a member of their community (75% vs 63%) and that they have strong ties to their community (61% vs. 48%).

Figure 4 (overleaf) shows that more than two thirds of participants indicated that they would classify their feelings to the 'other' community as being of positive while nearly six out of ten said they had feeling of respect for the other community. However, respondents were less likely to report feelings of trust towards members of the 'other' community, with less than half of the total number of respondents reacting positively.

Again, the negative responses must be considered as important. They indicate a basic level of respect to the 'other' community, but do not go as far as trusting them. The reasons for the lack of trust could be attributed to the perception that the 'other' side has disrespected their culture or community in the past. It could also be associated with past assertions that the 'other' community had broken their word. The broader regional political stalemate has likely also impacted on how the two communities relate to one another. There was little difference between how Catholics and Protestants responded to this section of the survey.

Figure 3. Percentage of respondents by community background who indicated strong sense of community attachment

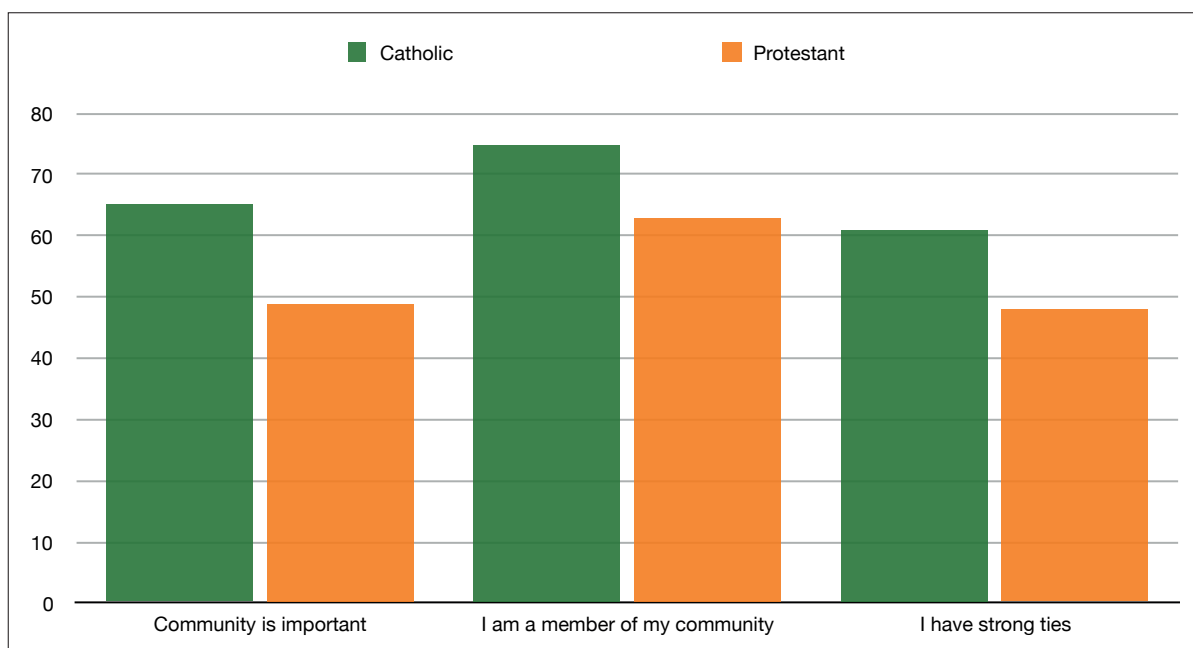
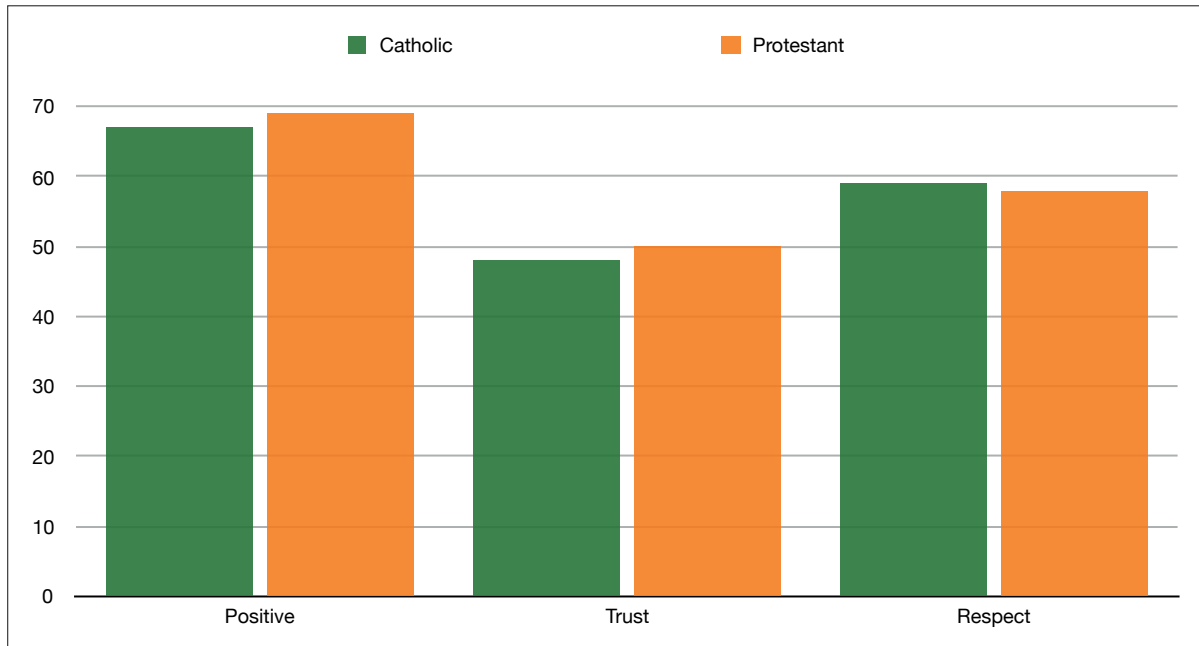


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents by community background who reported a high degree of positive feelings, trust and respect for the 'other' community



The survey then asked participants to consider different aspects of how the 'other' community expressed its identity. This section was split into four forms of community expression: cultural celebrations, flags, murals and painted kerbstones. Overall, around one in four respondents agreed, or strongly agreed with the suggestion that various types of community expression made them feel threatened, with the reaction to flags (27%) being more negative than to cultural celebrations (21%) and to murals (15%).

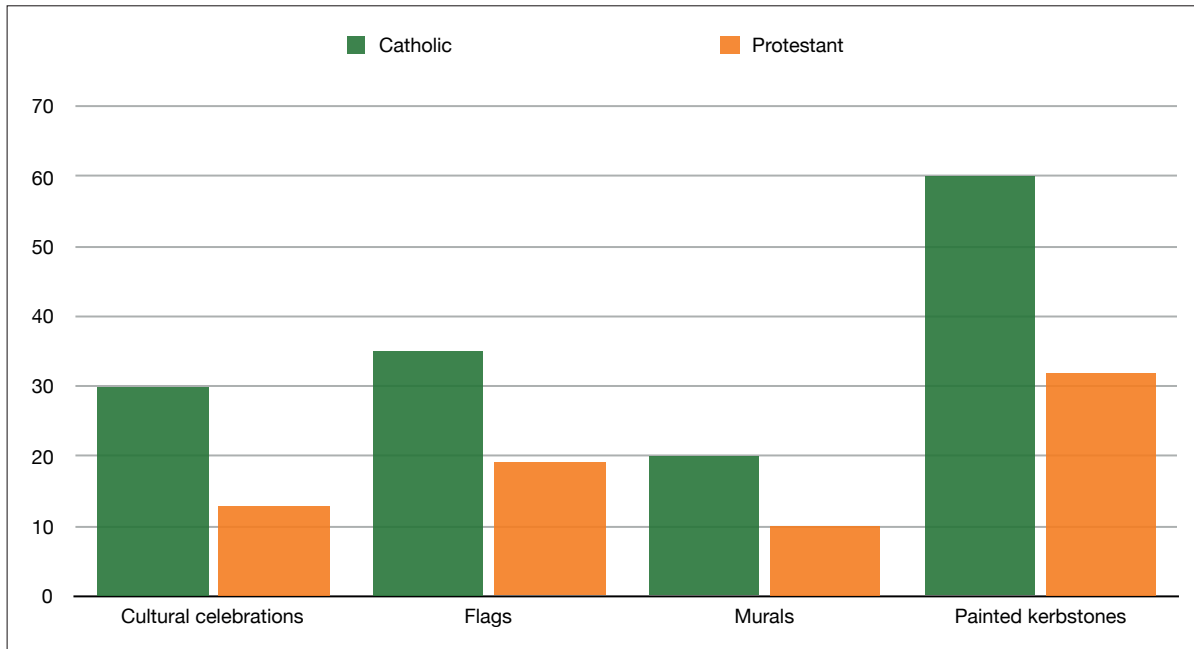
Figure 5 compares the responses of Catholics and Protestants who reacted negatively to various forms of cultural expression by members of the 'other' community, or to the presence of different types of visual displays in public spaces. In each case, Catholics were more negative in their attitudes towards such cultural displays than Protestants:

- 29% of Catholics agreed or strongly agreed that they felt threatened by members of the 'other' community celebrating their cultural traditions (13% of Protestants responded in this way);

- 35% of Catholics felt threatened when they saw flags being flown that expressed the identity of the 'other' community (compared to 19% of Protestants);
- 20% of Catholics felt that murals associated with the 'other' community was a threat to their identity (in comparison to 10% of Protestants); and
- 60% of Catholics felt they would not be welcomed or respected in areas where kerbstones were painted in the colour of the 'other' community (compared to 32% of Protestant respondents).

It is worth noting that in each case only a minority of each community had negative reactions to each of the four forms of displays discussed above. The one exception to this is the Catholic response to painted kerbstones, with just under 60% of Catholics stating that they felt threatened by kerb painting compared to 32% of Protestants.

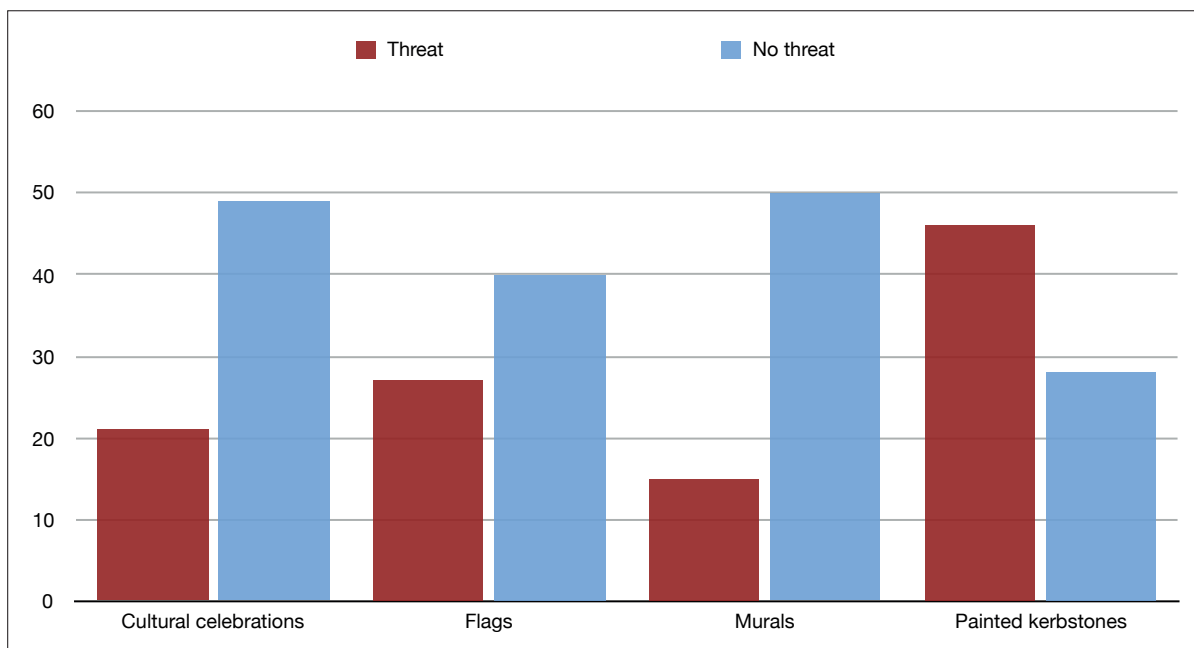
Figure 5. Percentage of respondents by community background who felt threatened by cultural and visual displays



In most cases, respondents report a degree of indifference (neither agreed nor disagreed) or indicated that the cultural activities and visual displays of the 'other' community did not make them feel threatened.

Figure 6 compares the combined responses of people from both community backgrounds who indicated that they felt the various visual displays were a threat to their identity with those who said they did not pose any threat.

Figure 6. Percentage of all respondents who felt threatened by cultural and visual displays, compared with those who did not



Participants were asked a series of questions related to community safety. Overall, Catholic participants were more likely to indicate a greater level of concern about their sense of safety than Protestants (See Figure 7):

- 44% of Catholics indicated that that they were sometimes afraid of being identified as a member of their community (30% of Protestant participants responded in this way);
- 33% of Catholics worried about being physically attacked by members of the ‘other’ community (compared to 21% of Protestants);
- 24% of Catholics worried about their personal property being damaged by members of the ‘other’ community (as opposed to 20% of Protestants); and
- 39% of Catholics indicated that living in Belfast is dangerous for members of their community because of sectarian violence (31% of Protestants responded in this way).

This sense of fear may be thought of as part of the legacy of the conflict in North Belfast, but also a response to the extensive violence in the area since the ceasefires in 1994 and particularly in the early years of the peace process when North Belfast was subject to recurrent rioting and attacks on properties in interface areas.

Several additional questions explored participants’ willingness to use everyday spaces beyond their own communities. Generally, the responses were positive here, although as we shall see, our data on activity space segregation and actual use of everyday spaces are somewhat contradictory.

A large percentage of participants rejected the suggestion that they would avoid areas that were associated with the ‘other’ community, with between 40% and 55% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with suggestions that they would prefer to use single identity facilities, travel through or close to areas dominated by their own community, and avoid some public spaces, particularly if marked by visual symbols associated with the ‘other’ community.

Figure 7. Percentage of respondents by community background who expressed fear of being identified, physically attacked, having property damaged or who think Belfast is dangerous

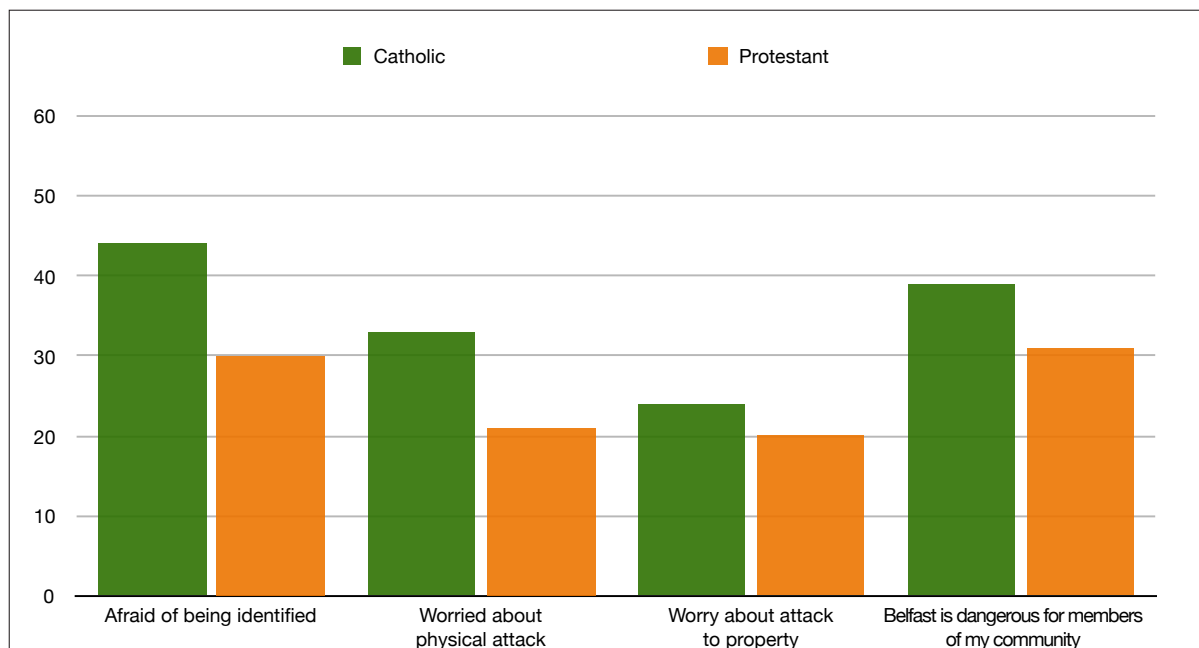


Figure 8. Percentage of respondents by community background who adapt their mobility because of their community identity

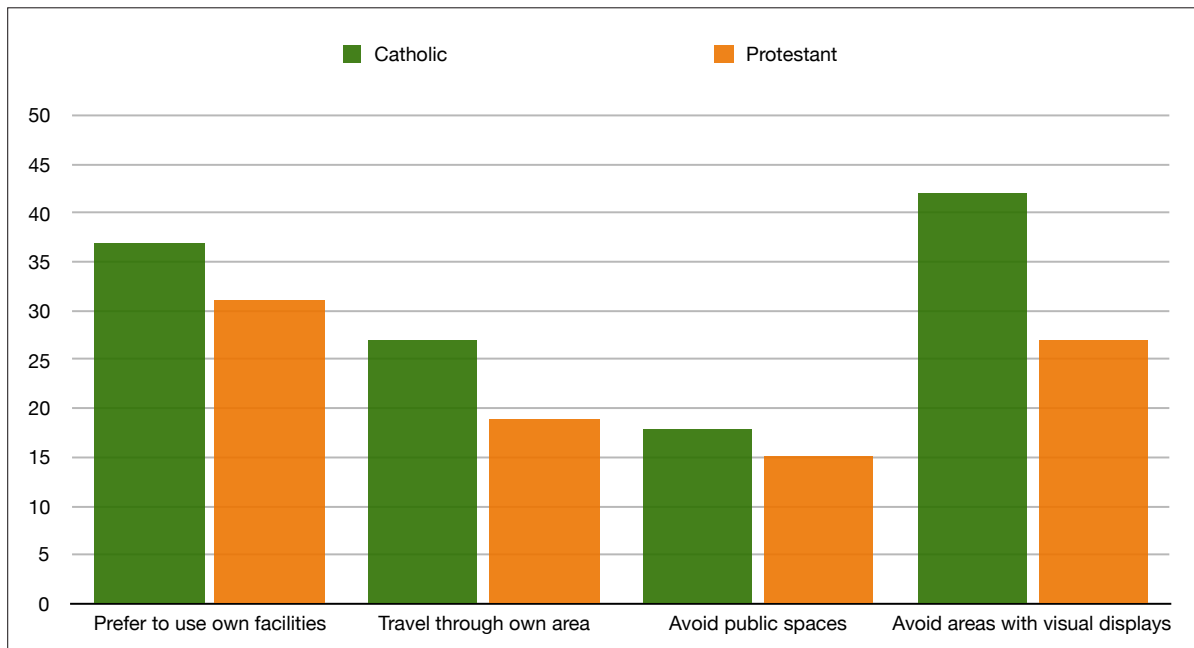
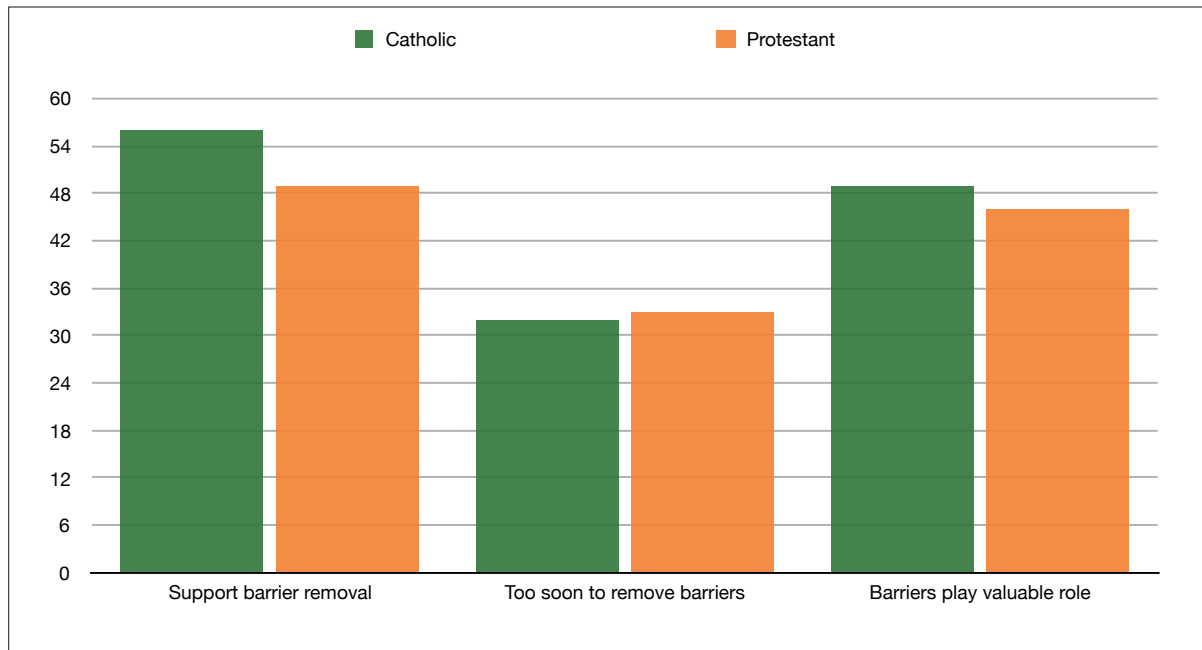


Figure 8 illustrates that Protestants were generally around 10% more likely to be willing to use spaces where they may encounter the 'other' community, whereas Catholics were more likely than Protestants to avoid places that had clear visual markers of community identity:

- 37% of Catholics said they preferred to use facilities located in areas of Belfast dominated by members of their own community, while 31% of Protestants responded in the same way;
- 27% of Catholics chose routes that were within or close to their own community, even if they were not the quickest way to get to their destination, whereas 19% of Protestants did the same;
- 18% of Catholics said they would avoid public spaces where they were likely to encounter members of the 'other' community, while 15% of Protestants responded in this way; and
- 42% of Catholics said they avoided streets that have clear symbols (murals, flags and kerb painting) associated with the 'other' community, as opposed to 27% of Protestants.

Another set of questions in the survey asked participants to consider their views on the large number of interface barriers or peace walls that exist throughout North Belfast (See Figure 9 - overleaf). Overall, there was a majority support for the government's proposals for the removal of interface barriers (53% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with such proposals). Perhaps surprisingly given the response to the questions about community safety, Catholics were more supportive of removing the barriers than Protestants (56% vs 49%).

Figure 9. Attitudes of respondents by community background to interface barriers

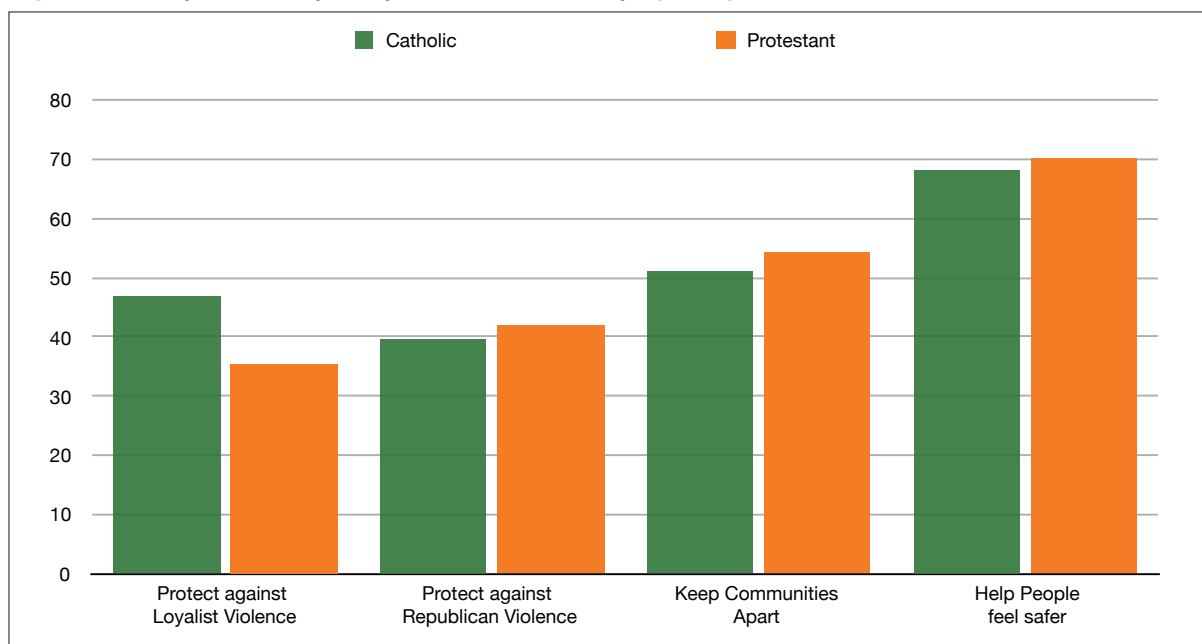


It is also worth noting that 32% of Catholics and 33% of Protestants believed it was too soon to remove the barriers and, nearly half of all respondents (47%) also felt that some barriers continued to provide a valuable role in their community and should remain (Catholics and Protestants responded in a largely similar way).

When asked about the function of that interface barriers played at this time, around 40% of respondents thought they served

to protect communities against violence by paramilitary groups, more than half thought they served to keep the communities apart, while nearly 70% thought they were there to make people feel safer (See Figure 10). These figures correlate with the 2015 edition of the *Public Attitudes to Peace Walls Survey (2015): Survey Results*, carried out by Ulster University on behalf of the Department of Justice, which indicated that 61% of respondents felt the function of their nearest peace wall was to help them feel safer.

Figure 10. Respondents' perceptions on the roles played by interface barriers



2.2 Participatory GIS - Segregation, Division and Mixing

Belfast lost around one third of its residential population between 1971 and 2011, and although North Belfast's population has been relatively stable, there has been a subtle shift in the demographics of the area with those of a Catholic community background becoming the majority (57%). One consequence of such demographic shift that Sterrett et al, (2019) observe is that some areas in North Belfast that are currently considered as 'mixed', might come to be classified as 'Catholic' in the near future. They note that this transformation is not happening at a 'working-class' level, but rather in more affluent parts of Oldpark, Cliftonville, Cavehill and the Antrim Road, which have witnessed significant 'Protestant middle class departure'. Therefore, while North Belfast may not be as highly polarised as is often portrayed, it is not clear whether such mixed residential areas are stable communities or are a more transient phenomena of an ongoing process of demographic change.

Despite these subtle changes to the demographic profile of North Belfast, the area is still widely described as a 'patchwork quilt' of Protestant or Catholic dominated and largely segregated residential areas, a view that has been frequently reinforced over the past twenty years by disputes over parades, tensions at interfaces and the presence of numerous peace line barriers.

Such a perception was confirmed to a great extent by participants who used the Spraycan software to visualise local patterns of segregation and division. Figure 11 illustrates their understanding of the local divisions, with large swathes of North Belfast clearly identified as being inhabited by either Protestants or Catholics.

However, as well as the clear understanding of extensive single identity areas, the results also revealed that residents were also aware of a significant number of mixed residential areas, and which often receive

little acknowledgement or recognition. Mixed residential areas were identified in predominately owner-occupied areas, and in particular across large parts of the North Circular, Antrim and Cavehill Roads, and also along sections of the Oldpark and Crumlin Roads.

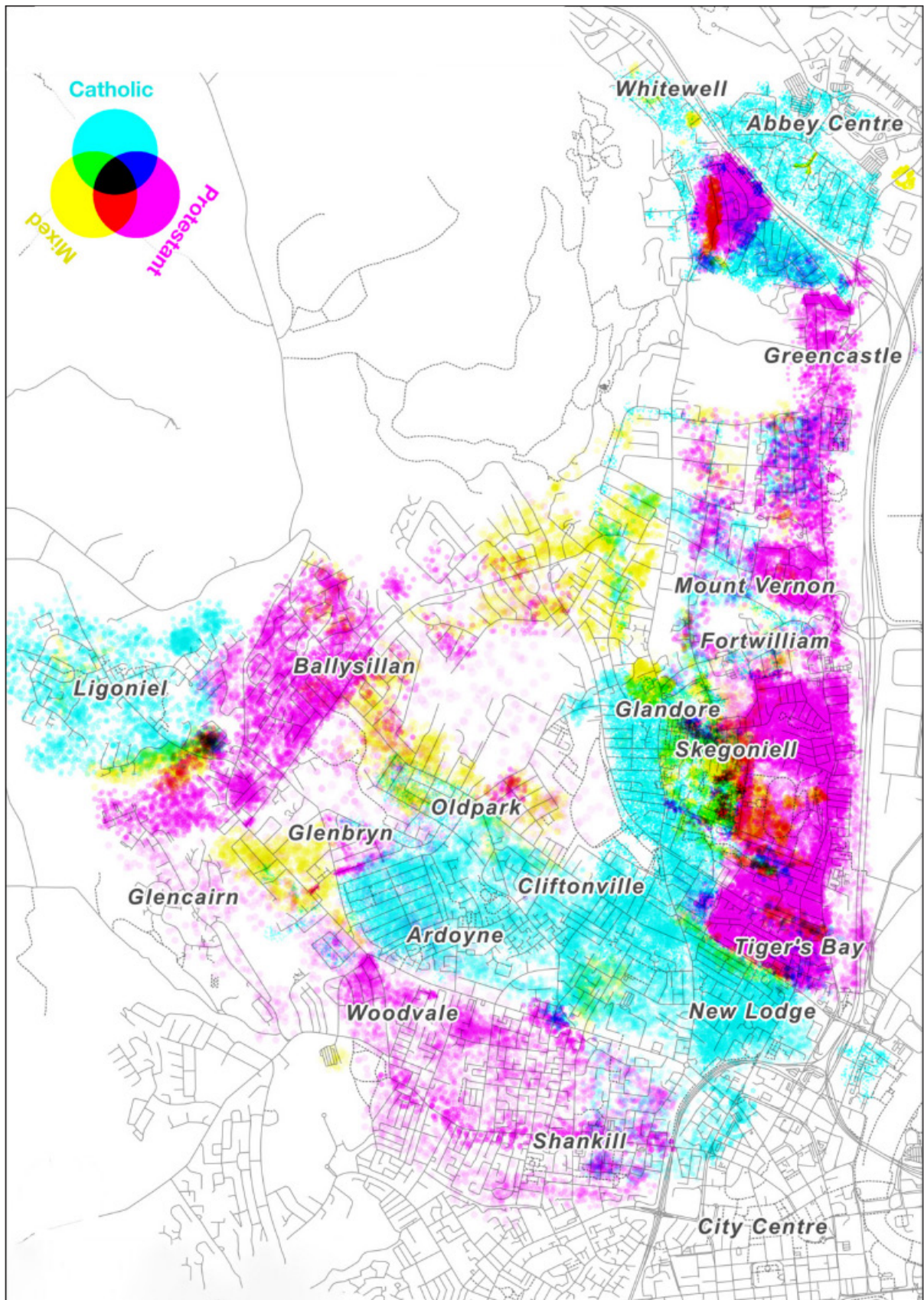
The Spraycan software maps also highlighted differences in the perceptions of local residents of local divisions compared with data from the 2011 Census (See Figures 11 and 12 - overleaf), and which also identified some mixed areas, but which did not fully overlap with the perceptions of local residents.

If policy-makers are trying to build and support shared use of space and the development of mixed residential areas, then there is perhaps a need for a greater recognition of such existing shared or mixed spaces in places such as North Belfast and thought needs to be given to what can be done to ensure that such areas are demographically stable, rather than be acknowledged as part of a transitory process that reinforces the norms of binary division.

2.3 Belfast Pathways App - Segregated Pathways, Activity Spaces and 'T-communities'

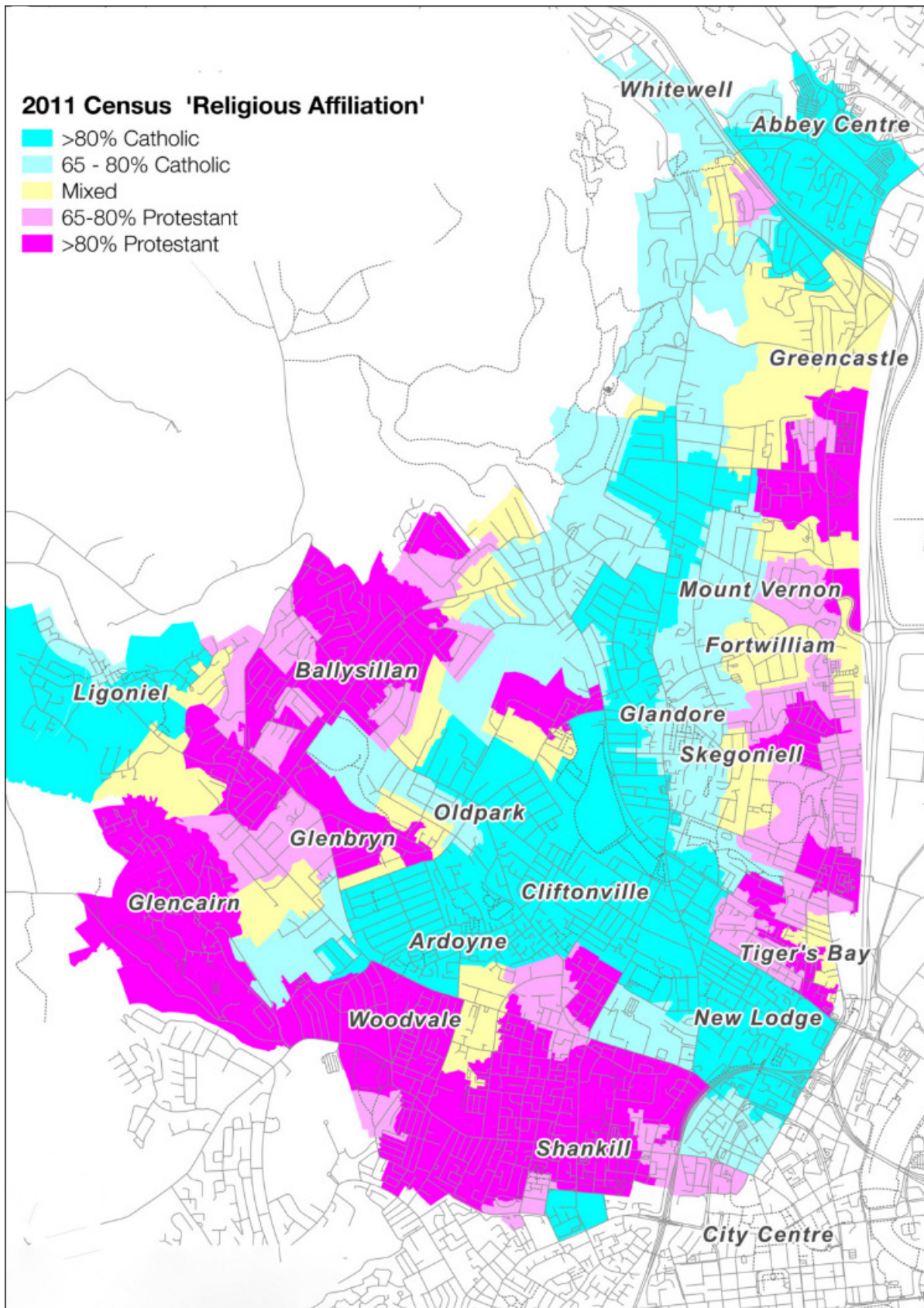
The Belfast Pathways App enabled the research team to consider participants' movement in a fluid manner within the landscape by tracking them using the built-in GPS receiver in their smartphones. A total of 233 individuals agreed to download the app for a two-week time period and agreed that all of the data collected by the app could be used within the context of this study. Twenty-four million GPS points of tracking data were collected during the fieldwork.

Figure 11. Perceptions of community affiliation gathered by 'Spraycan' exercise



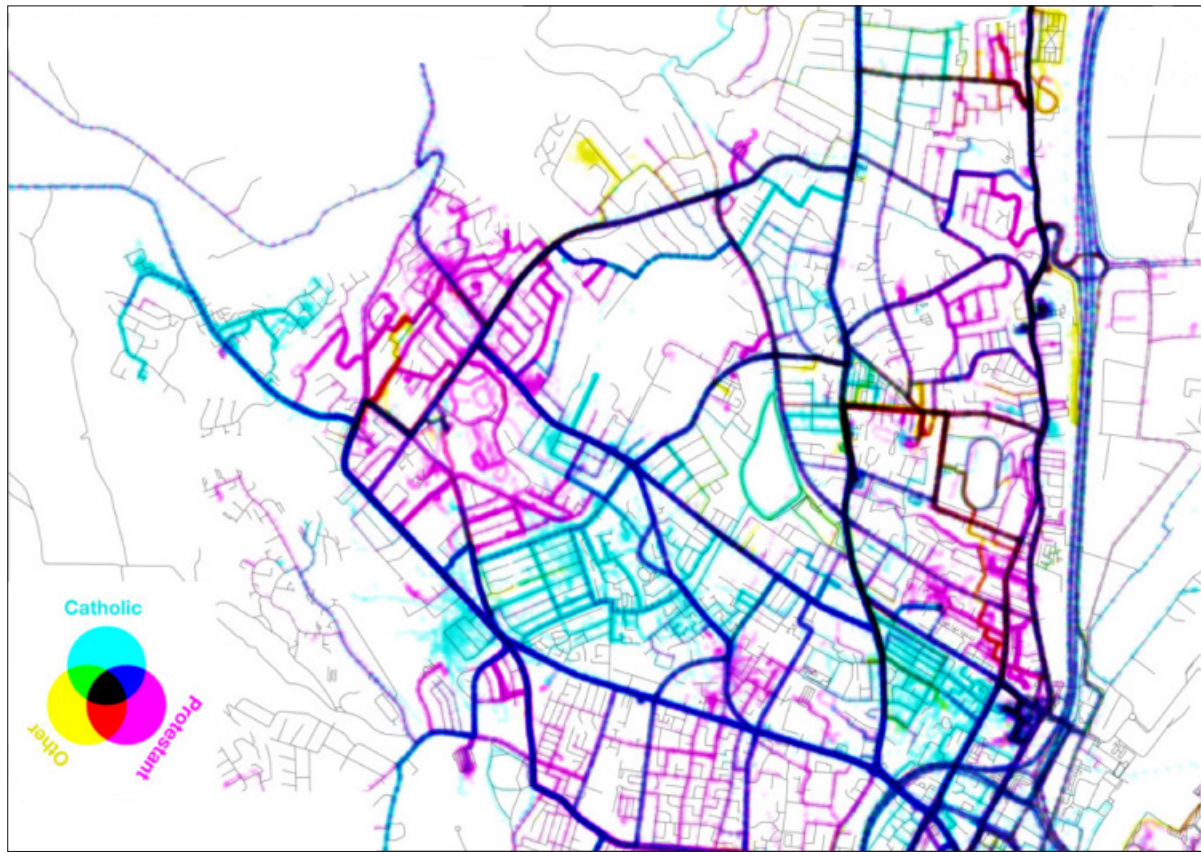
Road data © 2019 OpenStreetMap Contributors

Figure 12. Community Affiliation according to 2011 Census



Road data © 2019 OpenStreetMap Contributors

Figure 13. Cumulative GPS track traces indicating patterns of usage of shared and divided spaces



Road data © 2019 OpenStreetMap Contributors

Given the enormous amount of data obtained from the Belfast Pathways app, the research team is able to make a number of judgements regarding how our participants spend time in their local environment. When we display the data in an illustrative manner on a map of the local area (see Figure 13) what is most striking about how our participants move around in North Belfast specifically, is the degree to which Catholics and Protestants use separate pathways and activity spaces, thereby extensively living their lives apart, despite being in close proximity to one another. Figures 14 and 15 show the same data, but this time disaggregated into Protestant and Catholic pathways overlaid on the Spraycan map of perceived segregation in North Belfast.

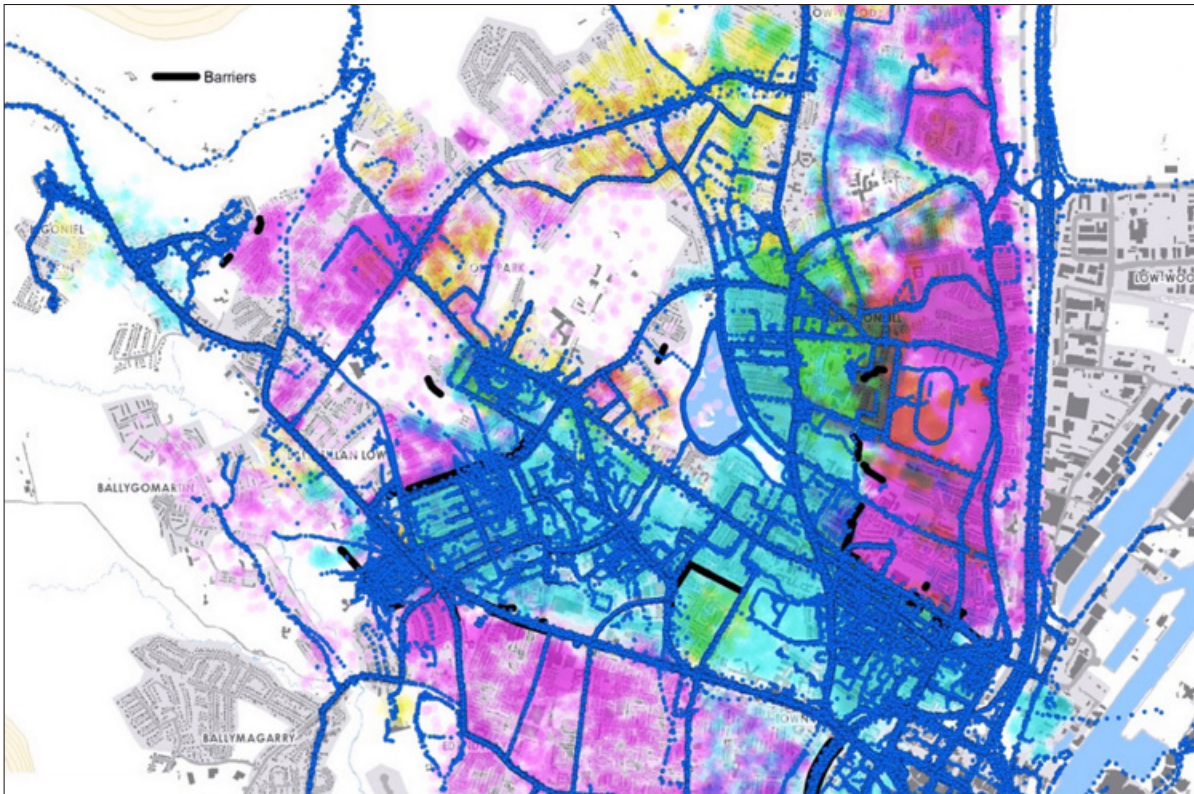
The tracking traces show that while people from both communities used the same primary routes, such as Crumlin, Antrim and Shore Roads, and secondary routes, such as

the North Circular, Cliftonville and Oldpark Roads, most of their time was spent in their own areas using tertiary level streets. For example, in upper North Belfast Protestant participants spent a large amount of time in the Ballysillan and Glenbryn areas, while Catholic participants spent time in Ligoniel and Ardoyne, while in lower North Belfast Catholics spent time in the New Lodge and Waterworks areas, while Protestants spent time in Tigers Bay, Mountcollyer and Shore Road. Beyond the main routes and some key commercial facilities there was limited shared use of space.

Due to the general absence of large levels of 'mixing' in our data, we can identify that our participants were most likely to spend their time in areas associated with their own community background, also known as 'in-group spaces'.

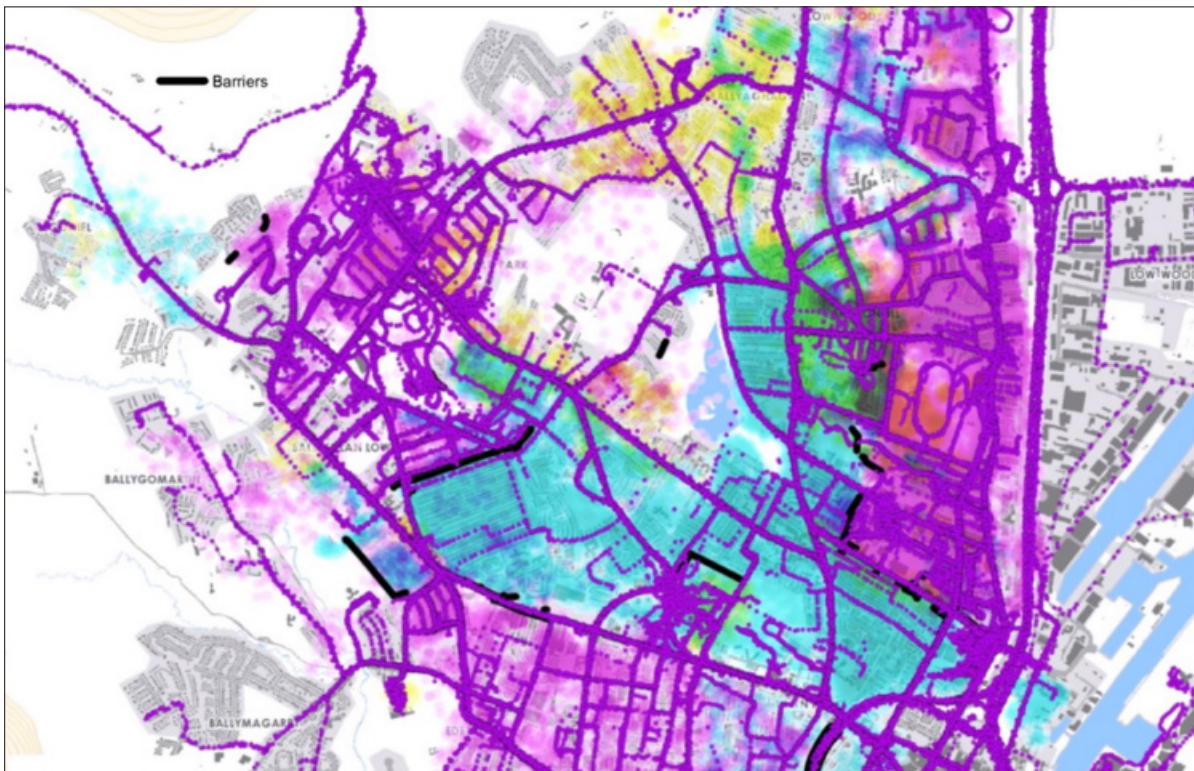
To investigate further the types of space that residents move within during their every day life, we used the GPS tracking

Figure 14. Cumulative GPS track traces for Catholic respondents indicating patterns of usage of shared and divided spaces



Basemap © Crown Copyright

Figure 15. Cumulative GPS track traces for Protestants respondents indicating patterns of usage of shared and divided spaces



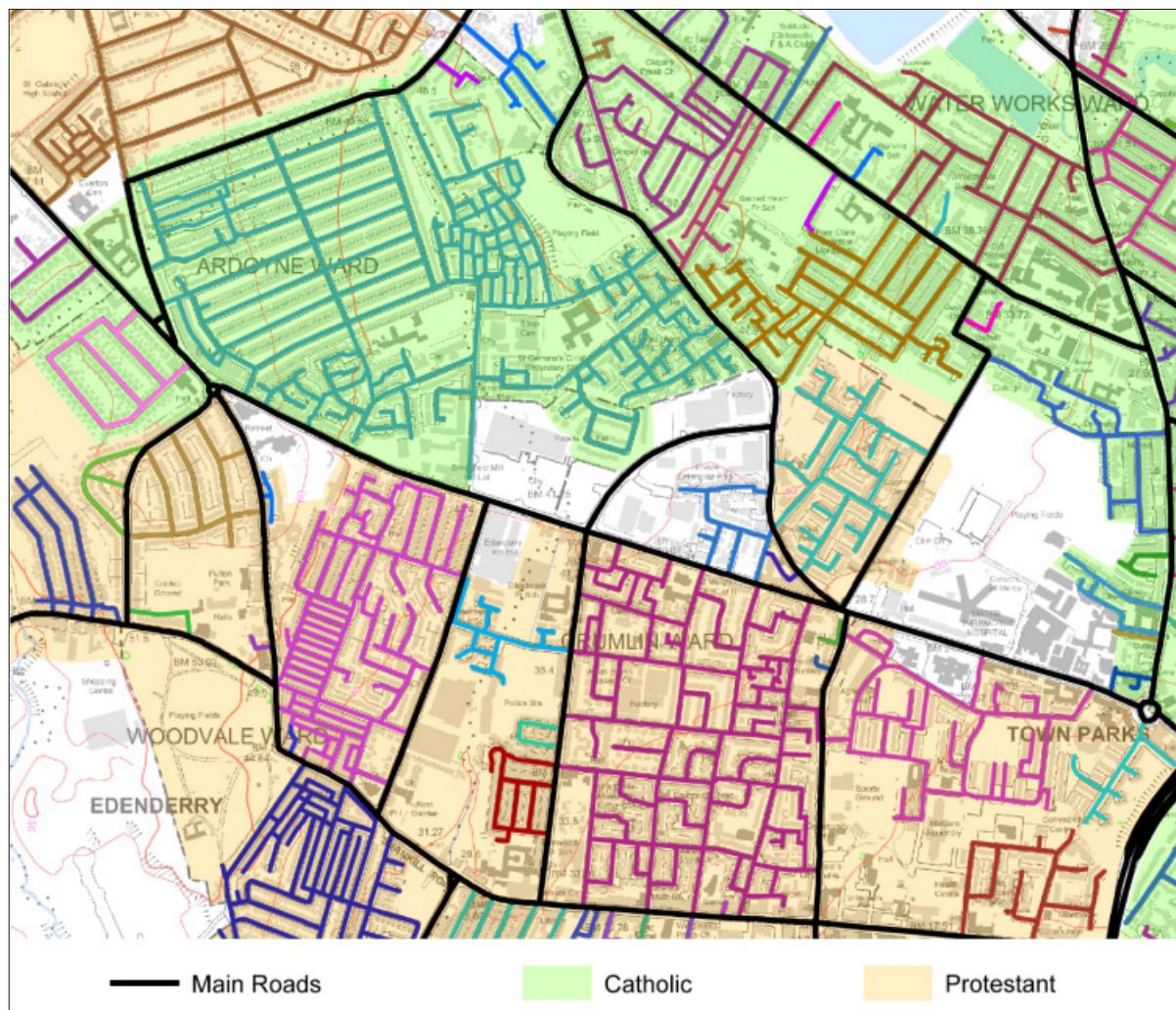
Basemap © Crown Copyright

data to assess the amount of time spent moving within different types of group space (ingroup, mixed and outgroup), within different types of areas (along main roads, or within tertiary street networks). This was achieved by adapting the concept developed by Grannis (1998) to define series of interconnecting tertiary streets as T-communities. T-communities terminate at the point they reach a main road, or other barrier such as parkland. The theory of T-communities is underpinned by the idea that they define local neighbourhoods accounting for potential interactions with others, hence being particularly useful for segregation studies.

To generate the T-communities framework a road dataset was obtained from the Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland (OSNI). Additional residential pathways, that were

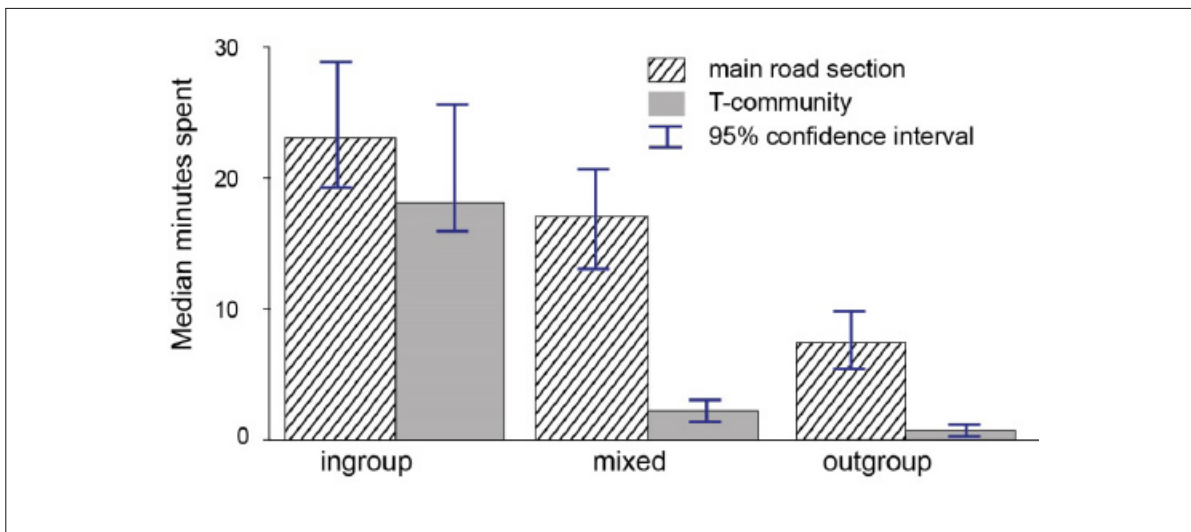
visible on OSNI background maps or on Google Maps, were then digitised and added to the maps. At this point, main roads (defined as through roads wide enough for two cars to pass), and other features such as interfaces, parks, industrial areas and retail centres, were used as 'line barriers' – providing the necessary boundaries to create the proposed 'T-communities'. The spatial extent of each of the T-communities was then determined using network analysis in ArcGIS Pro to define service areas (See Figure 16). We were then able to determine the community affiliation of each T-community by using a combination of population census data and the specialized local knowledge of those involved in the research team. Most significantly for an understanding of the levels of everyday segregation in North Belfast, no T-community straddled identifiable Catholic and Protestant areas.

Figure 16. T-Communities in North Belfast © Crown copyright



Basemap © Crown Copyright

Figure 17. Median minutes spent along main roads or within T-communities, across types of group space



Key findings from our analysis of time spent moving within T-communities and sections of main road, showed that residents were significantly less likely to move within mixed or outgroup spaces (see Figure 17). This is especially true within T-communities, with greater mixing likely to occur along main roads. Movement within mixed and outgroup spaces was significantly more likely to occur when travelling in a vehicle than on foot. There were no significant differences in results between Catholic and Protestant participants.

For fuller details of the T-community methods and results see Davies et al (2019).

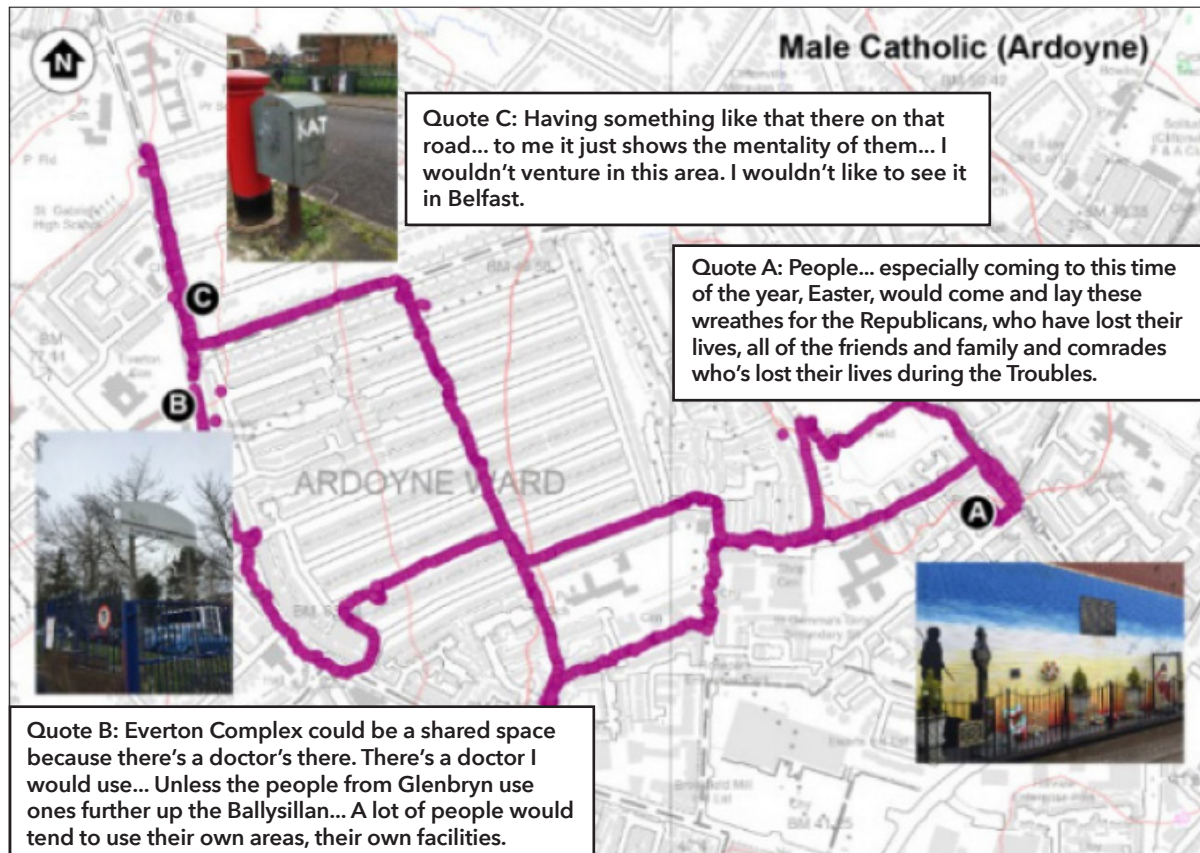
2.4 Walking Interviews - Chosen and Rejected Pathways

The Walking Interviews helped contextualise the raw data obtained from the survey, Spraycan software and Belfast Pathways App and allowed us to access participants' own explanations of how and why they chose particular routes as they navigated North Belfast. They also gave participants the opportunity to identify particular spaces as shared and to explain why, thus adding qualitative richness and depth to our survey and tracking data.

Throughout each walk, researchers questioned participants about how they related to their physical environment, and how the landscape impacted upon decisions they made regarding use of space. The researchers prompted participants to discuss how they felt about different features as they moved through the area (i.e. murals, flags, painted kerbstones and different facilities that were considered shared or more clearly designed for single identity use). At the same time, researchers remained sensitive to hidden or subtle aspects of the landscape that may only have a connection to 'insiders' from the local community (see the project website, <http://belfastmobilityproject.org/index.html> for the Walking Interview Framework).

Figure 18. Walking Interview Route of Participant A

Basemap © Crown Copyright



Participants revealed a range of views about how they felt about their community, their relationship with the 'other' community and points of interaction or mixing between the two. Figure 18 outlines a walk taken with a Catholic male from Ardoyne (Participant A). Within the interview, he indicated a clear and deep awareness of his community's tradition and values (see Quote A), aspects of the physical landscape that he found offensive and intimidating (Quote B) and a shared space utilised by both communities (Quote C).

Figure 19 provides an overview of another participant (Protestant, male) living in the Glenbryn/Upper Ardoyne area (Participant B), who demonstrates a comparable awareness of the region, but does so from an opposing viewpoint. He too explains aspects of the local tradition (particular to his community - see Quote D), observes potential instances of sharing (Quote E) and

identifies clear points of perceived threat from the 'other' community (Quote F).

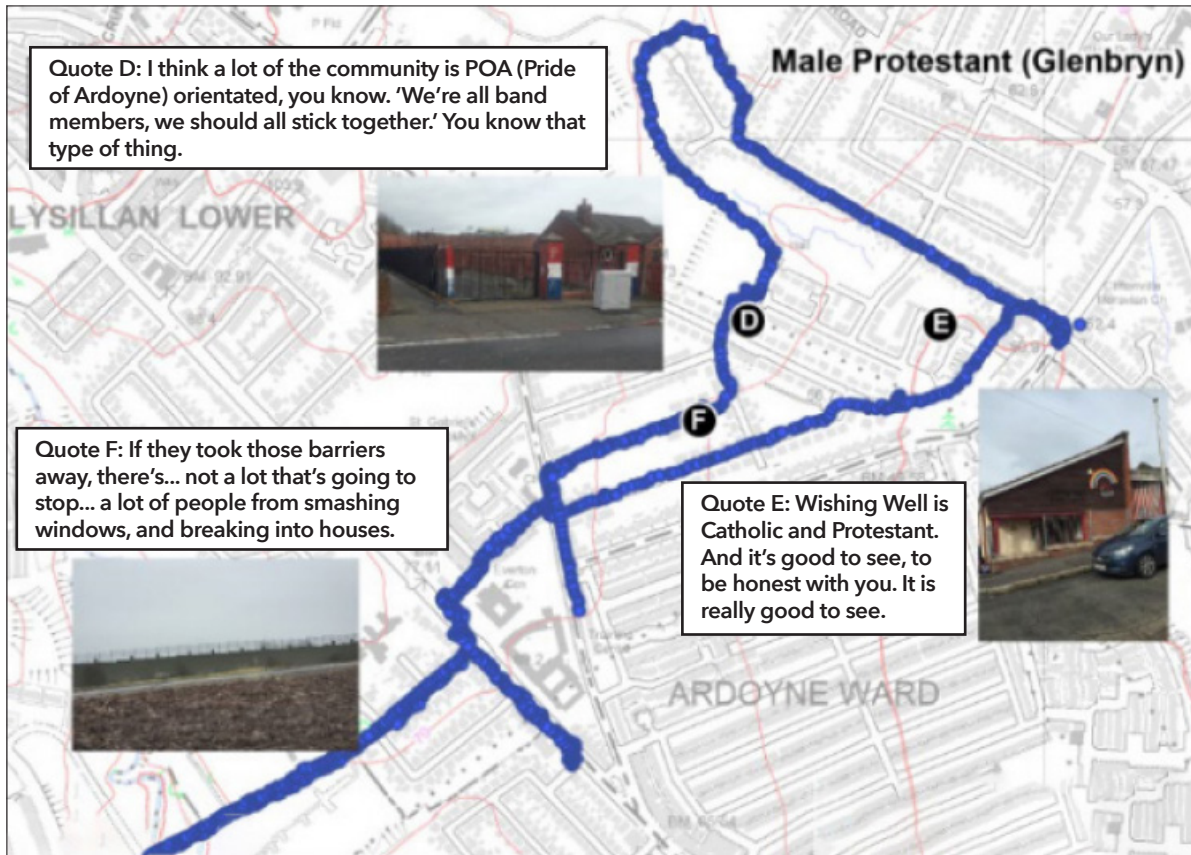
Throughout the Walking Interviews there were key trends and variations regarding how participants responded to the questions from the researchers. Male participants generally demonstrated a clearer sense of the local geography in the outdoor portion of the walk, but they showed less willingness to take the researchers into areas that would be associated with the 'other' community. For instance, Participant B demonstrated considerable reluctance to use a nearby collection of shops as he felt that they were affiliated with the Catholic community:

"Now there's shops just down there (the Ardoyne shops). I would never use them shops... I've never been in them."

(Participant B - Protestant male from Glenbryn/Upper Ardoyne)

Figure 19. Walking Interview Route of Participant B

Basemap © Crown Copyright



Female participants were less likely to feel their mobility was restricted by the surrounding residential segregation and often explained that they used facilities (i.e. shops) that were based in or near the 'other' community. This resonates with other research that has identified gender differences in mobility patterns in Northern Ireland (Lysaght and Basten, 2003; Hamilton et al. 2008), which has found women felt more confident, at least anecdotally, about entering areas associated with the 'other' community. It has been suggested that this gendered sense of confidence could be linked to the fact that women and children were not considered as 'legitimate targets' during the region's recent conflict (Dowler, 2001).

Despite this apparent trend, the GPS tracking data provided by the Belfast Pathways App did not reveal gender differences in mobility practices. Women were no more likely than men to spend greater amounts of time in shared or outgroup spaces. Nor are they more likely to visit destinations located within such spaces. Thus, there is a potential discrepancy between what women and men say they do and what they actually do.

Figure 20. Walking Interview Routes mapped against Spraycan data on segregation

Basemap © Crown Copyright

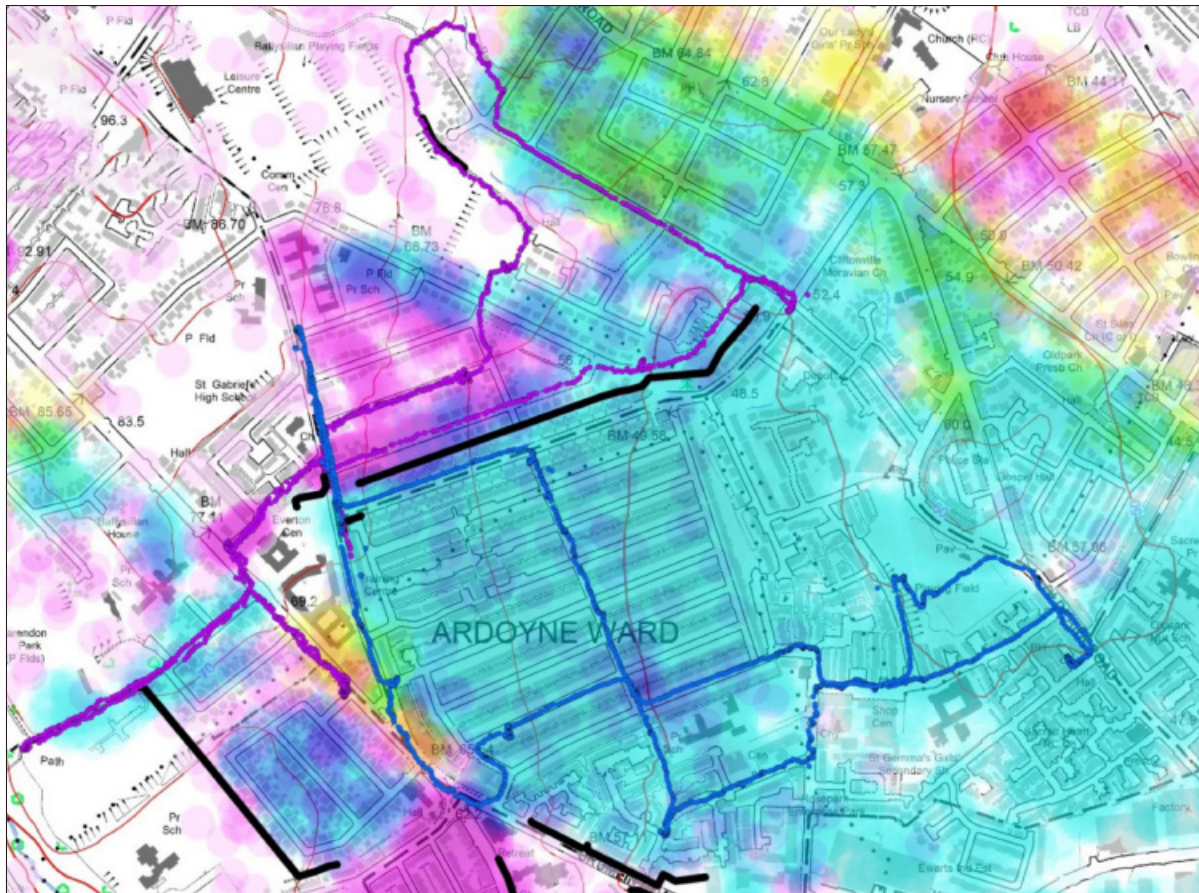


Figure 20 shows the routes of Walking Interview Participant A and Walking Interview Participant B against the Spraycan map of perceived segregation and which illustrates how both participants remained within the bounds of their own community territories. However, it is also worth noting that Participant B's route took in the Deerpark Road area, which was perceived to be predominately Catholic by those mapping the area via Spraycan, and which highlights some of the perceptions of demographic change taking place and which was noted earlier.

The majority of participants explained that their perception of their safety in passing through roads within the 'other' community was often dependent on a number of variables: the 'time of year' was an issue for most participants and indicates the degree to which certain annual celebrations remain contentious in North Belfast. Even Catholic participants who indicated that they rarely changed their routes for fear of encountering the 'other' community, noted that they would likely do so throughout the month of July³, while others articulated the general sense of intimidation they felt at that time of year:

³ July is regularly a contentious month in Northern Ireland. During the high point of the region's conflict, annual parades by the Orange Order were accompanied by riots and paramilitary violence. In the post-conflict era, disputes over parading routes continue to be a major point of division between the two main communities in North Belfast.

“In Mount Vernon, come the Twelfth (of July) you hear sounds of war ... Beating drums, fife being played, bonfires being burned. The whole Twelfth thing... the Catholics stay in their houses; they don't come out... We should be allowed to, but you don't go out. The whole town is turned off. And the marching is done to impress upon the bystander that this is our area and you cannot come in here and just cross, you can't cross the line of the parade, for example, that would be a terrible bad thing to do.” (Participant C - Catholic male from Fortwilliam)

Most participants stated that they felt more comfortable passing close to 'interface' areas during the day, rather than after dark, and a number suggested that their sense of safety would be determined by how they were moving through the 'other' community, i.e. almost all felt that they would be comfortable driving. Participant B identifies the type of decision-making process residents consciously and subconsciously consider:

“It's funny, it's like, if I was driving ... and I turned the corner and there was red, white and blue, for instance, it doesn't annoy me. It wouldn't. But if the car broke down there, I'd be, ah, well. But if I was driving through an area that was green, white and gold, I'd start panicking, I would, I'd be going like aagh. I don't want to break down here. You know, you just know. To be honest, you know I mean. You just come in an area and you know this is definitely not an area where you want to break down. Or I wouldn't like to be stranded in this area.”

(Participant B - Protestant male from Glenbryn/Upper Ardoyne)

Participants also stated that negative contact with the 'other' community in the past shaped their views and on-going interactions:

“Look, I wouldn't be able to walk up the road, I can't walk up to the Catholic area, Glandore or Antrim Road... I can't go into the area... cause they'd all be rioting, my face is known, you know. I'm one of the ones they'd chase you know.” (Participant D - Protestant male from Skegoneill)

Such viewpoints provide a connection between the interview and questionnaire data. In the questionnaire data analysis, negative contact experiences were linked to self-reported and actual avoidance of shared and outgroup spaces for both Catholic and Protestant residents. Conversely, positive contact experiences were associated with a greater self-reported willingness to use shared or outgroup spaces and, again, more time spent in such spaces (Dixon et al., in press).

Discussion

Overall, the four strands of the study present a complex pattern of segregation in North Belfast. The survey data found that participants have considerable attachment to their own community, while a large number also had positive interactions with the 'other' community. However, such attitudes and experiences were balanced by concern, particularly in relation to a sense of safety and threat by the cultural and visual displays from the 'other' community. This underlying sense of threat is in turn likely to influence some of the concerns about moving around in public spaces and in particular in areas dominated by the 'other' community.

Protestants were generally more positive regarding experiences of community interaction and had greater sense of comfort in inter-communal settings, while Catholics expressed concerns about issues of safety, considered visual displays as more of a threat. Consequently, Catholic respondents were also more likely to report limiting their mobility in public spaces and accessing resources beyond their own community. Ironically, though,

Catholics who downloaded the Belfast Pathways App, actually spent slightly more time in shared or outgroup spaces. This amount of time in shared spaces is again a statistically significant effect, though fairly small in size (Dixon et al., in press).

Reflecting on the survey findings, one can trace a sense of caution by participants toward people from a different community background to their own, participants have implied that they are generally not opposed to interacting with the 'other' community (and often do so with positive outcomes), yet they also indicate that single identity cultural celebrations make them feel uncomfortable. This is further evidenced by the large number of respondents to the survey that support the Government's proposals to remove all interface barriers by 2023, while many also indicated that these structures play an important role in regulating community safety in their area. Moreover, and tellingly, our GPS tracking data shows that the vast majority of participants spent little or no time within areas associated with the 'other' community's spaces and rarely, if ever, visit destinations located within such spaces (Dixon et al., in press).

The survey results reveal that participants appear conflicted. While they display a general openness to the 'other' community in some contexts, they are not ready to fully embrace those of the opposing community background. There are positive sentiments, but also hesitation. These findings correlate with data from the Belfast Pathways App where the majority of the pathways taken were within 'in-group' spaces and mixing were largely based upon need. Participants' movements were linked to an apparent unease toward the 'other' community. People appear willing to travel through spaces associated with the opposing community background, but preferably in a vehicle.

The data obtained from Spraycan reflects the large degree of segregation that participants residing in North Belfast identified in their surrounding area. While official statutory statistics (e.g. Census data) also provide a comparable breakdown, the Spraycan data provides us with an important and novel 'bottom-up' view of how people interpret their neighbourhoods and communities. Such detail is important - it offers us the opportunity to look at some of the inaccuracies we encounter when studying maps that have been generated using official sources. For instance, there are large spaces of North Belfast that are neither 'Catholic' or 'Protestant', as they may simply be a space of dereliction or industry - by identifying locations as belonging to one community or the other, as Census data does (it also identifies areas as 'mixed', where appropriate), this can be misleading and is ultimately inaccurate. Further exploration of software such as Spraycan may help reduce some of these inaccuracies and also assist residents living in spaces subject to plans for regeneration (e.g. Ardoyne and Ballysillan are listed as one of The Executive Office's 'Urban Villages') an interactive opportunity to identify how they relate to their local area.

In the walking interviews, participants often indicated that they did not have a 'problem' with the 'other' community, a sentiment that was especially common when participants were deep in their own communities. But as they moved closer to streets or facilities perceived as 'owned' by the 'other' community, their attitudes often seemed to become more hostile to those in that area. This was often triggered by the appearance of flags, murals and or painted kerbstones, associated with those of the opposing community background.

Whether displayed to demarcate space or simply as demonstration of community pride, such visual displays served as significant points of threat for participants. Some refused to cross into streets where the community affiliation clearly changed. When asked why, they often found it difficult to articulate exactly what posed a direct threat. Some young men suggested it was too much of a risk, as members of the 'other' community might recognise them from previous incidents of low-level rioting, but often participants simply implied they would not feel comfortable or safe.

The four strands of data demonstrate challenges for both residents of North Belfast and policy-makers. Where goodwill does exist between the two communities, it is compromised by participants feelings about the 'other' community's cultural celebrations and does not extend to people feeling comfortable enough to pass through areas associated with the opposing community unless they are in a vehicle. Our data suggests that people enter 'outgroup' space relatively infrequently.

Clearly residential segregation powerfully shapes wider patterns of movement and activity space use, notably through the segregation of tertiary street networks or T-Communities. It limits residents' opportunity for goodwill to be developed further. The way in which the segregated landscape is heavily marked by community identity further adds to the sense that some spaces are 'no-go' areas. While transforming the residential layout of North Belfast is clearly complicated, the ways in which segregation is re-emphasized by cultural displays means that locations become less easily understood as public streets and more accurately considered as single identity territory.

There are obvious and dangerous issues with such a landscape. It institutionalizes divisions and lead to the development of sustained pockets of inequality. There is a need to better understand what makes the small number of spaces where the communities mix be felt as safe spaces. We have identified elsewhere in this chapter that visits to these locations are generally based on need, but in Chapter 3 we will explore the characteristics of these sites to assess the context within which a small amount of sharing space is happening within the deeply divided landscape of North Belfast.

Chapter 3: North Belfast - A Shared Landscape

Northern Ireland's conflict is fundamentally about territory, sovereignty and identity. As a consequence, creating genuine shared spaces where all people can feel equal and valued is extremely challenging, particularly as efforts to create these spaces are undermined by a backdrop of very physical and evident legacies, as described in Chapter 2. Such landscapes constantly remind residents of who they are. They also remind them where and with whom they belong or do not belong. In this chapter, we briefly explore the policy context in which the promotion of a 'Shared Landscape' has acquired significance, before outlining some relevant findings from the Belfast Mobility Project, developing on our preliminary discussion of results presented above:

- 3.1 Shared Space and Policy - An Overview of Relevant Shared Space Initiatives;
- 3.2 Survey Findings - Views on Cross-Community Experiences and Feelings During These Engagements;
- 3.3 Walking Interviews and Participatory GIS - Spaces Perceived to be Shared;
- 3.4 Belfast Pathways App - Identity of Locations that were Shared.

3.1 Shared Space and Policy - An Overview of Relevant Shared Space Initiatives

Within the policy domain, past efforts to create, encourage or even identify shared spaces has proved problematic. The 2001 *Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025* did not specifically mention 'shared spaces' but did emphasize the importance of a 'shared vision' (Department for Regional Development, 2001). The document sought a 'sustained urban renaissance in our cities and towns', allied with a 'vibrant rural Northern Ireland' within its proposed 25-year vision for

the area. The value of 'sharing' was clear. However, without specifically defining the 'spaces' where this 'vision' could be explored, or how such spaces could be created, the value of the premise seemed limited. The document rightly indicated the importance of creating a 'shared vision' to support 'Northern Ireland's increasingly diverse population', but there was limited detail regarding how this should best be achieved.

In 2005, *A Shared Future* noted the importance of 'reclaiming shared space', as too often there had been a tendency to mark town centres, arterial routes and main thoroughfares with flags, symbols and other markers of group territoriality (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2005). Despite the unquestionable merit and accuracy of this point, a report for Belfast City Council noted that it was necessary for policy-makers to recognise that the challenges are not just physical - there are 'mental walls' that people will need help navigating, even where high quality shared spaces are created (Gaffikin et al, 2008).

Furthermore, *A Shared Future* noted that the key premise of sharing in Northern Ireland, was significantly undermined by the underlying 'culture of intolerance' that exists in the region. The strategy pointed to the need for 'cohesive communities' where 'relationships are central' and 'political, civic and community leadership' was evident. The importance of developing a progressive and coherent good relations agenda was noted:

"Separate but equal is not an option. Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically."

The most recent relevant policy document to address the problem of shared space, *Together: Building a United Community Strategy* (TBUC), was published by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (now The Executive Office) in 2013 and outlined a vision of:

“(A) united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance.”

The document noted a particular commitment to young people (via the new ‘United Youth’ initiative) and to building a safer community (by creating a ten-year programme aimed at removing all interface barriers by 2023). It also pledged to deal with issues related to cultural expression, which would be led by the establishment of an all-party group that would make recommendations related to parades and protests; flags; symbols; emblems and related matters. The fourth and final headline action was a commitment to a ‘shared community’, which sought to enhance good relations ‘by placing it on a statutory basis with the creation of a new *Equality and Good Relations Commission*’ and introduced a more sophisticated good relations section for Equality Impact Assessments for all policies across government.

In this regard, the strategy offered a clearer definition of shared space than what had been provided by previous relatable strategies:

“Shared space need not be neutral space; it is not pursuing some sense of sanitised territory that denies the ability of people to celebrate their culture. The challenge is to ensure that shared space remains open, on the basis of equality of opportunity to ensure that all sections of society can have access”

Despite TBUC offering a desirable vision of a united community and an improved understanding of shared spaces, there was still scant detail of how these matters could be practically achieved. For instance, there was little detail of how to introduce shared spaces into the existing urban environment.

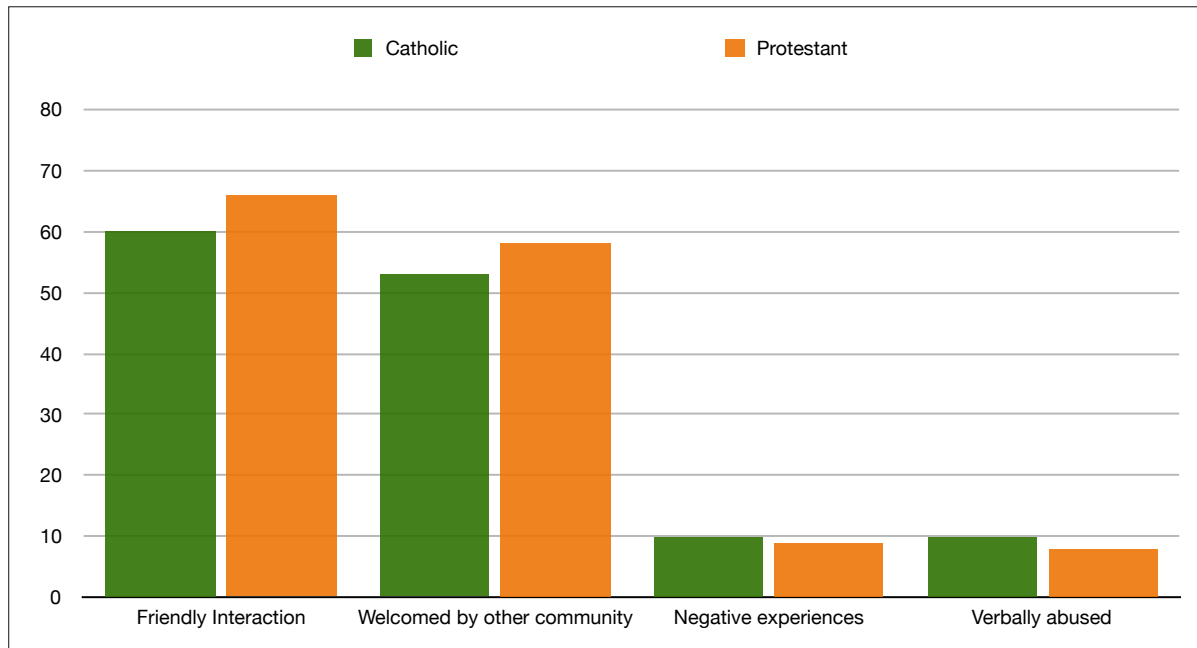
Throughout these policy documents there is a clear desire to increase the number and quality of shared spaces throughout Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, in most cases, there is little detail regarding how shared spaces should be defined, encouraged or created. The value of sharing is clearly emphasized, but in addition to a lack of detail regarding its practical implementation in generic terms, there is no explanation of how areas with deeply entrenched community identities could be made more inclusive and integrated. Perhaps as important, there is also limited data on how local residents may already be sharing their spaces, i.e. evidence based on analysis that directly examines how they use the everyday spaces of the city, the pathways they take, and the destinations they visit.

3.2 Survey Findings - Views on Cross-Community Experiences and Feelings During These Engagements

While the findings from the survey that relate to sharing space can only provide an insight into the views of the participants in isolation, they offer an important indication of how individuals might be prepared to use and share space in practice. The survey data from Chapter 2 indicated that participants generally had positive feelings toward members of the ‘other’ community, and this can be considered as an important component of creating a more ‘shared’ society. A significant proportion of respondents also recorded that they were willing to use spaces beyond their own communities.

The survey suggested that there is a potential for greater sharing and

Figure 21. Percentage of respondents by community background that had positive interactions with the 'other' community and those who had experienced negative experiences



cooperation in North Belfast (See Figure 21). For instance, participants reported that they often had friendly interactions with members of the 'other' community and that such interactions were much more common than negative forms of contact. More than 60% of all respondents indicated that they always interacted with the 'other' community in a friendly way. Similarly, some 55% of respondents stated that they always felt 'welcomed' by individuals from the opposing community background.

Moreover, the survey revealed that participants rarely had negative feelings towards members of the 'other' community, less than 10% of respondents indicated this happened regularly.

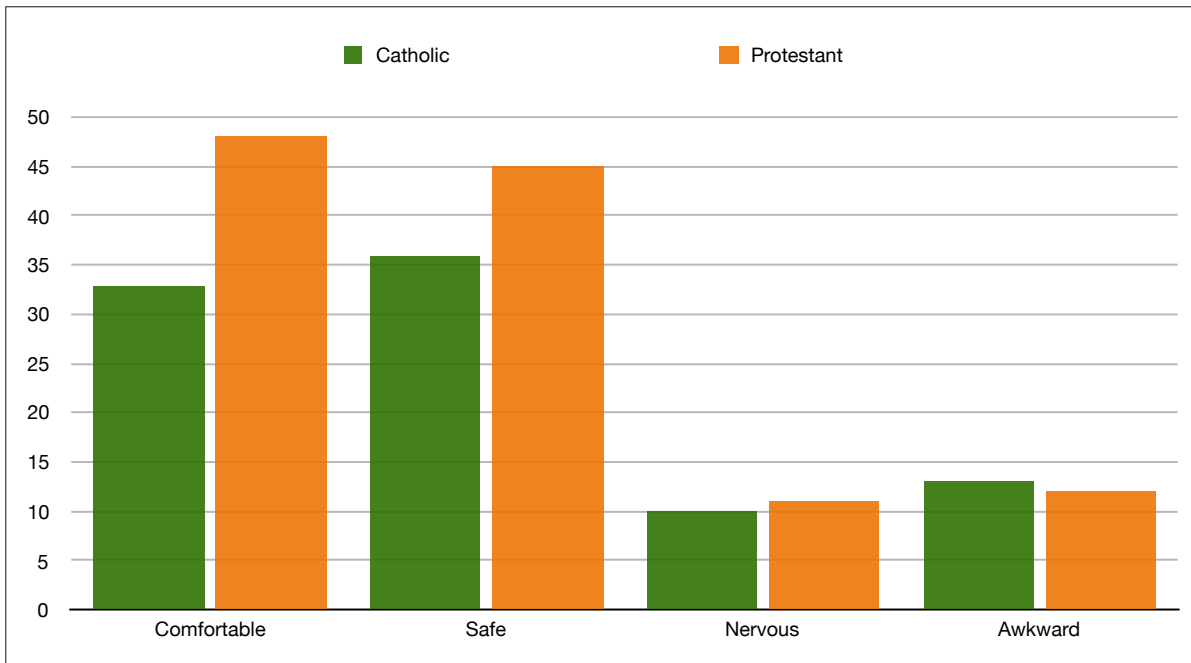
It is encouraging that so many participants feel positive about different aspects of engagement with the 'other' community, but we cannot overlook the small percentage of respondents who reported that they had negative experiences in such situations, especially as people will likely recite the details of these to other members of their community. About one in ten of those surveyed stated that they always had negative interactions with the

'other' community, and Catholics were a little more likely than Protestants to respond in this manner.

Perhaps the key set of results regarding the potential of mixing in North Belfast, comes from the set of questions that ask participants directly to consider how they would feel if they were in a situation where they were interacting with individuals from the 'other' community. When asked if they would feel comfortable or safe, around a third of Catholic respondents (34%) and close to half of the Protestant respondents (46%) indicated they would and only 16% of the total number of respondents indicated they would not feel safe. Similarly, respondents gave positive responses to the questions about whether they would feel nervous or awkward in such situation - just 10-12% indicated that they would be nervous or awkward if they were interacting with the 'other' community (See Figure 22).

In general, Protestant respondents were more positive than Catholic respondents in relation to their feelings toward community interaction with the 'other' community and stated that they would more comfortable (48% vs. 33%) and

Figure 22. Percentage of respondents by community background who would feel comfortable, safe, nervous or awkward in the presence of other community



safe (45% vs. 36%), but there was no real difference in the percentage of those who said they would feel nervous or awkward.

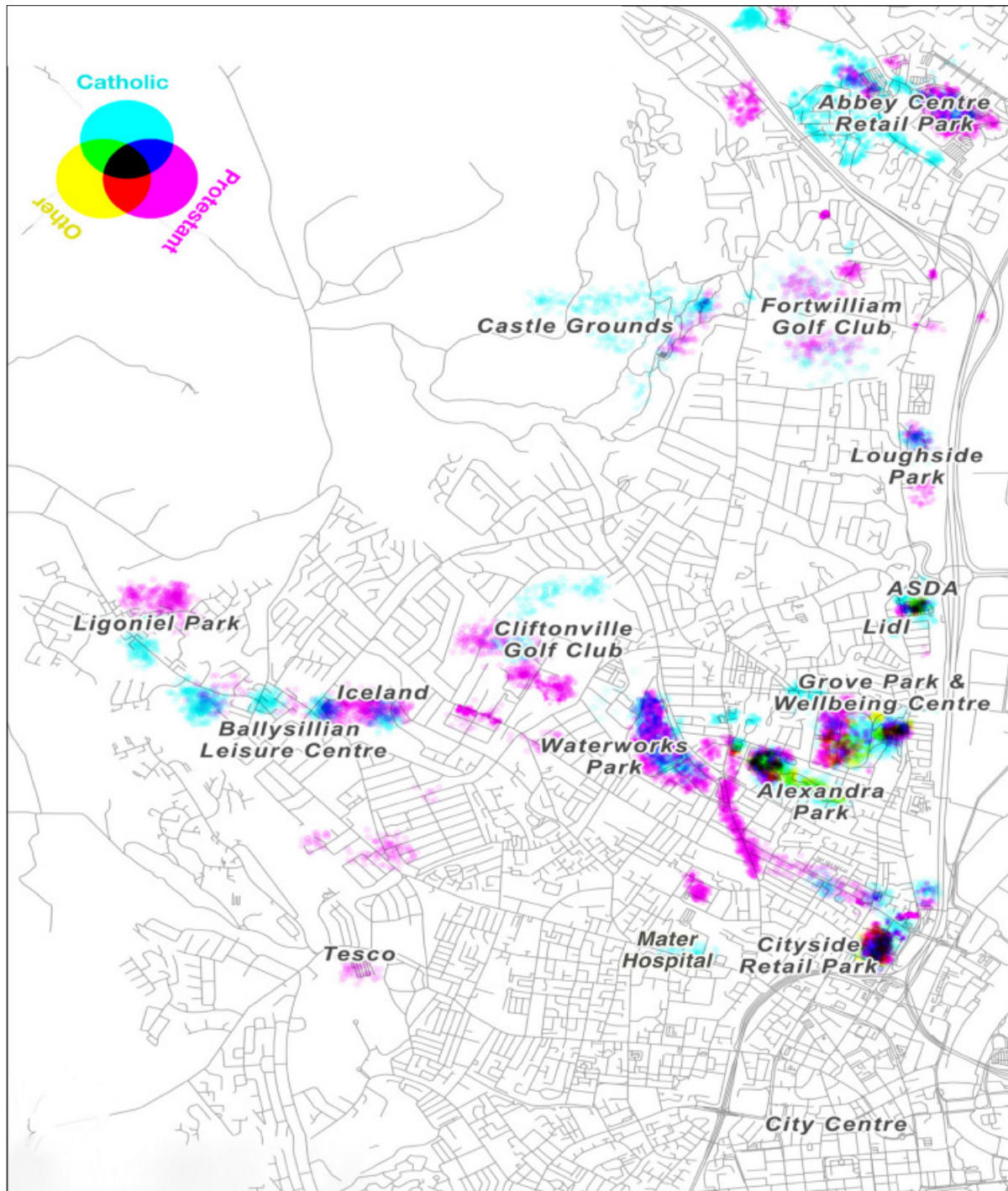
3.3 Walking Interviews and Participatory GIS - Spaces Perceived to be Shared

Nearly fifty years ago Frederick Boal (1971) sought to map Belfast community members' perceptions of the extent of 'their area', by asking people to describe 'How far does your area extend in each direction?' He then drew the resulting regions, based on the most commonly cited landmarks. Over time, work of this type has emerged in other locations. In 2016, Goldblatt and Omer assessed the measurement of 'perceived neighbourhoods' in their study of segregation in Jaffa, Israel. They collected sketches from their participants that indicated boundaries of their neighbourhoods, which were later digitised by researchers. While the value of both approaches should be clearly acknowledged, they still encourage participants to classify neighbourhoods using predefined boundaries. The Belfast Mobility Project sought to ensure that

the participant rather than the system dictated the way we interpret how people living North Belfast relate to spatial boundaries and so provide a bottom-up perspective on segregation in Belfast.

The Spraycan exercise that participants completed before the walking interviews enabled them to map key shared or mixed areas. Figure 11 (See page 24) illustrated how far people were aware of shared or mixed residential areas, while Figure 23 indicates respondent's views of some of the more specific shared spaces. The aggregate sprays showed that participants generally focused on a limited number of types of spaces, these included supermarkets, shopping centres, leisure centres and other spaces of consumption, and as we shall discuss below these were the most likely public spaces to be identified as 'shared' by the GPS tracks from the Belfast Pathways App. We are also able to identify that of the total time our participants spent in mixed or shared spaces, 57.4% of these visits occurred during the day - between 12pm and 6pm (19.7% happened in the morning and 22.9% in the evening).

Figure 23. Perceptions of Shared Space (Road data © OpenstreetMap Contributors 2019)

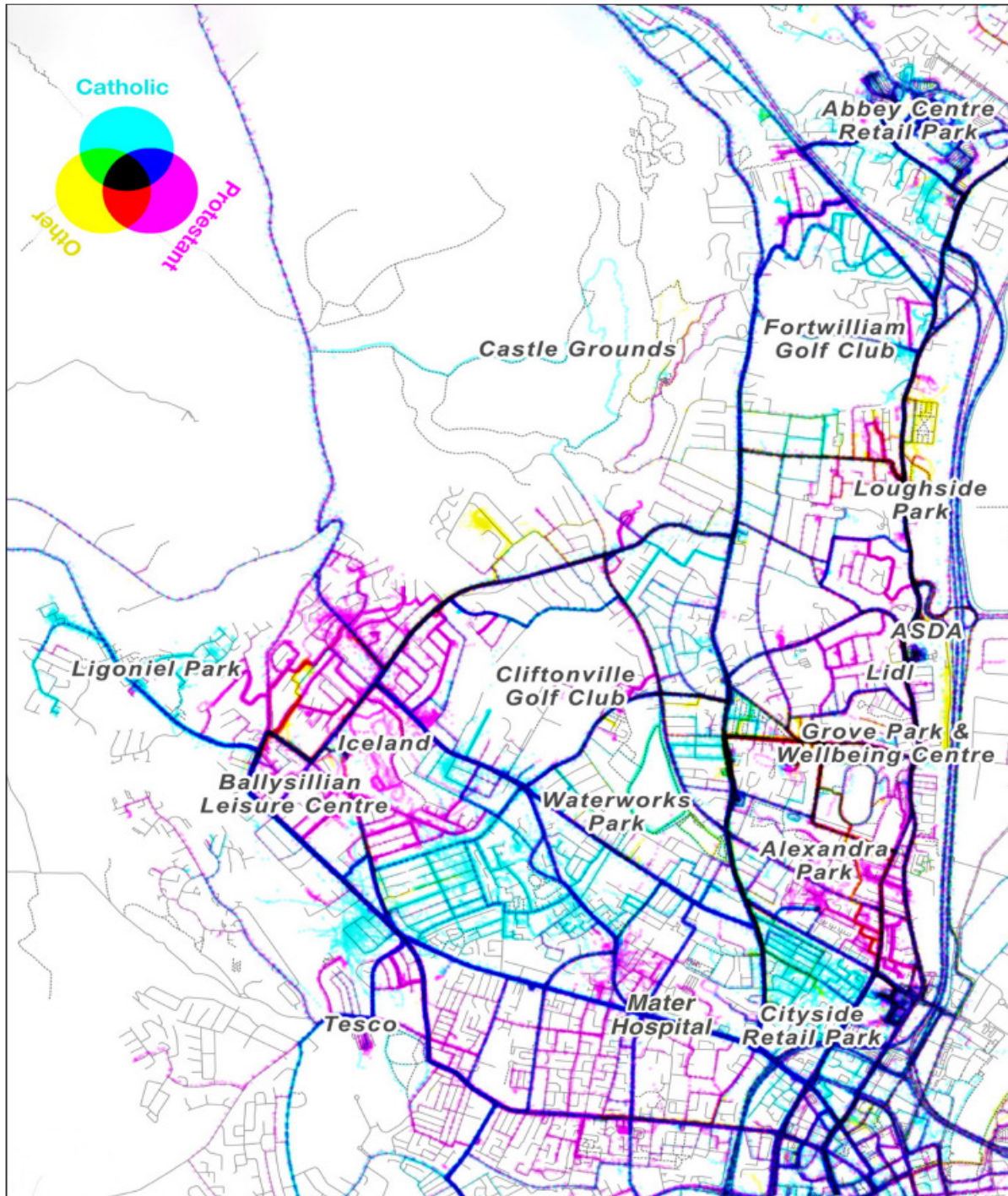


Figures 23 and 24 illustrate how perceptions and behaviour coincide in many cases. There are a number of sites on both maps that were identified as places considered to be shared (via Spraycan, Figure 23) and sites where the two communities also potentially mix in practice (Figure 24). Figure 23 shows that participants felt that the large shopping centres (Cityside Retail Park and Abbey

Centre), parks (Ligoniel Park, Alexandra Park, Loughside Park and Grove Park) and leisure centres (Ballysillan Leisure Centre and Grove Wellbeing Centre) would be considered as shared spaces.

While Catholic and Protestant participants were largely in agreement with the sites where mixing might occur, there were

Figure 24. GPS Tracks by Community Affiliation (Road data © OpenstreetMap Contributors 2019)



some sites that only Catholic participants selected, such as the Mater Hospital, on the lower right hand side of Figure 23, or that only Protestant respondents marked, for example Tesco at Woodvale, on the lower left side of Figure 23. The reasons why the two communities have designated sites not recognised by the other is unclear. For instance, did Protestant participants

simply overlook the presence of the Mater Hospital as the use of the space is purely based on need? By contrast, did our Catholic respondents not mark Tesco at Woodvale because the residential housing near the site is largely Protestant? It would be wrong to draw definitive conclusions from these differences, but what we can infer is that the two communities are likely

to interpret space differently – one may consider a particular site to be shared; the other may not.

Also, despite the clear sense of correlation between the two maps, there are some variations in regards how perception and behaviour matchup. While a number of participants in the Spraycan exercise flagged public parks as spaces where they would anticipate the two communities would meet, the tracking data indicated that few participants actually visited the different public parks throughout North Belfast (see Section 3.4 for more details). Interviewees discussed some of the challenges they encountered when it came to using public parks, for example noting that they did not feel comfortable using certain access points that may be identified as being close to an area associated with the ‘other’ community. Other concerns relating to safety (such as poor lighting and general lack of people) and poor-quality facilities (no public restrooms) were also raised by participants.

As discussed, other locations regularly identified as being ‘shared’ by the participants were largely based around shopping (including shopping centres, supermarkets and other smaller convenience shops) or health (leisure centres, doctor surgeries and dentists). These locations cannot be considered high quality shared spaces, rather they may best be described as ‘neutral’ spaces where the two communities are content to share space on the basis of need or convenience. For instance, one participant involved in the Walking Interviews stated that a local recycling centre (based beside Alexandra Park) would be one of the few local locations where he expected the two sides to mix, but usually without actually disclosing their identities:

“Yeah, that would be like the closest thing to a shared space I’d know. It’s the dump [recycling centre at Alexandra Park Avenue]. Cause everyone has to use the dump at some point.”
(Participant E – Protestant male from Skegoneill)

Even where sites are identified as shared in the Walking Interviews, the Belfast Pathways App demonstrated that their usage can still be sectarianised on very basic levels, such as how people access the site. Figure 25 opposite shows the perceived community identity of the residential streets surrounding Cityside Retail Park (top panel), the perception that the retail park is shared (central panel) and the way local residents accessed the site (bottom panel).

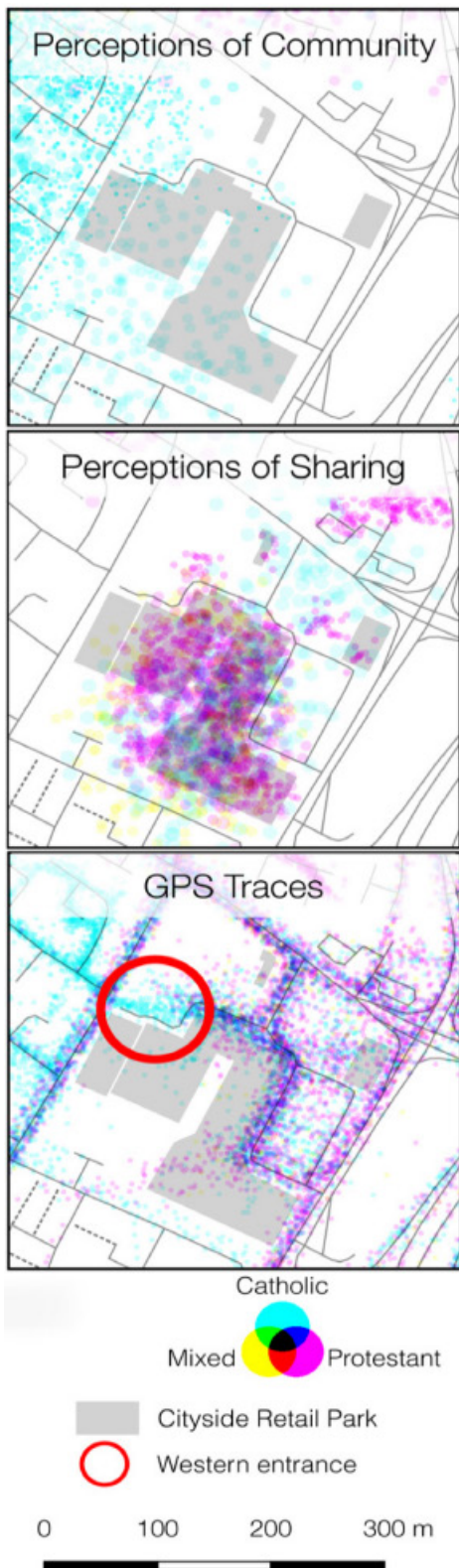
The research findings indicate (bottom panel) that Catholics from the adjacent and predominantly Catholic New Lodge area end to use one entry point and Protestants from the neighbouring Tigers Bay area arrive and depart via another. What we can conclude is that even in spaces where we feel sharing is happening in a casual and indirect manner in North Belfast, there is often a very subtle and deliberate effort by residents to regulate how they mix with the ‘other’ community.

3.4 Belfast Pathways App - Identity of Locations that were Shared

The data from the tracking app evidenced high levels of activity space segregation throughout North Belfast with most people spending the majority of their time in spaces inhabited by people from a similar community background (see Chapter 2). But people also spent a considerable proportion of their time in spaces that are not closely identified with one of the two main communities. The data from the Belfast Mobility App made it possible to identify locations where the movements by participants from the two communities overlap, that is spaces that were shared to at least some extent.

Chapter 2 highlighted that main spaces used by members of both communities on a routine basis were the main arterial routes that run through North Belfast, a rather perfunctory use of space that rarely generates any form of interaction. However, the app data also evidenced that people ‘shared’ a range of other spaces such as large retail stores, supermarkets and other shops (Figure 26 opposite).

Figure 25. Shared space: Perceptions and GPS traces about the Cityside Retail Park



Road and Building Data © OpenStreetMap Contributors

Figure 26. Main destinations in shared or mixed spaces

DESTINATION TYPE	PERCENTAGE OF TIME SPENT IN LOCATION
Large retail stores	14%
Other shops	13%
Supermarkets	10%
Industrial	4%
Parks	3%

The main shopping locations used by participants were the Cityside Retail Park, off York Road; the Abbey Centre Shopping Mall and the Abbey Centre Retail Park; as well as Tesco’s on the Antrim Road and Asda on the Shore Road. All of these were visited equally by Protestants and Catholics, except for the Asda store which was mainly used by Protestants. Other frequently visited sites that seem to be shared in practice include: Fortwilliam Nursing Fold (an old persons’ home); the Yorkgate railway station; and the Valley Leisure Centre. Spraycan data identified a wider range of spaces that were perceived to be shared (see Figure 23), but this did not necessarily translate into shared usage.

While there is some degree of value in the two communities using the same sites for shopping, this need not result in high-quality sharing. Visits are based on utility and likely result in very little engagement between individuals from different backgrounds. For instance, a Catholic family and Protestant family may be in the same aisle of the same shop, but this is unlikely to result in normal circumstances to any meaningful type of engagement. In this sense, people experience such spaces

as neutral rather than truly shared.⁴ They use the spaces as individuals rather than as group members, consequently the sites and their usage are stripped of identity-relevant meanings. Auge (2008) has identified such locations as 'non places', sites which lack any particular historical, relational or identity-relevant meanings. As a result, cross-community interactions in spaces of this kind may be considered as fleeting or shallow (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994).

However, given the large amount of time that participants spent in shopping locations, we must consider if retail can be considered a method for sharing in the future. As noted earlier, the value of interactions between the two communities in these spaces is likely to be limited, but are there ways to enhance the quality of this mixing? While large supermarket chains would likely be unwilling to engage with any relevant initiatives, it should be considered what facilities could be added to these sites to increase the opportunity for the two communities to engage more meaningfully.

The widespread use of retail sites raises the possibility that such sites could be further developed in interface areas to open up movement in and around the areas, where they may act as both a buffer and a shared resource. Thus far this theory has had mixed success – failing quickly in the Hillview site on the Crumlin Road, but working well in the Cityside centre and on a smaller scale with the development between Suffolk and Lenadoon in West Belfast.

The specific absence of co-use of the Asda on the Shore Road may be explained by its location. Where both Catholic and Protestant communities reside close to the

Cityside and Abbey retail centres, Asda is largely surrounded by predominately Protestant residential areas and which likely has an impact on how the site is used. Protestants may feel a greater sense of ownership of the site, with Catholics possibly feeling that they would prefer to use an alternative store closer to an area dominated by members of their community. A similar context applies to the Tesco store in Woodvale, which is a predominately Protestant area and all the visits to this site were made by Protestant participants.

In contrast, the Tesco shop on the Antrim Road has a reasonably even distribution of visits from both communities despite being largely surrounded by residential housing associated with the Catholic community. This might be explained by the fact that there is a substantial amount of Protestant housing nearby and much of the area is private housing, which may make Protestants visiting feel safer and more comfortable than might otherwise be the case. Moreover, there are few flags demarcating any perceived ownership of the surrounding area and there is a police station located nearby, which may make shoppers feel more secure.

Despite the widespread co-use of shopping spaces, public parks were less widely used by participants in the Belfast Mobility Project, who spent just 3% of their time in North Belfast's parks. Given the scale of shared space initiatives that have promoted the value of these spaces, it is worrying that these sites have not been more regularly used by our participants.

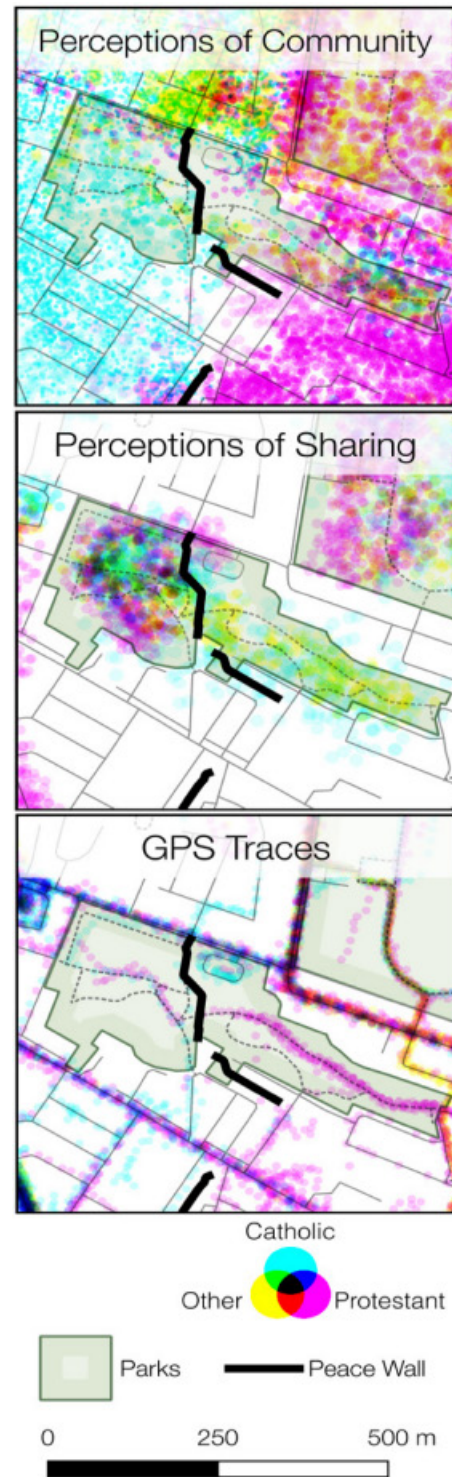
The findings echo those of another study (Abdelmonem and McWhinney, 2015), which found public spaces in Belfast to be complex sites of contention and

⁴ When discussing spaces that are 'neutral' rather than 'shared' we are indicating that they are locations where people from different community backgrounds may be in the same location, but there are little quality interactions between the groups (e.g. people from different backgrounds may be in the same aisle of a supermarket, but never speak to one another). These may also be locations where people consciously avoid making their identity known and wear no markers that could 'give away' their background (e.g. they would intentionally not wear a sports top that reveals a particular allegiance to a particular team/community).

uncertainty. This evidence may partly explain why our participants spent so little time in these locations. Parks and green spaces are generally underpinned by the principles of 'openness' and 'inclusivity', but in North Belfast, the use of such spaces can become sectarianized by the way in which the communities approach these locations. For instance, it is common for the two main communities to identify community specific access points to North Belfast's parks, and in some cases, such as the Waterworks, residents choose to avoid one another completely by self-segregating the sites into zones belonging to 'their' local area and the 'other' community (Hocking et al., 2018). Furthermore, the three main parks in North Belfast (Alexandra Park; Ballysillan Playing Fields and the Waterworks) contain interface barriers, a legacy of past tensions that appear to continue to resonate with local residents.

The principles of inclusivity and sharing have been significantly compromised in Alexandra Park, where in an extreme example a fence has essentially partitioned the park into two distinct single-identity spaces. Although a gate was constructed in the fence 2011, allowing access to both parts, the ideals of openness and inclusivity of public parks has been undermined. The data from the Belfast Mobility Project illustrated that people participating in ordinary activities, such as walking their dogs or taking their children to play areas, frequently reflect on what entry-point should they should take and which area of the park they should visit (See Figure 27).

Figure 27. Perceptions of division and usage of Alexandra Park



Road and Park Data © OpenStreetMap Contributors

Figure 27 shows that people perceive the area surrounding Alexandra Park to be highly segregated (top panel), but also that the Catholic side of the park is perceived to be a more shared space than the Protestant side (central panel). In addition, the figure also suggests that relatively few people used the park, and few of those who did crossed through the gates from one side to the other (bottom panel). Once again, these data highlight the differences between what people may perceive as shared and their willingness to actually use the perceived shared space.

However, it is also interesting to note that in spite of perception that environment around Alexandra Park was highly segregated, two adjacent sites, the Tesco shop on the Antrim Road and the recycling centre on Alexandra Park Avenue were both widely used by people from both communities, and treated as a shared resource. This perhaps highlights a contrast between a willingness to share a functional space such as a shop or recycling centre, but not the leisure spaces within the park.

Discussion

Despite the deeply segregated nature of North Belfast, the research highlighted an awareness by residents of several predominately owner occupied residential areas that were perceived to be mixed (Figure 11). While the presence of such mixed areas challenge views of North Belfast as completely polarised, they also raise questions of whether such mixing is a long term or a transitory state and whether they may serve as the basis for a more integrated future geography.

Our data also demonstrates that sharing of public spaces is common, albeit with significant limitations to this sharing. Most of the mixing between the two main communities happens during the afternoon (12pm-6pm) and is based around need (i.e. shopping) and wider practices of leisure and consumption. This correlates with research by Hamilton et

al (2008), who also indicated shopping centres, supermarkets and leisure centres tend to be viewed as shared, in contrast with local 'bread and milk' shops, which were generally always considered to be segregated (see Huck, 2018 for more details).

The obvious challenge for local policy-makers will be to study these trends in an effort to produce more substantial levels of sharing in North Belfast and beyond. Chapter 2 clearly evidenced the negative impact that flags, murals and painted kerbstones had on creating the type of atmosphere where sharing was possible. Elsewhere, Shirlow (2003) has also explained that for mixing to occur on a significant level, the respective place has to be decoupled from any relevant political and religious backgrounds. The failure to do this in North Belfast has led to the sectarian segregation of public spaces, such as parks – thereby reducing the range of platforms available to encourage further interaction.

In the absence of locations that can easily be identified as examples of spaces which routinely play host to 'high quality sharing', we must then likely consider in what ways we can take advantage of other aspects of mixing identified in this chapter. It is easy to be underwhelmed by the fact that the majority of the sharing we have evidenced in this section of the report is based on need, but it is still occurring, and we should think about how we can enrich this low-level engagement. For instance, a large number of both Catholics and Protestants visited Cityside Retail Park and the Abbey Centre Shopping Mall – the mixing between the communities was likely at a low level (i.e. being in the same physical space, but with little actual engagement), but can this be stimulated further? Could statutory bodies look to insert additional facilities at or near these locations – such as libraries or an open public space with a child's play area? Those involved in policy development would likely prefer a different driver for sharing other than shopping,

but mixing in such spaces is occurring at a reasonably significant level and the general absence of further examples of comparable levels of sharing means that this is likely an opportunity that requires further evaluation.

Moreover, while we should continue to encourage the sharing of space in particular sites where the two communities meet, we must also routinely evaluate the dynamic of the small number of mixed housing developments in North Belfast. Recently developed sites, such as Felden, require on-going review to ensure they develop appropriately - while we explore how developments of this kind can be replicated elsewhere. In addition, we must be careful that locations that have been traditionally defined as 'shared' do not transition into single identity status.

Chapter 4: Belfast City Centre

Belfast's civic centre has a complex history in terms of who has access to it and who feels safe there (Connolly 2012; Bryan, Connolly and Nagle, 2019). The class, gender, religion and politics of the people who have been allowed to be represented in the commercial and civic space, as well as those who have had restrictions placed upon them, has varied over time. There have, for example, been periods when expressions of working class 'Orangeism' were unwelcome in the centre's civic spaces. At other points, it has been considered one of the few locations in the city where Catholics and Protestants largely feel free to share space (Shirlow, 2003).

Even during the height of the conflict, Belfast city centre was a location where the two main communities frequently mixed in shops and offices, although this was also a period when civic life decreased (Bryan, 2012). After the 1998 Agreement, a greater diversity of events developed, including: St. Patrick's Day, Culture Night, Pride and the Festival of Fools as well as the development of new commercial outlets and the rise of the café culture and the Cathedral Quarter appear to have made the city more vibrant. This has been underpinned by a number of policy initiatives from the council.

There have, however, been moments when the accessible nature of the city centre has been undermined. In 2011, the *Belfast City Council's Good Relations Plan* noted the particular importance of making progress in transforming 'contested spaces' beyond the main city centre (Belfast City Council, 2011). Yet within twelve months of this document being published, the city's main civic space around Belfast City Hall had staged a sequence of aggressive protests related to the decision to limit the days the Union Flag would fly at this location (Nolan et al., 2014).

So, while the shared space offered by Belfast city centre should always be considered of considerable value, it should never be taken for granted. Belfast City Council's *Good Relations Plan*, aimed to consolidate this long history by identifying 'securing shared city space' as one of its four key themes that could help promote equality and good relations across the city. The plan also included the need to transform contested space, develop shared cultural space and build shared organisational space and noted that the centre of Belfast was important in connecting the city together in ways that '*encourage citizens to travel to new parts (of the city) and have new experiences while remaining comfortable and feeling safe. Finding ways to connect places is extremely important in this regard.*' The plan also acknowledged the significant impact segregation was continuing to have across the city:

"Many of the deprived areas within Belfast in 2011 are those same areas that were the most deprived in the city in 1991. Most of these areas are those in and around interfaces. There is still extensive residential segregation with accompanying security concerns and crime. Promoting better community and race relations are particularly acute within this context."

The *Belfast Agenda*, which identifies a series of aspirations for how the city will evolve by 2035, is less specific about the need to deal with residential divisions, the word 'segregation' only appears twice in the forty-eight-page document. The ambitious vision put forward in the document largely focuses on the centre of Belfast. While the value of such aspirations should not be discounted, it must be acknowledged that there is already a distinction between how the city centre and interface areas have developed since the 1998 political settlement.

The redevelopment of Belfast’s economy and architecture, the regeneration of derelict spaces, the ‘reimagining’ of areas marked by flags and murals, and the widespread funding of a service-based voluntary sector to promote reconciliation and social and economic development have all been positive steps taken since 1998. However, they have arguably had most impact in the central parts of the city, leading to a relatively integrated and peaceful city centre but a very visible urban hinterland where sectarian enclaves are considered as places which the peace-building process will, in theory, be later extended (Mitchell and Kelly, 2010). The northern part of the city could be considered as archetypical of such a hinterland, with sectarianism still a prominent characteristic.

Having established how our participants used space in North Belfast in Chapters 2 and 3, this Chapter will analyse the degree to which those involved in the study relate to the city centre, which, as established, is an area traditionally viewed as ‘shared’ and has been a site of significant investment in the post-conflict era. This analysis will be presented within the following three themes:

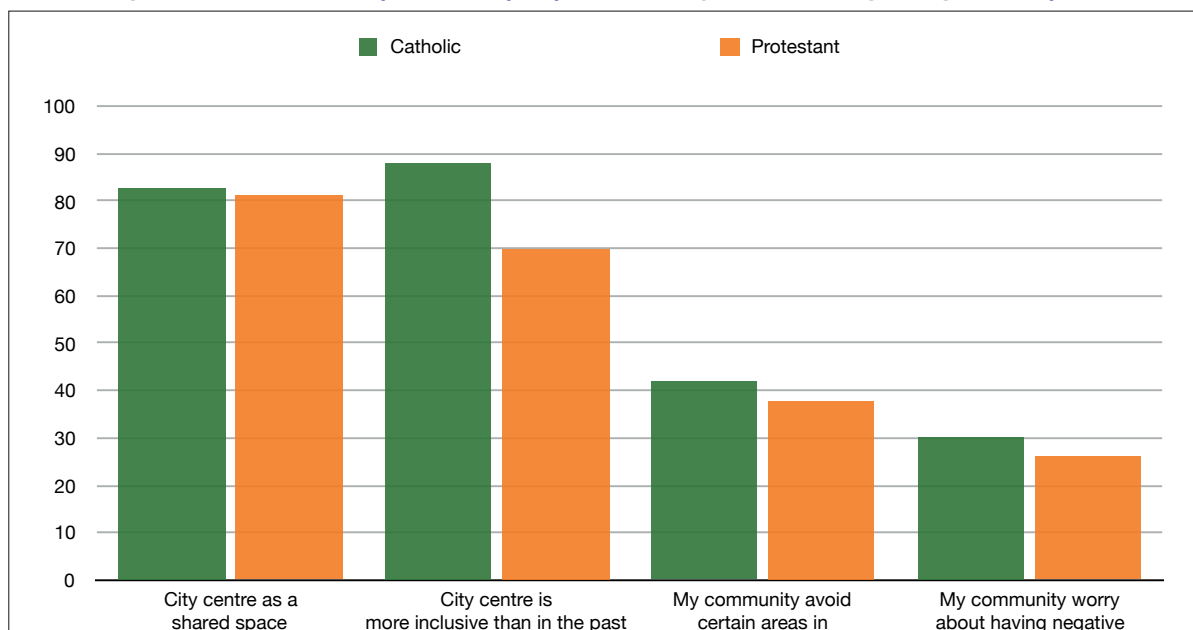
- 4.1 Survey Findings – Views on Community Belonging in Belfast City Centre;
- 4.2 Belfast Pathways App – Use of Belfast City Centre;
- 4.3 Walking Interviews and Participatory GIS – Views on ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ locations in Belfast City Centre.

4.1 Survey Findings - Views on Community Belonging in Belfast City Centre

The research team included a series of questions about Belfast city centre in the survey, so that we could review how individuals living in a highly segregated residential environment related to the nearby civic space. Overall, respondents offered a very positive view of Belfast city centre.

Figure 28 shows that a large percentage of respondents from both communities felt the city centre was a shared space within which both communities could feel equally welcome (82%) and was a far more open and inclusive space than it had been in the past (79%). While people from

Figure 28. Percentage of respondents by community background who agree or strongly agree that Belfast city centre is a shared space; is more inclusive than it was in the past; has areas that their community would avoid and a place that people still worry about having a negative experience in



both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds expressed similar views, Catholics were more strongly in support of the view that Belfast city centre is more inclusive than it was in the past.

However, there are some qualifications to this positive view of the city centre. Nearly four out of ten (40%) of respondents to the survey indicated that they felt that their community would avoid certain areas in Belfast city centre because they worry that they may not be welcome, with Catholic respondents being slightly more concerned than Protestants (42% compared to 38%).

Furthermore, 27% of respondents also said they worried about having a negative experience with members of the other community while in the city centre, and again Catholics were slightly more concerned than Protestants. So, while people in North Belfast generally feel positive about developments in the city centre, they also retain some fears and concerns about interacting with members of the other community.

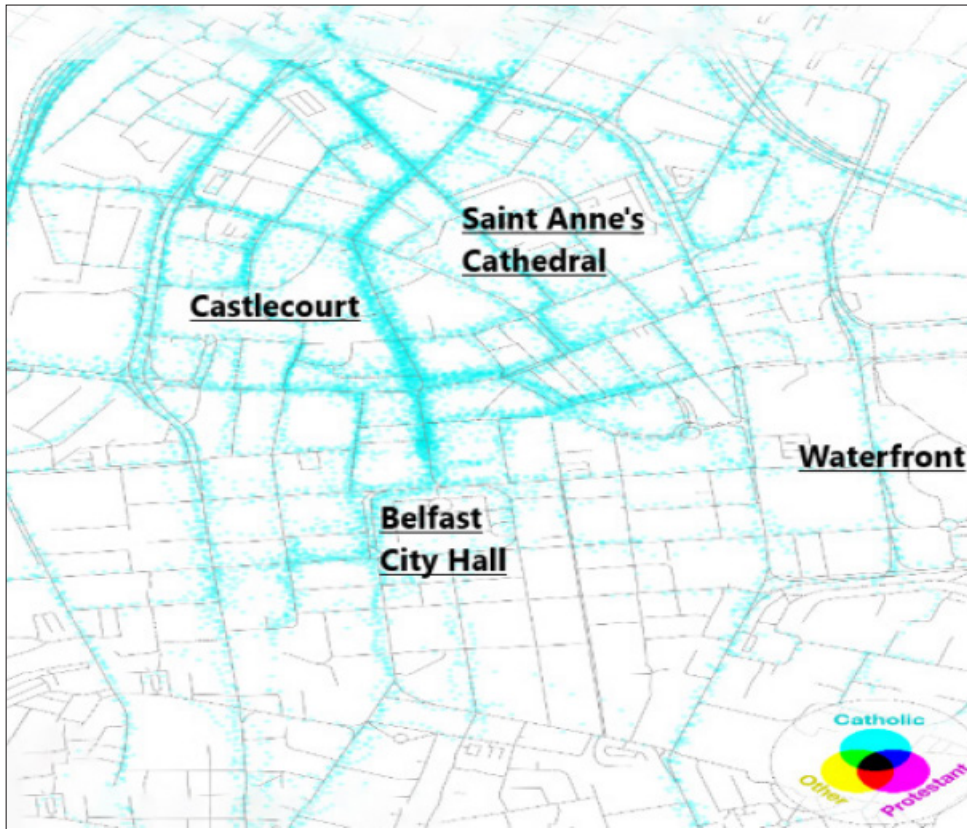
When the research team explored the responses to this section of the survey in further detail, we found that that more favourable attitudes towards the city centre were predicted by realistic and symbolic threat (the strongest predictors) and positive experiences of contact with members of the 'other' community. In other words, people who were more generally afraid of being attacked or worried about threats to their community identity were less likely to perceive the city centre as a shared and inclusive space. Similarly, people who had a history of positive contact experiences with members of other communities were more likely to perceive the city centre as a shared and inclusive space. Demographic factors such as age, gender, community identity and socioeconomic status had little impact on perceptions of the city centre (see Dixon et al, forthcoming).

4.2 Belfast Pathways App - Use of Belfast City Centre

Tracking and PGIS data suggest the vast majority of city's central spaces and routes are widely used and perceived as safe by members of both Catholic and Protestant communities. The city centre accounts for about 9% of destinations visited in 'shared' or 'mixed' activity spaces. We recorded 313 visits by our participants in Belfast city centre - it appears that these were mainly routine (possibly for work) as there were only 57 unique users. There was little difference between how the two main communities moved around the centre of the city; Figures 29 and 30 illustrate the pathways taken by Catholic participants and those from a Protestant background.

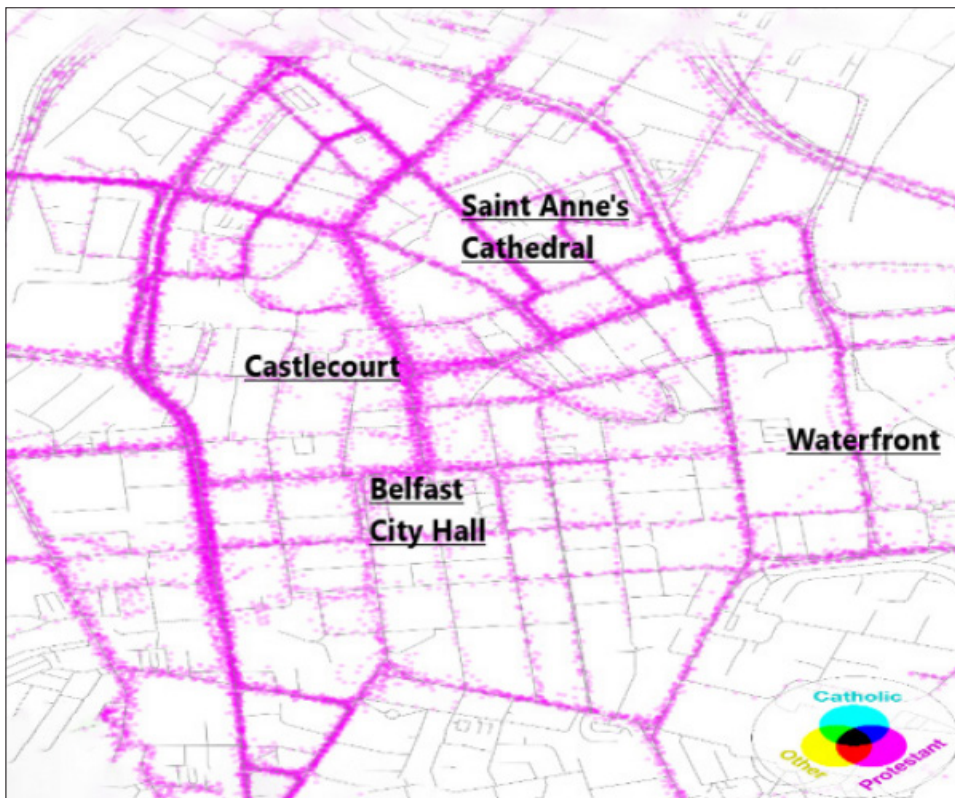
The data relating to the city centre indicates a clear sense that the majority of participants feel comfortable moving around in this zone. It does not appear that people felt bound by the access points they had entered from, i.e. their movement and decisions regarding where they went do not appear to be influenced by the way in which they entered and would later exit the area. However, there was noticeably less data from Catholic participants in the south side of the city centre, than from participants but at this stage it is not clear why this should be the case, and this is something that needs to be explored in further research.

Figure 29. Pathways taken by Catholic participants in Belfast City Centre



Road Data © OpenstreetMap Contributors

Figure 30. Pathways taken by Protestant participants in Belfast City Centre



Road Data © OpenstreetMap Contributors

4.3 Walking Interviews and Participatory GIS - Views on 'safe' and 'unsafe' locations in Belfast City Centre

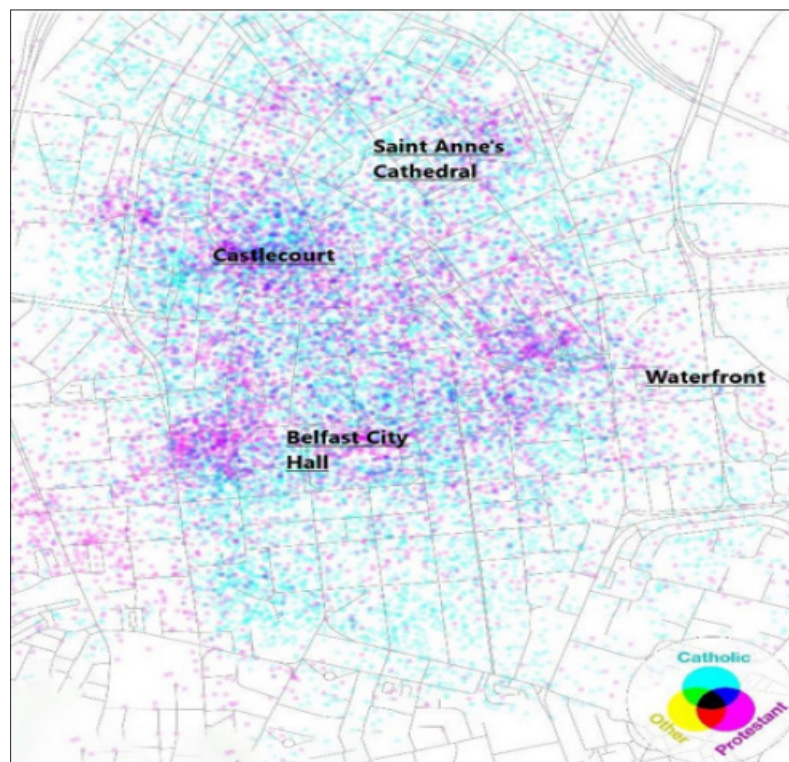
Some concerns about safety were identified during the Walking Interviews, but these mainly concerns people's attitudes to sites on the perimeter of the city centre rather than the central core area (Figures 31 and 32). For example, a small number of Catholic respondents indicated that they would feel uncomfortable in areas bordering South Belfast, due to past experiences of inter-community violence near Central Station during the parading season in Northern Ireland, and several participants from a Protestant background stated that they were uncomfortable in this area as well, due to

its close proximity to the predominately Catholic Markets area.

A number of respondents also identified concerns about some of the boundary areas between the core city centre and the adjacent residential areas. In particular Catholic participants often stated they felt would be unsafe moving past or through North Street (an area close to the predominantly Protestant Shankill Road), while Protestant participants indicated that they would be uncomfortable near Castle Street (an area close to the predominantly Catholic Falls Roads).

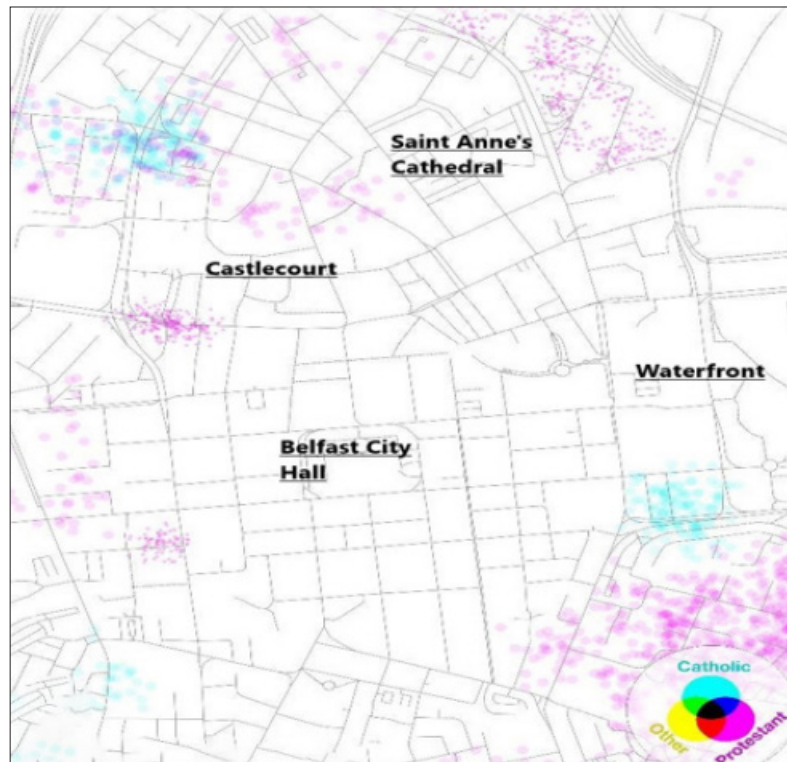
Yet, as demonstrated by the tracking data, a sizeable proportion of participants who self-identified themselves as Protestant

Figure 31. 'Safe' spaces in Belfast city centre



Road Data © OpenstreetMap Contributors

Figure 32. 'Unsafe' spaces in Belfast city centre



Road Data © OpenstreetMap Contributors

appear to have visited/passed by these areas in significant numbers. This could best be explained by the fact some of these areas are on natural access points from North Belfast to the city centre, while the roads near the Markets serve as a route into East Belfast (an area which is predominantly Protestant). This contradiction does though offer an important outcome regarding the data we have obtained - what people say they do and what they actually do can often be quite different.

Of course, we should not discount the sense of threat that participants have recorded in any area of the city and each feature that invokes discomfort needs further evaluation. For instance, a number of participants also explained that they felt uncomfortable in the ring of industrial and derelict land they encounter when entering and exiting the city centre. These included streets to the north side of the city centre, such as Corporation Street and York Street. Similar concerns were expressed about the

area north of Dunbar Link, this is an area that has long been largely derelict, but is currently an area with a number of new commercial developments in progress. These are routes that serve as access points to the city centre and therefore participants' sense of discomfort may have been prompted less by any potential engagement with the 'other' community than an expression of a basic fear about moving through a rundown area that offers little sense of security or reassurance as one moves through it.

Discussion

Belfast's city centre has long been considered as one of the few sites where the city's residents feel safe to 'share' space. Due to its civic nature and the general absence of party emblems or flags, there is less of a sense of space being 'owned' by one group. Perhaps for this reason, mixing throughout the centre of the city generally withstood some of the most contentious moments of the region's wider conflict. Again, we need to consider in more detail the characteristics of the city centre that make it a location where the two communities feel comfortable for shopping and socialising. In addition, we need to continue to gauge where, when and why community members use the city centre, move freely through its streets, and access its facilities.

In this sense our analysis is timely, especially given that Belfast city centre has been the location of a number of high profile and contentious political and social moments in recent years. For instance, the 'Flag Protests', following Belfast City Council's decision, in December 2012, to limit the days the Union flag flies above Belfast City Hall, led to a series of violent riots between loyalists and the police and could have impeded the 'open and free' use of city centre space. A now annual march by the Anti-Internment League (a group perceived to be largely comprised of dissident republicans), which passes through Belfast city centre, has also involved violent exchanges with the police. Consequently, the opportunity to assess how people enter and move around the centre of the city is a valuable one. We found that our participants tended to move around reasonably freely throughout the city centre. This could be likely connected to the fact that most respondents to our survey indicated high levels of positivity to questions relating to their sense of belonging in the space and that those who completed the Participatory GIS exercise identified few locations in the area that they defined as 'unsafe'.

Nevertheless, there were areas where our participants registered concerns about entry points to the city centre that are regularly identified as being associated with the 'other' community (notably a number of Protestants marked the Markets area of the town and several Catholics marked North Street and its surrounding area). While it would be easy to overlook these findings as de-stigmatising entry points will likely be challenging, there are further abandoned spaces and points of dereliction that also made our participants feel 'unsafe' (for instance a large number marked the area commonly referred to as Sailor Town in this way). Consequently, while the largely favourable attitude toward Belfast city centre should be considered encouraging, there are certainly points of concern and these are not simply limited to anxiety about the perceived sectarian ownership of specific spaces. Moreover, further research of this kind is likely important to study and understand what knock-on effects of issues such as the 'Flags Protest' and marches by the Anti-Internment League will have on how people use the city centre. The handling of these events and the long-term cumulative impact will likely have important consequences for how our participants view Belfast city centre in the future, as our findings indicate the perceived neutrality of the zone has been an important feature of its usage.

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