PUBLIC SPACE FOR A SHARED BELFAST

A research report for Belfast City Council

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The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Queen’s University Belfast or Belfast City Council.

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The brief

This is a research report commissioned by the Good Relations Unit of Belfast City Council, on behalf of the Project Reference Group, to examine the role of public space in Belfast and in particular, its contribution to building a shared city. The remit can be expressed as follows:

Aims and Objectives

With respect to Belfast, this study aims to:

1. explore understanding about, and values of, public space
2. investigate the perceptions about, access to, and use of, shared public space
3. examine the role of key statutory agencies in the promotion of sharing and interaction in the city’s public spaces

Its objectives are to:

- review the research and policy literature about urban public space
- consult with stakeholders across the community/voluntary/ private and statutory sectors, about their practice and the challenges they face
- identify the policy implications of the data so generated
- make recommendations about how to increase sharing in public spaces in Belfast
- report with the findings and recommendations, and present the results of the study to the Project Reference Group, Good Relations Steering Panel and/or the relevant Committee/s of the Council
Methodology

To achieve these aims and objectives, the following methodology was adopted:

- a review of the research literature on public space
- a review of relevant urban planning and policy documents
- semi-structured interviews with senior personnel across community, statutory and private sectors to elicit their knowledge and views about public space. The full list of interviewees is available in Appendix 1
- a series of five focus groups with targeted audiences (details in Appendix 2).
- site analysis in four key areas of the city
- data derived from Queen’s University action-research in local community planning projects and community studies undertaken within the last two years in Donegall Pass; Botanic; Laganside; New Lodge/Tiger’s Bay; and Mount Vernon.

Structure of report

The structure of the report starts with a literature and policy review, before proceeding to set out the research findings under the following themes: contested space; connectedness; urban design; planning and governance. This is followed by a set of recommendations for implementation by relevant city stakeholders.
Executive Summary

Introduction

Belfast is not unique – it is subject to the same pressures as most international cities in terms of the ‘privatisation’ of public space, the extension of protective surveillance, the dominance of private transport and the needs of excluded minorities. It is, however, a ‘contested city’ in terms of both pluralism (differential power disputes) and sovereignty (the legitimacy of the state) and these issues obviously affect planning and governance.

As it seeks to emerge from its ‘contested’ state, Belfast can pursue an ambitious shift from ‘managing’ to ‘transforming’ the conflict, or at least an approach which both tolerates and recognises the diversity of its citizens. Public policy in the recent past has tended to ‘parcel’ the city into a spectrum of spaces – ethnic (largely residential), neutral (city centre), shared (e.g. integrated schools) and cosmopolitan (Titanic Quarter). It is now time to move beyond that splintering – towards the kind of integrated ‘vision’ recently espoused for the city but only partially implemented.

Central to any vision a shared city for Belfast, is the concept of public space. But, definitions of ‘public space’ are themselves problematic. For instance, we may distinguish between the physical and the procedural: the physical including arterial routes, shopping centres etc. as well as conventional street, square and plaza; the procedural including channels for interaction beyond the physical spaces such as ‘school gate’ exchanges between parents and children to include radio talkshows, cyberspace, etc. Moreover, there are many ‘publics’, for whom space is important in different ways. As citizens, all have the right to their own experience of it.

Re-Thinking Public Space

Space can be categorised also as ‘display space’ (used as theatre to affirm what tend to be fixed identities) or ‘relational space’ (accommodating multiple identities that interact and change, based on negotiation over time). Belfast has more experience of the former than the latter, although this latter perspective represents current policy direction. But, since much public space operates as temporary ‘places of transit’, its capacity to facilitate meaningful engagement among strangers or opponents can be over-stated. Similarly, nostalgic notions of past ‘inclusivity’ contrasted with
present ‘exclusivity’ of public spaces are arguable. So, it is important to be positive in our current approaches to space design and management, and to understand that space is dynamic and changes with its use, while recognising that all public spaces cannot be neatly controlled. For vibrant urban environments, the irregular, the random, even the ramshackle, all have their place – though even these kinds of spaces need policy recognition and support. In essence, this conception of space sees it less as a passive stage and more as an event.

*The Urban Design Tradition*

The distinction between ‘civic space’ (used by citizens) and ‘public space’ (frequently ‘left-over’ space) has some historical precedent – urban design analysts have documented the transition from the intimate, ceremonial spaces of classical and mediaeval towns to the modern era’s focus on ‘land parcelling’ for buildings and the creation of ‘left-over space’ in urban areas. Reaction to this prompted an anti-modernist nostalgia for vanished townscapes (Cullen, Lynch) and social networks (Jacobs) in Europe and the United States.

The relationship between the social and the architectural is the focus of most twentieth-century analysts – underpinning the American and British perception studies and more recent socio-spatial and identity-based analyses (Madanipour and Bentley). The international identity-studies are relevant to the Belfast situation – emphasising the cross-cultural acceptability of humour in public art, natural landscaping in public places and permeability in urban townscapes.

The current focus on sustainability encourages the return to high-density, compact cities, which help populate and animate urban space. Since they may restrict the availability of additional public open spaces, it is important to have a strategic public realm policy to make the most of the existing hierarchy of spaces, and to evolve a network of small, pedestrian - friendly streets and places, particularly in city centres.

*The Social Perception of Urban Space*

While traditional aspects of urban design - composition, form, enclosure - are important, it should be recognised that different people read and use the environment in different ways. Architects and urban designers focus on ‘aesthetic’ interpretations of design while lay people respond to ‘expressive’ interpretations – the meanings and sensations that environments provoke.
Increasingly in recent times, the aesthetic has become a market-led aesthetic – the publics’ acceptance of postmodernist imagery being a reaction to a climate of repressed desire built up under the visual austerities of modernism. Postmodern attitudes to design accept a diversity of meanings, some from non-architectural sources such as film, literature etc. There is also a large diversity of social groups, creating a series of ‘taste communities’, which are much wider than traditional class distinctions. ‘Meanings’ of the built environment are therefore multi-faceted and complex. Not only are they socially constructed, but also contested, time–specific, and diversely interpreted. Significantly though, the meanings of place change over time.

In relation to urban space, it is important to distinguish between ‘borders’ (which are porous, adaptable and positive) and ‘boundaries’ (which are hard-edged, inflexible and negative). As such, the pre-occupation with developing centres within community areas may be wrong - it may be better to develop along borders where interaction between groups can take place. Urban design, therefore, is not ‘big architecture’- it has to understand and accommodate diversities of perception and meaning, and the fact that all of these change significantly over time.

*Review of Urban Policy and Planning Context*

The planning system is the main statutory instrument for shaping public space in Northern Ireland but it has evolved an essentially regulatory character and has not made full use of some of its legislative tools. There are a large number of plans, policies and programmes – from a plethora of public agencies – but there is lack of co-ordination among them and a mainly rhetorical approach to the issue of contested and shared space. Compartmentalisation within Government – three different Departments covering the basic planning functions – accentuates the problem.

Relations among Government agencies and between Government and the extensive community sector are made difficult by the above structural problems, with the consequence that some policies tend to reinforce separatist lifestyles and segregated spaces. Although there is ‘equality – proofing’ for major initiatives, it has little impact at the site-specific level of local planning regulation. What is necessary is an effective shift to ‘spatial planning’ as practised in some parts of the UK, allied to forthcoming changes in public administration which will relate planning more directly to local accountability. Achievement of shared civic space makes it imperative for governance in general, and planning in particular, to move from reactive to proactive approaches.
From Contested to Shared Space – Analysis

Two narratives have dominated Belfast: a narrative of ‘nostalgia’ on the Protestant Unionist side and a narrative of ‘utopia’ on the Catholic\Nationalist one. These are changing slowly, and shared, safe spaces can help to transform ‘antipathy into empathy, if not enmity into amity’. To facilitate this, four choices are available: the persistent dominance of insular enclaves and related separatism; a ‘live and let live’ indifference to difference that largely translates into a separate though equal development for the two sides of the community; a constant series of temporary accommodations, based on candid exchanges across the divide; and positive interaction, reciprocity and mutual enrichment. Unsurprisingly, most interviewees opted for the last option – a transformative approach.

Within this were two additional alternatives: a promotional approach based on economic development and new city imaging which ‘airbrushed’ out most of the old problems or a coordinated and cooperative partnership of relevant agencies which confronted the contested nature of space in the city without undermining economic development and well-founded promotion. Most interviewees again opted for the latter approach.

Belfast has mental ‘walls’ as well as the obvious physical ones; both need to be systematically dismantled, along with other paraphernalia of surveillance and enclosure. Physical development must be planned sensitively in relation to those brownfield sites, formally occupied by the Protestant Unionist community, to avoid any perceived Catholic\Nationalist ‘ownership’, and in relation to key buildings (like Crumlin Road Goal and the Girdwood site) which can become shared space for educational/cultural purposes. Existing shared spaces, such as the Belfast Hills and city parks, need to be made more accessible to inner-city communities.

Belfast, like all cities, will be a city of ‘identities’ – becoming more diverse in ethnic, cultural and linguistic terms. This is a positive development, provided established communities are non-antagonistic in their assertion of local identity, are welcoming to visitors and are sensitive to outside perceptions of any partisan political association with their language, culture and sporting activities.
Connectivity-Analysis

Belfast lacks ‘permeability’ due to its radial structure and its history of ‘territoriality’. It needs a strategic assessment of its key public spaces and the ‘path network’ between them in terms of their ‘sharedness’ and in terms of their ‘connectivity’. Arterial routes would be central to this network – they provide ‘opportunity sites’ for the creation of service centres designed as shared space to encourage people to ‘come out of their enclaves’. It is important to reduce the expense of duplication and the isolation caused by the tendency of local service centres to locate in the heart of exclusive territories.

Inner city areas in North, West and East Belfast (but not South Belfast) have become physically isolated from the city centre and its ‘neutral spaces’ by major roads infrastructure which provides good circulation for outside motorists, but little practical benefit for local communities. Pedestrian, cycle and public transport linkages need to be significantly improved to facilitate this important functional and social connection.

44% of households in Belfast do not have access to a car, although this percentage rises to 72% in Crumlin ward and to 73% in Shankill. Obviously, therefore, connectivity to public spaces and to the ‘shared space’ of the city centre depends significantly on good public transport. Existing routes have been largely developed and adapted in response to the ‘Troubles’. So, it is necessary to develop a ‘post-conflict’ public transport strategy and network.

Whilst high-density living is a prerequisite for a sustainable city, there is some evidence of an ‘absence of community’ in many of the new apartment blocks in the city centre. Perhaps, this is due to a deliberate choice by young, relatively affluent (including many new migrants) residents seeking ‘communities of interest’ and urban anonymity. There is also some evidence of a lack of ‘psychological access’ to many of the new urban spaces by traditional residential communities. More particularly, the new retail and office developments would seem to have a privatised and commercialised form of space-management which can be contrary to the concept of accessible public space. These are considerations for both planners and policy-makers.

Urban Design - Analysis

At the strategic level, a linked network of public spaces ‘from edge to centre’ should connect the peripheral greenbelt with green corridors, water regimes and the city centre pedestrian area,
developing the themes indicated in dBMAP’s Urban Environment Strategy and the Urban Task Force Report. Arterial routes are key parts of this strategy – the opportunities they provide for shared community space should be enhanced by appropriate urban design control and public realm improvements, for example the Connswater Greenway.

Distinctive local identity can be a positive aspect of good urban design. The problem is that in Belfast, some aspects of local identity are deeply contested. International studies show that permeable access patterns, strong natural landscaping and sensitive public art, particularly humorous art, or art with multi-identity references, provide the best opportunities for urban design likely to appeal to all sides. The Flemish tradition of street art celebrating ‘the common man’ is one useful model.

Governance and Intervention – Analysis

Current governance arrangements are struggling to come to terms with the legacy of the ‘Troubles’. For example, recent planning documents have just begun to refer to issues of division and territoriality. Thus, there is a need for sectoral and organisational learning about this, allied to awareness training for all relevant public sector staff. Conflict mediation, collaboration, visioning, and confidence-building techniques should all be part of a skills – education programme for city officials.

Planning, for example, should vet significant applications on the basis not only of high-quality design, but also the extent to which any proposed development accentuates or ameliorates separatism and segregation. More specifically, design analysis of the contribution to the public realm should be a development control criterion. Planning gain, of course, is the key mechanism for achieving public realm contributions as well as affordable housing. It has been used only sparingly for this purpose.

On the wider governance front, inter-agency working, multi-disciplinary approaches, and collaborative partnerships, allied to funding incentives for synergistic cooperation, are all necessary to break down compartmentalisation. Collaborative action in relation to young people is particularly necessary, as some can become involved in the anti-social behaviour which stigmatises public spaces. Above all, civic leadership is paramount, and Belfast City Council, commended frequently for its success in achieving a more shared city centre, will play the key
role after the reform of public administration. Thus, it is critical that the Council demonstrates within its own organisation a capacity for integrated decision-making and operation.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are underpinned by principles and values, which, of course, are also subject to contest. First, ‘space’ here is understood as a living dynamic entity. Thus, the form and designation of space influence its use and the relationships among the users, and likewise, these uses and relationships influence the form of that space. Second, historic patterns of its ownership, associations, and use should not forever determine its current and future use. Third, the extensive division and related socio-spatial segregations that persist in the city demand candid acknowledgement and related challenging dialogue across the divide. Fourth, tackling the spatial partitions that hinder Belfast’s development as a shared city demands proactive and collaborative response from all city stakeholders. Finally, the step change this involves within the system of governance requires improved civic literacy and capacity among all stakeholders with respect to planning and regeneration.

**Strategy**

1. **Not only to ensure more efficient scale and scope, and to correspond with the geography of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP), but also to prevent any divide between what has been a growing Catholic\Nationalist city and its predominantly Protestant\Unionist suburbs and surroundings towns, it would be preferable to plan in a metropolitan framework.**

2. **Extension of shared space in Belfast involves the creation of contrasts to the ‘ethnic norm’ via ‘pilots’ of alternatives. Such a strategy is best delivered through a systematic approach based on (a) incrementalism: that starts with securing the centre and waterfront for integrated living; moves out to tackle the symbols, flags, emblems, and other barriers on arterial routes that mark them as ethnic territory rather than the public peaceful right of way that they should be; and then follows through with the neighbourhoods adjoining the arterial routes. (b) principled opportunism: while it is generally unwise to seek to remove walls etc. in the most tense interface areas first, there may arise opportunities for action which should be taken to offer demonstration of what is both desirable and feasible. For instance, the wall dividing Alexandra Park in North Belfast is not considered by the police to**
offer substantial security. It could be gradually changed, first by putting in a ‘normal’ park fence with a through gate, later by its complete removal as inter-community negotiation allows.

3. This demands a strategic, proactive, partnership approach, rooted in an ambition to transform rather than manage the contested nature of the city, recognising that to airbrush out the awkward reality of sectarianism via glossy imaging or denial is only likely to entrench it further.

4. There is a need to continue creating safe spaces for candid but respectful dialogue across the divide. Among community initiatives, this should involve the privileging of cross-community projects intent on such promotion over single-identity projects intent on amplifying difference.

5. There is a need for a comprehensive co-ordination and implementation programme to provide a linked network of shared and accessible public spaces from ‘edge to centre’ of the city. Linkages should be diverse, secure, well-signposted and well-designed.

6. It is worth exploring the possibility of creating service centres or nodes within the ‘path network’ (roads and pedestrian paths) - places that offer shared facilities and which draw people out of their territories. In this context, where arterial routes are identified, they should be prioritised for investment in design initiatives such as pavement widening and re-surfacing, enhanced street-crossing facilities and designed ‘places’ at street intersections.

7. The appropriateness of the public transport network and the design of its services, needs to be reconsidered in the developing context of a ‘post-conflict’ city. For example, cross-radial and cross-city public transport routes together with pedestrian and cycle paths could be developed to help open up access to public spaces and employment opportunities throughout the city.

8. Public policy, financing and design control should support where possible the protection and enhancement of small-scale, informal, and innovative public spaces which promote interaction between diverse communities.
Action

9. There is a strategic need to examine the overall structure of the city in terms of the provision of key public space, including parks. City planning and relevant regeneration agencies should undertake a regular 'good relations' audit of key public spaces, that would include: the measurement of shared space in the city; its extent; its users; the quality of their engagement; identification of hindrances such as poor access, safety, etc.

10. The more squeezed and small the space under review, the more intensive the reactions to its changed land use. Instead, it is critical to examine contentious issues like housing in a wider geography — either the city as a whole or large city segments — and to allow each side to see mutual benefits: for instance, in Belfast there is both a high demand for new housing for Catholic\Nationalists, and a need to redress the decline in Protestant\Unionist communities and to undertake both tasks within an overall strategy designed to reassure mutual safety. Of course, as the city becomes more ethnically diverse, issues about equity and integration among many identity groups will become more prominent.

11. New sites will become available with the rationalisation of school plant in the city, providing an opportunity for some of these buildings to be converted for shared educational/cultural use. Moreover, we should seek to use the combined opportunity of school rationalisation and abolition of 11plus transfer to create new collaborative arrangements across the Controlled, Voluntary and Maintained educational sectors. An even more radical reflection of such a shift would be a Belfast ‘brand' school uniform, a common one for all primary schools and a separate common one for all secondaries. Thereby, the school badge and blazer would no longer be a cue for sectarian identification and enmity.

12. There are city forums that bring leading figures within each sector together for mutual exchange. For instance, there is a public sector network for chief executives of some of the large public bodies, while the Chamber of Commerce and similar business organisations provide channels for the private sector developers and consultants. However, these sectoral forums, in turn, need to arrange a regular
exchange, perhaps sponsored by the Royal Town Planning Institute, or the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors or the Civic Trust, or a network of all three.

13. Local community planning, including neighbourhood renewal, could play a more effective role in shaping neighbourhoods and the city than it does currently. Such local strategies need more formal authority, but, on condition that their community perspective is situated within an overall civic framework. It would be preferable to plan in a metropolitan framework. Not only to ensure more efficient scale and scope, and to correspond with the geography of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP), but also to prevent any divide between the city and its predominantly Protestant Unionist suburbs and surroundings towns.

14. It is important that an initiative like Titanic Quarter does not become a city within the city. While such areas can start afresh on sites that have little residential/territorial history and ‘baggage’, and create residence and social activities for those keen to mix across the sectarian divide, they may add to the social segmentation in the city. Thus, it is critical that social/affordable housing is allocated space across the city in locales that optimise the prospect of building integrated communities.

15. A more systematic approach to research on these matters is needed, linking the capacities of agencies like Belfast City Council, the Community Relations Council, NISRA, the Housing Executive, the community sector and the universities in a coherent research programme that agrees priorities, avoids duplications, etc.

16. Successful international approaches to design for contested spaces include the design of permeable access patterns offering alternative routes, strong natural landscaping and sensitive public art – particularly humorous art or art with multi-cultural references. Furthermore, the City should adopt a policy of street art and sculpture which takes the Flemish approach of ‘celebrating the common man (woman)’ and focuses on shared history and personalities – such as sportspeople, industrialists, labour leaders, literary figures etc.

17. Planning policies and practice should encourage: the provision of comprehensive access to the river from new developments on the eastern side; the maintenance of
existing riverside walkways as neutral public spaces; and the option of small-scale retailing and commercial functions along both sides of the river.

18. There should be a programme to remove as many physical barriers to access in the city centre as possible – including protective railings at City Hall and visible security installations generally. There should be incentives for shop-owners to remove evening shutters from all city-centre shopping facades and the enforcement of twenty-four hour public access through new shopping complexes such as Victoria Square.

19. Special initiatives and programmes targeted at young people in disadvantaged areas are necessary to develop safer shared space. It is particularly important, in this context, to target ‘hard-to-reach’ young people.

**Delivery and Governance**

20. Within the Public Sector there is a need for the development of a more multi-disciplinary capacity. It is important that all key stakeholders acquire new skills to mediate contentious discussions; build trust and confidence amongst protagonists; and thereby create constructive dialogue about future city development. In this connection, planning and public policy-making needs to embrace best practice in spatial planning and collaborative governance elsewhere in the UK, as well as in other parts of Europe and USA.

21. Planning in its broader sense (across all three Departments) should make better use of existing statutory-based facilities such as: planning conditions; planning agreements; planning gain; comprehensive development; and compulsory acquisition powers.

22. Belfast City Council should convene a collaborative partnership between agencies and the private sector to develop a programme to promote shared space across the city.

23. It is now good practice in most public agencies to have a ‘good relations’ component that informs overall decision-making. This allows key policies and
practices to be appropriately audited for the promotion of equality and building a shared city. Such mechanisms should be encouraged within all key urban agencies.

24. Genuine synergy and collaboration need to be rewarded with an incentive system of (a) special funding for inter-agency projects; (b) internal organisational procedures for staff engaged in collaborative practices.
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1 Introduction

1.1 In thinking about ‘public space’, the first acknowledgement is that the city holds ‘many publics’. Living with diversity and difference is highlighted as a central challenge in contemporary urban life, and in the UK is centred on policies designed to enhance inclusion and community cohesion. However, this issue is far from new. Early urban sociology was concerned about the eclipse of community and the replacement of solidarities and common bonds with the estrangement, impersonality, and heterogeneity that characterised the modern industrial city. So, this is an old problem, a universal problem — but, one intensified in a more global age with the increasing mobility of economic and political refugees. The distinctive circumstance in Belfast, with its particular forms of division, separation and spatial segregation, needs to be contextualised in this wider historical and contemporary frame.

1.2 Thus, Belfast has not been immune from the main urban narratives over recent decades: e.g. the extent to which the commercialisation and privatisation of social life has crowded out the communal public realm and led to the creation of separatist gated communities; the extent to which ‘fake’ anaesthetized public space is replacing the more authentic, if messy, ‘real’ urban spaces; the extent to which new threats like ‘global terrorism’ and ‘rampant violent crime’ have rationalised the prevalence of the ‘surveillance city’, involving a militarisation and fortressing of the city — particularly its public spaces — as a demonstration of urban resilience against external and internal intimidations; the ‘right to the city’ movements hailing the need for women to reclaim the streets as safe for their use; the ‘slow city’ movements seeking to reclaim the city from the perceived spatial dominance of the car and the rush of contemporary commerce for a better environment and quality of life; etc. However, these debates about urban space and ownership have been mediated in Belfast within its dominant discourse about competing nationalisms.

1.3 Belfast is a contested city. However, an important distinction needs to be drawn between cities contested around issues of pluralism — disputes about differential power and status — and those contested around both pluralism and sovereignty — the latter concerning issues of state legitimacy and rival claims of national belonging. An example of the first type of contested city is Chicago, a hyper-segregated city based on race, whereas Belfast and Jerusalem are examples of the second type. While these two cities also experience
contentions about equity with regard to class, gender, age, ethnicity, etc., these are superimposed with the fundamental dispute about ethno-nationalist affiliation.

1.4 Thus, in cities like Belfast, the big division about national identity and ownership of territory drills right down into small districts where the link between territory and identity produces its own partitions. Since space is so central to the overall conflict, and planning is the main instrument for the social shaping of space, planning is unavoidably central to the conflict’s resolution.

1.5 However, the objective of creating public space for a shared future is not without definitional ambiguity. First, the concept of public space can be understood at two levels: (1) the physical; and (2) the procedural (Iveson, 2007). The physical sense is the one mostly addressed here, and within this, there are limited and generous definitions. The limited version sees public space almost exclusively in terms of the city centre, public parks, squares, waterfront townscape, and such like. A more expansive interpretation — and the one adopted here — includes arterial routes, the streetscape at central nodes within communities, shopping centres, and such like. But, in reality, there is no simple demarcation between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms. For instance, the home is traditionally seen as a place of retreat and privacy. However, we no longer consider certain actions within the home — for instance, domestic abuse — to be a ‘private’ matter to be managed within the family. Similarly, most people wish to retain a private autonomy in public spaces that permits them to choose whether to engage with others — for instance, whether they want to speak to the passenger occupying the same bus seat, or indeed, whether they really should be subjected to hearing what should be a private conversation between others via mobile phones. This notion of the ‘private space’ within the ‘public space’ suggests that some public spaces should not be about attracting hordes, but rather be quiet places of refuge and sanctuary from the urban bustle and din. As social beings, people seek both communalism and privacy, and planning ‘public’ space needs to pay heed to this balance.

1.6 Alongside this physical dimension, there exist other procedures for public interaction — for instance, the inter-communal exchange offered by the Talkback show on Radio Ulster, or the newer forms of ‘cyber’ communication offered by chat rooms, MySpace, Facebook, etc. Moreover, the use of these different forms of public interaction varies with class, gender, age and race, as much as with politico-religious affiliation. For instance, the school gate is
an important public space used mostly by women. If the school has a religious-mix pupil intake, this provides opportunity for cross-community contact. Predominantly, young people use the chat and blog channels in cyberspace, and to date, there is scant research investigating the extent to which this ‘virtual’ dialogue represents a cross-class, cross-community networking in Northern Ireland. Iveson (2007, 17) summarises the distinction between these two models:

‘Put simply, topographical models of public space use ‘public’ to denote spaces of sociability in the city where one’s actions are visible to others, while procedural models of public space use ‘public’ to denote spaces where one may take part in collective discussions about common interests and issues.’

1.7 But, these are not to be understood as two separate spheres. Rather, they can overlap. Moreover, given that there are many publics, not all have the same status, access, and use of public space. In this hierarchy, the most marginalized – depending on circumstance, they may be the LGB (lesbian, gay and bi-sexual) sector, ethnic minorities, women, disabled people, etc. – can be characterised as ‘counterpublics’ for whom existing forms of public space may not work. Thus, Iveson (2007, 26) argues that ‘rather than holding on to the principles of existing public spheres as the basis for challenging their limits, we ought to be more concerned with the production of counterpublic spheres which enable novel scenes of public address to develop.’ At the same time, the risk with such an approach is further segregation and ghettoisation according to race, gender, age, etc. Later in his study, Iveson acknowledges this, in quoting Painter and Philo (1995, 115):

‘If people cannot be present in public spaces (streets, squares, parks, cinemas, churches, town halls) without feeling uncomfortable, victimized and basically ‘out of place’, then it must be questionable whether or not these people can be regarded as citizens at all: or, at least, whether they will regard themselves as full citizens on an equal footing with other people who seem perfectly ‘at home’ when moving about public spaces.’

Such debates illustrate the intrinsic controversy in defining ‘public space’.

1.8 Similarly, the concept of a ‘shared future’ does not itself elude contention. Its most obvious meaning — and the one now endorsed in public policy — assumes a significant increase in integrated living and collaborative working across the divide, rooted in principles of
inclusion, respect for diversity, equity, and inter-dependence. However, a more differentiated understanding of the term begs the question of how much inter-communalism is actually sought by whom in what places over what time period. How can this be given spatial expression in a city marked by a predominantly Catholic\Nationalist West and a predominantly Protestant\Unionist East, sectioned from each other by both the natural environment of the river, and the built environment of major infrastructure?

1.9 Moreover, other vocabularies associated with the creation of a ‘shared future’ are intrinsically contestable. For some, this future implies a shift from managing to transforming the conflict, involving in the case of Belfast, a step-change to a more pluralist city with less insular communities anchored in exclusivist ethno-nationalist affiliation. In turn, this conversion is taken to elide over the long term with the nurturing of a ‘cosmopolitan culture which is seen as globally open, and inviting cross-pollination, hybridity and fluidity’ (Skrbis and Woodward, 2007, 731). Translated into Belfast, this receptive approach cultivates increasing engagement, familiarity, and ultimately empathy and reciprocity across the divide. As such new sensibilities in turn create ever more porous boundaries and borders, it is hoped that the visceral fear of ‘the other’ that feeds conflict and separatism in time dissolves (Beck, 2006). A less ambitious agenda emphasises the intrinsic character of conflict to the human condition. For instance, the paradoxical resurgence of tribal identities amid the integrations of a globalising world indicates the persistence of a human ‘Tower of Babel’, reflecting separatist identities and belongings. While for some, this ‘Babel’ syndrome implies the need to promote the acceptance and tolerance of diversity, others note (Jones, 2006, 123):

‘Toleration is associated with disapproval: we tolerate only that to which we object….The demand that is most commonly associated with differences in identity is a demand for recognition rather than for toleration. ‘Being recognised’ seems to imply a form of positive endorsement that goes beyond being merely tolerated and that is altogether more consonant with cherishing and celebrating diversity.’

1.10 But, if the concept of toleration is flawed in its assumptions about who has the power to designate certain identities and values as normal, according recognition and validity to all identities and their associated beliefs and behaviours is also problematic, as, for instance, secularist France discovered in banning Muslim headdress in schools.
1.11 In response to such challenges in the past, Belfast planning has tended to ‘parcel’ the city into forms of development that ‘fit’ the type of space. So, there is:

- **ethnic** space: reflected in the dominance of segregated communities, particularly in the working class parts of the city. Here, intervention has involved a mix of housing, regeneration and special assistance programmes — but, most often on the assumption that most religious-political spatial demarcations are largely immutable for the foreseeable future, and that at the most volatile interface areas, ‘peace walls’ are an evil necessity.

- **neutral** space: based largely in the city centre and waterfront, where public funding for expansion, modernisation, and re-imaging has been justified in part on the creation or consolidation of safe space open to both main traditions for employment, shopping, leisure and residence.

- **shared** space: taken as space that facilitates not just contact, but also engagement, across the divide, this is more rare in the city. Distinct places like integrated schools claim to be arenas for this deliberate dialogue on difference. But, even some sites that are perceived widely in these terms have qualification. For instance, Queen’s University as a campus seeks to offer students an ‘integrated’ experience. Yet, there is a strong impression emerging that Catholic\Nationalist student residence tends to congregate around the Holylands, while Protestant\Unionist students tend to live more towards the Lisburn Road side.

- **cosmopolitan** space: defined as space that is international in character and has no specific reference in terms of the local division, this is even more rare. Arguably, the ‘new spaces’ — particularly areas like the Titanic Quarter — along the waterfront are conceived more in these terms. Attempts have also been made to re-define ‘old spaces’ like Stormont and Belfast City Hall — for instance, by bringing a regular international flavour such as major concerts in the case of the former, and a European Christmas food market, in the case of the latter.

1.12 As an alternative to this splintering of the city, there have been voices raised in promotion of an open compact urban future — one city, developed through integrated planning, and built on the primacy of civic over ethnic leadership, and on the creation of ever more safe
spaces for a new conversation across the old divide among citizens. However, efforts to construct a common city vision and genuine sustained collaboration in its delivery have yet to take firm root. This has not been for the want of trying. For instance, for five years from the mid-1990s, the City Vision Partnership, comprising City Council, community and business representation, invested intensive endeavour in forging a new shared vision for Belfast. Most of the main urban agencies signed up to the final document. Yet, this support tended to evaporate when it came to its implementation. One explanation is that each key agency is under remit to deliver its own corporate strategy audited within its own budget and cannot risk diluting its autonomy through collaborative partnerships. A different explanation emphasises the tendency for leading personnel in the main agencies to be willing to sign up for collaboration as long as they are in the lead, setting the agenda, and are recipient of the most kudos.
2 Re-thinking Public Space

2.1 Public space holds the potential for chance encounters among people of diverse traditions, and in such serendipities, rests the opportunity for exchange and learning that can help break barriers. However, before inflating the role that public space can play in enhancing interaction across divides, it is important to address the argument of Amin (2002) that most public spaces are ‘places of transit’ that offer little meaningful or durable contact between strangers.

2.2 This suggests the need to re-think what we mean by ‘space’, and to get beyond the common notion of a place that is both physically grounded and socially fixed. In recent literature about public space in the contemporary diverse city, two very different models emerge: the first conceives it as display space where difference based on distinctive and closed identity can be affirmed, while the second suggests that it is relational space where a greater pluralism of identities and belongings emerges from constantly negotiated collaborations and contestations across divides.

2.3 Massey (2005, 9) argues three main propositions about space that are relevant to this debate: (a) space is the outcome of interrelations. It is ‘constituted through interactions’; (b) space is an arena of ‘coexisting heterogeneity’, reflecting and changing the multiplicities and pluralities of contemporary society; and (c) space is forever a work in progress, continuously being remade. In this, she is arguing against the conventional understanding of space as associated with stasis, closure and representation, and instead is elevating concepts of change, openness, mix, difference, and relationality. Following Laclau (1990), she sees space not as a site but as an event. This disavowal of spaces as ‘pregiven discrete entities’ leads her to propose a new spatial imagination — ‘for the reconceptualisation of places in a way that might challenge exclusivist localisms based on claims of some eternal authenticity’ (Massey, 2005, 20-21).

2.4 Some simple examples illustrate how space can be continuously remade, including through change coming indirectly from legislative or other sources. For instance, since the smoking ban in public buildings, there are new congregations of smokers in the streets, forming their own network for social engagement. Yet, in the height of the ‘Troubles’, such assemblies would not have been considered safe, particularly at night, since spaces around bars, clubs and restaurants could be subjected to sectarian attack. Similarly, the time extension in the
licensing laws has created controversy in English towns about its impact on binge drinking and drink-related anti-social behaviour in the streets.

2.5 A persistent narrative in recent literature about public space is that through processes of privatisation and commercialisation of social life, the public realm has been compromised or diminished. As posed by Robbins (1993, vii), this begs the question: ‘For whom was the city once more public than now?’ Iveson (2007) agrees with this rejection of a ‘paradise lost’ analysis, while acknowledging that the language of retreat and retrieval can serve a purpose in setting an ideal of public space, around which a city politics of inclusion can develop. He quotes Mitchell (1995, 117) in this regard:

‘By calling on the rhetoric of inclusion and interaction that the public sphere and public space are meant to represent, excluded groups have been able to argue for their rights as part of the active public. And each (partially) successful struggle for inclusion in ‘the public’ conveys to other marginalized groups the importance of the ideal as a point of political struggle.’

2.6 Changing the perception and social use of space in a city with longstanding fixed territories demands ambitious vision and proactive intervention that writes a new script, while appreciating the capacity for such scripts to become self-fulfilling. As expressed by Watson (2006, 7):

‘Stories of the city and its public spaces as dangerous, dead or dull, or as sites of exclusion, marginalisation and violence….contribute to, and produce, the very conditions that they describe….But new stories of public space as life enhancing, exciting, safe and inclusive….can take us far in creating those spaces in just that way.’

2.7 However, in thinking through the role of deliberate intervention to shape public space, Iveson (2007), Watson (2006) and others suggest that an important consideration is whether all public space can best be ordered, designed and planned. There may be a role for the irregular, random and ramshackle ‘public’ spaces that hold some of the improvisation, spontaneity and messiness that also characterise an interesting and vibrant cityscape. Space that facilitates chance encounter, happenstance, the accidental and contingent, and allows for exploration and discovery is part of what a dynamic urban
environment should offer. Massey (2005) sees this as fitting in with an appreciation of the complexity and indeterminacy of contemporary social life, and a distinctive modification in the scientific paradigm. She quotes Zohar (1997, 9) in this regard:

‘Like Newtonian science before it, twentieth-century science has grown out of a deep shift in general culture, a move away from absolute truth and absolute perspective toward contextualism; a move away from certainty, toward an appreciation for pluralism and diversity, toward an acceptance of ambiguity and paradox, of complexity rather than simplicity.’

This shift is reflected to some extent in the changed thinking about urban development and design from the modern to the postmodern city.
3 Shaping Urban Public Space: the Urban Design Tradition

3.1 One of our interviewees (Kuhne, 2007), the design consultant to the Titanic Quarter, consistently made an important distinction between ‘public space’ (a negative concept – associated with ‘left over space’ in new towns) and ‘civic space’ (a positive concept – associated with vital and popular places, plazas and piazas in historic European cities). This is a useful distinction, but over-simplified to make the point that the essence of good public space is utility, identity and inclusivity – space that all citizens use, identify with, and are free to enjoy on a regular basis. It is interesting to trace the robustness of this argument over time by considering the ideas of some key urban design analysts.

3.2 The original academic analysis of traditional urban space was Camillo Sitte’s ‘City Planning according to Artistic Principles’ (Heckscher, 1977, 33) in which he argued, on the basis of painstaking analysis of many historic European cities, that the modern (late nineteenth century) city had effectively reversed the proper relationship between buildings and space. Civic space was originally designed self-consciously as public buildings, to provide enclosed fora for pageant, ceremony and debate, but now ‘we begin by parcelling out building sites, and whatever is left over is turned into streets and plazas’. The re-occurrence of the term ‘left-over’ space in Kuhne’s argument, one hundred and twenty years later, underlines a timeless principle – the achievement of good public space, in any period, demands the application of good urban design.

3.3 August Heckscher (Heckscher, 1977, 16), although writing from an American perspective, charts the evolution of open space design in European cities as gradual transition from the ‘enclosed’ mediaeval spaces beloved of Sitte towards a more ‘open’ approach in the Renaissance period: ‘the Renaissance created in men a sense of movement towards outward ends; the discovery of perspective encouraged the vista leading to a distant horizon’. This transition was continued in the monumental axes opened up by Pope Sixtus in Baroque Rome, and more explicitly in the avenues, boulevards and formal parks of Napoleon III’s Paris, under the autocratic planning of Baron Hausemann. This provided the cue for Modernist monumentality in the twentieth century, and - in examples like Le Corbusier’s ‘ideal city’, with its isolated tower blocks in limitless parkland - the ultimate in ‘left-over space’.
3.4 Also written from an American perspective, Jane Jacob’s (1960) famous repudiation of Corbusian planning and its wasted spaces chimed with the emphasis on public perceptions of urban space exemplified by early urban design studies in America (Lynch, 1960) and the UK (Cullen, 1961) -- although it has been argued (Harvey, 2000) that Jacobs and her colleagues were ‘every bit as utopian as the utopianism they attacked’. Lynch’s analysis of public perception in Boston via the use of ‘mental maps’ led to the much-copied concept of urban ‘imageability’ and its physical components (nodes edges, landmarks, routes and districts) while Cullen’s more idiosyncratic and picturesque analysis of much-loved British townscapes referred back frequently to Sitte’s preoccupation with ‘enclosure’ in public spaces and the important inter-connectivity of streets and places in the ‘serial vision’ of the urban pedestrian.

3.5 Cliff Moughtin (Moughtin, 1992, 13) refers also to Camillo Sitte ‘as the starting point and inspiration’ for his study of the urban design of ‘street and square’, arguing that only by analysing the properties that made fine city streets and squares in the past is it possible to reproduce some of these qualities in future development. He re-emphasises the relationship between citizens and civic space by outlining processes for the involvement of ‘laypersons’ as well as ‘professionals’ in an evolving urban design process. Of the several case studies illustrating this process, the most notable is in fact one for the redevelopment of the Markets area in Belfast – where citizen involvement was a key ingredient in the resultant housing scheme which was, in Moughtin’s opinion, more successful in social than aesthetic terms but an example of a positive urban design process.

3.6 The most practical application of some of these early concepts is to be found in ‘Responsive Environments’ (Bently et al. 1985) in which Lynch’s notion of urban ‘imageability’ is disaggregated into a series of desirable urban qualities, such as ‘permeability’, ‘variety’, ‘legibility’, ‘robustness’ and ‘visual richness’. All of these qualities are to be found in urban spaces as well as urban buildings, the interplay between built form and interconnecting space being essential to the achievement of the necessary quality. More recently, Bentley (with Butina Watson, 2007) develops the theme of ‘identity’ as associated with built environments in a series of international urban case studies – ranging from Prague through Bologna to Lynch’s original test–bed, Boston. Reconciliation of the lessons learned for the case studies – many from ‘divided cities’ in cultural terms – with the original ‘responsive environments’ principles leads to a series of practical proposals to reinforce positive identity-association with public places. The use of public art (particularly
humorous art), multi-identity references, strong natural landscaping and permeable access patterns were all found to be beneficial in this regard.

3.7 This relationship between urban public and urban space – ‘a socio-spatial process’ – is the theme of Ali Madanipour’s (1996, 30) ‘Design of Urban Space’, which usefully locates the ‘visual’ understanding of urban space – the predominant theme above – within a wider theoretical context. Going beyond the visual and aesthetic aspects of urban space, he debates urban design as social or spatial management, as technical process or product, as engineering or design professional function, as public or private sector activity and as objective/rational or subjective irrational process. He concludes that ‘to transform urban space through urban design, we need to understand urban space…the physical space with its social and psychological significance’.

3.8 The most influential consideration of urban public space within a comprehensive urban design context is probably the ‘public realm’ section in the design chapter of ‘Towards an Urban Renaissance’ (Urban Task Force, 1999, 56-59). Here there is a clear allocation of responsibility – ‘the public sector must act as the custodian of the public realm’ on the basis that ‘most compact and well-ordered cities are designed around a well-connected pattern of streets and public spaces’ and only the public sector has the authority to manage an extensive network of inter-connected spaces with complex land-ownership patterns. Indeed, it may require more than one authority to manage the recommended ‘centre to edge’ network of spaces and the ‘green inner rings that supplement the outer green belts’. To this end, there is a clear recommendation for public authorities to prepare ‘a single strategy for their public realm and open space dealing with provision, design, management, funding and maintenance.’ A more ambitious recommendation is ‘a national programme to create comprehensive green pedestrian routes around/across our major cities and towns’. This has been initiated in Belfast by the preparation of the dBMAP Urban Environment Strategy and the Public Realm Master Plan and Vision (EDAW 2006) and its proposed implementation programme.

3.9 The Urban Renaissance Report focuses particularly on the achievement of sustainability through densification, mixed-use and the facilitation of pedestrian and public transport. A similar emphasis is evident in Carmona et al’s (Carmona et al., 2003, 290) ‘Public Places, Urban Spaces’, which, topically, considers all the dimensions of the design of places and spaces in terms of their ‘sustainability’ credentials - the ‘functional’ dimension includes
mixing uses and building at higher densities to conserve energy, while the 'visual' dimension includes the idealistic proposition that 'diversity in the built and natural environment is a key sustainability principle, while concern for aesthetic fulfilment indicates a willingness to invest in sustainable quality'. The achievement of these qualities requires 'urban design as a process of joining-up, both joining-up environments and places, and joining up professionals...with communities and those who wish to invest'. It requires a collaborative approach and, as the Task Force (above) recommends, strong leadership from the public sector.

3.10 This brief summary of the urban design tradition as it relates to urban public space suggests at least three key themes which permeate the chronological narrative: first, the relationship between the citizen and civic space; second, the return of the ‘sustainable’ compact city; and third, the recurring significance of considered urban design. These will be discussed in turn.

3.11 On the relationship between the citizen and civic space, Kuhne’s original designation of ‘civic’ space – urban open space identified with the ‘civis’ (citizen) - proves to be a pervasive theme. It forms the basis of Lynch’s and Cullen’s human perception studies; it is central to Moughtin’s Belfast (and other) case studies; and it is the focus of Madanipour’s socio-spatial analysis. The distinction between the (involved) citizen’s space and the (amorphous) public space – particularly the recurring ‘left-over’ public space – is also important, the implied criticism of public authority management being directly addressed in the recommendations of the Urban Task Force.

3.12 On the return of the sustainable compact city, it is interesting to identify three historical phases: the original mediaeval city, as analysed by Camillo Sitte; the picturesque, nostalgic townscapes as depicted (graphically) by Cullen and (verbally) by Jacobs; and the current ‘sustainable’ compact city as promoted by Carmona and by the Urban Task Force. Whilst compaction limits the opportunities for major open spaces, it facilitates the realisation of a genuine pedestrian environment, with a network of inter-connected urban ‘places’ which relate to the local built environment and to the achievement of a distinctive ‘sense of place’.

3.13 On the significance of considered urban design, the practical handbooks, such as Bentley’s Responsive Environments and, to a lesser extent, the Urban Taskforce Report, demonstrate the need for a strong urban design framework within which to locate strategic
urban spaces. 'Townscape' traditionalists, such as Cullen, would also argue that accidental, organic, urban growth can create interesting public spaces – this was undoubtedly true in the pre-motorised era of small-scale piecemeal development, but is very arguable in an age of motorways and retail megastructures. As Kuhne argued initially, the achievement of good civic space almost always demands the application of good urban design.
4 The Social Perception of Urban Space

4.1 As noted above, traditional design literature on public space champions the notion of civic space, that is, space that offers social interaction opportunities for all citizens. In the language of this research, such spaces are regarded as shared, as being open to all and are typically characterised by good quality design and layout. However, while the generic principles underpinning good design have remained relatively consistent over time, there is an emerging view that people not only read and use the environment in different ways, but that they also respond to visual stimuli on the basis of socially constructed perceptions. This is an important factor when considering the future development of public spaces in Belfast. In other words, while traditional principles such as composition, form, enclosure and variety should still inform the design and development of public spaces, it is also vital to acknowledge what might be called the socially informed reading of the environment.

4.2 In a preview of the challenges facing planning in the 1990s, Healey recognised this and argued that planning and urban design had to move beyond technocratic practices to embrace what she called ‘the expressive and aesthetic dimensions of the environment’ (Healey, 1989, 11). Planning practice and education, she suggested, have been overly focused on ‘instrumental values’ and had given ‘insufficient attention’ to aesthetic issues, normally leaving them to ‘passing fashions’ or to ‘the discourse of architects’. And yet, the environment, both built and ‘natural’ are becoming more meaningful for people, and also it would seem, for local authorities who are increasingly intervening to affect the design of the built environment and of public spaces. The debates about aesthetics, she argued, are either ‘locked into a narrow subjectivism’ or else are left to rather elitist discussions among those who ‘have been educated in the principles of aesthetics or design’ (Healey, 1989, 11).

4.3 In Healey’s view, there needed to be some structure to these debates, some way of setting out principles that could guide both the production of design as well as its reception and evaluation. She suggested that ‘one way’ of doing this was ‘to separate out the expressive character of what things look like from the aesthetic’ (Healey, 1989, 11). The expressive referred to the ‘social meaning of buildings, spaces and environments as expressed in physical form’, while aesthetic principles were concerned with the ‘internal integrity of a design’ (Healey, 1989, 11). City planners, architects, urban designers and decision makers, in her view, needed to begin to develop an understanding of design issues within these
terms, rather than rely on the safety of ‘conservationist’ approaches. Healey’s distinction between the expressive and the aesthetic is also captured in Jencks’ notion of double coding (Jencks, 1991).

4.4 It is important to note that this renewed interest in design and aesthetics is not an ahistorical phenomenon, but rather appears to be related to wider changes in society. In the context of the city for example, Boyer has argued that during the 1970s and 1980s, buildings and neighbourhoods became aesthetic objects. This new aesthetic gaze on the city, in her view, was however a ‘distant’ gaze: ‘it neither sees the displacement of uses and people, the rapid gentrification of whole areas of the city spreading out from the center’s core; nor does it understand the hidden class structure implicit in the development of these formalistic tastes’ (Boyer, 1988, 51). In Boyer’s view, the return of aesthetics to city planning was the outcome of a broader structural shift from the meta narratives of the modern period, which originate in the enlightenment, to what she calls ‘the great malaise of relativity’ that is postmodernity.

4.5 While recognising the reality of new times, Boyer nevertheless laments the loss of a ‘discourse of reasons’ which can guide planning action. The fragmentation of planning practices to a sort of clientism and the focus on a private market-led aesthetics is regressive in her view. Aesthetics, she argues, must not be left to the ‘codes of market production’, but rather ‘we must again search in the return of the aesthetic to find a position exterior to the market, outside of this affirmative culture, a site from which we can learn the incommensurability of different aesthetic expressions (Boyer, 1988, 56).

4.6 David Harvey too, acknowledges that the emergence of this new aesthetic sensibility seems to be associated with major changes in the structural character of capitalism. In his analysis of the emergence of postmodern architecture in the city, he argues that ‘modernism, for ideological reasons as well as for other ‘practical, technical and economic reasons ... did go out of its way to repress the significance of symbolic capital in urban life’ (Harvey, 1989, 80). This, he suggests, created a ‘climate of repressed desire’ which contributed to the proliferation of architectural designs which now characterise the postmodern ‘landscape’.

4.7 This turn to design and aesthetics, which sees ‘the visual as the privileged sense’, has encouraged further interest in understanding how people read the environment. Ongoing
sociological and cultural analysis is attempting to offer a more nuanced understanding of how meanings of the environment are negotiated and contested by different groups in society. Much of this debate is prompted by the interest in the development of postmodernist culture. Dickens, for example, argues that while the built environment carries ‘social meanings and symbols which are widely accepted’, and while ‘these meanings can be challenged and reinterpreted, they still deeply affect how people as individuals and groups interpret their own and other people’s circumstances’ (Dickens, 1990, 5). Dickens is acknowledging firstly that the meanings communicated by the built environment are part of a wider expressive order, which affects ‘peoples actions and social change’, but significantly it is ‘people (and their interpretation or use of locales) who are the causal elements in such change’ (Dickens, 1990, 6).

4.8 However, Savage and Warde note that such meanings are ‘the product of specific social relations struggling for cultural hegemony and social and political power’. In this sense, the built environment can be understood as ‘an arena of contestation’ (Savage & Warde, 1993, 125). This is in contrast to a view which is sustained in some architectural theory and urban sociology, that meanings of the built environment are straightforwardly a manifestation of the dominant social values of any given historical period. Such approaches, it might be argued, can lead to forms of architectural determinism where alternative architectures or new arrangements of urban forms are offered as political and social panaceas.

4.9 Savage and Warde also recognise that some architectural analyses now acknowledge that the built environment is the outcome of a complexity of social forces and moreover that a ‘diversity of meanings and values are expressed by the variety of buildings and architectural forms’ (Savage & Warde, 1993, 128). However, they make the significant point that the meanings employed are not constructed through architecture and urban design alone - ‘rather places derive values from other cultural processes, as in the use of urban images in films, literature, the popular press and so forth’ (Savage & Warde, 1993, 128).

4.10 It should also be acknowledged that within the contemporary postmodern age, new social groups are continuing to emerge. It is therefore no longer adequate to think of social groups on the basis of class alone, although class remains important. Rather, social structure can be characterised on the basis of divisions such as race, religion, age, gender, ethnicity, environmental beliefs and place-based community. In other words, and in the
language of Bourdieu, the developing and changing social structures of society are, in turn, creating a variety of ‘taste communities’ (Bourdieu, 1986).

4.11 A broader review of the literature on how people’s social, or ethno-social, class or community affects their understanding and reading of environments offers a range of views. However, arguably there is some consensus that the following factors are important:

- The environment, including the built environment, has no inherent meaning;
- The meaning of the built environment is socially constructed within historically specific socio-economic and cultural circumstances;
- Various social and ethnic groups, including emerging social groups often read the environment in different ways;
- The meaning of the built environment is often contested; and
- Meanings of the environment can change over time and place.

4.12 Within the context of discussions about the design of public space, it is also important to consider briefly some of the literature on the design of space to affect social relations. Although there is a long tradition within planning and architecture of shaping the environment to encourage social behaviour, there has been a recent growing interest in creating spaces that help to reduce levels of crime (CABE, Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention, 2004). Much of this can be traced back to Newman’s theories of defensible space and to their implementation in a number of New York’s housing schemes (Newman, 1972). A key dimension of the theory relates to informal surveillance and how to design the edges of public spaces to encourage ‘overlooking’. The theory was employed in Belfast in the design and layout of Poleglass and has been used in park designs elsewhere.

4.13 The design of space to affect social relations continues to be of interest to a range of urban sociologists, planners and urban designers. Relatively recent reflection in this field, by Professor Richard Sennett (Sennett, 2004, 10) is of direct interest for this research project.
In a public lecture, Sennett makes the distinction between borders and boundaries in urban space. He argues that cities are often divided by two different kinds of edges. A border, in his view, is a place of exchange between different communities, sometimes, different classes in the city. It is like a ‘porous membrane’. A boundary, on the other hand, is ‘a guarded territory … (it) establishes closure’. To illustrate the significance of this distinction for planners and designers, Sennett used an example of a project to create a market for the Spanish community in Spanish Harlem, New York City. The market, known as La Marketa, was located in the very centre of the community on 115th Street. In his view, this was a serious mistake, because it missed an opportunity to encourage interaction between two quite different communities by locating the facility on the edge (Sennett, 2004, 10).

4.14 The planners have since learned from this mistake. Other projects on the west side of Manhattan were located at the edges of community areas ‘in order … to open the gates between different racial and economic communities’. In Sennett’s view, therefore, emphasizing the importance of the centre helped to reinforce isolation. Whereas, ‘understanding of the value of the edge and border has proved integrating’. (Sennett, 2004, 11).

4.15 Urban design is now a ‘broad church’. It is much more than ‘big architecture’. By definition, urban design has to capture and try to understand all the major processes that create, produce and consume the cityscape. While recognising that good functional design of the public realm encourages better access and potentially a more inclusive environment, it is also essential to acknowledge that public spaces and the ‘walls’ and ‘furniture’ that shape them are symbolic — in other words, they transmit social meaning. This in turn can discourage use and promote exclusion (see Risbeth, 2001). However, on a more positive note, the meaning of the built environment can change over time. Policies and programmes can be devised to promote inclusion through redesign and inclusive aesthetics.
5 Review of the urban policy and planning context

5.1 As the main public instrument for shaping and regulating social space, the planning system plays a crucial role in any strategy to create a more sustainable and inclusive city. However, the current planning system in Northern Ireland, introduced in 1973 as an early outcome of Direct Rule, is arguably rather limited in this regard. In the case of Belfast, it has been insufficiently proactive and interventionist in contributing to a shared city. Its concentration on its regulatory role has encouraged a perception of its operation as complex, cumbersome and risk averse. Like many public agencies, it has had under-developed connectivity with other relevant city agencies. Moreover, it has not fully utilised and enforced the legislative tools at its disposal -- for instance, comprehensive development schemes, planning permissions and planning gain -- to achieve exceptionality, social redistribution, and development coherence.

5.2 Alongside the planning system, many urban policies and programmes have been introduced to address issues of spatial regeneration. Most recently, these include: the Department of Social Development’s Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, ‘People and Place’ and Public Realm Strategy & Masterplan for Belfast City Centre; the Department of the Environment’s draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) & Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation; the NIHE’s pragmatic approach to dealing with segregation and community relations. Other non-statutory spatial strategies include the Belfast City Council’s Belfast: The Masterplan 2004 – 2020 and their strategy for open spaces Your City, Your Space. Some interaction and equality (non-physical) policies include: Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998; New Targeting Social Need (New TSN); A Shared Future; the Racial Equality Strategy, etc.

5.3 If we take, for example, four recent documents: the Department of the Environment’s draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) & Planning Policy Statement 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation; and the Belfast City Council’s Belfast: The Masterplan 2004 – 2020 & Your City, Your Space, we can see similarities – and overlap – among them. While it is commendable that the City Council is proactively undertaking its own policy research and formulation of spatial strategies, particularly with respect to its key responsibility for open space, two difficult questions arise:

(1) beyond the rhetoric of encouraging people to create safe shared spaces, are there clear objectives in both strategies about how this can be proactively achieved?
(2) is there clear complementarity between dBMAP and the City Council’s strategy Your City, Your Space in tackling (shared) public space?

5.4 Moreover, all such policies aiming to create a better, shared future for Belfast exist separately, without a clear overarching vision for the city, and, in terms of delivery, operate within a fragmented governance. This linked problem -- a proliferation of plans and strategies and splintered city leadership -- causes duplication in research, policy formation, and provision. Planning is now split across three Departments: development control and development plans operate within the agency of Planning Service which is within the authority of the Department of the Environment (DoENI); while regional planning and transport operates under the Department of the Regional Development (DRD); and social development, regeneration, and neighbourhood renewal are the responsibility of the Department for Social Development (DSD). Such compartmentalisation undoubtedly causes difficulties in effective and efficient policy coordination and implementation.

5.5 In addition, Belfast has an extensive community and voluntary sector, which has emerged within the democratic deficit that has marked political culture here during most of the ‘Troubles’. A dynamic, well-connected voluntary and community sector is crucial for supporting the production of accountable and democratic decision-making. While a geographically diverse, strong and active community sector can be extremely beneficial in the formulation of policy and decision-making, connecting and conveying community viewpoints and tacit information to government can be difficult – and is a generic problem within planning. The complex, fragmented governing arrangements mentioned above make such participative processes difficult to achieve. A report by the National Trust acknowledges that there is a ‘need for the Department of the Environment and Department of Regional Development to engage more effectively with people, moving from consultation to a modern participation ethos’ (National Trust, 2004, 30).

5.6 Bollens (2002) suggests that when confronting fractured public interests on issues of ethnicity or race, planners often use professional coping skills that distance them from the core issues. Consequently, the policy outcomes of such processes are inadequate in that they do not address the underlying problems underpinning the conflict, and they do not prioritise the production of a shared city. In fact, they may inadvertently exacerbate prevailing situations and re-enforce separatist lifestyles through the creation or perpetuation of enclaved and segregated spaces. In this respect, it can be argued that though ‘not the
primary cause of strife, cities and their policy makers may nonetheless be capable of activating or moderating extant intergroup tension’ (Bollens1998, 730).

5.7 This critique suggests that planners and policy makers do not sufficiently consider what effect planning decisions – and lack of planning intervention – may have on community relations, interaction and stability. Although there is equality proofing of area plans and new policies, the methodology applied is quite rigid and uses technical devices that do not capture fully the ‘social’ dimensions in the planning of space, using techniques that are more appropriate to the regulation of the physical environment. Despite their limitations, such proofing remains a critical component of planning policy impacts. However, planning applications on site specific developments do not involve a similar proofing exercise like those carried out on larger area plans or policies. Yet they may have significant socio-spatial impact, given the localised scale of their development and the sensitive symbolic zones that may be involved.

5.8 Good planning involves getting the right development in the right place and at the right time. With regard to creating sharing and interaction in public space, it can always be argued that the time is not yet right, a recipe for indefinite postponement of any ambition to tackle the spatial dimensions of division and separation. The planning system across the three Departments currently responsible has not assessed the financial and social costs of segregated spaces. The predominant ethos in the planning profession of the 1970s and 1980s viewed planning as a technical procedure about the regulation of land-use that largely ignored an integrated socio-economic perspective (the soft infrastructure), and the legacy of this physical model persists today in the psyche, policy formulation and operations of the planning professional.

5.9 In short, the planning system in Northern Ireland has not yet embraced the shift to spatial planning\(^1\) that is occurring in other parts of the UK. Nevertheless, it has at its disposal a range of underused, statutory based facilities that could be employed proactively to help deliver a programme of shared public spaces. These facilities include: planning permissions; planning conditions; planning agreements; planning gain; comprehensive development schemes; and compulsory purchasing. Currently, planning is reluctant to move beyond its traditional regulatory role, relying largely on the market to deliver

\(^1\) Although there is no definitive definition of Spatial Planning, it is a new approach that brings planning together with the policies and programmes which have an impact on people and their environment and therefore goes beyond just looking at the use of land.
development that is in accordance with its statutory plans and policies. Occasionally, the planning process attempts to secure broader social gains. For example, the condition on affordable and social housing attached to the outline permission for Phase 2 of Titanic Quarter represents a progressive step forward. In similar vein, planning conditions and planning gain can offer significant additional benefits for the delivery of shared spaces.

5.10 Similarly, while Comprehensive Development Schemes have been used in parts of the city to advance mostly commercial developments such as Castle Court, Victoria Square, Duncairn and the North Foreshore, there is no reason why they could not be used to advance and facilitate the development of shared spaces elsewhere.

5.11 All of this requires a new form of planning and policy making: one that is better connected to the broader needs of the city; one that is more proactive and interventionist in the processes of implementation; and one that is structured for a higher degree of horizontal organisational integration that connects ‘integrated community planning’ to spatial planning and spatial planning to delivery. If a shared society is to be achieved, planning policy needs to turn from neutral, re-active, and crisis management approaches, shifting its focus towards more proactive policies that are based on integration and have a strategic commitment to the building of a shared civil society.
6 From Contested to Shared Space

6.1 Findings

6.1.1 One respondent, from a community relations perspective, considered that public space embraced both physical space — that refers to the city’s assembly points, amenities, parks and streetscape — and institutional space, which refers to the civic organisations, ranging from the City Council to the Arts. At a formal level, the city contained substantial civic space. But, in practice, the concept of ‘the civic’ was very fragile. Instead, there was a lot of ‘contest for power’ space, whereby the formal public space was dominated by territoriality and partiality, with both overt and covert intimidation to inhibit dissent from tribal loyalty. This gap between the ‘formal’ appearance and the ‘informal’ reality was often taken for granted because over time people had normalised practical ways to navigate between the ambivalences. From this viewpoint, shared space could not be simply declared. It had to be won. Without deliberate interventions and legitimations and prioritised targets, the non-shared space would predominate. Yes, this was social engineering. But, this should not be treated as a negative, since the pervasive hidden iceberg was the violence and threat of violence in support of separatism.

6.1.2 From this interpretation, policy had to progressively build from the current strengths. In other words, it needed to secure the best-established shared public realm and move outward. Rather than start with the most difficult interface areas, policy should focus first on reinforcing the civic components of the city centre and riverfront, and move on to the arterial routes. Then, neighbourhood strategies could be linked to the secured shared space of the arterial routes. In the short term, this strategic incrementalism might involve a tacit acknowledgement of the prevalent ethnic spaces. But, it was crucial to create contrasts, pre-figurative spaces or what Lederach referred to as ‘permanent pilots’, places that illustrated the viability of alternatives to divisive segregations and created new norms about integrated city living. Otherwise, Belfast was in danger of settling for a few major shared spaces as tokens of its declared ambition for a shared future.

6.1.3 The forces lined in opposition to the shared city did not have to deploy direct intimidation. The intimidations rested in the ingrained suppositions and assumptions, creating a ‘common sense’ view about the immutability of division and the pre-eminence of tribal affiliation in the city. Fear of radical challenge to these dispositions had become internalised and normative. In response, civic forces had to ask whether ethnicity/group identity should be compelled to express itself within a democratic/legal framework that
protected pluralist values, rather than have the civic realm submit itself to the politics of sectarian identity. Without endorsement of civic norms, a clear sense of purpose and capacity for delivery, the public city would be squeezed, since the ethnic blocs on the street would determine the key spatial and social outcomes. England was confronting a similar dilemma about which approach to community cohesion would prevail: a form of multiculturalism that legitimated differential relationships to the state and the rule of law, based on group identity, or a cosmopolitanism that promoted diversity within shared democratic values and human rights, whereby primary allegiance was to the common good.

6.1.4 Substantive change in the overall nature of the conflict was now evident. The ‘Troubles’ had demonstrated that a competitive ethnic contest about domination through physical force did not work. An alternative partnership model had slowly emerged. But, it needed to be cemented, and people on the ground, in the most troubled communities in particular, needed to have practical experience of its benefits. Demonstration mattered, since the crisis was no longer about the desirability of a shared future, but rather about its plausibility. Given that the tendency to segregation remained dominant, it was essential to demonstrate that:

- walls did not create ‘safe spaces’, but rather increased predicaments of insecurity and hostility in the longer term;
- a segregated economy, with all of its inefficient duplications, did not work in a more competitive age;
- sectarianism could often masquerade as localism;
- a growing Catholic\Nationalist city and Protestant\Unionist suburbs militated against any perception that we were all in the same boat sailing in the same direction;
- a re-defined urban demographics that encompassed a city-region spatial unit of analysis and administration could best generate pluralism and partnership; and
- new spaces like Titanic Quarter could become important pre-figurative arenas of integrated living, prompting others to look and say: ‘that’s what we want too’.

6.1.5 In this view, the challenge was urgent. The next five years would determine a lot about the shape of the city for future generations. Attempts to airbrush out the realities of Belfast's contested spaces, and to pretend normality, would only yield by default sectarian outcomes. A shared future implied moving beyond any proportional distribution of urban
resources based on a tribal ‘balkanisation’. Similarly, a viable urban economy had to challenge some of the traditional reflexes of community development, like demands for locally based employment for all. Contemporary urban economies needed mobility, and here issues of access and transport across the city were critical. This more ‘open’ city would, in turn, promote wider civic interaction. But, in those spaces that were the most sensitive, change had to be handled with care. Such micro spaces could not bear the weight of the conflict that they were being asked to resolve. There was need for a wider framework of development within larger urban geographies, whereby both sides could see a ‘win-win’ scenario through a balanced package of initiatives that addressed the different forms of housing need on both sides of the community, alongside assurance about mutual safety. Such a negotiated strategy demanded choreography based on concurrency rather than consequentiality, within a growing context of a Belfast ‘brand’ of common belonging as citizens of the city. Ultimately, change would come from the market as well as through public intervention, and since the market was now increasingly global and inter-cultural, its profit motive would not sit easy with a narrow bigoted parochialism.

6.1.6 From the perspective of a developer, Belfast needed to build on those spaces that could not be labelled as ‘belonging’ to Catholic\Nationalist or Protestant\Unionist, and proactively seek to create spaces that could be shared. As a company seeking to optimise the use of their developments by all sides of society, they undertook front-loaded investment in ethnographic studies to appreciate how various local communities perceived and used the space in the development’s hinterland. Then, on the basis of this knowledge about boundaries and patterns of communal living, they sought to ensure that they positioned the development and its access points in ways that would make its use welcoming and safe for all. Involving local people from a formative period was key. But, inter-community negotiation and changing social space was not easy, particularly when some politicians got involved, given their concern about electoral demographics. Often, the most sensitive component was housing, particularly social/affordable housing that Protestant\Unionists tended to see as being inevitably allocated to Catholic\Nationalists, given the differentials in housing need. An example here was the dilemma related to brownfield use in the city. The developer responded to the argument that a good share of such sites was in or near Protestant\Unionist areas, and the likely development of new housing on such sites would tend to go to Catholic\Nationalists. He pointed out the example of the Girdwood site in North Belfast as fitting this pattern, and argued that such impasses needed political leadership. However, the fundamental need was for better civic
education — not only for politicians and community leaders, but also for planners, city officials and developers. The question should be put before all with responsibility for city development: ‘how do we lead ourselves out of this ghettoisation?’

6.1.7 The developer emphasised that all cities changed and evolved, if only because of the cycles of economic transformation, and the successful ones were those that could best adapt. So, the lesson for him was that cities should not allocate any particular space an unchangeable function, regardless of changed circumstance. He also suggested, that if a public park was now in a trouble spot that hindered its open and safe use by all of the public, then re-designate that space, and with the capital raised by its sale, create a new park elsewhere capable of offering shared use. In some cases, such as the proposed Giant’s Park, make a deliberate effort from the start through a Football Academy to ensure its use by mixed teams. Again, proactive and visionary intervention was imperative. Another example was the potential outcome of the rationalisation of school plant. New opportunities for shared space might result. But, much of this strategic and creative approach relied on a radically changed Planning system. Currently, it was too regulatory and risk-averse, and prone to stymie inventive thinking. Essential to this transformative approach was a system that empowered all the relevant stakeholders that operated in partnership, and was supported by a good urban design team.

6.1.8 A prominent city architect expressed many of these same concerns, emphasising the importance of addressing the contentious issues more candidly. For him, the segregations associated with the divisions were part of a more general disconnectedness in the city. Among the policy responses he would prioritise were the following:

- **access**: take care how any major development could be accessed from different neighbourhoods;
- **activity**: in the most derelict/brownfield sites, take more risks rather than be forever immobilised by the potential problems. For instance, restore housing and related facilities, re-establish activity, use and vibrancy, and then give thought to longer-term management challenges;
- **ownership**: historic Protestant\Unionist / Catholic\Nationalist ‘ownership’ of particular sites should not block appropriate current and future use. Building a more ‘common’ ownership was important;
- **demonstration**: first steps had to be taken with respect to the city’s walls that could demonstrate the feasibility of their long-term removal. Transitional initiatives
were possible, e.g. putting sliding doors in the walls that could be open except in
the most tense circumstances;

- **participation**: it was critical to work from the ground up, particularly in those
  communities, where people feel the most vulnerable; and

- **transport**: circular as well as radial transport was needed to open up the city.

6.1.9 The emphasis here was on risk-taking, leadership, and demonstration of what was
feasible in areas of vacancy and voids -- all rooted in a long-term vision. Small minorities
should not be able to hold back progress in this direction. He felt there was a need to
examine how the contested nature of the city had shaped our spatial assumptions, and to
re-think these assumptions. For instance, there had been concern that open space that
was not defensible was a congregation point for crowds and possible hostilities. Thus,
landscapes and buildings had to be framed within a fortress city. This now needed to be
challenged. There were related issues: a city centre that was mostly about commerce,
reflected in the privatising and commercial enclosure of cityscapes that, for instance,
might arise with the Victoria Square; the association of ‘the public street’ with contention
such as parades and disorder; the land held by the private sector that was not being
developed, but whose rising value put it beyond the reach of the public sector for social
development; the land that was badly developed for poor quality apartments; the publicly-
owned sites like former leisure centres and surplus school plant that could be used for
deliberate creation of shared space; the need for a more ‘walkable’ city that allowed
people to be less dependent on the car in, for instance, getting to work; the prevalence of
neighbourhoods that were not civic spaces open to the ‘outsider’. All of these aspects
were part of the city’s overall disconnected structure and required a new approach. But, in
particular, the public money and energy being devoted to areas like the Cathedral and
Titanic Quarters needed to be devoted also to the inner city, such as the most bereft
communities touching the commercial centre. Commitment to restore them and to
connect them to the city was vital.

6.1.10 What was taken as ‘resurgent nationalism’ by some sections of the Protestant\Unionist
community prompted fear about ‘Catholic\Nationalist expansionism’. What was needed
was a re-think away from an exclusivist notion of community, and an attitude that was too
community-focused: ‘This is my place, and my priority. Someone else can look after the
city-wide interests.’ A combination of generosity and reciprocity could turn things around.
For instance, if those communities resisting parades could ‘invite’ the parades through
their area, and this move was met with a positive response on the other side, progress
could be made on the thorny issue of territorial ownership. But, the ‘sectarian’ city was not restricted to the obvious locales like the Falls and Shankill. Such areas could be often the most visible manifestation of a feature that ran through the urban fabric.

6.1.11 There was a risk that the creation of new areas like Titanic Quarter could involve a ‘plantation’ of a city within the city: gentrified and rarefied, and adding to the disconnections. Instead, there was no escape from tackling the problem of division directly, and getting beyond the retort of constant deferment that ‘now is not the right time’. Thus, the city faced a limited set of options. Basically, it had to acknowledge one of the following propositions:

1. this segregation is happening, and overall it is acceptable;
2. this segregation is happening. It’s not good, but we can’t do much about it; or
3. this segregation is happening. It’s not good and we’re going to do something effective about it.

6.1.12 Alongside the sectarian issues, other impediments to the safe and open use of public space in the city included anti-social behaviour, including features such as under-age drinking and drug abuse, and the fear of crime held by people, particularly the most vulnerable populations like the elderly. The fear, which was not always proportionate to the reality of the threat, could operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy — emptying the streetscape and parks of mature adults, leaving voids that facilitated potential anti-social behaviour. Partnerships, including the police, local community leaders and the City Council, were already underway with initiatives to tackle these linked aspects. Part of the response involved an attempt to ‘design out’ crime, involving a comprehensive set of preventative measures such as appropriate lighting; boundary definition and security; natural surveillance from adjacent built environment; limited scope for rubbish accumulation, litter and dog-fouling; and good regular management and maintenance.

6.1.13 Complementary to these interventions and related proposed initiatives, such as the greater use of trained park rangers and police community support officers, were proactive attempts to engage young people in positive pursuits such as sport and Arts, working with schools and other youth programmes. Through such an overall strategy, police were keen to set targets for reduction in anti-social incidents, and, in general, they were finding better co-operation from the public in more recent years. The political changes, which included
recognition of the PSNI by Sinn Fein, were contributors to this transformed framework, though some interviewees still perceived that local people could be sometimes more flexible and responsive than their political leadership. Thus, while change was evident on the ground in the ‘post-Settlement’ period, legacies of decades of conflict were still entrenched.

6.1.14 It was emphasised that patterns of behaviour varied according to seasonal and time factors. For instance, areas that could be safe for public use in the daytime were less so at night-time. Some mentioned that the use of CCTV cameras could help, offering reassurance and early warning. From a policing perspective, walls were less of an answer. As short-term solutions, they could contribute to long-term problems. Such fences did not make good neighbours. Moreover, no matter how tall the walls have been built, the deterrence value was limited. Rather, segregation and its containments deepened a sense of abnormality that was unhelpful to securing a settled peace. Changed attitudes – involving the chipping away of old enmities — were needed. Just like over time, it had become socially unacceptable to drink and drive, over time, sectarianism could achieve the same disapproval. Thus, police were ready to tackle the issue of flags and emblems on the main arterial routes. But, to do so sensitively and effectively demanded that they work in cooperation with the immediate local communities. Local leadership, in the form of voluntary agencies, churches, etc. was vital. Progress was evident, with, for example, some murals becoming less militaristic and more cultural in expression. But, it was important that the community and statutory initiatives that contributed to this reduction in aggression continue. With the decrease in Peace Programme money expected, some of these local projects were at risk. Similarly, it was critical that the community safety projects supported by Belfast City Council, in partnership with the police service, continued.

6.1.15 The policing component of these challenges faced some immediate paradoxes. For instance, the more acceptable the PSNI became on a cross-community basis, the more likely they were to receive increases in reported crime. Yet, following the Patton Report, which helped improve this legitimacy, their staff numbers were down and set to become around half of what they were during the ‘Troubles’. So, demand for their service might increase while their capacity was on the decrease. Similarly, the local community/political leadership that might seek to work more with the police, might by the same token forfeit some of their local clout with those who ‘respected’ them more when they were the alternative authority. Such problems suggested the need for multi-sector partnerships,
involving police, community leaders, and civic agencies. While such collaborations could yield new ideas through cross-fertilisation of expertise and experience, they also had to be able to translate the ideas into action, otherwise their credibility was compromised.

6.1.16 A city official echoed many of these concerns. For him, public space is that which is publicly ‘owned’, and where the public at large is eligible. By contrast, commercial centres like Victoria Square want people as ‘consumers’. St George’s Market had a different ambience. While it involved commerce, it was also a meeting place. In a city already bereft of good public spaces, the ‘Troubles’ had closed spatial options. We needed to get out of the trenches, deliberately creating spaces and events that attracted people out of their areas. This meant taking risks. For instance, a proposal for a footbridge from the Gasworks to Ormeau Park had been advanced to improve connectivity in that part of the city. Whatever the other problems with the proposal, such as cost, it met with local opposition because there was fear that the bridge would become a new sectarian interface. We needed to champion such sites if we were to re-make Belfast. But, development should get beyond simply a physical focus. Opening up the city also included using natural assets like the Lagan and the Belfast Hills to create safe places with easy public access, and with special effort to attract working class use. This is a role that could be led by the City Council, which had a particularly strong responsibility in the whole area of environment and open space.

6.1.17 But, if public spaces were to be used more effectively, they had to have a clear rationale beyond their physical attractiveness, involving a strategic management for safety, animation, special events, and joint projects with other partners. But, achieving this required prioritisation. If say, 4-6 main sites – like the proposed Giant’s Park – were to be targeted over the next few years with the objective of improving shared space and civic linkage, it could make a big impression.

6.1.18 Many times it was emphasised that Belfast had to face up to the realities of division, rather than ignore these, or put a gloss over them. Promotional imaging had limitation. Substance should overtake style.
6.2 Analysis

6.2.1 Two different approaches emerged in our study. Some emphasised the need to move rapidly into a post-conflict scenario by diminishing the focus on the past. The belief here was that deliberating about the conflict only helped to give it and its protagonists prominence. Starting a new chapter meant to a large extent airbrushing out the old script. Concentration on a new city image, supported by an economic development agenda for post-industrialism and new landmark physical developments, would create a virtuous cycle that would see the remnants of conflict wither. An alternative perspective, endorsed overwhelmingly by the interviewees, counselled against this evasion. Without confronting the contested nature of space and social life in the city, there was little prospect of shifting from a managerial to a transformative approach. The shift had to be from a reactive to a proactive response. Moreover, since no one agency had either the authority or capacity to deliver an answer to the lack of shared space, a coordinated and cooperative partnership of all relevant agencies was essential.

6.2.2 Two narratives have dominated Belfast: the narrative of nostalgia on the Protestant\Unionist side that looks back to a contented time before violent subversion disturbed an ordered and prosperous corner of British society; and the narrative of utopia on the Catholic\Nationalist side that looks forward beyond grievance and inequity to a better future in a new Irish settlement. Both of these narratives are changing — how much, how fast, how uniformly no one knows. However, in its widest interpretation, ‘the public realm’ needs to become a space where remaining difference can be navigated and negotiated peacefully; where old borders and boundaries are blurred; and where in a more porous, fluid, shifting ‘dialogic space’, the pluralities, hybridities and multiple identities of a complex diverse world offer an alternative to the fundamentalisms of fixed identity. The safe spaces that will help shape these new conversations will not magically transform enmity into amity. However, they may transform antipathy into empathy, offering a more widespread civic capacity to engage, and sometimes even robustly contest, with ‘the other’ within a public ethos of trust, respect and reciprocity.

6.2.3 Ultimately, this aspect of creating space for deliberation about a ‘shared future’ confronts the four main choices a divided society has:
• the withdrawal of a substantial share of each tribe into an insular enclave of exclusivity and absolutism, whereby hostilities simmer and periodically re-erupt;
• a minimalist ‘live and let live’ settlement, involving a form of respectful indifference to difference, managing co-habitation in the city with scant intercultural engagement;
• a responsive democratic politics of identity and belonging, whereby a series of temporary settlements derive from a process of continual negotiation and compromise, involving exchanges that will be often jarring; and
• a more ambitious acknowledgement that no single tradition or belief system has total purchase on the complexities and horizons of humanity, but that perhaps a positive interaction and mutual enrichment can add value to each tradition for shared benefit.

6.2.4 Faced with such choices, most of the interviewees opted for a transformative approach based on risk, vision, and effective partnership delivery. Many emphasised the need to get the measure of the challenge. Sectarianism and segregation were not restricted to the traditional ‘heartlands’ in Belfast. Rather, they were entrenched features in the physical and mental spaces of an extensive part of the city. Any concern that intervention was social engineering should be balanced by the reality that failure to tackle the issue deliberately would by default concede space to the ‘ethnic engineers’, thereby ensuring the persistence of division and separation.

6.2.5 At the same time, intervention needed to be strategic and systematic, based on prioritisation, inter-agency collaboration and community participation. Moreover, it should be underpinned by clear and consistent values and principles. In essence here, many felt that there was a choice between a form of multiculturalism that emphasised the autonomy of ‘single identity’, and cosmopolitanism that fostered a common belonging, democratic framework, and inter-culturalism, within which diversity could flourish. Those who emphasised this distinction opted for the latter.

6.2.6 The walls in the city, built to offer a short-term solution, had become part of a long-term problem. While they might offer some respite for anxiety, they did not offer sustainable security. Unless there was a targeted ambition to start removing or scaling down these barriers, and over time, other paraphernalia of surveillance and enclosure, Belfast would remain a fortress city. But, some recognised that there were other kinds of ‘walls’ operating, an important point that has often been emphasised. In Belfast, people refer to the ‘walls of hate’ that treat the ‘other’ as hostile stranger, and there has been recent reference to ‘walls of silence’ that prevent people cooperating with the police service in
the detection of those responsible for incidents that may have paramilitary links. Clearly, these mental walls needed to be addressed as well, and many interviewees emphasised the efficacy of civic education for all strands of society as a contribution to such effort.

6.2.7 Over the next five to ten years, Belfast’s skyline is likely to be transformed. One aspect of this development agenda is the optimal use of brownfield sites. Since there is more void and vacancy in Protestant\Unionist areas, there is likely pressure on unused and under-used land there being zoned for housing and other social purpose, and given its higher housing demand, the Catholic\Nationalist community is likely to be the main recipient of the social/affordable housing component. To avoid conflict over the apparent ‘encroachment’ of one community at the cost of the other, a transparent and inclusive debate needs to be sponsored about overall patterns of demography, housing need, and community structure. But, some of this will change with the market rather than the state, as the trends in new apartment development already indicate.

6.2.8 Changing social policy is set to ‘liberate’ some publicly-owned buildings from their existing use, and this offers the prospect of re-definition. Major examples include the Crumlin Road prison, a symbolic site that could become a shared space for educational/cultural use between the Catholic\Nationalist Lower Antrim Road/New Lodge, the Protestant\Unionist Crumlin/Shankill Road and the Indian Cultural Centre at Clifton Street. Another potential derives from the rationalisation of school plant. However, development in the city is about more than buildings. The city is lacking in good public spaces. It was felt that to create shared and effective parks and open space, it was essential to have a clear rationale, good management, and deliberate animation. Other natural assets such as the Belfast Hills offered a shared space, though at present, specific enthusiasts such as climbers largely accessed them. More access by working class people to such amenities needed to be promoted, in cooperation with youth and community organisations.

6.2.9 Belfast will remain a city of ‘identities’. But, these do not need to be locked in mutual hostility within a zero sum development game. Part of changing the city’s narrative involves the welcoming of new ethnic populations, and letting a generous diversity of language, food, custom, etc. flourish, supported by civic and legal intolerance of race hate crime. Part of it is to recognise that alongside the expansion of shared and cosmopolitan space, ethnic space will persist. It is likely there will always be neighbourhoods that are predominantly of one religious/political persuasion. But, an area can be Catholic
\textit{Nationalist or Protestant\-Unionist}, with visible representations of these identities, without being aggressive or antagonistic to the other persuasion. An important barometer here is the extent to which such an area signals to the other community that they are welcome or unwelcome to use the pathways, parks, shops, clubs, or maybe even visit friends. Similarly, the linguistic, sporting and cultural elements of Irish and Ulster-Scot identities are associated in some minds with political projects. If these language, sport and cultural movements genuinely want to appeal to an optimum level of participation across society, they need to tackle the reality and perception of any partisan political association.
7 Connectedness

7.1 Findings

7.1.1 Strategic connections

7.1.1.1 Accessibility to public spaces and indeed access around the city more generally, were some of the key issues raised by interviewees, focus group participants and other studies. The notion of connectedness in the context of this research refers to access and permeability, both real and perceived. A number of points were made about strategic connections in the city, particularly strategic connections between residential areas, the central area spaces and other public spaces such as parks. A view from the Planning Service was the need for a strategic overview of the main public spaces across the city, including parks as well as so called shared public spaces in and around the city centre. If these key spaces can be identified as existing or potential shared spaces then how can they be better connected and how are they geographically distributed? This is the strategic challenge facing the city. Official from the Parks department supported this view, suggesting that there needs to be a more joined-up approach to the development of public spaces, particularly between those agencies such as Planning Service and the Council which has the responsibility for planning and developing public space infrastructure.

7.1.1.2 As an example, the Parks official pointed to the Connswater Community Greenway project and suggested that a similar approach should be considered for North and West Belfast. This latter point was echoed by a representative from a North Belfast community forum, who suggested that North Belfast had some good public spaces that should be better developed and connected to allow for shared usage. He specifically referred to the Castle, Cave Hill, the Zoo, the Prison site, Waterworks Park, Alexandra Park, the North Foreshore and Cathedral Quarter. Another City Council official acknowledged the need to ensure that the new Giant’s Park on the North Foreshore was accessible to both communities in North Belfast.

7.1.1.3 Another view from the Parks department was that access and connectedness could be improved through the staging of more events, not only in the two large City parks but also in the second tier district parks and third tier neighbourhood parks. This would also
allow local communities to collaborate on events and potentially could show some so-called troublesome communities in a good light. Bringing people into spaces such as parks, particularly those that might be viewed negatively, offers opportunity for people to change perceptions. He also suggested that, drawing from the American experience – events could be planned that purposely link spaces. An example here from America would be to stage cycle days that connected a number of public spaces. This, in turn, would bring people into and through parts of the city that are normally excluded from mainstream events. The Belfast marathon has successfully encouraged this, but events that involve staged activities in the parks would further develop a more open city.

7.1.1.4 A problem relating to strategic connectedness was raised by an architect who pointed to the physical barriers around the city, particularly around the central area. In his view, the only good connections for pedestrians accessing the city centre are on the south side. Pedestrian connections from the west and the north are particularly poor and of course are made worse by territorial geography. To illustrate this, he pointed out that the distance from the Crumlin Road Prison to the city centre is the same as from Queen’s Lanyon Building to the city centre. The experience for the pedestrian walking along these two routes is significantly different. One has continual visual interest and stimulation, is pedestrian friendly and feels safe, and the other, along the Crumlin Road, is largely unattractive, is dominated by cars and feels unsafe. He referred to what Urban Initiatives (dBMAP consultants) called the ‘fracture zone’ – that is the road barriers and junctions around inner North and West of the city. He also made the point that Belfast was heavily reliant on the car for moving around the city. This was evident in his view, even in working class areas which have low levels of car ownership. Here people used taxis. This car dependency, he thought, was due in part to the ‘Troubles’ and to a poor public transport system. Consequently, he argued that there was an urgent need to start shaping the paths around the city, particularly the inner city, to suit the needs and interests of the pedestrian. This was a laudable objective in itself, but would also open up the opportunity to create more shared spaces and thoroughfares. A participant from the Community Transformation Unit took a similar view about the detachment of North Belfast from the city centre and indeed the rest of the city. He argued that people who had lived largely within their territories during the ‘Troubles’ now needed the opportunity to be reintegrated into the city.
7.1.1.5 Another architect - urban designer suggested that Belfast city centre’s compact form meant that most spaces in and around the central area were within walking distance. This permeability could, in his view, be developed to enhance shared space and to market the city experience to tourists.

7.1.1.6 A private developer recognised the need for shared communal space within new apartment developments, but also acknowledged that the new downtown residential developments were dependent on existing public space infrastructure for communal use. This relates to another view by an architect that Belfast is a relatively low density city and that the drive to densify and regenerate the inner city needs to be supported by more public space infrastructure. A representative of an environmental agency pointed to the need to make connections between issues. For example, the geography of sectarian territory in North Belfast is obviously linked to patterns of movement and to the potential usage of public spaces.

7.1.1.7 Some participants mentioned a more specific reference to the role of the arterial routes in the city. One City Council official argued that it might be useful to revisit the strategy for the arterial routes in the context of a drive to reduce interfaces and create shared spaces. This challenge was partly taken up in a study by Queen’s University students for the South Belfast Partnership Board. The project, which looked at the future of the Botanic area, suggested that Botanic Avenue could be developed as a shared space. The avenue is surrounded by a number of communities which do not interact particularly well and often argue for separate services within their own areas. The study recommended that Botanic Avenue could be developed as an ‘urban village’ with a range of services that would be attractive to communities such as Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, Holylands, Lower Ormeau and Queen’s. A successful shared space, it was argued, would draw people out of their territories into an area that offered a mix of commercial, social, cultural and leisure facilities.

7.1.2 Local connections

7.1.2.1 The territorial geography of Belfast also impacted on how people used the streets and paths to access public spaces, particularly the city centre. A seminar participant acknowledged that people from East Belfast using the main access roads into the city
centre, that is the Albertbridge Road and Bridgend, were careful about passing the community territory of the ‘other’. In the case of the Albertbridge, Protestant\Unionists walked on the south side and Catholic\Nationalists on the north side. Similarly in inner South Belfast, Protestant\Unionists from Donegall Pass avoided the Ormeau Road, instead using the Dublin Road and Ormeau Avenue. In inner North Belfast, Protestant\Unionists accessed the city centre and sometimes the Yorkgate complex via York Road and avoided North Queen Street and the Antrim Road. A number of participants also referred to bus routes and how users choose services to avoid passing through ‘other territories’.

7.1.2.2 Donegall Pass residents, particularly young people, felt uncomfortable using the shops and cafes in Botanic Avenue. Some said that they only used the nearby Spar, because beyond that, they encountered ‘GAA shirts’, a reference to the largely Catholic\Nationalist student population of the Holylands who often wear their home County GAA jerseys.

7.1.3 Transport

7.1.3.1 Transport issues including buses, car parking and disabled access were raised by a number of participants. A focus group for disabled people noted that poor public transport limited access to public spaces for many people including those with disabilities. They also argued that there were insufficient disabled spaces around key sites in the city. St. George’s Market was offered as an example. Here is a shared space, a vibrant space, but with poor parking facilities. This restricts disabled access. The same group echoed a view from other participants that there is now a tradition of people using taxis to access public events and services, partly because of poor public transport but also because it allows people to avoid what they perceive to be troublesome areas.

7.1.3.2 This latter point relates to the view of a City Council official that the bus system in Belfast, that is the route network and services, was significantly defined by the ‘Troubles’. This reinforces an earlier point made by participants in North Belfast, that bus routes are chosen carefully by people in the area. In other words, the Catholic\Nationalist population tends to use the Antrim Road services, while the
Protestant/Unionist population tends to use the Shore Road services. Even small distances matter when choosing to travel through or past the ‘other territory’. Consequently, taxi use appears to be relatively high in North Belfast. Another City Council official, however, mentioned the proposed new railway halt at Gamble Street. This, in his view, will open up better access to Clarendon Dock.

7.1.4 Access and perception

7.1.4.1 A number of participants talked about access to spaces in terms of people’s perceptions. For some, in North Belfast for example, the Odyssey complex and potentially Titanic Quarter are perceived to be some distance away. However, it was widely recognised that the Odyssey complex is considered to be a shared space and as such, contributed to the development of shared spaces within the city, particularly for young people. A significant problem though, is that access is limited to those who can afford to get there and, in turn, can buy into the facilities. The same point was made in a young persons’ focus group. Participants argued that while the Odyssey complex was a safe space, it was difficult to walk to. One possible response to this would be to introduce free travel for young people under eighteen. On the other hand, a view from some young people in West Belfast was that taxi services open up the city for those who are distant from new spaces. This also helps to overcome a poor public transport network.

7.1.4.2 A focus group of North Belfast residents valued the parks in the area, but acknowledged that they also presented problems. Alexandra Park was physically divided by a peaceline and the Waterworks was effectively divided in the mindsets of the two adjacent communities, at Westland and Newlodge/Newington. Participants pointed to the Cavehill and the surrounding walkways as a good example of space that was effectively shared. They also echoed a point made by others, that the parks were not the problem. Rather the problem is the sectarian nature of much of local society. Parks such as the Waterworks and Alexandra, however, may in part help facilitate a more shared society in the future.

7.1.4.3 A number of participants identified Botanic Gardens as probably one of the city’s most successful shared spaces. One participant argued that it should be seen as a flagship model for how to host events. However, in the view of some local communities,
particularly the Protestant\Unionist communities in Donegall Pass and Sandy Row, Botanic Gardens is not a shared space. In part, this relates to the space being extensively used by students from the Holylands, who they perceive to be largely Catholic\Nationalist, but also because the Lower Ormeau community would appear to have better access and therefore better usage. These communities also pointed to the semi-private area at the rear of Queen’s that discourages direct access to the park (see site analysis, p.49).

7.1.4.4 A Queen’s University study of community perceptions of the Waterfront area in Laganside (Bannon, 2005) also pointed out different views on a relatively new public space that is generally perceived to be neutral. Groups from areas that might be regarded as working class such as the Markets, Donegall Pass and West Belfast were largely uncertain about the value of the area for their communities. While recognising that the area communicated a new and refreshing aesthetic, they nevertheless felt it also excluded.

7.1.4.5 ‘Yes we like the area because it’s whole new buildings, it’s a whole new concept and we’ve never had that before, but at the same time it’s kind of exclusive. I feel a bit intimidated by the area because the affluence just smacks you in the face. Like the materials used and the fact that there is no restraint on trying to huddle things together to save space, seems to me that there has been no money spared.’ (West Belfast)

7.1.4.6 ‘… generally people round here see it as a no-go area. I don’t think people are intimidated by the design, what I’m actually saying is people round here might not see any value in the buildings because they think that’s for other people and not for us.’ (West Belfast)

7.1.4.7 The Markets group were also concerned about the re-imaging of the area and the lack of respect for local community history and memory.

7.1.4.8 ‘I mean we’re one of the oldest districts in Belfast and we haven’t even been an afterthought. The only afterthought is that man herding the sheep and that’s the only connection with what that site was. They seem to have given the area a feeling of ships, but ships were never part of the Markets. Also, they just changed the name of the area
to Lanyon Place. I mean, I bet hardly anyone in the Markets knows who or what Lanyon is!’ (Markets resident)

7.1.4.9 ‘I think coming from the Markets, we were always surrounded by the high courts or you know things like that there, which were never part of the Community. They were things that this community disliked because of the situation (The ‘Troubles’) and how many people went through them and were treated with contempt. Rather than an inviting building (new Law Courts building), from an architectural point of view that building might be a lovely building, but it’s a building that I personally just don’t like because of its history you know. It could look like the Sistene Chapel and we still wouldn’t like it.’ (Markets resident)

7.1.4.10 Similar views were shared by people from Donegall Pass:

‘Everything that has been put here, first it’s forced upon us and secondly it’s aimed at a more affluent community- it’s definitely not for the likes of the people of Donegall Pass that are unemployed or on benefits. It’s aimed at those people who can afford to live in the fancy apartments at the Waterfront, who have a bit more money. I mean the buildings down there could be out of this world gorgeous but we still won’t like it. It doesn’t include anything for our community. Except for four cleaners and one call agent!’ (Donegall Pass resident)

7.1.4.11 On the other hand, more affluent communities appeared to be comfortable with the new ambience of Laganside. The views of residents from the Laganview apartment complex confirms this:

‘Belfast being rebuilt, nice and clean and fresh, lots of light, basically post Good Friday Agreement, a bit of optimism, trying to be like the rest of Europe instead of harking backwards… It includes my community very much because we would be buying in and would have deliberately settled here. A lot of us are what would have been traditionally termed ‘yuppies’ back in the 90s. I mean there would be a lot of single people here, a lot of gay people, there aren’t very many children. Most people are out and about twenty four-seven, I mean work hard, play hard type of thing- so we really like it.’ (Laganview resident)
7.1.4.12 ‘I quite like the fact that the area still allows for some anonymity. I also find the aspects of design friendly, but then I’m used to going to concerts and theatres.’ (Laganview resident)

7.1.4.13 Another resident remarked that the area is pleasant and the buildings are neutral:
‘… they don’t feel oppressive or heavy. There aren’t tight little streets. It’s all very broad and spacious…I feel quite comfortable and by Belfast standards this is pretty good.’ (Laganview resident).

7.1.4.14 Interestingly, another group from the Malone area of South Belfast took a more discriminating view. In their opinion, the design of the Laganside area certainly communicated something new to Belfast. It signaled Belfast “coming alive again” after years of problems and recession caused by the ‘Troubles’. However, there was some distaste for the appearance of the area, with claims that it was dominated by ‘corporate imagery’.

7.1.4.15 ‘The area doesn’t make me feel oppressed as such, I just feel that it’s a pity that they put something like the BT Tower next door to something that was round, I mean I quite like the Waterfront Hall as a shape, and then they’ve all enclosed it in with all these other flippin’ towers! I mean you could have put a square box there and nobody would’ve known. I think it’s wrong.’ (Resident from Morton Community Group, Malone)
7.1.4.16 Arguably, the recent opening-up of the space in front of the Law Courts has added to the overall public realm ambience in this area and has strengthened the connection between the waterfront and the city centre. Moreover, the now direct line of vision from Donegall Square towards the Waterfront Hall has increased the perceptual connection of the city centre to Laganside. This is a very significant development and underlines the importance of making visual connections as well physical connections.

7.1.4.17 Some groups had a particular view on access that was specific to their needs. A women’s focus group, for example, said that older women tended to avoid the city centre, preferring to use suburban and peripheral shopping areas. In part, this was because they did not feel comfortable using public transport and found the centre not particularly car friendly. On the other hand, younger women in the group were happy to access the city centre using the buses. A related point was made by an architect who suggested that the city centre, particularly at weekends tended to be used by young people and people who depended on, and were comfortable using, public transport. The women’s group also suggested that their perception of public spaces was less to do with the architecture and the design of the space and more to do with the people who use the space. As an example, they said they would be discouraged from using a public space if it was used by ‘hoodies’. However, on the other hand, they enjoyed watching skateboarders in some of areas around the centre of the city, and thought they contributed some lively interest to sometimes rather dead spaces. Interestingly, some young people in a focus group suggested that football shirts, particularly Rangers and Celtic shirts should be banned in public parks.

7.1.4.18 A key issue for women using public spaces including parks was access to toilet facilities which they argued were generally poor in Belfast. They also suggested that they assess the usability of public areas in terms of security - in other words, how safe they feel. Public parks, in their view, would be much better used if there was a more active ranger or warden service.
7.1.5 Site Analyses

7.1.5.1 This section offers an analysis of three public spaces in Belfast; the Waterworks Park, Botanic Gardens Park and Castlecourt Shopping Centre. The purpose of these analyses is to go beyond normal site assessment to consider access and other issues within the context of the surrounding community geography. More particularly, the analysis considers the barriers that might prevent or discourage access and sharing.

The Waterworks Park

7.1.5.2 The Waterworks Park provides an important open space resource for inner North Belfast. Over the course of the 'Troubles', however, it has also been a contested space. The surrounding territorial geography of this part of North Belfast has changed over the last 30 – 40 years into what is now a relatively well-defined ethno-religious landscape. This is by no means static and there is evidence that the religious make-up of parts of this catchment area continue to change.

7.1.5.3 Three of the main entrances to the park are located on the lower Antrim Road. Another entrance is located at Brookvale Avenue on the lower south side of the park and another on the south side, of Solitude. On the Cavehill Road side, there are three entrances: one allowing direct access to a playground and hard surface sports area and to the path network beyond; one midway along the Cavehill Road; and one just below the rear of the Fire Station. It is also possible to enter the park via the derelict land and bonfire site off the Westland Road. However, the formal entrance to the park on the north side, is via Westland Gardens.

7.1.5.4 The residential areas around the periphery of the park are largely Catholic\Nationalist on the west, south and eastern sides. Although there is some evidence of a religious mix in areas such as the Cavehill Road and upper Cliftonville, it is probably safe to assume that they too are mostly Catholic\Nationalist. The only adjacent Protestant\Unionist area is the Westlands estate on the north side of the park. There are, of course, a number of Protestant\Unionist neighbourhoods within the wider catchment area of the park. The Tiger’s Bay area, for example, is only 500 metres from the park entrances on the Antrim Road.
7.1.5.5 There is some evidence to suggest that walkers, joggers and others from both sides of the community use the whole of the park. However, it is also evident that there is a perceived north-south divide, particularly for young people. The play and sport facilities on the north side appear to be used mainly by Protestants, and the facilities off the lower Cavehill Road by the Catholic community.

7.1.5.6 A number of issues emerge from this analysis:

- Firstly, there is some evidence that the religious geography of this overall area is continuing to change. Anecdotal evidence suggests that what previously were mixed private housing areas, are becoming more Catholic\Nationalist. This, in turn, engenders a sense of isolation in areas such as Tiger’s Bay and Westland. The future of the park as ‘shared space’ needs to be considered in this context.
• Secondly, the environment around all entrances needs to be free of territorial markings and should be as welcoming as possible.

• Thirdly, while the design, layout and geography of the park and surrounding area is unlikely to change, the promotion of the Waterworks Park as a shared space, will rely largely on the promotion of shared activities. This will require a proactive collaborative approach, possibly using the Park’s ‘Friends’ Group.

Botanic Gardens

7.1.5.7 Botanic Gardens is generally perceived to be one of the most shared public spaces in Belfast. Its successful development as a venue for a range of events has undoubtedly enhanced its reputation in this regard. However, as well as being a city park serving the broader population of Belfast, it also functions as a local park for neighbouring communities. Within the park, there are a number of facilities, including Queen’s University’s Physical Education Centre (PEC), the Palmhouse, the Ulster Museum and space for passive and active recreation.

7.1.5.8 The main entrances to the park are located on University Road, College Park, Colenso Parade, Agincourt Avenue and via Stranmillis Embankment. The residential areas in the immediate vicinity of the park are the relatively high density Holylands and Stranmillis. For the most part these areas are largely student areas, although there is still a significant ‘more permanent’ residential population in parts of the Holylands. Other residential areas close to the park include Ballynafeigh, Lower Ormeau, Donegall Pass, Sandy Row, lower Donegall Road and the Markets.
7.1.5.9 The main entrances into the park for residents of the Holylands are via Agincourt Avenue, College Park footpath and via Stranmillis Embankment. For Stranmillis residents and for residents from the west side of University Road, the main entrances are at University Road, Colenso Parade and via the PEC. For residents from Donegall Pass, Sandy Row and the lower Donegall Road the main entrance is via College Park footpath. For the residents from the Lower Ormeau area the most direct route is via Agincourt Avenue or Stranmillis Embankment. Ballynafeigh residents are most likely to cross the Ormeau Bridge and enter via Stranmillis Embankment.

7.1.5.10 According to recent research (QUB), some communities perceive Botanic Park to be a ‘cold area’ for Protestant\Unionists, particularly for the local working class Protestant communities. Although the park is a significant open space resource for this part of inner South Belfast, it is perceived to be largely used by students from the Holylands and the Lower Ormeau community. The latter is a longstanding Catholic\Nationalist community, while the student population of the Holylands is also largely Catholic\Nationalist. The obvious signals for these perceptions are Celtic regalia, GAA shirts and people playing Gaelic sports.

7.1.5.11 Another barrier affecting access to the park for the local Protestant communities is that the most direct entrance is via Botanic Avenue and the College Park footpath. This route requires the pedestrian to negotiate a difficult junction at College Park and a University car-park barrier further on. Significantly too, the visual signals are that this space, from College Park to Botanic Gardens, belongs to the University and is not a public thoroughfare.
7.1.5.12 A number of issues emerge from this site analysis.

- Firstly, it is important to build on the development of Botanic Gardens Park as a shared space, particularly for local neighbouring communities. Shaftesbury Square (adjacent to Donegall Pass, Sandy Row) is less than 700 metres from Botanic Park, as is the lower Ormeau area and the Stranmillis College area. For some of these communities the perceived distance is considerably more. In this relation key access points need to be improved. Improving the public space along College Park footpath could enhance the overall access route and entrance to the park from Botanic Avenue. This would tie-in with some recent proposals being considered by the South Belfast Partnership Board.
which seek to promote the Botanic corridor, from Shaftesbury Square to Botanic Gardens, as a shared, multicultural space.

- Secondly, two key institutions occupy part of the park complex: Queen's University and the Ulster Museum. Both have a civic responsibility to contribute to the development of the park as a shared space. This may require a more proactive and creative approach to the development and management of activities involving the local communities identified above.

- Thirdly, the ‘chill factor’ for the local Protestant\Unionist communities needs to be addressed. Planning and designing shared events for local communities will continue to help break down negative perceptions, but other park management initiatives need to be considered. As the Comedia report noted, we should "not take it for granted that interaction will happen by chance. If we want it we must work for it. At the same time though, we need programming with a light touch building on shared interests, common curiosities and spaces to help people bridge the gap without forcing outcomes." (Comedia, 2007, p30)

**Castle Court**

**7.1.5.13** Castle Court is presently the main indoor shopping centre in Belfast's central area. Built in the late 1980s it was hailed as a major development that signalled a new confidence in the city and the start of the process of regenerating and revitalising the city centre. Its postmodern façade to Royal Avenue was purposively designed to communicate Belfast's embrace of contemporary urban living. This, alongside the arrival of new national and international retail chains with their distinctive logos communicated a degree of optimism during the ongoing 'Troubles'.

**7.1.5.14** In most people's view, the city centre is perceived as a 'shared' space, or at least a 'neutral' space that both sides of the community feel comfortable using. The main entrance to Castle Court in Royal Avenue effectively allows the shared shopping street
to extend into the shopping centre. And then, within the shopping centre there are no signs or activities that undermine that neutrality.

7.1.5.15 However, apart from the car park entrances, there are two other rear pedestrian entrances: one connects to Gresham Street, Winetavern Street and Smithfield Square, and the other to Chapel Lane, Berry Street and Bank Street. These, in turn, connect into the geography of the areas to the rear, north, west and south of the shopping centre. Although there is no evidence that the rear entrances are exclusively used by any one community, it can be assumed that the Catholic West Belfast community largely use the Chapel Lane entrance. This connects directly to Castle Street, which might be regarded as an extension of the Falls Road radial route. Furthermore, the bus stops for West Belfast are located on Castle Street and Queen Street. And as importantly, the terminus for the West Belfast ‘black taxis’ is situated between Francis Street and Castle Street.

7.1.5.16 It would seem, from a visual site appraisal, that the area around the southside of the Shopping Centre is probably perceived to be a Catholic\Nationalist ‘comfort zone’. This is confirmed by a number of indicators including street traders selling Celtic regalia and Catholic religious shops. Irish language signage for Kelly’s Cellars effectively extends this zone into Bank Street.

7.1.5.17 The entrance to Gresham Street connects through to North Street and to the Shankill area and north Belfast. Bus stops for the Shankill routes are located on North Street as is the terminus for the Shankill ‘black taxis’. There is, however, little evidence that upper North Street and the area around the north side of Castle Court is perceived as overwhelmingly Protestant. Rather, this part of the city centre has become rundown and is characterised in part, by vacant and derelict properties. Given the broader changes to the demography of North Belfast, including the Greater Shankill, it might be fair to speculate that the declining Protestant population has had an impact on this part of the city centre.

7.1.5.18 It is also important to note, that on a more general level, pedestrian access to Castle Court and indeed the wider city centre, is impeded by the major road barriers at Millfield (the inner box) and the Westlink.
7.1.5.19 Two main issues emerge from this analysis:

- Firstly, the site that is Castle Court has a front face and two back faces. The front face appears to work well with the theme of shared space. It has a common entrance for everyone and connects into the main retail spine of the city centre. Proposals for this northern part of the city centre offer a counterbalance to the new Victoria Square, which may have the effect of pulling retail activity eastwards. The implications of all of this needs to be considered in the context of promoting shared spaces.
Secondly, the development of the areas around the north and south side of the shopping centre need further consideration. The analysis above suggests that the south side is not shared and there is some ambiguity about the north side. Any further development of these areas needs to factor in an analysis of the connections to the wider geography of North and West Belfast and should also consider whether relatively well-defined ethno-religious space can be accommodated in the city centre.
7.2 Analysis

7.2.1 Strategic connectivity

7.2.1.1 Bently et al. (2003), note that:

‘only places which are accessible to people can offer them choice. The extent to which an environment allows people a choice of access through it, from place to place, is therefore a key measure of its responsiveness. We have called this quality permeability’ (p12).

7.2.1.2 As some of the participants in this research have suggested, Belfast lacks permeability. This, in part, is the legacy of a spatial framework that connects the city largely on the basis of radial, sometimes fractured, routes, but it is also partly due to the territorialisation of much of the city and the consequential psychological barriers that are factored into people’s mental maps. From an urban design point of view, therefore, permeability is the first focus in an analysis of a city’s structure. In Belfast, as in any other city, the pedestrian and vehicle circulation system affect where people can go and the choices they can make.

7.2.1.3 This raises two important points in relation to the potential development of shared spaces in the city. Firstly, what connections need to be enhanced, and in some cases developed, and secondly, what further role can these connections have, given that they are public spaces in themselves.

7.2.1.4 A number of the participants in this research prioritized this need for a more strategic understanding of the city. More specifically, they suggested the need to examine the overall structure of the city in terms of the provision of key public spaces, including parks. Such an assessment would of course include the main ‘path network’ (road and pedestrian paths) in the city and its links between these key spaces. The purpose of this would be to get a better understanding of the geography of the existing configuration. In turn, this would allow further analysis of those spaces to determine the degree to which they are shared or not. In addition, the assessment would examine how well these spaces are connected to each other and to surrounding residential areas.

7.2.1.5 An analysis of this kind of the wider city will no doubt identify limited shared spaces outside of the central area. The challenge therefore is to devise an integrated strategy
that aims to distinguish both existing spaces, such as parks, that have the potential to be more shared, as well as opportunity sites for the further development of shared spaces. At a city-wide level, a number of the arterial routes and perhaps some cross-city routes, have the potential to become the key ‘neutral’ connectors that link residential areas with key public, possibly shared nodes across the city. The development of this key ‘path structure’ is essential if the city is to become more accessible and connected. Of course, this in turn raises issues about how these routes can and should be developed. At a strategic level, we need to address the areas that fracture and disrupt those connections.

7.2.1.6 Parts of the path network, and perhaps some of the arterial routes in particular, can also serve another complementary function. As noted above, streets and paths are also public spaces; spaces of social interaction. In Belfast, it is worth exploring the possibility of creating service centres or nodes within the network; places that offer shared facilities. The planning and design of these nodes would encourage mixed use environments with good pedestrian space and frontages that are active and interactive, particularly at ground floor level. And, where possible, new offices, shops and leisure facilities should be located in these nodes to facilitate and encourage sharing. An important purpose here is to draw people out of their ‘enclaves’.

7.2.1.7 This builds on the experience cited earlier by Sennett, that social interaction in a city, particularly interaction between place based communities, needs to be facilitated, where possible, on the edges of community areas. Demos also refer to this as enhancing the border zones (Demos, 2007, 29).
7.2.1.8 During the period of the ‘Troubles’, many communities retreated into their territories and attempted, where possible, to develop services to address their specific area based needs. While understandable in the context of creating safer, self-protecting communities, arguably, this phenomenon has had the effect of reinforcing territoriality and what Sennett calls ‘isolation’. More than this, it has encouraged an expensive duplication of services in many instances. In the context of a drive to create more sustainable communities within Belfast, it is important that planning, in its broadest sense, avoids where possible, reinforcing sectarian territory through locating and facilitating local services, including commercial services, in the geographical heart of ‘exclusive’ territories.

7.2.2 Connectivity in the inner city

7.2.2.1 A number of contributors have pointed out that the inner city is poorly connected to the city centre. In part, this is due to sectarian geography and the impact this has on patterns of movement throughout the city. But as well as this, the restructuring of the inner city over the last 30 years, including the development of new road infrastructure, has disconnected much of inner and middle city residential areas from the city centre. Inner North and West Belfast in particular, are separated from the city centre by road and junction barriers.

7.2.2.2 In many ways, this helps to reinforce their real and psychological detachment from that part of the city which has seen the development of shared spaces and activities over the last decade. Of course, this relates mainly to pedestrian movement, but it is not simply a one-way relationship. Rather, the physical severance presented by the road infrastructure also hinders natural movement from the city centre into the spaces of inner North and West Belfast. And again, this reinforces isolation and detachment. This is not the case in South Belfast, where pedestrian movement from the city centre to Botanic Gardens, Shaftesbury Square, and the Queen’s complex is a relatively comfortable experience.
7.2.3 Connectivity and Public Transport

7.2.3.1 A number of the contributors to this research raised the issue of public transport. Most suggested that improved connectivity in the city was highly dependent on a better public transport system. Arguably, this is particularly relevant to many of those communities in Belfast who are isolated from existing shared spaces and who are dependent on various forms of public transport, including taxis, for travel outside of their local area. While in overall terms, 44% of households in Belfast don’t have access to a car, this figure increases significantly in both Protestant\Unionist and Catholic\Nationalist working class areas. In the Crumlin ward, for example, 72% do not have access to a car, in Shankill the figure is 73%, and in Ardoyne 66%. (NISRA: Census Data)

7.2.3.2 Considered at one level therefore, the issue is about improving the system for those communities who need public transport the most. But, what does this mean in real terms? A more accessible system of public transport can translate as more frequent services from the right places to the right spaces, but accessible can also mean affordable. One contributor to the research noted that the current public transport system in the city was effectively shaped by the ‘Troubles’ in all its manifestations. This is evident in the design of many of the bus routes and in the way people make choices about transport alternatives.

7.2.3.3 The implication of all of this is that a new system needs to be designed to address the ongoing transforming needs of the ‘post-conflict’ city. Of course, and as noted before, this is only one dimension of a wider problem that needs to be addressed in a collaborative and integrated way.

7.2.3.4 The development of new, largely private residential complexes over the last 10 years, is in part a response to the strategic drive to create a more compact city that has a vibrant residential core. Planning policy and practice has effectively facilitated the market in delivering significant new developments, particularly in Laganside and on the south side of the city centre, but also now in parts of inner North and West Belfast. In addition, new apartment and townhouse developments pepper many of the long standing suburbs of the city. Over the last 8 years, the Planning Service has processed around 300 applications for new apartment and townhouse developments in the Belfast City Council area. In the context of the development of the central area of the city, this ongoing
process is very significant and probably is as significant to the residential patterning of the city as redevelopment was 30 years ago.

7.2.3.5 There is little doubt that many of these new developments have brought new life and vitality into the spaces in the centre of the city. This developing downtown population will help support the range of activities in areas such as the commercial city centre, Cathedral Quarter, Laganside and the ‘golden mile’. However, growing evidence suggests that the people occupying the new apartments are largely young, single or couples. Also by implication, the majority are relatively affluent. So what are the broader implications of this phenomenon for the development of shared spaces in the city, particularly the central area of the city?

7.2.3.6 Firstly, anecdotal evidence suggests that the new residents do not necessarily seek community in the traditional place-based sense. Rather, they seem to enjoy the anonymity afforded by the new living opportunities, which in turn, frees them up to seek out and develop their own communities of interest. Anecdotal evidence would also suggest that these new residential environments offer an escape from what they might regard as the rather insular and sometimes intolerant nature of traditional community in Belfast. It is also worth noting that some initial research by QUB also indicates that new migrants, and ethnic minority groups more generally, are a significant presence in these developments.

7.2.3.7 Secondly, many of the new and developing spaces in the centre support the social, economic and cultural needs of the new residents. And arguably too, the design and aesthetics of these spaces also resonate with their psychological preferences for a postmodern, playful landscape. This was certainly evident in the QUB study on the aesthetics and design of Laganside (see p. 41). However, the research also suggested that while some people from traditional community areas, particularly young people, enjoyed the new spaces, there was also evidence that the design and indeed the activities located there, excluded others. The latter refers largely to traditional working class communities from both sides of ‘the divide’. It is important therefore, that issues relating to what Montgomery calls ‘psychological access’, are addressed in the design and reshaping of shared spaces (Montgomery, 2006).
7.2.3.8 Thirdly, and this connects to the last point, there is a danger that many of the new and developing spaces in the centre of the city are being defined by commercial interest. The Comedia report referred to earlier, notes the view that ‘the public realm is becoming so penetrated and co-opted by commercial interests that the public no longer behave as citizens of a common entity but as atomised consumers.’ (p30). It is important therefore, that shared space in the city centre is not always defined by the potential for shared consumption, but rather that genuinely civic spaces are developed for everyone to enjoy.
8 Urban Design

8.1 Findings

8.1.1 Strategic Urban Design

8.1.1.1 There was a common feeling that although Belfast had plenty of strategic and local planning documents (including dBMAP’s Urban Design and Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation Technical Supplements, 2004), it needed a strategic approach to the development of a public space hierarchy which linked spaces together via some kind of accessible linear spatial network. A historical explanation for this is the fact that most large parks were legacies, so their locations were accidental. Now, however, is a good time to evolve a functional linked hierarchy of public spaces, as the City Council has initiated using the CABE classification of City, District, Neighbourhood and Country Parks.

8.1.1.2 This relates closely to the ‘centre to edge’ network and ‘green inner ring’ of public space advocated by the Urban Task Force (1999), which is particularly relevant in a city like Belfast, where, if one particular space is perceived as unwelcoming, clear signage and access to another park and a wider network is beneficial. New York is a good model with its extensive cycle network and special ‘cycle day’ events – which is now being taken up by the ‘Sustrans’ system linking Carrickfergus, Belfast and Lisburn and will be developed under the Connswater Community and other Greenway projects.

8.1.1.3 This relates to the wider question of transport accessibility in Belfast where there was much criticism about car-domination and parking fee ‘rip-offs’. (Free public transport for under-18s to existing shared spaces like the Odyssey Centre was frequently recommended). A more specific point here was the number of ‘dead’ traffic junctions (like Shaftesbury Square) which otherwise have strong public space potential. Traffic prevents the integration of the series of spaces around the Cathedral and the Art College, although Botanic Gardens (minus some of its railings) offer the potential to integrate the Queen’s University complex with the new Ulster Museum.

8.1.1.4 Another element in strategic urban design is the consideration of arterial routes as the ‘hard alternative’ to a ‘greenway’ network – these are also key public spaces, with a
potential as ‘shared space’. Some people recommended a strict design policy for their street frontages, and the deliberate insertion of well-designed public buildings (as was the case in the past – e.g. Crumlin Road Courthouse) to emphasise their importance. The need for ‘animation’ of public spaces was a common theme – this generally exists already in the commercially-vibrant arterial routes.

8.1.2 Social Perceptions of Design

8.1.2.1 There were many, and obvious, criticisms of public spaces and buildings (see below) and some complaints about perceived architectural (and planning) arrogance and incompetence. Most people react against overt threatening symbolism in the built environment (some murals and graffiti, and painted kerbstones) but in addition there are more complex reactions to less overt cultural signifiers. For instance, what some people see as traditional statues around the City Hall, some others see as imperial statuary. Similarly, what some see as valid Irish language signage in places like Bank Square, others view this more negatively. In other words, such cultural symbols are read differently by each tradition. Generally, however, there were positive comments about the direction in which community relations were heading, and praise for particular efforts to ‘de-sectarianise’ murals in East Belfast and to turn the Twelfth into ‘Orangefest’ and St. Patrick’s Day into a inter-communal celebration in Customs House Square.

8.1.2.2 Indicators of local identity are generally considered as key aspects of urban design, but in Belfast it is difficult to separate the positive and negative manifestations of such identity. The City Council supports pictorial rather than language-based signage within its own buildings, so as to create a welcoming environment for all. There is some evidence of class-based (and even ageist) prejudice against the proliferation of young people who use the city centre, particularly places like Castle Court, on Saturday afternoons.

8.1.2.3 New developments have to take account of these factors – Carvill Developers on the Sirroco site have commissioned a detailed ethnographic study of the surrounding area, and the Titanic Quarter designers make constant reference to Belfast’s industrial heritage in their ‘urban villages’ plan. New apartment complexes are generally considered to be ‘neutral’ and secure places – particularly important for new ethnic
minority groups who have experienced some intimidation in traditional residential environments. The balance between negative and positive aspects of identity is well illustrated in the success of the Belfast bus tours – one of the ‘curiosity’ factors which have made Belfast the third-most popular overnight tourist stay centre in the UK.

8.1.2.4 Professionals with experience outside Northern Ireland tend to play down the significance of the ‘divided community’. The designer of Titanic Quarter has experience of urban design in many multicultural locations – Malaysia, the Middle East, American cities – and regards designing for different religious or racial groupings as standard urban design practice. His team have carried out extensive public consultation for the project as have the consultants for the Public Realm Master Plan, who have experience of working with many different ethnic and religious groupings in the Olympic Village project in East London. From an international perspective, it seems that strong local identity, whether positive or negative, is good for marketing purposes – hence the continuing emphasis on the Titanic Quarter, which was not a particularly successful, or socially-progressive, enterprise in its time.

8.1.3 Urban Design in the City Centre

8.1.3.1 Many of the interviewees and focus group participants made a definite distinction between the City Centre – generally regarded as ‘neutral’ space - and the inner/ outer City – generally regarded as ‘divided’. Exact definitions of the city centre differed – some experts thought that it should be extended to include the river as a highlight feature (as in Dublin or London) or to extend southwards to Shaftesbury Square; others feared the ‘eastwards drift’ of the commercial centre because of Laganside and Titanic Quarter and the consequent separation from West Belfast. A general theme was the need to get rid of as many barriers as possible – security fences, railings, intrusive traffic routes etc., so the re-definition of the river as a central feature rather than an ‘edge’ was regarded as a logical step in planning terms.

8.1.3.2 Belfast city centre, like all modern city centres, provides the ‘image of the city’ in marketing terms, so there was a marketing and promotional flavour to many of the interviewees’ arguments, and frequent praise for the Belfast City Council, and other agencies, for their work in this regard. There was strong criticism, however, about the
extent of public open space, as compared with comparator cities, and about the present quality of the older public realm, although recent Laganside initiatives in the north-east of the centre were praised.

8.1.3.3 Frequently mentioned examples of positive public spaces were, for example:

- **Donegall Square** (popular public events but needs more traffic exclusion and landscape integration with Donegall Place);

- **Lanyon Place** (popular public art, good modern architecture, high-quality paving materials, well-designed link through courts complex);

- **Cathedral Area** (good traditional cobbled paving, innovative modern architecture; increasing business vitality);

- **Customs House Square** (dominant public building – which needs stronger public function as art gallery/museum, high-quality paving, specialist recreation);

- **St Anne’s Square** (to be refurbished as Georgian Square similar to exchange Square in Glasgow); and

- **Merchant’s Hotel** (good use of new open space opposite to show off impressive façade of Victorian former bank building).

8.1.3.4 Frequently mentioned examples of negative public spaces were, for example:

- **Bank Square** ('backyard' location, poor surrounding architecture, lack of surveillance and lighting, perceived sectarian image);

- **Writers’ Square** (potentially good, when Cathedral projects completed, but currently underused, with negative night time image);

- **Blackstaff Square** (potentially good, but with maintenance and litter problems);
• **Lower North Street - Donegall Street** (underuse and redundancy – will benefit from Four Corners project when completed); and

• **Shaftesbury Square** (how to get rid of traffic. One-way loop under consideration).

8.1.3.5 Considered as a whole, Belfast city centre was thought by consultants to have the benefits of compactness, walkability, permeability – all related to an interesting, fine-grained street system. It also has great contextual landscape – good views of the Lough and mountains – which provide themes for urban design projects. It also has some recent success stories – the Gasworks site, for example, is now well-integrated into a local system of pedestrian and vehicular access from all neighbouring communities. Belfast’s main problems are its lack of major public spaces, as compared with other European cities, its low population density, leading to under-use of spaces, particularly at night – even Donegall Square is under-used, possibly because of traffic-route isolation, although it is the ‘heart of the city’.

8.1.3.6 Proposals to improve Belfast’s public realm start from the premise that in the absence of significant public space (e.g. St Stephen’s Green in Dublin or St James’s Park in London) there has to be a network of small spaces – ‘pocket parks’ as in Barcelona – linked by well-designed and well-paved walking streets. This is the theme of the Public Realm Master Plan which combines proposals for ‘streets and spaces’ with a series of ‘catalyst projects’ on strategic sites, with three main focal points in the north, centre and south of the city centre: Cathedral Gardens, the City Hall area, and the Bankmore Link area. The inspiration for the ‘streets’ policy is Copenhagen, with its organic, pedestrian street and squares system, and for the ‘catalyst projects’ is Manchester, with its recent urban landscape projects such as Piccadilly Gardens, Exchange Place and Cathedral Gardens. Other positive role model cities mentioned were Oslo, Stockholm, and Helsinki, which have high-density centres and outdoor cultures in spite of northern climates, and Barcelona for its intricate system of large and small parks close to the centre. Chicago was also praised for its vibrant city centre, its prestigious public art and its proliferation of small public parks.

8.1.3.7 The DSD’s ‘streets ahead’ programme is already implementing some of these ideas as part of its £85 million investment in the city centre’s streets and places, with Phase 1 upgrading the Anne Street area over the next two years. The key to this is the
replacement of the sub-standard hard landscaping with high-quality paving and soft landscaping. A management problem in relation to this is the refusal of Roads Service to adopt some of the new high-quality paved surfaces (for example in Custom House Square and environs) because of the danger of slippage for buses. Another problem, evident in previous hard-landscaping schemes, is lack of contractor expertise in the laying of high-quality street paving. This should not be a deterrent to the installation of high-quality materials everywhere, as experience from Europe, particularly from Dutch, Flemish and French cities, shows the long-term economic benefit of using traditional high-quality materials in the first place.

8.1.3.8 Some of the architects interviewed stressed the importance of street façade architecture as part of the urban space experience, and there was some criticism of the planning system's focus on individual sites to the exclusion of the wider public realm impact. The relationship between ground floor design and function to the pavement and public realm is crucial, hence the importance of open-fronted cafes and pubs (now becoming common thanks to the smoking ban), and the visibility of shop interiors from the pavement in the evening – still problematic because of the predominance of shutters. Street activity and ‘animation’ are important, and there was much praise for the Christmas market and the ‘big wheel’ in Donegall Square over the holiday period.
8.2 Analysis

8.2.1 Recurring reference has been made in the literature review to the notion of the ‘civis’ – the ‘citizen’ – and the relationship between him (not ‘her’ in Roman times) and what has been termed ‘civic space’. Another classical reference appears in the Demos Report (Lownsbourough and Beunderman, 2007) to the Commission for Racial Equality: ‘our vision should be the creation of a twenty-first century ‘polis’…(which) should certainly be more inclusive than the ancient Greek description…the idea of a common belonging to a citizenship that can embrace diversity but still engender solidarity’. The need to refer back to classical societies (slave-owning, sexist and violent as they were) to find a reference point for today’s aspirations suggests a dearth of contemporary models and a rose-tinted perception of the past. Nevertheless, this perspective is common in urban design analysis, and the terms are useful in their conventionally-understood definitions. The analysis (below) seeks to identify the positive aspects of the civic space that we aspire to and the political structures that will support them.

8.2.2 Definitions of public space are considered above, and can include innovative, if rather nebulous, concepts such as ‘virtual space’, ‘in-between space’ and ‘exchange space’ as suggested in the Demos Report (above, 2007). However, with regard to the topic of urban design it is still necessary to focus on physical urban spaces and the linkages between them, notwithstanding the criticism that ‘whenever policymakers, designers and architects remain focused on ‘high-spec, high-design’ places this will come at the cost of failing to identify…the alternative opportunities’ (above, p.36). Policymakers have a wider responsibility, but designers and architects have to focus on design and quality, particularly in a situation, as in Belfast, where there is well-justified criticism (see above) of these aspects of the local built environment. This section focuses on these issues.
8.2.3 Strategic Urban Design

8.2.3.1 At the strategic level, there is a demand for a city-wide approach which develops the BMAP urban design and open space strategies and identifies and promotes a linked network of public spaces from the 'edge to the centre', linking also with the peripheral green belt on the outside and the water regimes provided by the river and the Lough. Reference to the Urban Task Force (1999) model suggests a hierarchical system, moving outwards from the civic spaces at the centre towards local pocket parks, neighbourhood parks and sports centres, district parks and amenity areas via protected green corridors which utilise linear features such as watercourses, disused railway lines etc. Most of these elements are already in place in Belfast – the physical hierarchy of parks and open spaces, some of the greenways and pedestrian/cycle routes, and the BMAP Urban Design and DSD Public Realm plans for the city – but they need coordination, integration and implementation.

8.2.3.2 As regards the wider issues of urban connectivity and the arterial routes, these are essentially 'exchange spaces' and 'service spaces' rather than more formal 'activity spaces', so their urban design will reflect more focussed functions. The need for better-quality frontage design is obvious but the key design problem here is the reconciliation of the traffic route function with the civic space function. The evolution of even a major arterial route such as Tottenham Court Road from a multi-lane urban motorway as envisaged in the Buchanan Report to a currently successful and socially integrative series of public spaces (Marshall, 2005) owes much to a significant change of perception as to the social role of arterial routes, as well as to appropriate urban design initiatives such as pavement widening and re-surfacing, enhanced street-crossing facilities and designed 'places' at street indentations and intersections. Most arterial routes have a natural social vibrancy and in the case of Belfast a potential for 'shared space' – this can be facilitated and enhanced by sensitive and sensible urban design.
8.2.4 Social Perceptions of Design

8.2.4.1 As regards social perceptions of design, it is important to understand both the significant limitations and the positive contributions of urban design to the realisation of good public space. As regards the former, the Demos Report (2007) suggests an approach which ‘emphasises human creativity and persistence in using and improving the most unlikely of spaces for their own everyday needs, and questions the prerogative of architects and planners to shape the public realm’ (p.8). This reflects a common criticism of the built environment professionals, well-ventilated in the seminar discussions and interviews (above). It is an over-simplified critique, nevertheless, as demonstrated by the paucity of alternative public spaces suggested by the authors: ‘community garage sales that happen even in the most car-dominated suburbs, the temporary appropriation of vacant land for barbeques and other social activities, and the subaltern practices of street vendors and political protest in public’. Small-scale, accidental and innovative public space will always make a contribution, but for the significant civic spaces there is an obvious need for good urban design – with political will, inclusive processes, and well-informed urban designers.

8.2.4.2 ‘Sense of identity’ and ‘sense of place’ are generally regarded as positive features in successful local environments. Belfast has no shortage of these qualities in its local residential environments, but in many cases it is the negative rather than the positive aspects of identity that predominate and, as a consequence, exclude. International consultants (above) downplay the significance, and indeed the uniqueness, of the malign aspects of Belfast's conflicting identities, and regard designing for multicultural inclusivity as a standard feature of urban design practice. There may be some wishful thinking, or promotional colour-blindness, in this argument, but this is understandable in a professional activity that is, by definition, optimistic in outlook. There is no point in designing for failure - social, political or environmental - so if investment is committed, designers tend to take a positive interpretation of whatever is on offer.
8.2.4.3 On the question of identity, Bentley and Butina Watson’s (2007) review of world cities suggests that the most successful approaches to contested spaces were permeable access patterns offering plenty of alternative routes, strong natural landscaping and sensitive public art – of which humorous art, or art with multi-identity references, were most likely to be acceptable to all sides.

8.2.4.4 Applying these lessons to Belfast, there is already evidence of these approaches being implemented: Laganside’s ‘big fish’ and ‘sheep’ sculptures have the benefit of humour, there is ample natural landscaping and new tree planting generally, and recent recognition of public figures – such as George Best and Van Morrison – has cross-community acceptance and approval. It is interesting that in Belgium, for example, which also has serious cultural and language divisions, the ubiquitous public sculptures which are essential parts of high-quality pedestrian environments tend to celebrate ‘the common man’ – the butchers, bakers, brewers and students of the community – rather than the political and military figures of the past. Here the positive approaches to the fostering of language and culture are necessary, albeit fraught with difficulty, and the depiction of historical events rather than paramilitary propaganda on wall murals is obviously beneficial.

8.2.5 Urban Design in the City Centre

8.2.5.1 As regards urban design in the city centre, Belfast, like all European cities, is now very much in the place marketing business and, ironically, its recent troubles and their physical manifestations provide a curiosity value that is being tentatively marketed with some success. There is no doubt that the city centre is generally regarded as ‘neutral space’, albeit with some perceived sectarian spaces. It is crucial that these – like the Bank Square/Berry Street area for example – are designed carefully in the emerging public realm programme: architectural interest around the edge of Bank Square is necessary and should acknowledge both Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist associations with this area. Some additional, non political statues in Donegall Square could celebrate Belfast’s sportspeople, industrialists, labour and literary figures in a way that would be acceptable to everyone.

8.2.5.2 The definition of the city centre is important, and there is merit in the idea that it should include both banks of the river. This obviously depends on the density of future
populations in Titanic Quarter, the Sirroco site and others, but, at present, the east bank of the river lacks animation. This could include the provision of good access to the river from these developments; the maintenance of the existing riverside walkways as popular and neutral public spaces; and the option of retailing and other commercial functions along the river. Having rescued the river from its pre-Laganside environmental squalor, it is now important to develop its potential for the city centre – as a minimum, some regulation to retain small-scale development close to the river, and to retain visual and functional permeability on both sides of it, should be a planning priority.

8.2.5.3 The achievement of shared space demands the removal of barriers – physical as well as mental – and the environmental benefits of, for example, the removal of the sangers and security measures around the Law Courts, are evident in what is now a very attractive approach to the Waterfront Hall. The removal of barriers generally is necessary – the City Hall railings are prime examples, if Belfast’s principal civic space is to achieve its full potential. Barriers to public access to the new Victoria Square should be reduced to a minimum, and twenty-four hour permeability of this very large urban quarter is essential. By the same token, public access restrictions to privatised space generally should be discouraged – this applies to new apartment block design as well as commercial property, although it is recognised that some communal garden space may occasionally be necessary.

8.2.5.4 The general design strategy for the city centre, however, must recognise Belfast’s deficiency in relation to significant civic space. Apart from Donegall Square, where the space is compromised by barriers, traffic routes and the central position of the City Hall, (fine building though it is), the city lacks a dominant, image – defining civic space. It is essential, therefore, that it develops the kind of high-quality network of pedestrian streets and places which characterise Dutch and Flemish towns, with their long tradition of high-density living and high-quality urban townscapes. The Public Realm study correctly diagnoses this, and identifies a range of new, linked public spaces which will emerge with the completion of the Cathedral Area proposals and the exploitation of the available Bankmore area spaces. More important, however, is the effective completion of the street paving and landscaping schemes now initiated in the Anne St area, and their extension over the entire city centre space. The existing pedestrianisation programme (very modest by the standards of most comparable European cities) needs to be extended and, allied to this, the restraints imposed by Roads Service standards, by sub-
standard workmanship and by confused management responsibilities have to be removed.

8.2.5.5 While some voices, particularly those of consultants, were positive about many recent city developments, other opinions, including those from the development sector, were critical. The argument here was that the city had very little quality public realm to compare with similar sized counterparts in continental Europe. Initiatives like the Custom House Square were not well connected to their surroundings, and had no obvious rationale or animation. The lack of significant sized parks and squares put a premium on less formal and ordered open spaces, capable of flexible use and safe congregation, and these were neither plentiful in supply nor coherent in linkage.

8.2.5.6 Belfast has emerged from a difficult period, when territoriality and the colonisation of urban space was understandable. There is clear evidence (above) that the city centre is leading the way in the evolution of public attitudes away from this and towards the effective sharing of space, and the positive benefits for city life, image and promotion that follows on from this. If limited ambition and cautious regulation were at all understandable in the past, now is the time to remove the barriers, build on the city’s potential and take risks.
9 Governance and Intervention

9.1 Findings

9.1.1 Planning, related professions and skills

9.1.1.1 Many of the participants suggested that most public sector agencies did not proactively promote shared spaces and opportunities for cross-community trust building. In other words, the ambition to create an open and connected city had been missed either in policy and planning formulation, or its execution. This relates to the wider question about skills and knowledge deficits among public sector professionals in addressing the issue of the divided city.

9.1.1.2 Many participants acknowledged the positive value of public space in the city and particularly more shared space for communities, but suggested it needed to be embedded in the operations of all public sector agencies, and not just the planning system. Various agencies needed to intervene and work together to improve the public realm. One interviewee valued the importance of the public realm, given the emergent popularity of Belfast as a tourist destination.

9.1.1.3 Some of the architects interviewed made the point that Belfast had failed to fully involve the private sector, particularly the development industry, in the achievement of good public realm.

9.1.1.4 Both interviewees and focus group participants mentioned the important role planning could – and should – have in encouraging the creation of shared space. Senior City Council representatives called for a more positive and proactive form of socio-spatial development in the city, one that was strategically aware, but locally focused. While supporting this view, a senior planner referred to the transfer of proactive planning activities to the Department of Social Development with the reorganisation of public service delivery in 1999. Interestingly, however, the planner did rhetorically ask how the current planning system could help create more shared space in the city and suggested that there was the need to ensure better use of the planning system to deliver developer contributions. This could be achieved via planning conditions and planning gain.
9.1.2 Governance and Leadership

9.1.2.1 In addressing governance in the city, contributors noted particularly that current arrangements were somewhat complex, and needed refinement. Separate responsibility issues were mentioned on occasions – there had been little attempt to collaborate and share responsibility in creating shared public space. Many organisations, including the Council, stay very much within their area of responsibility. There is little attempt to collaborate around common urban challenges and share responsibility in implementing strategies to tackle them.

9.1.2.2 There was unanimous support for a more joined-up approach to the development and management of open spaces – particular reference was made to dBMAP and Belfast City Council’s Open Space strategy. A senior planner questioned the synergy between the two documents and suggested the need for better collaboration. One city official spoke of a severe fragmentation problem that had a negative effect on the development of the city, a point echoed by other interviewees. The need for an overarching strategic framework was imperative to create a clear vision that provided focus, direction and ambition, and avoided duplication.

9.1.2.3 The formative involvement of developers and communities in the production of shared space was emphasised by many of the participants in the research. Both sectors needed to be active agents – with other public sector bodies – in creating shared public space. Community ownership was important to achieve civic pride and respect.

9.1.2.4 Architects and developers raised the issue of community infrastructure and community capacity for participation and articulation of views. From the developers’ perspective, it was better if there was one main point of contact. However, the capabilities within communities could vary substantially across the city. One developer indicated that it was easier to achieve this in Catholic\Nationalist areas where the community was normally better organised.

9.1.2.5 A recurring issue was an apparent lack of leadership in the city, criticised at – and by – many levels – government, civic and community. There seemed to be a strong desire from participants for transformative leadership in the city. One participant suggested that people wanted to see good leaders who were connected to disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, the fragmented governance of the city, as mentioned above, affects the
potential for strong leadership and allowed separate agencies to sustain the ‘silhouette’ mentality that prevailed during the period of Direct Rule.

9.1.3 Management of spaces

9.1.3.1 The key points emerging around this sub-theme were: safety; community involvement; fragmented governance and piecemeal planning; intervention and coordination of management approaches; and connectedness of the urban public realm, public spaces and parks. Responses indicated that there was no current arrangement dedicated to public space management in a holistic fashion. More typically, public spaces were managed within much larger units that broke down responsibilities across different departments/functions. By separating lines of responsibility, collaborative governance became ever more essential. As mentioned elsewhere, incentive (and reward) mechanisms were necessary to create and sustain partnership arrangements for managing shared space. A more strategic approach that looked at the connections between issues and one that champion a partnership approach was emphasised by an environmental improvement agency.

9.1.3.2 A City Council official acknowledged that Belfast City Council had also inherited a parks culture that needed to change, and indeed was changing. This culture was founded on the Parks department providing what might be called horticultural exhibitions. However, the City Council were now seeing parks as spaces for various uses. The City Council’s strategy ‘Your City, Your Space’ had three themes: healthier places; safer spaces; and our heritage – all linked together by the theme of people and the community.
9.2 Analysis

9.2.1 Planning, related professions and skills

9.2.1.1 In light of the findings, it is evident that the current governance arrangements are struggling to adequately deal with the legacy of the ‘Troubles’, let alone facilitate sharing and interaction in public space. Particularly in planning, the reality of a divided city was only recently conceded in the planning system. Previously, most plans were in denial about the full impact of segregation and sectarian geography. But, even now, the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP) has been limited in what it has to say about division, territory, identity and public space in the city.

9.2.1.2 The public image of the city may appear as one of transformation in the current ‘post-conflict’ era, but deep segregation in many areas of the city contributes to fear of, and/or hostility to, the ‘other side’. Moreover, continuing to develop urban policies and strategies, e.g. on public space, without acknowledging the stark urban ethnoscape in Belfast may simply reproduce past failures. Successful approaches acknowledge the difficulties and challenges, but work within a visionary mindset, pushing the boundaries of any dialogue to reconceptualise a new understanding of how a win-win outcome may be achieved, instead of the traditional win-lose, two-community syndrome that currently prevails. Thus, there is a need to mainstream concepts of sharing and interaction into organisational terms of reference, policies and practices. With this comes the need to emphasise personal, sectoral and organisational learning that will allow for reflection and improvement of future policies. To complement all of this, sufficient informative training of public sector staff who draft legislation, apply policies and implement strategies dealing with the conceptual and pragmatic issues of contested space, sharing and integration, is crucial.

9.2.1.3 The above discussion relates to the next point of debate — skills for professionals. Some participants pointed responsibility on planners and architects to come up with a ‘new architecture’ for Belfast — one that helps facilitates sharing in the city. But alongside this, a number of contributors criticised city professionals, suggesting that they did not have appropriate skills to deal with the urban complexities in contested Belfast. One example put forward was that two major urban plans mentioned territoriality, yet never questioned
the matter nor discussed alternative options — showing a lack of ambition to challenge the status quo.

9.2.1.4 As mentioned earlier in the report, planning, or at least planning legislation, has at its disposal an existing array of underused, statutory based facilities that could be employed proactively to help deliver a programme of shared and enhanced spaces. The point was raised by most interviewees that planning is critical to: (1) guide concepts proposed by developers (and government agencies) via constructive and extensive pre-application discussions to ensure that good quality design and socio-spatial analysis have been appraised; and (2) enforce developments to have reference to shared public spaces. Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that the way planning permission is given is site focused. Very little is said about the contribution to the public realm, particularly the ground floor use and relationship to pavement, windows, treatments etc. In his view, the Planning Service should require the architects to prepare an analysis of how a new building contributes to the public realm.

9.2.1.5 A number of contributors also argued that Belfast had missed out on significant ‘planning gain’ from developers. The planning system must achieve both implementation and management/maintenance agreements for public space with developers. Attracting private investment into public spaces should be encouraged. There is an understanding by developers of their potential contribution, but there needs to be a leap from understanding to delivery. Furthermore, planning gain should be used more extensively to support the development of public spaces/open spaces as shared spaces. A good illustration of how the planning process can secure broader social gains is evident in the announcement of planning approval for Titanic Quarter Phase II. It seems that affordable housing and an element of social housing will be a condition of the approval.

9.2.1.6 The following are suggestions for some appropriate skills required for those involved in the design and delivery of shared space:

- Mediation of conflict – turn adversity and crises into opportunity;
- Development of informal and formal networks of collaboration;
- Leadership that can champion causes and maintain vision and goals;
- Transformative thinking and risk-taking; and
- Confidence and trust building.
9.2.2 Governance and Leadership

9.2.2.1 In a post-conflict environment, Belfast faces significant transformation. Part of this transformation concerns good governance and strong city leadership. As Sweeting (2002, 3) remarks: ‘local political leadership has moved on from the era when it involved heading a local political party, with the aim of controlling a local council which produced local services. Leadership in local government is now a more expansive activity, requiring leaders to interact with other local stakeholders…to address matters of local concern, whether or not they are directly within the realm of local government’s service responsibilities’. All of this, therefore, calls for a collaborative working environment in which co-operation, openness, honesty and trust are highly valued and are strongly underpinned by leadership which has a transformative vision at its core.

9.2.2.2 Successful delivery will be established by good inter-agency working. Thus, progress on joint planning and proactive collaboration has been uneven, if not limited, in grappling with the creation and management of shared spaces in the city. The ethics of a city is to serve people, and not just the economy. This principle should be upheld if the city is to become a safe and democratic place to live. The power of planning can be utilised to help support such democratisation.

9.2.2.3 Many of the problems associated with public spaces e.g. fear, anti-social behaviour, territoriality, lack of facilities, require a multidisciplinary approach that necessitates intra-agency collaboration. Good collaborative partnerships can work well at different levels. Building partnerships for change between civil society, the State, and the market, with emphasis on participatory management and increased citizen involvement is imperative for success. A good example might be to draw together a governing body with practical community experience and research expertise. Every partner should view themselves as agents of change — as agents of integration. However, partnerships would always be dismissed as ‘talking shops’ if they failed to demonstrate effective delivery. In this view, success depended on not just the ‘horizontal’ efficiency of a coherent well-organised partnership, but also the ‘vertical’ efficiency of good delivery on the ground. All partnership structures should continually ask themselves what made them special, what was their added value. Instead of becoming institutionalised, they should remain nimble and reflexive, continually evolving to adapt to changing circumstance.
9.2.4 The quality of city infrastructure is dependent on efficient and strong governance. The challenge for good governance is to remove barriers for collaboration, such as non-cooperative organisational targets and budgetary contributions that do not facilitate collaborative opportunities. It might be useful to consider funding incentives for collaboration.

9.2.5 Furthermore, there is unlikely to be a discernible shift in resources available to facilitate partnership arrangements. However, without adequate funding, sustained collaboration can be difficult. Relying on the goodwill of individuals or agencies is also difficult, given the array of commitments contemporary organisations have. The challenge therefore, is how to exploit the genuine benefits that a joined-up approach brings to design and delivery.

9.2.6 In planning the city, successful strategies will be those which make a break from the past and with tradition. Thinking radically, yet being mindful of what is feasible, may be appropriate in certain situations that demand a new way of approaching the issue of sharing and interaction in urban public space. In any location, it is important to place the current situation within a context of change.

9.2.7 One participant suggested there is a desire for integrated and shared activities, such as living, socialising etc. Nevertheless, there appeared to be a mismatch between the needs of the communities and policies which are assumed appropriate and relevant by public agencies. In other words, there appears to be a people – policy gap.

9.2.8 There was no specific mention of the social economy in Belfast. However, stronger links with the social economy could be beneficial for achieving greater success in creating shared public space, as many of these organisations have the potential for reducing prejudices and changing attitudes within neighbourhoods.

9.2.9 Adaptability and innovation are crucial for good governance – particularly for agencies and collaborative arrangements in the future. In addressing the challenge of change and developing policies relevant for the creation of shared space, urban agencies need to cope with uncertainty and change. This requires organisational learning, the fostering of
reflection-in-action, cooperative learning processes, involving multiple actors that seek to attain shared goals.

9.2.2.10 Important cultural changes are being encouraged as a result of using academics and consultants, brought into forums as change agents (all of the authors have been involved in such activities). In this way, practitioners and communities are able to develop their understanding of the changing context, identify strategic issues and initiate debates about the barriers to achieving a shared future and commonly agreed objectives. Such practices can have a dramatic impact on the ability to change perceptions and attitudes towards pertinent problems; it allows externals to challenge the status quo and help frame change within a more strategic perspective.

9.2.2.11 It is important to connect leadership with the related aspect of partnership working, as the crucial attributes for effective partnership strategies are vision and leadership. As is apparent, Belfast has plenty of policies and agencies, but lacks strong leadership. The question asked is: ‘who runs Belfast?’ The objective of having strong leadership and interagency action is necessary if the aim is to enhance sharing and interaction in public space.

9.2.2.12 Although lacking statutory powers, the Belfast City Council was commended for their achievement in ensuring the city centre is accessible and respected by all, and for their recent capacity for showing leadership. Belfast City Council will be an important facilitator in bringing about people-led change to the way we use space and manage spatial change. A reformed Council system, with an enhanced civic leadership role will, undoubtedly, benefit the Good Relations programme and the creation of a shared future. However, realisation of the former should not detract from the latter.

9.2.3 Management of spaces

9.2.3.1 A pertinent passage from Sandercock (2003, 86) is a reminder that ‘most societies today are demographically multicultural, and more are likely to become so in the foreseeable future… [and the central question is] how can we manage our co-existence in the shared spaces of the multicultural cities of the 21st Century. The practical question is what challenges does this present to citizens, to city governments, and to the city-building professions.’ This affirms that Belfast is not the only city grappling with such concepts as
co-existence and shared spaces. As Amin notes: ‘the city’s public spaces are not natural
servants of multicultural engagement’ (cited in Sandercock, 2003: 94). Thus, a
proactive approach is imperative.

9.2.3.2 There appears to be a paradigm shift in how officials view public parks, and to a certain
degree the wider public realm. Recognising public space as more than just aesthetically
pleasing and passive environments is the first step for enabling greater variety of uses
and better animated spaces that will attract people and encourage interaction.

9.2.3.3 One developer welcomed the involvement of local people in the early stages of any
development. In his view, communities had to realise that they were changing over time
and community representatives should keep up to date with developments happening
within their area, working positively with relevant public agencies and private developers.
But, arguably, the initiative has to come from those with power and wealth – such as
public agencies and developers.

9.2.3.4 Having a strong local infrastructure, with community participation is important.
Supportive and accessible community hubs are important for providing guidance and
support in tackling problems in public spaces and the encouragement of sharing in
spaces within neighbourhoods. It can be argued that given contemporary individualistic
lifestyles, kinship networks and community association membership are poor. However,
if community associations exist, they have a responsibility to approach and welcome
both existing and new residents in their area.

9.2.3.5 On the matter of residential proactiveness, one method of encouraging different
communities to collaborate is to tackle a common problem or issue that affects
everyone. Some issues that (cross-) community groups could first focus on are
environmental improvements, recycling and green issues, and community organic
gardens. Germain and Radice (2006, 121) use a similar example for the ethno-culturally
diverse Mile End district in Montreal. There a Citizens’ Committee was founded in 1982
that was initially preoccupied with physical problems in the neighbourhood. However, it
soon began to mobilise on social issues such as reclaiming land for much-needed parks.
Germain and Radice (2006, 121) note that ‘the committee tries to campaign in such a
way as to include (and preferably unite) all groups…Cosmopolitanism has thus become
a shared representation in the neighbourhood of Mile End, a vision that almost everyone
agrees with, because of the cosmopolitan label is a ‘fussy’ one that can be tailored to suit every resident.’ This illustrates that while recognising diversity and difference, using commonalities to transcend polarities can create meaningful partnerships.

9.2.3.6 One good example of strong local infrastructure promoting shared neighbourhoods in Belfast is the Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA), which ‘acts as a catalyst for change and development’ (BCDA, 2007). BCDA insists that collaborative action and teamwork are everyday features of its activities and are necessary for achieving success. The extract below is an exemplar of good practice.

‘BCDA ran a youth development project with ‘unclubbable’ young people, funded by PEACE I. Led by its youth worker, its simply involved talking to young people on the street, determining their needs and engaging them via the most amenable among the peer group. This model was replicated in 2006 to address anti-social behaviour in the Rosetta area, through a partnership of residents, police and BCDA, with delivery on the ground led by a local church worker. A 37 per cent drop in anti-social behaviour was achieved within months. Yet, a funding respect for a partnership with the policy to develop this work did not succeed.’ (Wilson, 2007, 30)

9.2.3.7 This illustration points to three main management issues: (1) attitudes of young people targeting resources; (2) collaborative action; and (3) securing financial support for achieving long-term success. The focus on young people and public space cannot be overstated, since our research indicated that there are concerns not only about how young people use public space, but also about the perceptions of this use. One participant mentioned how people sometimes saw parks as dangerous, frightening places, particularly at night. Largely, this relates to anti-social behaviour – youths hanging about drinking and taking drugs. It was also mentioned that the Police sometimes move young people away from the streets and into parks, and that way they are out of public view. Though this may not be widespread, it illustrates how a collaborative, more systematic approach may be more appropriate, rather than simply moving the problem to another area. A focus group participant stated that some young people use the internet to create sectarian tension, organise fights and arrange to meet in the parks. But this can also be disorganised and spontaneous. A local community representative from North Belfast also mentioned such behaviour, making the interesting point about how there are very few shared spaces for young people in North Belfast. In his view, communities at interfaces are still as fragmented and polarised as ever. Young
people, he suggested, only meet in areas that are contested; we need to create spaces where young people can be young people and enjoy joint and shared interests and activities.

9.2.3.8 Many contributors advocated organisation of programmes and events that had broad appeal, as an effective means of encouraging and managing better sharing and interaction in parks and public spaces. Concerts might encourage more interaction and de-sensitise certain spaces. Other arts-based events, e.g. in the cultural Cathedral Quarter and Custom House Square, might produce more cultural exchange. Another suggestion might be the ‘Screen on the Green’ concept that occurs in Washington DC, London and Paris. This is a popular event throughout the summer where movies are shown outdoors on a gigantic movie screen in urban parks. To draw diverse crowds, though, these events must appeal to all sections of the society. However, as mentioned earlier, some communities feel disconnected and unwelcome in nearby parks. Thus, innovative approaches are required to overcome such problems with accessibility and perceptions, which demands collaborative intervention and a long-term strategy.

9.2.3.9 Safety issues in public parks appeared to be paramount, and in addition to the above suggestions, some participants recommended that there should be consideration given to a better system of park management using rangers not only to patrol, but also to provide education and management services.
10 Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 From Contested to Shared Space

10.1.1 In a divided city, planning and regeneration should pose for itself the basic question: does a particular development or lack of development accentuate or ameliorate division and segregation? Thus, city planning and relevant regeneration agencies should undertake a regular ‘good relations’ audit of key public spaces, that would include the measurement of shared space in the city; its extent, its users; the quality of their engagement; identification of hindrances such as poor access, safety, etc.

10.1.2 ‘Space’ has to be understood at both a physical and mental level. For instance, people’s ‘mental maps’ of where they feel safe and welcome may be rooted in unjustified or exaggerated fears that need to be recognised by both sides of a divided community.

10.1.3 To allow for such engagement and exchange, there is a need to create safe spaces for candid but respectful dialogue across the divide. Among other initiatives, this involves the privileging of cross-community projects intent on such promotion over single-identity projects intent on amplifying difference. In the current language of the debate, it involves choosing a cosmopolitan approach of supporting and celebrating diversity within a democratic framework of common belonging, individual human rights, and respect for the rule of law, over a form of multiculturalism that emphasises the autonomy and separateness of group identity.

10.1.4 Shared space cannot be declared. It has to be won. This demands a strategic, proactive, partnership approach, rooted in an ambition to transform rather than manage the contested nature of the city, recognising that to airbrush out the awkward reality of sectarianism via glossy imaging or denial is only likely to entrench it further.

10.1.5 Extension of shared space in Belfast involves the creation of contrasts to the ‘ethnic norm’ via ‘pilots’ of alternatives. Such a strategy is best delivered through a systematic approach based on (a) incrementalism: that starts with securing the centre and waterfront for integrated living; moves out to tackle the symbols, flags, emblems, and other barriers on arterial routes that mark them as ethnic territory rather than the public right of peaceful way that they should be; and then follows through with the neighbourhoods adjoining the arterial routes. (b) principled opportunism: while it is generally unwise to seek to remove
walls etc in the most tense interface areas first, there may arise opportunities for action which should be taken to offer demonstration of what is both desirable and feasible. For instance, the wall dividing Alexandra Park in North Belfast is not considered by the police to offer substantial security. It could be gradually changed, first by putting in a ‘normal’ park fence with a through gate, later by its complete removal as inter-community negotiation allows.

10.1.6 A major dynamic in the city in the coming years involves the optimum use of brownfield sites. Since many of these are in Protestant\Unionist areas, given the demographic decline of that community, and their new use will potentially include housing, for which Catholic\Nationalists have a high demand, this spatial realignment holds potential conflict. While such disputes come to ground in particular sites, such micro spaces should not be considered in isolation from their larger hinterlands. The more squeezed and small the space under review, the more intensive the reactions to its changed land use. Instead, it is critical to examine contentious issues like housing in a wider geography — either the city as a whole or large city segments — and to allow each side to see mutual benefits: for instance, in Belfast there is both a high demand for new housing for Catholic\Nationalists, and a need to redress the decline in Protestant\Unionist communities and to undertake both tasks within an overall strategy designed to reassure mutual safety. These issues are particularly acute where communities feel hemmed in. For instance, this applies to the Catholic\Nationalist Short Strand in the East of the city. In the North and West of the city, given the demographics referred to earlier, this pattern is more apparent in the Protestant\Unionist community: examples include: Suffolk in West Belfast; Glenbryn in Ardoyne; the Grove/Tiger’s Bay bordered by Catholic\Nationalist New Lodge and Newington. A review of initiatives like the Community Empowerment Partnerships is needed to evaluate the best steps to enhance confidence and capacity in such vulnerable communities.

10.1.7 ‘Space’ is a living dynamic entity. Historic patterns of its ownership and use should not forever determine its current and future use. Thus, arguments for parades or marches that cross into the ‘other community’ should be based less on tradition and precedent and more on a negotiated consent that is respectful of changing demographics.

10.1.8 In similar vein, new sites will become available with the rationalisation of school plant in the city, providing an opportunity for some of these buildings to be converted for shared educational/cultural use. It may be easier to envisage this in places like Castle High in
Fortwilliam, rather than Mount Gilbert in the Greater Shankill. But, the opportunity calls for vision and proactive intervention. A much less ambitious approach would be to settle for school ‘reallocments’ that reflect shifting demographics. So, for instance, in North Belfast, the Girls’ Model, located now near an expanding Catholic area, could exchange sites with Our Lady of Mercy, located in the predominantly Protestant Ballysillan. Such moves would reflect the managerial rather than transformative approach to a divided city, in which one of the tribal markers is school uniform. So, for instance, a different approach to the former example would be for Our Lady of Mercy to be re-located to combine with St Gemma’s in the Oldpark, while its site on the Ballysillan could over time develop as a mixed adult education centre. In general, a more radical approach would seek to use the combined opportunity of school rationalisation and abolition of 11plus transfer to create new collaborative arrangements across the Controlled, Voluntary and Maintained educational sectors. An even more radical reflection of such a shift would be a Belfast ‘brand’ school uniform, a common one for all primary schools and a separate common one for all secondaries. Thereby, the school badge and blazer would no longer be a cue for sectarian identification and enmity. Again, as with other institutions, the school system needs to be challenged with the stark question: ‘what distinctive contribution can we make to foster a sense of common belonging and equity in this divided city?’

10.1.9 Public and private sector agencies involved in urban development need to be better mutually informed about their respective priorities, pressures and procedures. While there are city forums that bring leading figures within each sector together for mutual exchange — for instance, there is a public sector network for chief executives of some of the large public bodies, while the Chamber of Commerce and similar business organisations provide channels for the private sector developers and consultants — these sectoral forums, in turn, need to arrange a regular exchange, perhaps sponsored by the Royal Town Planning Institute, or the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors or the Civic Trust, or a network of all three.

10.1.10 Best practice in creating shared developments should be disseminated widely. For instance, Carvill have undertaken ethnographic studies of community living patterns in the vicinity of their proposed development around the old Sirocco works to optimise different access points for both sides of the community. This kind of front-loaded investment in drawing in community views at a formative stage in a development can make a useful contribution to the overall improvement needed in the process of community participation.
in city planning. Moreover, this example also points to the importance of the private and public sectors sharing best practice in this regard.

10.1.11 To facilitate inventive educational linkages and to open up the labour and housing markets in the city requires greater mobility and access, and, for this, public transport and cycle paths need to have a cross-radial as well as radial structure. Combined with design initiatives mentioned elsewhere to improve connectedness and walkability in the city, these transport improvements would progress greater integration.

10.1.12 As a long-standing feature of community development in Belfast, local community planning could play a more effective role in shaping neighbourhood and city than it does currently. But, two aspects need attention: (1) such plans lack statutory authority, have no obvious place in the nesting of area and regional planning, and accordingly, can be ignored in the regulation of land use; (2) even if they were granted more formal status, there is a risk that a series of separate local plans either deliberately or inadvertently foster tribal territoriality and thereby balkanise the city further. So, such local strategies need more formal authority, but, on condition that their community perspective is situated within an overall civic framework. The basic question that should inform them is: ‘how can our community become more connected into the wider city-region for mutual benefit?’ Not only to ensure more efficient scale and scope, and to correspond with the geography of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (dBMAP), but also to prevent any divide between what has been a growing Catholic\Nationalist city and its predominantly Protestant\Unionist suburbs and surroundings towns, it would be preferable to plan in a metropolitan framework.

10.1.13 New spaces in the city are emerging, some very large like the Titanic Quarter and Giant’s Park. It is important that an initiative like Titanic does not become a city within the city. While such areas can start afresh on sites that have little residential/territorial history and ‘baggage’, and create residence and social activities for those keen to mix across the sectarian divide, they may add to the social segmentation in the city. Such a scenario would accentuate the trend for the most segregated spaces to be mainly working class. Thus, it is critical that social/affordable housing is allocated space across the city in locales that optimise the prospect of building integrated communities. A good standard here is the concept of ‘sustainable community’, involving the creation of mixed use and accommodation of socially mixed inhabitants. Moreover, planned events provide an opportunity to open up parts of the city to groups and communities that are fearful or
anxious about using them. Initial investment in transporting people to public events has longer term benefits. Once people overcome initial fears, they are more likely to use shared spaces on a more regular basis. A recent Comedia report\(^2\) argued that ‘interaction will not happen by chance … we need programming with a light touch, building on shared interests, common curiosities and spaces to help people bridge the gap without forcing outcomes … the most successful interactions occur when people from different backgrounds share experiences which are new to both’. Such issues are considered in more detail in the section on urban design.

**10.1.14** Effective intervention in all of the above examples pre-supposes quality accurate data. A more systematic approach to research on these matters is needed, linking the capacities of agencies like Belfast City Council, the Community Relations Council, NISRA, the Housing Executive, the community sector and the universities in a coherent research programme that agrees priorities, avoids duplications, etc. There remain many areas about which we are ignorant, and reliant on anecdotal or impressionistic information. For instance: what share of new city housing is in ‘integrated’ locations? How mixed are the occupants of the new city centre apartments? How connected are they to nearby local communities? How really mixed are assumed shared spaces, such as the student Holylands district? Etc.

Achieving greater shared space is inextricably linked to the need to improve connectedness in the city, and this interplay between an urban ‘fluency’ and the contested nature of Belfast is considered in the next theme.

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\(^2\) COMEDIA is a research and advisory consultancy based in the UK. The ‘Bringing Communities and People Together’ report was commissioned by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion and is available at: http://www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/upload/assets/www.integrationandcohesion.org.uk/bringing_communities_and_people_together.pdf
10.2 Connectedness

10.2.1 There is a strategic need to examine the overall structure of the city in terms of the provision of key public spaces, including parks. Such an assessment would include the main ‘path network’ (roads and pedestrian routes) in the city and its links between these key spaces. Further analysis would seek to determine the degree to which these spaces are shared or not and would also assess how well these spaces are connected to each other and to surrounding residential areas. In addition, the physical severance presented largely by road infrastructure, hinders natural movement from the city centre into the spaces of inner North and West Belfast and indeed, vice-versa.

10.2.2 Parts of the road network, and perhaps some of the arterial routes in particular, can also serve another complementary function. They are, after all, public spaces in themselves. It is worth exploring therefore, the possibility of creating service centres or nodes within the road network, places that offer shared facilities and which draw people out of their territories. Service providers should take this into consideration when locating new facilities within the city.

10.2.3 In the context of a broader review of connectedness and shared space in the ‘post-conflict’ city, the appropriateness of the public transport network and the design of its services, needs to be reconsidered.

These issues are, in turn, linked to good urban design.
10.3 Urban Design

10.3.1 The city has a well-established hierarchy of public spaces and a number of published strategies on design and open space. It also has a public realm regeneration strategy and programme of implementation for the city centre. Providing some safe and immediate linkage between these identified spaces is the key priority. There is a need for a comprehensive co-ordination and implementation programme to provide a linked network of shared and accessible public spaces from ‘edge to centre’ of the city. Linkages should be diverse, secure, well-signposted and well-designed.

10.3.2 Arterial routes into the city have been identified in urban design strategies as major factors in the urban design character of the city. They have also been identified in consultations as providing opportunities for ‘shared space’ and bringing together people from separated communities. Arterial routes should be prioritised for investment in design initiatives such as pavement widening and re-surfacing, enhanced street-crossing facilities and designed ‘places’ at street intersections. Arterial routes should be considered priority locations for new landmark buildings.

10.3.3 There is considerable evidence of the important role played by small-scale, accidental and innovative public spaces such as informal markets, school-gate meeting areas, summer barbeque spaces etc. It is recommended that public policy, financing and design control should support where possible the protection and enhancement of small-scale, informal and innovative public spaces.

10.3.4 Interviews with some international consultants suggest that design for multicultural inclusion in the use of public spaces in divided societies is a standard feature of urban design practice, although the degree of contestation varies from place to place. International comparative experience is essential in relation to design for inclusive public space – good practice from other European and international cities should be considered and applied in relation to this issue.

10.3.5 The question of competing multicultural identities and their use of public space is the subject of a number of international urban design studies. Successful international approaches to design for contested spaces include the design of permeable access patterns offering alternative routes, strong natural landscaping and sensitive public art – particularly humorous art or art with multi-cultural references.
10.3.6 Experience from Belgium, which is a clearly divided society in terms of language, culture and political affiliation, suggests that successful street art and sculpture should focus on the shared experience of the everyday lives of common people. It is recommended that the City should adopt a policy of street art and sculpture which takes the Flemish approach of ‘celebrating the common man (woman)’ and focuses on shared history and personalities – sportspeople, industrialists, literary and labour figures etc.

10.3.7 Indicators of local identity are generally considered as key aspects of urban design, but in Belfast it is difficult to separate the positive and negative manifestations of such identity. There needs to be further debate about how, or whether, local political identities can be expressed in shared public spaces. Currently, in order to create a welcoming environment for all, Belfast City Council supports pictorial rather than language-based signage within its own buildings.

10.3.8 Discussions on the definition of the city centre indicate some sensitivity in West Belfast to the ‘eastwards’ extension of the city centre implied by Laganside and Titanic Quarter proposals. Nevertheless, there was considerable support for a definition of the city centre which included both sides of the River Lagan – this would strengthen the urban design image of the city and extend the amount of perceived neutral space. It is recommended that planning policies should encourage the provision of comprehensive access to the river from new developments on the eastern side, the maintenance of existing riverside walkways as neutral public spaces and the option of small-scale retailing and commercial functions along both sides of the river.

10.3.9 As Belfast moves on from the era of the ‘Troubles’, there were strong arguments in favour of removing residual barriers and facilitating public access generally, but particularly in the city centre. This is linked to the many promotional arguments which suggest that an image of normality, accessibility and high-quality urban design is necessary to promote increased investment, weekend tourism and ‘feel-good’ conditions for shoppers and residents. Accordingly, there should be a programme to remove as many physical barriers to access in the city centre as possible – including protective railings at City Hall and visible security installations generally. There should be incentives for shop-owners to remove evening shutters from all city-centre shopping facades and the enforcement of twenty-four hour public access through new shopping complexes such as Victoria Square.
10.3.10 High-quality urban design is obviously beneficial to urban place-marketing, which in turn stimulates the local economy and the ‘normalisation’ process. There was a consensus that Belfast lacked significant or large-scale civic space, so it would be essential to make the most of its compact townscape to create a series of linked small spaces. Belfast should attempt to develop the kind of high-quality network of pedestrian streets and places which characterise Dutch and Flemish towns, associated with high-density living and high-quality urban townscapes. Its modest pedestrian area should be extended over most of the city centre, and the high-quality paving and landscaping programme initiated in Laganside and in the Streets Ahead project should be an integral part of the programme.

Achieving greater shared space, improving the connectedness and quality of urban design in the city require interventions, linked with collaborative urban governance.
10.4 Governance and Intervention

10.4.1 There is a need to achieve greater engagement of the public sector in the creation and management of public spaces. The first step is to acknowledge that the extensive division and related socio-spatial segregations that persist in the city demand proactive and collaborative responses from all city stakeholders. There is the need to take risks and be more innovative. Agencies need to work together to free the public realm from threat, particularly displays of sectarian aggression and intimidation, while allowing for legitimate expression of cultural celebration. This could be achieved, by working with artists, in a range of ways, from the creation of positive mural art to applied art and more interactive art in public spaces.

10.4.2 Within the Public Sector there is a need for the development of a more multi-disciplinary capacity. For instance, planners with a particular interest in education, economic development, cultural activity and social policy could help the planning system embrace the new spatial planning paradigm. Along side this, there is a twin need for a strong design team. The importance of quality design was overwhelming endorsed by participants in this research. Similarly, in the field of regeneration the current objective of creating sustainable holistic development demands an inter-disciplinary approach.

10.4.3 A recurring issue for many participants was inadequate professional skills. Proactively tackling difficult issues around territory, identity, sharing and interaction require professionals and policy makers to be prepared for argument and conflict. This demands new skills (as set out in 9.2.1.6) to adequately mediate such discussions and help develop a constructive dialogue that builds trust and confidence. There is a necessity for all city stakeholders to be prepared to have challenging conversations about the use of public spaces.

10.4.4 The planning functions need to embrace best practice embodied in spatial planning elsewhere. This involves developing a new culture that would move beyond the current regulatory system to embrace a more integrated, inclusive, visionary and action-orientated practice. Planning, like other city agencies, needs to be less risk-averse.

10.4.5 Planning in its broader sense (across all three Departments) should make better use of existing statutory-based facilities such as planning conditions, planning agreements,
planning gain, comprehensive development and compulsory acquisition powers. All of this could deliver more public spaces/open spaces as shared spaces.

10.4.6 Strategic ambitions should be translated into operational actions. There is the need to have more clarity about what strategic priorities are required to help deliver better sharing and interaction in public spaces. In this context, each agency, including planning, needs to be clear about what it can do to deliver a Shared Future.

10.4.7 To achieve shared public space, communities need to play an active role in shaping shared public space and developing collective ownership of those spaces. However, this demands new and better forms of public participation and a genuine partnership between government and civil society.

10.4.8 Given the research findings, the importance of young people cannot be overstated. Special initiatives and programmes targeted at young people in disadvantaged areas are necessary to develop safe spaces within which to share and interact. In specific areas of the city, many young people live in segregated communities, attend different schools and have limited spaces for interaction. Therefore, initiatives that bring young people together in shared spaces to develop relationships may have the potential to dismantle the barriers erected in the minds of young people and enable them to value such spaces.

10.4.9 Within the proposed new system of governance (RPA), the role of community planning should be seen as an opportunity to plan and deliver this new agenda on a shared future (now referred to in the Programme for Government as a priority to promote tolerance, inclusion & health and well-being). Importantly too, mainstream planning needs to be strongly connected to this.

10.4.10 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 exhorts public authorities to promote good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Thus, it is now good practice in most public agencies to have a good relations component that informs decision-making. This allows key policies and practices to be appropriately audited. Such mechanisms should be encouraged and enforced across agencies and partnerships involved in creating and delivering shared space in Belfast.

10.4.11 A new conversation about Belfast, with a better understanding of the challenges and innovative solutions is required. A step change within the system of governance clearly requires a new civic literacy about planning and regeneration. All the key agencies,
including local politicians, need to raise their understanding of the factors affecting change and the capacities required to address these changes.

10.4.12 The Council has been raising its capacity over the last decade. The Council is therefore the appropriate authority, given its electoral mandate, to utilise its civic leadership role to promote a shared space programme for the Belfast metropolitan area based on a co-operative and partnership approach.

10.4.13 Within the existing system of governance, the culture and habit of collaboration is relatively weak. To encourage the move away from the ‘siloh mentality’, the reward system for staff in government and other agencies should incentivise collaboration and cross-agency partnership. There is the need for a staff reward system in public agencies that encourages collaboration – where partners learn how to trust each other, gain mutual respect and share the responsibility for bringing about change.
11 Bibliography


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### 12 Appendix 1

#### Research Participants

##### Semi-Structured Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Paul Barr</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Parks Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Andrew Hassard</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Parks Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Laura Hamill</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Anti Social behaviour Pilot Project</td>
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<td>Mr Keith Sutherland</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Planning and Transport Policy Manager</td>
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<td>Mr Gerry Millar</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Improvement Directorate</td>
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<td>Ms Marie-Thérèse McGivern</td>
<td>Belfast City Council – Director of Development</td>
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<td>Mr Ronan Corrigan</td>
<td>Department Social Development - Public Realm Team</td>
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<td>Mr Paul McDonnell</td>
<td>EDAW Consultants on Streets Ahead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Jennifer Hawthorne</td>
<td>Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community Cohesion Unit</td>
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<td>Mr John Cummings</td>
<td>Belfast Divisional Planning Office</td>
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<td>Mr David Dornan</td>
<td>Belfast City Centre Management</td>
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<td>Mr Davy MacCausland</td>
<td>Police Service Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>Mr Pete Connolly</td>
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<td>Mr John Loughlin</td>
<td>North Belfast Community Transformation Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Eric Kuhn</td>
<td>Master Planner Titanic Quarter Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Chris Carvill</td>
<td>CE The Carvill Group</td>
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<td>Mr Mark Hackett</td>
<td>Hackett &amp; Hall Architects</td>
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<td>Mr Ciaran Mackle</td>
<td>Mackle &amp; Docherty Architects</td>
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<td>Mr Duncan Morrow</td>
<td>Community Relations Council</td>
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<td>Ms Sylvia Gordon</td>
<td>Groundwork</td>
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<td>Mr Gareth Graham</td>
<td>Sean Graham Developments</td>
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13 Appendix 2

Focus Groups

1. Using Public Spaces’ Seminar
   October 1st 2007
   Queen’s University Belfast

   The seminar involved people from three of Belfast’s Partnership Areas – East Belfast, West Belfast and South Belfast. This session included questionnaire completion, a mental mapping perception exercise and focussed discussion based on initial presentations from QUB Planning and Institute of Irish Studies representatives.

2. Shopmobility Focus Group
   December 14th 2007
   Queen Street, Belfast

   Facilitated by Mrs Amanda Ashe, Mr Ciaran Toal and Ms Maeliosa Hardy, the focus group consisted of 7 individuals with ages ranging from 18-55. Three of the individuals, one a woman, were volunteers with Shopmobility, while the remaining individuals were in the care of Shopmobility.

3. Children’s Focus Group
   January 2008
   Belfast City Mission, Innis Walk, Rathcoole, Newtownabbey

   This Focus Group was facilitated by Concilium representative Mrs Amanda Ashe with eight girls, aged between 14–17 years.

4. Women’s Information Group
   January 7th 2008
   Queen’s University Belfast

   Facilitated by Mrs Amanda Ashe, Mr Ciaran Toal and Ms Maeliosa Hardy the focus group consisted of 10 women from the Greater Belfast Area, with a broad age range from 40-70 years.
5. North Belfast Focus Group
January 8th 2008

Facilitated by Mr Billy Hutchinson, this focus group involved ten individuals, three female and seven male, of varying ages and all from North Belfast.

6. Community based ‘action research’ undertaken by the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

Donegall Pass - Interdisciplinary Action Research Project 2006

Mount Vernon - Professional Practice Action Research Project 2007

Botanic - Professional Practice Action Research Project 2007