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SU INSEDIAMENTI E AMBIENTE
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il mare e la città

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il mare e la città/sea and the city

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abstract

Conflicting neighbourhoods and maritime traditions: does the waterfront regeneration help to re-design a peaceful future? Insights from Belfast

Gabriella Esposito De Vita, Claudia Trillo, Alona Martinez Perez

Abstract

The globalization scenario has determined the rate of an increasing urban complexity: the city has followed a phenomenon of both densification and multiculturalism. In particular, the port cities could be seen as the access points of a "melting pot" process on one hand, and as places where these dynamics have exacerbated problems and conflicts on the other (Beguinot, 2009). This paper focuses on the potential of an approach centred on a maritime perspective in order to analyse and interpret conflicting dynamics in neighbourhoods whose residents show distinct cultural features.

A case study research method is adopted in order to capture the multi-faceted issues embedded in such a complex condition. This paper focuses on Belfast, which has been

Cover picture: The Titanic Exibition (authors' picture, 2012)

struggling for years with problems related to inter-religious sectarian conflicts. By applying a visual analysis combined with interactions with local communities, the relationships between the urban pattern and the waterfront are analysed, in order to show if and how the waterfront regeneration could be considered pivotal for contributing to the peace process. Further research could apply the results to different contexts, in order to generalize the approach at international level.

Quartieri in conflitto e tradizioni marittime: può la rigenerazione del waterfront aiutare a ri-progettare un futuro di pace? Approfondimenti da Belfast

Lo scenario della globalizzazione ha generato un notevole incremento della complessità urbana: la città è stata interessata da un fenomeno di densificazione e nel contempo di multiculturalismo. In particolare, le città porto possono essere considerate quale punto di partenza di un processo di "melting pot" e nel contempo quale luogo dove tali dinamiche hanno esacerbato problemi e conflitti. (Beguinot, 2009). Il paper focalizza l'attenzione su un approccio centrato sulla dimensione marittima della città, in grado di analizzare ed interpretare dinamiche complesse in contesti che evidenziano diversità culturali.

L'approccio scelto è basato sullo sviluppo di un caso studio allo scopo di cogliere la molteplicità degli aspetti di una condizione estremamente diretta. Il paper affronta Belfast, travagliata per anni da problemi collegati a conflitti interreligiosi. Applicando una analisi visuale combinata con i risultati dell'interazione con le comunità locali, si vuole mostrare in che modo un processo di rigenerazione del waterfront possa essere considerato centrale nella costruzione di un processo di pacificazione. I risultati del caso studio saranno elaborati ed applicati in altri contesti, allo scopo di generalizzare l'approccio adottato.

Keywords:
Waterfront regeneration, divided cities, conflicting spaces, maritime memories

Conflicting neighbourhoods and maritime traditions: does the waterfront regeneration help to re-design a peaceful future? Insights from Belfast

Gabriella Esposito De Vita, Alona Martinez-Perez, Claudia Trillo

1. Introduction

Several contemporary cities are plagued by issues of social conflict due to the presence of different groups divided by their cultures, religions or ethnic issues. The theme of the multicultural European city has renewed interest in the semantic values, collective memory and primary elements of the city to favour the integration of cultures and the co-existence of peoples (Hutchison and Krase, 2007). The dialectic between the trends of globalization and defence of identity is the basis of social movements whose activities are generating impacts felt all over the planet, and is also reflected in a concept of people-oriented urban planning (Body-Gendrot and Martiniello, 2000).

One of the first steps to be taken is to address the city as a place of social interaction: the encounter of identities – even conflicting ones – has generated endless spontaneous as well as planned combinations in port-cities, whose identities are determined by strong historical cultural influences (Clemente and Esposito De Vita, 2008). Cities characterized by a strong maritime tradition, by high flows of people and goods and by mutual cultural influences could be considered a sort of laboratory of cultural diversity and "glocal" identity; cities built by the water courses and struggled by turmoil coming from the waterways offer an added value in investigating the elements for promoting an inclusive and multifaceted identity. The possibility of directing urban development towards solving long-standing and renewed social and cultural conflicts has been strongly influenced by the suitability of spaces and urban places for promoting primary relationships, including those of a transient and unstable dimension (Carmona et al, 2003; Bollens, 2011). The awareness of the inherently plural character of the water-city suggests, preliminarily, that it would be worthwhile to investigate the convergence and concentration of cultural, religious and ethnic groups in the city: some answers should come from the waterfront and its ability to encourage and give form to integrated and inclusive community.

The city-by-the-sea and its architecture include and express the kaleidoscope of human life and urban culture just as the rainbow reveals all the colours of light. In the historical city, this urban kaleidoscope results in a sequence of architectural layers that expresses lifetimes; in the contemporary city, the kaleidoscope is achieved only if the project is able to meet the diversity of cultural needs and combine them with more spatial and intercultural functions.

The definition of a approach for the intercultural city project is based on openness and

willingness to receive the enrichment that comes from the different identities that coexist. The urban culture has to be experienced in its dynamic nature, constantly changing and evolving under the influence of multicultural suggestions that come from the waterways.

The case study approach focuses on Belfast, which plays a special role due to its maritime tradition, its troubled history and the recent peace process, which has resulted in a complex system of urban regeneration initiatives between the city centre and the riverside. The waterfront has been object of great investment in urban re-development initiatives, starting a process of reconnection of the fragmented urban pattern and the gated communities due to the "Troubles". The urban barriers mirror the divided society: in this scenario with the lough, the rivers, the docks and the port playing a pivotal role in facilitating a process of physical, functional and cultural reconnection. Relevant projects of urban re-development have been launched in these "neutral" areas, in order to address both the phenomena of industrial abandonment and of social division (Belfast City Council, 2008).

2. Setting the context: the Belfast scenario amid religious conflicts and maritime tradition

Fig 1 – The Belfast Laugh (a) and the Port (b) (authors' picture, 2010)

The roots of economic, political, social and cultural issues in Northern Ireland have been extensively investigated and have given rise to heated interdisciplinary debates during the period of violence and during the peace process. In this paper we would simply point out some salient passages to help understanding the process of transformation of the physical-functional tissue of the city of Belfast and the present process of re-discovering the waterfront.

The original settlement of Belfast was determined by the network of waterways surrounding the mouth of the River Lagan and is developed along the Belfast Lough at the confluence of three rivers at what is now Donegall Quay: the Lagan, the Blackstaff and the river Farset. The name of Belfast itself comes from the Irish name "Béal Feirste": "(river)mouth of the sandbanks". This area was the hub around which the original settlement developed (Royle, 2006). Originally a more significant river than it is today, the Farset formed a dock on High Street until the mid 19th century. Bank Street in the city centre referred to the river bank and Bridge Street was named after an early Farset bridge. Superseded by the River Lagan as the more important river in the city, the Farset now languishes underground, under High Street. There are other ten minor rivers around Belfast. Growing up around the lowest crossing point of the river, the town became the connection between a rural hinterland and wi-

der worlds across the seas. Belfast is still a maritime city.

Although Belfast has ancient origins, the city began growing considerably during the Plantation of Ulster by the English Crown in the Seventeenth Century, thanks to the arrival of the English and Scottish settlers and the expansion of the business due to the opening of the American colonies. The economy was built on commerce and the natural inlet of Belfast Lough gave the city its own port. The port supplied a corridor for trade with Great Britain, Europe and North America, exporting beef, butter, hides, tallow and corn and importing coal, cloth, wine, brandy, paper, timber and tobacco. Around this time, the linen trade in Northern Ireland blossomed and by the middle of the 18th century, one fifth of all the linen exported from Ireland was shipped from Belfast and the economy and the population boomed. Belfast harbour was dredged in 1845 to deepen and straighten the passage for larger ships, also creating new ground, first called Dargan's Island and then Queen's Island and now known as Titanic Quarter, commemorating the vast shipyards which came to occupy the space.

Donegall Quay was built out into the river as the harbour was developed further and trade flourished. Belfast was granted city status in 1888, by the Queen Victoria, due to its development as industrial port and shipyards activities (Hanna, 1999). The maritime role of the city is testified also by the coat of arms of the city: in the lower part of the shield there is a silver sailing ship shown sailing on waves. As port city, Belfast was a centre for the Irish linen industry, tobacco production, rope-making and shipbuilding. The Harland and Wolff shipbuilding firm was created in 1861, and by the time the well-known RMS Titanic was built, in 1912, it had become the largest shipyard in the world, propelling Belfast on to the global stage, employing up to 35,000 workers. Industrialisation and the inward migration it brought made Belfast, if briefly, the biggest city in Ireland at the turn of the 20th century, producing economic success. During this booming period, Ulster became the Irish region with the most significant settlement of Protestants involved in industrial and maritime activities, in deep contrast with the native population predominantly rural and Catholic. In 1801, with the Act of Union, Ireland was incorporated in the United Kingdom and the Irish parliament was dissolved, tracing back the origin of the present ethno-religious tensions. In the early XX Century there was a steady growth of the nationalist instances which resulted in tensions between the Irish Republican Army (IRA), formed in 1914, and loyalist or unionist paramilitary corps such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), founded in 1912. In 1920–22, Belfast became the capital of the new entity of Northern Ireland as the island of Ireland was partitioned. The accompanying conflict (the Irish War of Independence) cost up to 500 lives in Belfast, the bloodiest sectarian strife in the city until the Troubles of the late 1960s onwards (Horgan, 2006).

Fig. 2 - Murals in Belfast North celebrating the conflict (authors' picture, 2010)

The hidden tensions (Graham and Nash, 2006) resulted in the so-called *Troubles* that raged in the late sixties. The fight involved the entire population (3600 people died and 40000 were affected) and has led to the annulment of civil rights through the introduction of special laws for the state of emergency. Belfast was divided with no-go zones and the city centre, the potential main target of the attacks, was armoured with a "ring of steel" which closed virtually at six in the afternoon (Graham and Nash, 2006; Gaffikin et al., 2010). The cruel development of the relationships between the two communities has been represented in an hagiographic and aggressive way in many murals in the city (Boal, 1996; Institute for Conflicting Research, 2010).

The complex web of economic interests, cultural vocations, religious confessions and social conditions - that have characterized the two groups that could be ascribed to the loyalist or nationalist communities - have created for centuries socio-political processes that have been merged with urban transformation processes oriented to the segregation. Population growth in the first half of 1900, together with the disposal of industrial and economic crisis and the loss of the driving role of the port and the shipyards, have contributed to stress deprivation phenomena and the processes of expulsion and auto-segregation at the neighbourhood scale, paving the way for the explosion of the "troubles" of the 1969 (Jarman, 2005). This season of blood has been interpreted by scholars of all disciplines - scholars as such as Boal and Royle (2006), Bairner and Shirlow (2003), Murtagh (2002), Gaffikin and Morrisey (2011)- and has produced visual art and literature, collected and exposed by the Linen Library of Belfast.

From the point of view of the urban organization, tensions (before), conflict (later) and the peace process (now) have produced visible traces in spite of the intense urban redevelopment started with the peace process. Belfast remains segregated by walls, commonly known as "peace lines", erected by the British Army after August 1969, and which still divide 14 districts in the inner city. An armoured city centre, militarized and protected with checkpoints, was working as counterpoint to the Catholic and Protestant districts whose boundaries have been places of violence. One of the effects on the urban land design has manifested in the gradual (or sudden) separation between parts of the city through various typologies of spontaneous actions of those communities as well as of specific policies to mitigate the risks. The scenario is represented by exclusively residential gated communities, fenced, with access protected by gates or other barriers, with the internal distribution provided by cul-de-sac (Charmes, 2010). Different typologies of clusters of housing settlements have been re-designed in order to ensure the visual control of the territory and regulate access, allowing only those who belong to the community. Accentuating the physical separation and to the determent of pedestrian use of routes we can find walled industrial areas, militarized police stations and infrastructure made by the public initiative as buffer areas: means to mitigate the conflict. Despite the short distances between these parts of the city, the infrastructures are giving the appearance of extreme periphery to these central areas, favouring a car-friendly development.

In the Sixties, new highways have been built - the Westlink being the most important –

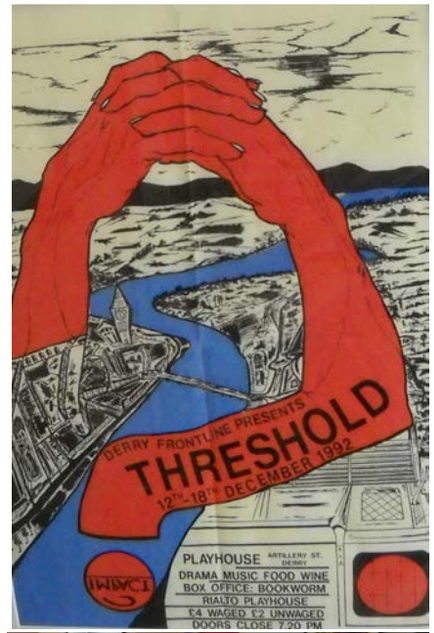

Fig. 3 – Exhibition of posters and leaflets celebrating the conflicts – Linen Library, Belfast (authors' picture, 2010)

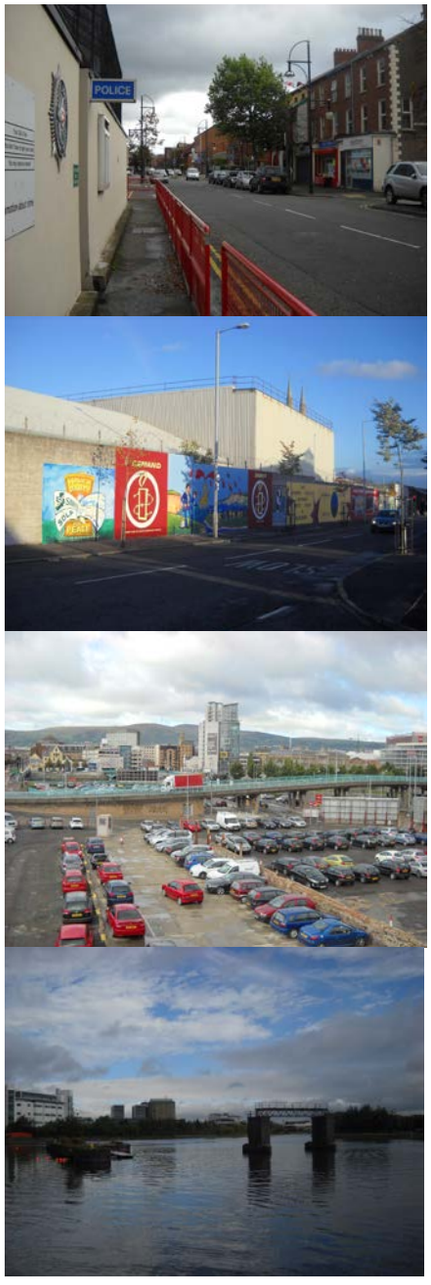

Fig. 4 - Walled Industrial Areas/Buffer areas (a) and militarized police station (b); extreme periphery in central areas (c) and the abandoned waterfront (d) (pictures and photomontages made by authors, 2010)

in order to project the urban development to the North, pushing initiatives of decentralization of retail activities (www.geographyinaction.co.uk). This phenomenon, together with the lack of public transport and the legacy of the season of fear, is among the main causes of the primacy of Belfast metropolitan area as the most car-dependent cities in the UK (Smyth, 2006).

During the decades of violence the river and the docks have become marginal in the urban morphology and the waterfront has assumed the role of potential barrier between communities in conflict.

3. The Good Friday Agreement and the regeneration process: focus on the riverside

Belfast was one of the main cities involved in the Northern Irish' *Troubles* , with nearly half of the total deaths in the conflict occurring in the city. Today, Belfast remains the legal centre and the economic engine of Northern Ireland as well as a major port, with commercial and industrial docks dominating the Belfast Lough shoreline, including the famous Harland and Wolff shipyard. The sad decades in which the city was theatre of fear and pain provided relevant traces within the social-demographic system, the economic organization and the urban pattern. During the conflicts we can appreciate the growth of the suburbs and the tendency to settle in the northern coastal areas such as Lisburn and Carrickfergus, introduced by the Regional Plan for Northern Ireland del 1964 and encouraged by the risks related to the troubles. Belfast is a constituent city of the Dublin-Belfast corridor, which has a population of three million people, half the total population of the island of Ireland (DOE, 2004). The city suffered greatly during the period of conflict, but latterly has started a period relatively calm, free from the intense political violence of former years, and substantial economic and commercial growth.

Since the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, there has been significant urban regeneration projects in the city centre including Victoria Square, Queen's Island and Laganside as well as the Odyssey complex and the landmark Waterfront Hall. The Belfast City Council is currently investing into the complete redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter, which is planned to consist of apartments, hotels and a riverside entertainment district. A major visitor attraction the Titanic Museum of Belfast, opened in 2012. This image of peace and wellness need to erase memories of the tragic events related to the civil conflict.

But a trace of violence has remained in the tense atmosphere that reigns in the neighbourhoods politically connoted. The division between the communities and murals that celebrate the battles, despite some "restoration" aimed at mitigating the contents of incitement to violence, tracing invisible or visible lines of demarcation. These divisions remain, despite the efforts of activists and institutions towards the peace process, setting up a self-segregation de facto (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006; Esposito De Vita and Trillo, 2011). Recent researches show that 80% of the population still lives in the streets and

residential complexes segregated and segregating (Boal, 2006), divided by the so-called "peace lines" (Murtagh, 2002) and deprived (NISRA, 2012). The areas in which the two communities share common borders are called "interface areas" and appear frequently in a state of neglect and decline (BIP, 2010; Goldie and Ruddy, 2010)). Even in recent times, in the winter of 2012-2013, for example, the parades of either group were offered the opportunity for the outbreak of riots and episodes of urban warfare.

Nevertheless, the city has emerged from the closure which had forced during the period of violence and seeks to meet the Irish tourist routes and offers itself as a business center in the Anglo-American relationships (Belfast City Council, 2005). In so doing, it started with urban planning, real estate and retail development (Murtagh, 2011). As you will see below, significant investments have been made and signature new architecture have been designed such as the shopping center in downtown Victoria Square, the redevelopment of the waterfront promoted by the Laganside Corporation with the Waterfront Hall, sports and leisure in the Odyssey Arena, the recovery of the former industrial area of the Gasworks and the Titanic Quarter (BMAP, 2010). The cultural debate is hosted by two prestigious universities: the historical Queen's University located in the South of the city and the University of Ulster which, in addition to the campus located in the territory, has achieved a prestigious place in the Cathedral Quarter, North of the city center.

Fig. 5 - Interface areas (authors' picture, 2010).

The planning activities, slowly started during the Troubles, achieved a renewed momentum at the end of the Nineties, with the peace process development:

- social housing regeneration (Northern Ireland Housing Executive)
- new infrastructures such as Energy facilities, transports and telecommunication
- port redevelopment (Belfast Harbour Commissioners) and regeneration of the Lagan riverside
- regeneration of the city centre.

This regeneration phase started with the planning programmes 'Making Belfast Work' (1988) and Belfast Urban Area Plan (Department of the Environment, 1990). (OECD, 2000, p 28). The last one is oriented to reinforcing the role of Belfast within the Ulster region, creating the premises for the enhancement of the urban quality of life and of the local development.

The IRA Ceasefire in 1994 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 have given investors increased confidence to invest in Belfast. This has led to a period of sustained economic growth and large-scale redevelopment of the city centre. The two leading regeneration projects, undertaken when it was still ongoing armed conflict, are the Laganside redevelopment and revitalization of downtown, both aimed at encouraging the creation of "neutral zones" through breaking the existing barriers between communities. In 2008 a process was proposed for the removal of the 'peace walls', announcing an investment of 16 million pounds which started the transformation and redevelopment of streets and public spaces in the city centre.

Fig. 6 – The shipyards within the urban skyline (authors' picture, 2010).

The city centre has undergone considerable expansion and regeneration in recent

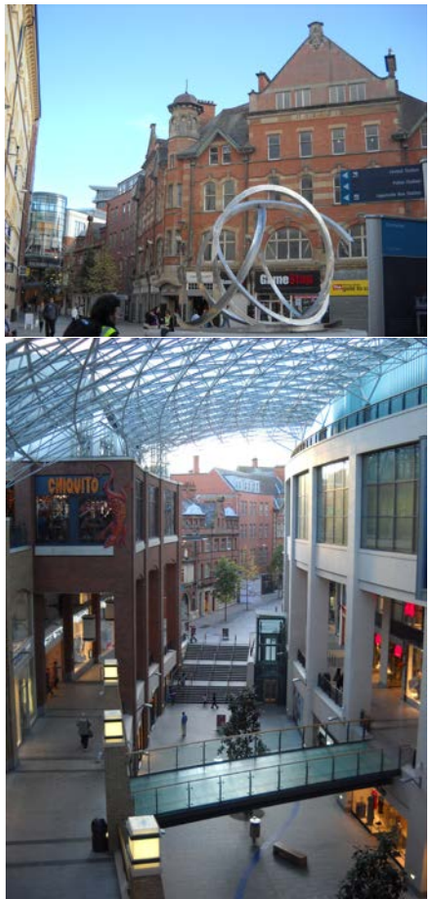

Fig. 7 – The city centre (a), the pedestrian area of Victoria Square (b) (authors' picture, 2010).

years, notably around Victoria Square and along the riverside. Developments include the retail area near the City Hall, the Cathedral Quarter, and the Laganside with the Odyssey complex and the landmark Waterfront Hall. Other major developments include the regeneration of the Titanic Quarter and the erection of the Obel Tower - a mix of living and office accommodation that dominates the city sky line - nominated for the "Carbuncle Cup", the UK Ugly Architecture Award 2010, because its façade described as "a confused barcode" (BBC, 2010)

The formula adopted to accelerate the process of social and physical regeneration of the city and the enhancement of its role in the UK was the public-private partnership through the Urban Development Corporations (UDC). This specific kind of PPP features prestigious precedent in the UK and the USA due to the structure of the partnership based on dynamics and streamlined procedures, maximizing the impact of public investment on the local development (Bult-Spierung, 2006).

4. The riverside projects: "drawing down the walls"

Paraphrasing the project idea of a group of activists North Belfast, 'Draw Down the Walls' – a cross-community project which uses art to engage people in interface communities to imagine and draw what Belfast could be like without barriers, whether they are physical or not (DDW, 2012) – addressing the interpretation of the re-development initiatives undertaken in the city. Activists and community workers are dealing with the perception of the divisions and the ongoing removal of the obstacles to a peaceful coexistence CRC, 2010). A long process which – as emerged through over thirty interviews administered by the authors to activists, representatives by the institutions and scholars in the field – goes through a constant effort at fostering dialogue and extending increasingly the use of shared neutral spaces: "Creating the conditions to imagine a city without barriers" (DDW, 2012).

According to these premises, we could interpret the complex web of development and regeneration initiatives which took place in Belfast in the last decades. The urban projects developed within the area which lies between the city centre, the river Lagan and the Queen's Island could represent the counterpoint of the community initiatives promoted within the Catholic and Protestant gated neighbourhoods.

The first project to be started was the Laganside one. On both the banks of the River Lagan, in an area of about one hundred and forty acres, adjacent to the Central Station and the Victorian St George's Market an abandoned industrial area surrounded by slums and characterized by high rate of social deprivation was laying (deprivation indexes, NINIS). This area was chosen in 1989 in order to develop a pilot project of regeneration aimed at demonstrate the "potential of the property market to recover the city from economic decline and political turmoil" (Sterrett et al, 2005, p 380). To achieve this aim - following the model of the waterfront regeneration in Baltimore (USA) and the refurbishment of the Docks of London - a mixed public-private partnership (UDC

Urban Development Corporation) called The Laganside Corporation and financed primarily with funds from the British government is was formed. On the public side of the UDC the Belfast City Council, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the Port Authority (Belfast Harbour Commissioners) and the Governmental Planning Department in Stormont can be found. In 1994, a weir was built across the river by the Laganside Corporation to raise the average water level so that it would cover the unseemly mud flats which gave Belfast its name. According to this, an intensive action of recovering, treating and decontaminating the river water took place, giving to the area a new life cycle. The piece of sculpture of a salmon which is 10M long, made in 1999 by Irish artist John Kindness, situated at Donegal Quay beside the River Lagan, commemorates the regeneration of the riverand surrounding areas. The project has ended, as by statute in 2007, and were initiated further project segments along the river to make it an integral part of the city, such as Lanyon Place, Donegall Quay, Clarendon Dock and the Odyssey complex. The set of projects focused on the riverside, where originally met Farset and Lagan rivers, became the starting point of planning actions of a different nature: the regeneration of historic buildings, the redevelopment of Brownfield sites and docks and the construction of buildings ex-novo. The part of Belfast called Sailortown - home to over 5000 people, dockers, sailors and their families lived alongside transient seamen from around the world – has been now transformed in a mixed district on both the social and the functional side. Residential areas are integrated with institutional buildings such as the Court, cultural facilities such as the Waterfront Hall in Lanyon Place.

Along the riverside promenade towards Donegall Quay or upstream to the Lagan Towpath and Lagan Valley Regional Park you can see the newborn Gasworks complex, one of Belfast's most famous landmarks. The park's distinctive funnel and clock tower mark the site where the city's gas-making industry began production in the 19th century. During the 1800s the Belfast Gasworks acted as the central power source to the rapid economic growth that put Belfast at the heart of Victorian commerce. The construction begins on the gasworks in Ormeau Road: the Marquis of Donegall lays the foundation stone on April 15, 1822. One year later the Gas Works Bill passed through parliament and, as a result, the Belfast Gaslight Company obtains powers to produce and distribute coal gas. In 1852 – due to a period of expansion programmes - new and bigger gas holders are constructed along with an office block with a tiled entrance and staircase. In twenty years site expands, growing ten-fold in size. A long history of various vicissitudes will lead to the closure

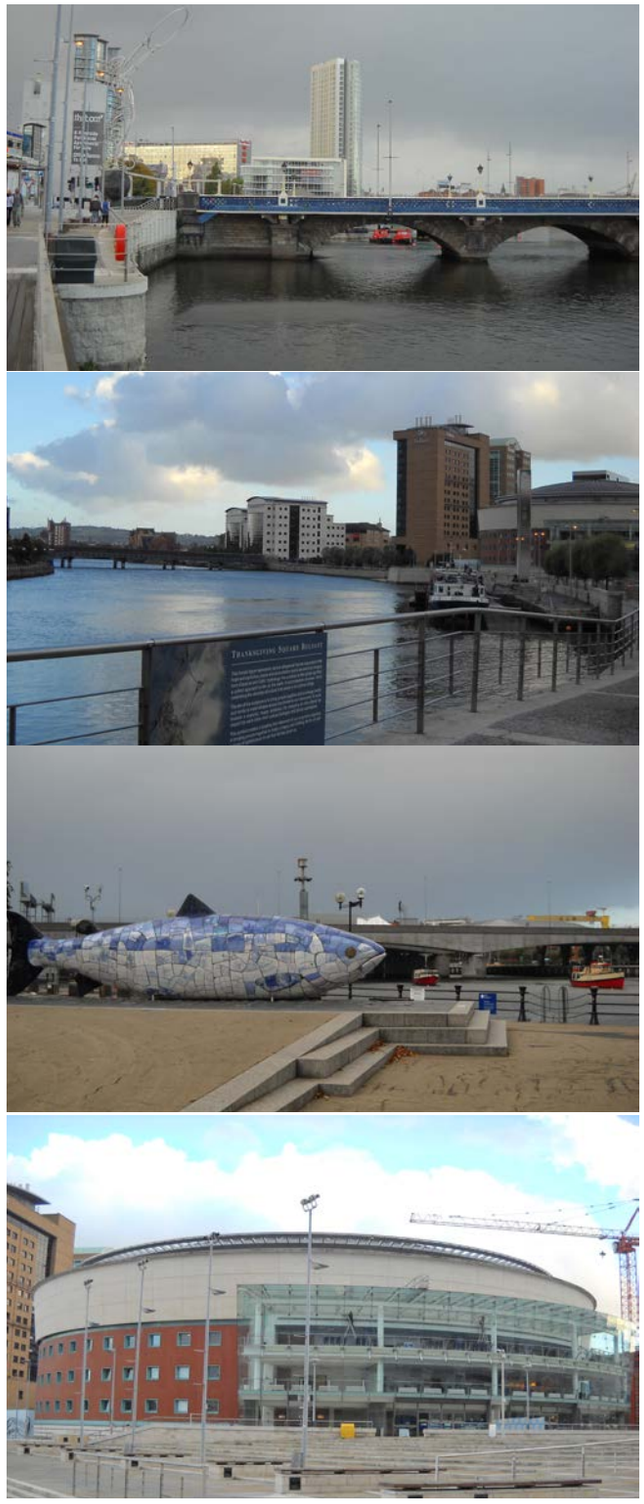

Fig. 8 – Laganside: the riverside (a) and (b), the signature salmon sculpture (c) and the Waterfront Hall (d) (authors' picture, 2010).

of the gasworks in 1988: the production ceases after more than 160 years. The closure of the Gasworks in 1988, one of Belfast's best-known landmarks of rapid economic growth, left behind a derelict and heavily contaminated inner city brownfield site with local job losses. Through the Gasworks site redevelopment project however, Belfast City Council has helped to address some of the area's main problems associated with deindustrialisation such as high levels of socio-economic deprivation and landscape 'blight'. The land was subsequently purchased by Belfast City Council in partnership with the Laganside Corporation, however, at that point it was heavily contaminated and unsuitable for most uses. The City Council spent €15 million (with ERDF assistance) on land acquisition, remediation and infrastructure development. The objectives of the project were: to enhance the quality of life for those living in the neighboring communities; to provide a source of employment in the area and to act as a catalyst for inner city regeneration. Physical transformation was only one aspect of the redevelopment. The Gasworks Trust was established to bring together the local Development Corporation, community groups and Belfast City Council to agree on the development strategy in the context of the wider area. Since the beginning, the trust's vision for the Gasworks has been as a mixed-use site offering opportunities for job-creation tailored to the needs of the local labor market. Maximising the benefits for the local community. The involvement of the community through the Gasworks Trust was critical in identifying locally important issues and opportunities that could be integrated in the strategy for the site redevelopment. The impacts of this redevelopment project for the local community included a new public open space (ca. 4 ha) complete with water feature; a cycling/walking route and public art; locally-managed workspace facilities and local housing. Other indirect benefits included targeted employment initiatives; blight removal; enhanced connectivity; effective community engagement and increased local resources.

The redevelopment won the 1998 Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Award for Reclamation. The area has been substantially redeveloped under the Laganside Corporation in partnership with the Belfast City Council and now includes a number of office buildings for companies such as the Halifax centre, the Radisson Blu Hotel Belfast, the Ormeau Business Park shops, small enterprise workshops, offices, purpose-built business units and currently, some 2,500 people work there: the heavily polluted site was turned into a business park. A high quality public realm is created. Roads and walkways reunite the city, community and river.

Successful aspects could be considered: the identification of broad regeneration objectives, considering social and environmental priorities alongside more traditional economic incentives; the involvement of the local community through the Gasworks Trust has helped to ensure that people living in proximity to the site can directly benefit from its facilities and the employment and training opportunities it offers; the site is continuously developing and the City Council is currently working towards improving the traffic situation and accessibility for businesses and residents in surrounding areas; facilitating commercial opportunities within the site for new businesses; and maintaining local community engagement. The success of the initiative is magnified if we consider that

Donegall Pass faces the Gasworks and represents a loyalist interface between the republican areas of the Markets and the Lower Ormeau. The nature of the area can be recognized in the urban pattern that is fragmented and lack in pedestrian interconnections. The area now includes the refurbishment of public places, the land art exhibitions and the redesign of the Lagan riverside.

Finally, the Titanic Quarter is a large-scale waterfront regeneration project, comprising historic maritime landmarks, film studios, education facilities, apartments, a riverside entertainment district, and the world's largest Titanic-themed attraction centred on land in Belfast Harbour, known until 1995 as Queen's Island. It covers over 185 acres of reclaimed land adjacent to Belfast Harbour, formerly known as Queen's Island previously occupied by part of the Harland and Wolff shipyard. Named after RMS Titanic, which was built here in 1912, work has begun which promises to transform some former shipyard land into "one of the largest waterfront developments in Europe". Titanic Quarter Ltd officially launched its master plan in 2005 (Bairner, 2006). Since then the development has come to life with major commercial, tourism, residential and education schemes, re-developing Belfast's waterfront and former shipbuilding lands. Rooted in Belfast's heritage, Titanic Quarter is a natural expansion and consolidation of the city across the river Lagan and the Belfast Laugh (Belfast City Council, 2004).

Plans also include apartments, a riverside entertainment district, and a Titanic-themed museum. This Quarter can be considered one of the world's largest urban-waterfront regeneration projects, inspired by the legacy of Belfast's maritime and industrial past and reinvented in order to offer a neutral place for working and living without any perception of the political tensions of the recent past. The developers have chosen the Titanic and the shipyards as identitarian symbol for this new urban quarter, building a mix of residential, commercial, tourism, education and retail space on the international model. Titanic Quarter offers a diverse range of uses across a fully assembled site in central Belfast. It also includes one of Europe's most advanced telecoms infrastructure (Bairner, 2007).

The original idea was to reflect the diversity and complexity of modern urban life in its entirety. The work in progress is based on a 30+ year project, including other initiatives such as developing a Media Campus, extending the Financial Services Centre and progressing additional leisure and tourism projects. With 145,000 sqm already completed, 90 companies on site and around 5,000 people already living and working in the area, this ambitious scheme will ultimately provide homes and employment for 50,000 people. The residential units include a mix of apartments, houses and affordable dwellings inter-linked by public realm and open spaces. The planning approach chosen is coherent with the private-public partnership built: the original strategic project has been designed in order to have the flexibility to evolve to reflect the needs of society and investors. Mike Smith – former Chief Executive and Managing Director of Titanic Quarter Ltd (September 2002 to May 2012) and currently Chair of the Real Estate Initiative – interviewed in May 2011 by the authors underlined the needs forthe project were to blend into existing communities, through sympathetic planning and an access

Fig. 9 – The Gasworks (a) and (b); the Lagan Towpath (c) and (d) (authors' picture, 2010).

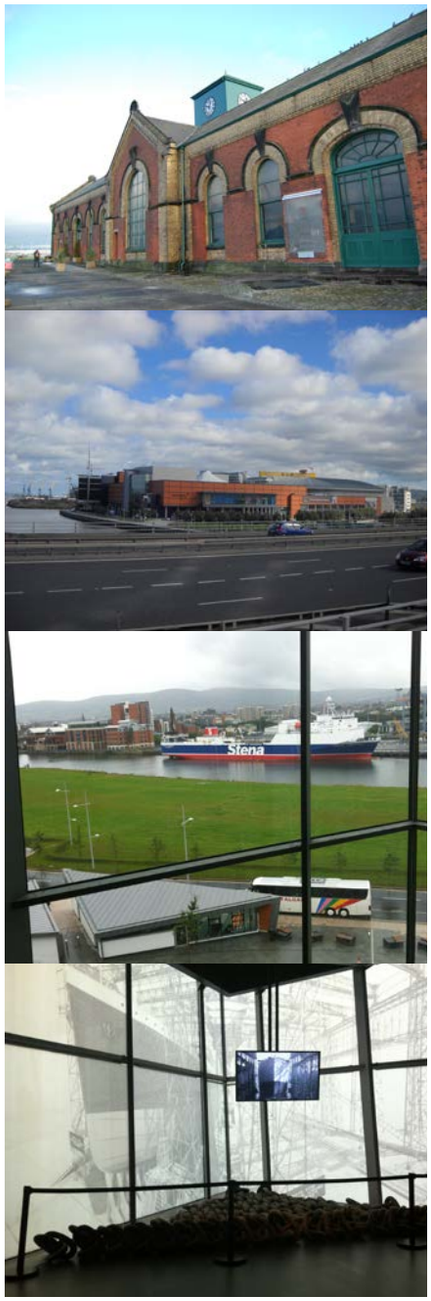

Fig. 10 - Titanic Quarter area: the Harland and Wolff building (a), the Odissey Arena (b), the new titanic building (c) and the exhibition (d) (authors' picture, 2010 and 2012).

strategy that delivers new physical routes and cohesive urban inclusion. The team delivering this vision for Belfast provide a wide range of local and international development experience, as well as other business and community interests. This topic, considering the specific context of Belfast, needs a huge effort by the City Council and the private subjects. On the environmental side, sustainable development as been achieved by recycling and reusing brownfield sites and former industrial buildings and by incorporating the latest procedures for green building technology, guaranteed by the Gold LEED award, the global benchmark for measuring sustainability.

The Northern Ireland Science Park, a hi-tech science park affiliated closely with Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster and Titanic Studios was launched in 2005. In September 2011, the largest education facility in Northern Ireland - Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education (now Belfast Metropolitan College) relocated to a new £44 million campus in Titanic Quarter. Belfast Harbour Marina opened in the centre of Titanic Quarter in 2009 as part of the Belfast Tall Ships Festival. It is the forerunner to a future 200 berth marina in the Titanic Quarter. In 2010 the first hotel opened in Titanic Quarter and the first residential development in Titanic Quarter was completed: the Arc (Abercorn Residential Complex) comprises 474 apartments and retail outlets located adjacent to Abercorn Basin. The new headquarters of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland opened at Titanic Boulevard in April 2011.

The Quarter is served by the Translink bus service and the NI Railways services (Bridge End) station.

The Titanic museum can be considered the catalyst of the quarter; the largest development is the £97million Titanic Belfast visitor's attraction opened on 31 March 2012 and welcomed over 800,000 visitors in its first year. Designed by CivicArts/Eric R Kuhne & Associates and Todd Architects the £97m centre is located in the shipyard where the eponymous vessel was built and features six floors of interactive galleries which bring the sights, sounds, smells and stories of the ship to life. The attraction is owned and run by a charitable foundation. The architects said that "we have created an architectural icon that captures the spirit of the shipyards, ships, water crystals, ice, and the White Star Line's logo. Its architectural form cuts a skyline silhouette that has been inspired by the very ships that were built on this hallowed ground" (www.titanicquarter.com). With less inspiring words we can humbly suggest that the building looks like the iceberg which gave the Titanic within the legend!

4. Appreciating the role of waterfront regeneration in addressing conflicting communities: evidence from the case-study of Belfast

The fight for identity in Belfast reaches an emblematic level and could be expressed by the walled public places and the diverse forms of gated communities. Identity is defined by Kevin Lynch as the "sense of place" which represents the limit beyond which a person can recognise or remember a place as an entity apart from other places. (Lynch, 1969)

The “visual memory” of city users and the “affective values” this generates contribute to identifying the image which spaces and places represent to the eye as expressions of urban identity.

Belfast has been a thriving port, a strategic market town, a leader in the production of linens and home to one of the most prestigious shipyards in the world; even today, the “listed” structures of the yards (the Samson and Goliath gantry cranes have become city landmarks) are kept for their symbolic value and represent the city skyline in the waterfront area which is currently interested by diverse regeneration projects.

Each of the projects described in this paper represent an important step in the process of revitalization of the city, which takes on connotations particularly strong when considering the peculiarities of the context and the framework of tensions in which it operates. In the space of little more than a decade, the city centre has achieved a “normalization” unthinkable in the nineties. The legacy of a thriving industrial past have been converted to a future of outsourcing advanced and has embarked on a process of “branding” rather than territorial marketing, to create a new image that erase the traces of the blood of the Troubles. Interviews with key players and the comparison with available maps as well as the visual analysis carried out on the field – walking and driving along the waterfront – have led us to focus on the potentiality of this natural barrier of being the channel for reconnecting divided communities in Belfast. The maritime tradition and the rediscovery of neutral symbols and catalyst nodes within the urban pattern could play a unifying role in the next years. Nevertheless, a detailed interpretation of the urban organization of the projects shows a tendency to be isolated. If we exclude the very small perimeter of the city centre - in which the pedestrian use and the urban furnishing create the connective tissue to support the regeneration projects - the other emerging elements completed or in progress appear unrelated to each other and do not contribute to produce the desired “city effect”. This aim could be achieved by strengthening the role of the river in creating the relationships between the politically aligned neighbourhoods and the neutral areas for culture and leisure. The ongoing Titanic Quarter, opposite the waterfront redesigned by Laganside Corporation and the industrial park and the area for the leisure of the Gasworks overlook the river and are connected by pedestrian paths that may become the hub of city life. The river, at the completion of the process, it could represent the dynamic element of social cohesion by extending more and more areas “neutral” for meeting and interaction across communities. To achieve this goal, however, the interaction between local institutions, central government and developers, under the umbrella of regeneration and reconciliation, is necessary (Plöger, 2007), allowing Belfast to emerge within the scenario of European competitiveness and to be successful in the local challenge with the nearby Celtic Tiger.

According to the Healey’s definition of planning as “managing our co-existence in shared space” (Healey, 1997: p.3) the research presented in this paper is a work in progress; in particular, this paper has illustrated the potential of an approach centred on the waterfront in addressing questions related to the pacific coexistence of divided or conflicting communities.

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