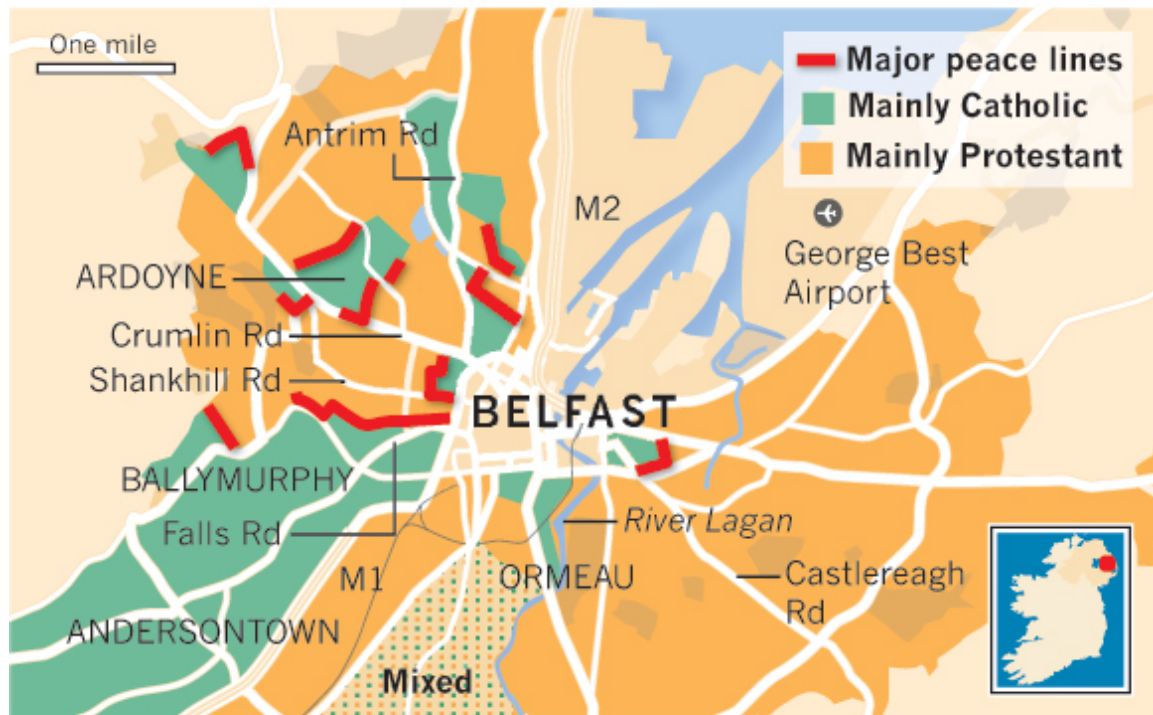


Columbia University  
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation  
A6911 Urban Planning Studio  
A4329 Joint Plan/Studio Seminar  
Richard Plunz, Architecture Critic  
Steven Kyle Cook, Architecture Assistant  
Nicholas Klein, Urban Planning Critic  
Shahneez Haseeb, Urban Planning Assistant

Spring 2017

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## Belfast, Ireland: Centre City Redevelopment



### INTRODUCTION

This studio seeks to combine both architecture and urban planning students in a joint project to their mutual benefit and to provide a unique resource for making crucial planning decisions in a city that is important to the future of European urbanism. While many tasks will be shared, it can be anticipated that the urban planning students will specialize in the aspects of the project brief more related to political economy; architecture students will specialize in the more spatial aspects of the project brief. The Columbia team will work in collaboration with their peers at Queens University in Belfast. The client is the Office of City Centre development in Belfast. It is understood that if appropriate a detailed publication report will outline the studio recommendations. Below is a summary of major issues to be addressed as outlined by the client.

### BELFAST AND NEXT PHASE GLOBALIZATION

Beginning in 1969 a consequence of the sectarian conflicts in Belfast produced strategies for a partitioning the city that have remained in place until today. While borne of the necessity for an immediate cessation of violence, the longer-term effects have been negative for both the spatial, social and economic fabric of the entire city and region. Now, with the "peace walls" slated for removal by 2023, this studio will study the effects of de-partitioning of the city. It will investigate the potential role of renewal of the City Centre in helping to catalyze the de-partitioning process. It will engage both the spatial and economic redevelopment of the City Centre; in the context of positive future economic potentials of Northern Ireland and with particular reference to renewed global investment and potential heightened European Community market access in a post-Brexit era.

Recent urban planning decisions in Belfast are intertwined with a complex political history with frequently evolving incarnations of major actors. For instance, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which was the [police](#) force in [Northern Ireland](#) from 1922 was replaced by the [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) (PSNI) in 2001. The former police force was renamed and reformed, as an outworking of the Good Friday Agreement.

As of now, the political spectrum is dominated by two opposing extremes: DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) Protestant Loyalist (1) and Sinn Fein Catholic Republican separatist (2). Since May 2016, these two parties govern in coalition with the other Northern Ireland political parties forming an opposition. Political activity is characterized by tradeoffs and concessions between SF and DUP.

At present, the peace process in Belfast is "on rent" and walls are still constructed higher. Although there have been a few successful interventions, for example in Ardoyne, North Belfast, (3) there still is a long way to go. The approach at multiple levels of government spending has been to separate allocations between the individual communities. Going forward this mindset will have to change, but with a coherent strategy regarding how to phase in a next generation urbanism. About 18 months ago, the Belfast City Council was given urban planning powers, which can bode well for a new era however limited this empowerment is in some respects including lack of power of *eminent domain*. Our studies will address planning strategies in full cognizance of these complexities.

## **BELFAST CITY CENTRE IN TRANSITION**

The City Centre exhibits a number of problematic conditions while at the same time it seems poised for a rebirth, should implementation of robust economic, programmatic and spatial strategies succeed. The problems are connected with its mono-functional character emanating from the many years of partition of the city, and the deliberate isolation of the Centre from its urban hinterland that remains highly fractured along religious lines. In an effort to control conflict, the Centre was deliberately maintained as a "neutral" (i.e. uninhabited) zone. As a consequence, there are highly inadequate transportation linkages that continue to isolate the area, making consideration of options for transit connections one of the priorities of our team. While there is some commercial and service sector activity, the Centre is lacking housing which together with lack of transit, makes it at best viable only in the daytime. The small amount of housing that exists in the city centre tends to be dominated by social housing (public housing) at low density and in religiously segregated neighborhoods.

## **HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION**

The options for addressing the lack of housing will be a primary focus of our work; and are connected to all other aspects of development strategies. Paramount will be addressing the bias among Belfast residents against living in the Centre, and against shared or integrated housing proposals. It is likely that one of the greatest change agents can be new external population and activities. For example, tourist activity bordering the city center is brisk, with the new Titanic museum and Game of Thrones site tours drawing impressive numbers of visitors from abroad. Moreover, international students are drawn to Belfast rather than other places in Europe for its perceived safety and affordability.

Another change agent may be Ulster University which will complete a new campus in the city centre by autumn 2019 and for which, a considerable quantum of student housing is being built. Queens University, which is located on its traditional Victorian campus south of the city center has purpose-built student accommodation but also has a large number of students living in an area known as the "Holy Lands" (4). Over a number of decades, this area, which is comprised of former family homes, has become inhabited almost entirely by students in an overpopulated housing stock with periodic events that produce anti-social chaos and negative media attention. For example, on Saint Patrick's Day the "Holy Lands" are a destination for Britons and Europeans and attract massive crowds. On July 12, in commemoration of the anniversary of the 1690AD victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II political tensions remain high until the present day. Israeli and Palestinian flags fly as surrogates for Protestant and Catholic constituencies.

A taskforce for new housing strategies is on-going, and money is available for "shared" housing schemes. A pilot project is underway in the Belfast periphery, but in the Centre resistance may be greater, complicated by widely understood local connotations about certain areas. Access routes play a role in determining those connotations. For example, The Falls is a "charged" road, synonymous with the Republicans (those advocating independence from British rule); while the adjacent Shankill Road is perceived as Loyalist, which points to the nationalist dimension of the fragmentations. (5)(6) A positive in this configuration is the "Urban Villages Initiative" that is encouraging diverse communities to work together and to improve their physical environments within "shatter zones." (7)

## **ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

A large component of the revitalization of the Belfast City Centre is dependent on private investor interest, emanating from the hope that a transitioning local and global situation will be catalytic. The components of this strategy are predicated on the factors of "Tax / Talent /Technology:"

**TAXES:** The exit of the UK from the European Community ("Brexit") could provide a large financial advantage to the Northern Ireland and Belfast economies. Corporate tax rates could fall to a level competitive with the Republic of Ireland ( $\pm 12.5\%$ ) (8). For Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, this rate is at 20% but in 2015 it has been agreed in principle to give the NI Executive the power to vary the tax rate to track that in the Republic of Ireland. But the Republic of Ireland enjoys autonomy in setting rates, such that it is lower. Having a competitive rate will greatly enhance the attractions for investment.

TALENT: Belfast is a regional center for the knowledge industry. Much talent is nurtured in Belfast at the Queens and Ulster Universities. Already developers are investing in new student housing, but the problem remains to retain this knowledge base after students graduate. Much depends on providing affordable housing in an attractive and vibrant city center that can overcome the stigma and dysfunction of the period of "The Troubles."

TECHNOLOGY: Belfast is already a major European node for technology related to cyber-security, in an age of growing demand for this expertise. For example, CitiGroup's cyber-security operation employs more than 1000 persons in its facility on Sydenham Road in the vicinity of the Docks. In general, a large amount of office space is dedicated to back-office activities for cyber-security businesses. It is a sector with a large potential to grow through diversification around related sectors.

The impediments to investment in the City Centre are related to the lack of life-style options for a new workforce. Apart the lack of high-quality housing options (as well as high-quality office space), there is little public space that is free of turf stigmas; and amenities and services for family life are not good. While some areas, like the Cathedral Quarter are developing nighttime activity, there is little for nurturing family life. While low rents can be expected to offer an attraction for new residents, developers are finding insufficient profit motive in this equation and are dearth to invest in new housing. And they face the reluctance of local banks to extend loans.

- (1) Democratic Unionist Party: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_Unionist\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Unionist_Party)
- (2) Ardoyne: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/one-peace-wall-down-109-across-northern-ireland-still-to-go-34486822.html>)
- (3) Sinn Fein: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinn\\_Féin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinn_Féin)
- (4) The Holy Lands: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyland\\_\(Belfast\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyland_(Belfast))
- (5) Shankill Road: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankill\\_Road](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankill_Road)
- (6) The Falls Road: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls\\_Road,\\_Belfast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls_Road,_Belfast)
- (7) Urban Villages Initiative: <http://sibni.org/project/urban-villages-regeneration-initiative/>
- (8) Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Act, 2015. <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/corporationtaxnorthernireland.html>

### **Course Organization**

The course will accommodate both the Urban Planning Studio format and the Architecture Seminar format. Joint presentations on various research and design progress will be held every Friday as per the below schedule. Joint project development will be emphasized inclusive of both planners and architects, roughly following challenges related to political economy and spatial structure. Participants should be keen on the topic, willing to work hard, and to collaborate. With inclusion of both planners and architects we should have a well-rounded skill set. By Mid-Semester analytics will be completed to the extent that schematic spatial proposals can be advanced for presentation in Belfast. As well, exchanges with a Queens University team throughout the semester will further issues and options. With field-study and feedback, a draft comprehensive report of the studio findings will be completed by the semester end.\*

Principal client representative in Belfast is:  
Nuala Gallagher  
Director of City Centre Development  
Belfast City Council

Principal academic coordination will be with:  
Ruth Morrow  
Professor of Architecture  
School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering  
Queens University Belfast

\*Additional Report Development may ensue in Summer 2017, dependent on reception of the work in Belfast.

### **Course Schedule**

Week 1 INTRODUCTION Friday, January 20

Week 2 RESEARCH PRESENTATION Friday, January 27  
Emphasis on Historical Pattern

Week 3 RESEARCH PRESENTATION Friday, February 3  
Emphasis on present Political Economy

Week 4 RESEARCH PRESENTATION Friday, February 10  
Emphasis on Spatial Distribution for Transit, Housing, Business

Week 5 SITE PROPOSITIONS Friday, February 17  
Overall Belfast Context

Week 6 SITE PROPOSITIONS Friday, February 24  
City Centre Options

Week 7 SITE PROPOSITIONS Friday, March 3  
The Housing Question

Week 8 SITE VISIT Monday, March 6 - Friday, March 10  
Field Study and Belfast City Council Presentation

### **MIDTERM WEEK**

Week 9 POST-VISIT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT Friday, 31

Week 10 POST-VISIT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT Friday, April 7

Week 11 POST-VISIT PROJECT DEVELOPMENT Friday, April 14

Week 12 DRAFT REPORT Friday, April 21

Week 13 DRAFT REPORT Friday, April 28

Week 14 GSAPP PRESENTATION\* Final Review

### **PRELIMINARY LITERATURE SEARCH**

## BELFAST GENERAL:

"Bloody Friday," BBC Documentary, 2012.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3s1iH3z8EhY>.

Andrew MacLaran and Sinead Kelly, "Urban Property Development," *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, pp 71 - 87.

Des McCafferty, "Urban Systems," *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, pp 57 - 70.

Michael R. Murray and Brendan Murtagh, "Strategic Spatial Planning in Northern Ireland," *Understanding Contemporary Ireland*, pp 112 - 124.

Henry Patterson, "The Legacy of Partition," *Ireland Since 1939*, pp 1 - 26.

Henry Patterson, "Modernization and Resistance: Northern Ireland 1945 - 1963," *Ireland Since 1939*, pp 116 - 147.

Henry Patterson, "Between War and Peace: Northern Ireland 1985 - 2002," *Ireland Since 1939*, pp 308 - 343.

Brian M. Walker, "Conflict and conciliation: identities and change, 1960 - 2011," *A Political History of the Two Irelands*, pp 107 - 154.

Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, "Belfast," *Divided Cities*, pp 61 - 82.

Colin Buchanan and Partners, "2004 Belfast City Master Plan - Part 4,"  
[www.belfastcity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=938&SID=687](http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=938&SID=687).

"Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan 2015."  
<http://www.planningni.gov.uk/downloads/bmap2015-techsupp6-urbanenviron-framework.pdf>

## BELFAST IN THE NEWS:

"Bloody Friday: How the Troubles inspired Belfast's medical pioneers," BBC News, July 20, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-18886867>.

"Northern Ireland leader says special status for province possible after Brexit," Reuters, October 31, 2016. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-eu-nireland-idUKKCN12T0JA>.

"Northern Irish court sides with UK premier over Brexit challenge," Reuters, October 28, 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-nireland-idUSKCN12S12B>.

"'Border Fox' O'Hare facing extradition to Dublin," BBC News, November 8, 2016.  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-37907023>. Related:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dessie\\_O%27Hare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dessie_O%27Hare).

“Former IRA informer found dead at his home in England,” The Guardian, October 29, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/oct/29/former-ira-informer-found-dead-at-his-home-in-england>.

#### RELEVANT BELFAST WIKIPEDIA LINKS:

The Troubles:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Troubles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troubles)

Provisional Irish Republican Army:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provisional\\_Irish\\_Republican\\_Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provisional_Irish_Republican_Army)

Democratic Unionist Party:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic\\_Unionist\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Unionist_Party)

Sinn Féin:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinn\\_Féin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinn_Féin)

The Good Friday Agreement / Belfast Agreement:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good\\_Friday\\_Agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Good_Friday_Agreement)

Ulster Volunteer Force:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster\\_Volunteer\\_Force](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Volunteer_Force)

Ulster Defence Association:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster\\_Defence\\_Association](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Defence_Association)

Irish National Liberation Association:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish\\_National\\_Liberation\\_Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_National_Liberation_Army)

Peep o' Day Boys:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peep\\_o%27\\_Day\\_Boys](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peep_o%27_Day_Boys)

Battle of the Bogside:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_the\\_Bogside](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Bogside)

No-go area:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-go\\_area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No-go_area)

Free Derry:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free\\_Derry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Derry)

Bloody Sunday (Bogside Massacre):

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1972))

Falls Curfew:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls\\_Curfew](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls_Curfew)

Operation Motorman:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Motorman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Motorman)

Peace People / Betty Williams / Nobel Peace Prize 1976:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty\\_Williams\\_\(Nobel\\_laureate\)#Peace\\_petition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_Williams_(Nobel_laureate)#Peace_petition)

The Disappeared:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disappeared\\_\(Northern\\_Ireland\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disappeared_(Northern_Ireland))

Parades in Northern Ireland:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parades\\_in\\_Northern\\_Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parades_in_Northern_Ireland)

Shankill Road:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankill\\_Road](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shankill_Road)

The Falls Road:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls\\_Road,\\_Belfast](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falls_Road,_Belfast)

The Holy Lands:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyland\\_\(Belfast\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyland_(Belfast))

#### DIVIDED CITIES:

Lance Freeman, "Implications for Planning and Policy," *There Goes the 'Hood: View of gentrification from the ground up*, pp 157 - 187.

Stuart Hall, "Cosmopolitan Promises, Multicultural Realities," *Divided Cities: Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, pp 20 - 51.

Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, "Mostar," *Divided Cities*, pp 103 - 120.

Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, "Nicosia," *Divided Cities*, pp 121 - 142.

Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth, "Professional Responses to Partition" and "Patterns," *Divided Cities*, pp 167 - 236.

HOUSING:

TBD