Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: The Open University
Unit of Assessment: A04 Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Title of case study: The Belfast Mobility Project: Transforming everyday mobility patterns in a divided city
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2018
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Dr John Dixon	Professor of Social Psychology	2011 – ongoing

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No

1.Summary of the impact

The Belfast Mobility Project (BMP) has shown how and why residents' everyday mobility practices may both reproduce and transform systems of segregation within the historically divided city of Belfast. In so doing, the BMP has produced two forms of impact. First, it has changed policymakers' understanding of the psychology of sectarian divisions in Belfast at a time when access to ostensibly public spaces and facilities remains shaped by sectarianism. In so doing, it has informed government initiatives, and planning decision-making, concerning the creation of shared spaces and public amenities within the city. Second, it has raised public awareness of the historical but continuing relationship between human mobility and local patterns of segregation.

2. Underpinning research

Belfast saw some of the worst of 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland and while there has been substantial expansion and regeneration of the city in recent years, it remains substantially divided along sectarian lines. Although intergroup contact can reduce prejudice, opportunities to experience such contact are often curtailed by systems of segregation. Work on this problem has generally focused on divisions entrenched within institutions of residence, education, and employment. Building on Professor John **Dixon's** earlier work in post-apartheid South Africa, the Belfast Mobility Project employed a complementary approach, which treated segregation as the outcome of individuals' movements over time within everyday life spaces, bringing together a research team consisting of geographers, anthropologists, and psychologists. Taking as a case study Catholics' and Protestants' use of public environments in north Belfast, the BMP used GPS tracking technology, combined with Geographical Information System Mapping (GIS) analytics, to explore residents' activity space use over time. It also used a field survey and follow-up set of walking interviews to explore how social psychological factors shape residents' willingness to use activity spaces beyond their own communities. The research was timely in that it coincided with local initiatives to promote shared spaces in Belfast and to encourage residents to use public facilities (e.g. parks) that have historically been organised along sectarian lines.

   Analysis based on over 1,000 hours of raw movement data derived from over 22 million GPS data points revealed that north Belfast is marked by high levels of segregation, expressed through residents' limited use of public spaces, facilities and pathways located in outgroup areas **[O1]**. To a large extent, this phenomenon reflects the sectarian patterning of movements along tertiary street networks or 'T-Communities' **[O2]** and residents' associated, often fine-grained, understandings of the location of community boundaries **[O3, O4]**. However, encouragingly, use of shared spaces is also common, occurring mainly in the afternoon within spaces of shopping and consumption.

   An exciting feature of the methodology used in this project lies in its capacity to identify shared spaces where potential intercommunity mixing is emerging and to investigate some of the social and psychological factors that may predict such mixing. This is important because several local government initiatives have attempted to encourage the emergence of shared spaces and to promote the common use of facilities such as parks **[O5]**. We found, for example, that residents' willingness to use activity spaces beyond their own community was associated with their past experiences of negative and positive intergroup contact, perceptions of realistic

and symbolic threat, and sense of place identity and belonging **[O1-O6]**. Perhaps surprisingly, demographic factors such as age, gender and community identity had little impact on Belfast residents' self-reported or actual use of spaces beyond their own community **[O1]**.

3. References to the research
All items referenced here were peer-reviewed

O1. **Dixon, J**., Tredoux, C., Davies, G., Huck, J., Hocking, B., Sturgeon, B., Whyatt, D., Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (2019) Parallel lives: Intergroup contact, threat and the segregation of everyday activity spaces. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 118, 457-480.* https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000191

O2. Davies, G., **Dixon, J**. et al. (2019) Networks of (Dis)connection: Mobility practices, tertiary streets and sectarian divisions in north Belfast. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 109,* 1729-1747*.* https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2019.1593817

O3. **Dixon, J**., Tredoux, C., Davies, G., Huck, J., Hocking, B., Sturgeon, B., Whyatt, D., Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (2020) 'When the walls come tumbling down': The role of intergroup proximity, threat and contact in shaping attitudes towards the removal of Northern Ireland's peace walls. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 59, 922-944. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12370

O4. Huck, J.J., Whyatt, J.D., **Dixon, J**., Sturgeon, B., Hocking, B., Davies, G., Dixon, J., Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (2018) Exploring Segregation and Sharing in Belfast: A PGIS Approach. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 109*, 223-241. https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2018.1480930

O5. Hocking, B., Sturgeon, B., **Dixon, J**., Jarman, N., Bryan, D., Huck, J., Whyatt, D., & Davies, G. (2019) Place-identity and urban policy: Sharing leisure spaces in the 'post-conflict' city. In R. Piazza (Ed.), *Discourses of identity in liminal places and spaces* (pp.166-192). London: Routledge.

O6. Hocking, B.T., Sturgeon, B., Whyatt, D., Davies, G., Huck, J., **Dixon, J**., Jarman, N., & Bryan, D. (2018) Negotiating the ground: 'Mobilizing' a divided field site in the post-conflict city. *Mobilities, 13 (6),* 876-893*.* https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2018.1504664

Research grant: ESRC grant awarded to Professor John **Dixon** (PI), 2015-2018, entitled: 'The Belfast Mobility Project: Intergroup contact, segregation and the time-geography of sectarian relations in Belfast'; Award amount: GBP392,138.

4. Details of the impact

The Belfast Mobility Project (BMP) has had two main forms of impact:

(1) Providing data to underpin policy decision-making regarding the use and creation of shared space in Belfast
To achieve this kind of impact, the project team have undertaken a large-scale programme of policy engagement activity. This has included the production of three policy reports, presentations to eight government departments and regular meetings with the project advisory group (comprising key figures from Belfast political and policy bodies):
- The first report (2017) resulted from a workshop on 'Shared Space' organized by Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, which was held in December 2016, and brought together academic and non-academic contributors interested in this topic. The latter, more substantive, reports **[C1, C2]** emerged via a partnership with the Institute for Conflict Research (2019): an NGO based in north Belfast who acted as a non-academic collaborator on the project's ESRC grant.

- The BMP's findings have also been disseminated via a series of presentations by the project team, delivered between 2016 and 2017, to eight government departments, as well as via regular meetings with our Project Advisory Group.
- The policy reports and presentations were complemented by an 'end of project' Workshop, held on November 2017 at The Open University's Belfast Office, and a policy report launch, held in north Belfast in January 2020.

These events were attended, among other beneficiaries, by representatives of the Northern Ireland Executive Office, Northern Ireland Department of Justice, Community Relations Council, Office of the First Minister and Deputy Minister, Belfast City Council, and Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Community Cohesion Unit. Through these varying pathways to impact, the BMP has enhanced policymakers' understanding of the psychology of segregation and sharing of public space in Belfast, as corroborated by interviews and testimonials from key stakeholders **[C3-C7]**.

On a general level, the BMP has provided policymakers with novel data on how Belfast residents use, move through, and avoid everyday public spaces in the city, offering a far richer picture than hitherto existed of how, when, why and where the segregation of everyday spaces occurs. Representatives of several branches of government have highlighted that its unique combination of attitudinal and behavioural data has made the BMP a valuable resource to their departments, enriching their understanding of community relations in Belfast and informing planning decision-making. For example, a leading figure in the Northern Ireland Executive Office observed that **[C3]**: "*we were always aware of the level of segregation and areas of integration, but we didn't have a lot of information as to just, other than anecdotal, about this as a predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant area. We didn't have any information on what that meant for the people that lived in the areas, and what their perceptions are. And I think that's something I'm very conscious of in policy […] it was a useful tool to get into the community, and in a way that wasn't Government-led, as well, and I think that's important.*"

Similarly, a representative of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive **[C5]** noted that "*no other study has captured in such detail how residents use everyday spaces in Belfast*", and the CEO of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council described the project as having "*provided valuable information*" **[C6]**. Developing this theme, she added that: "*Our mission is to create an environment in which positive, peaceful and respectful relations between local communities can develop in Northern Ireland. To do so, we need to know more about how, when, and why segregation or division is happening. The findings of the BMP have had a significant influence on our work by providing concrete, policy-relevant evidence about how people move around the city, where they go and when, how they live separated lives, and how they sometimes integrate and mix with one another. Such information is vital to enabling us to work more effectively as an organisation to fulfil our mission*" **[C6]**.

More specifically, local policymakers have highlighted the following contributions: (1) the project has clarified the nature, causes and extent of segregation of public spaces across North Belfast, particularly at the level of everyday mobility decisions; (2) the project has identified emerging spaces and pathways that are shared across communities and elucidated how, when and why such sharing is occurring; and (3) equally, the project has identified spaces that are assumed to be shared but are not perceived or treated that way by residents themselves, including some public amenities, supermarkets and recreational facilities. These contributions have informed policy and practice relating to the creation of shared public spaces across a number of key government agencies, including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Good Relations Unit, the Department of Justice, and the Northern Ireland Executive Office **[C3, C5-C7]**.

In addition, the former Director of Neighbourhood Services (Belfast City Council), a member of the City Regeneration and Development team (Belfast City Council), and a member of the city Innovation team Belfast City Council) have all emphasized that the BMP findings have particular significance for their plans to develop Belfast City Centre **[C4]**. At present, for instance, the Council is trying to encourage more residents to live in the city centre and is also involved in other major transformation projects, one of which entails the creation of a new campus site for Ulster University. In this light, the project's data on participants' use of city centre space, their patterns of entry and access to this space, and their perceptions of the safety of different areas of the centre have all provided valuable and policy-relevant information. Explaining the project's

impact, the former Director of Neighbourhood Services of the Belfast City Council noted in an interview **[C4]** that "*I think that the issue of connectivity, how people move about in the city is really, really important across a number of key policy areas in terms of our physical regeneration, in terms of our transport system, in terms of how we use open spaces, and our other particularly council assets [...] and in real terms it hasn't been looked at in a holistic way for quite a long time and this project is part of that for me*". He also emphasized that the BMP had already shaped policy discussions in terms of city centre planning, even if the collapse of the Northern Irish government's power sharing assembly between January 2017 and January 2020 has meant that there has been limited implementation of planning and policy initiatives to date. As he put it, "*[...] while we have had some implicit understanding of issues in the use of shared space, we have not had rigorous evidence on how people use and make sense of city spaces 'on the ground'. This is where the research conducted by the Belfast Mobility Project has proved invaluable in helping to inform planning policy in North Belfast and the city centre*" **[C4]**.

(2) Promoting public awareness of – and reflection upon - the relationship between human mobility and segregation

Building on an extensive program of community outreach activities, the BMP has also raised public understanding of the role of everyday mobility practices in shaping the sharing and segregation of public spaces in Belfast. This program initially featured more than 40 knowledge exchange meetings between project team members and local community groups and policymakers in North Belfast (2015-2017), which were designed both to enrol potential participants in the project and to provide information about how and why studying everyday mobility patterns and use of public spaces in north Belfast is important **[C8]**. We then produced a multimedia presentation for the Northern Ireland Department of Justice's peace walls' exhibition staged in Belfast and open to the public between November 21 and 24, 2017, which attracted several hundred visitors. Among other things, this presentation featured a visual animation, which served as a centrepiece of the exhibition, that used project data to simulate Catholic and Protestant residents' movement patterns through the north of the city and the City Centre **[C9]**.

These early events were followed up by a community workshop - delivered as part of the 'Being Human' festival, one of the UK's leading humanities public engagement events, held in Belfast in November 2019. This was designed in collaboration with local artist Heather Richardson. At the workshop, 30 Belfast residents participated in a cross-community quilt-making event held at the Ulster Museum. The quilt design was based on one of the BMP's GIS images of the human geography of north Belfast. The workshop aimed, among other goals, to encourage participants to explore, together through craft practice, the relationship between human movement patterns and segregation in Belfast **[C10]**. In recognition of the workshop's success, the organizers of the Being Human Festival asked Heather Richardson to write a case study for their website as an example of 'best practice', noting that it was an ideal model of public engagement: "*we all agree it was a fantastic example of what we are trying to achieve with the festival*".

The event led to increased awareness and reflection of how segregation operates within Belfast among the participants. Follow up questionnaire evidence showed that 84% of participants agreed that the event had encouraged them "*to reflect on how local residents experience and use public space in Belfast*", 92% agreed that "*The event was useful in getting members of different communities to work together in a project about segregated and shared spaces in Belfast*", and 100% agreed that they "*would like to participate in similar events in the future*". Interview materials with a sub-group of participants **[C10]** provided additional qualitative confirmation of these quantitative patterns. One interviewee emphasized how the event had taken her back to her "*[...] childhood and actually it made you realize that some things have changed but not an awful lot and not quickly enough [...]. It just made you realize that people still are safe in their own communities and they don't mix enough*". Another noted that "*I think it [the event] really helped me because even though we were all sewing together, we were all relaxed and we started to tell stories of what it had been like growing up in Belfast*" **[C10]**. Future community workshops, and museum display of the primary cultural output (the community quilt), are planned for when COVID restrictions allow.

The three sources of corroborating evidence presented within C10 include: (1) video footage of the cross-community quilt-making workshop, (2) photographs of the completed quilt, and (3)

the follow up audio interviews with participants. Taken together, these forms of evidence demonstrate also the BMP's contribution to Creativity, Culture and Society – which includes the coproduction of a new cultural artefact in the form of the quilt – as well as the project's broader role in raising public awareness of – and reflection upon - the dynamics sectarian segregation and mixing in Belfast.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1. A policy report produced by the Institute for Conflict Research, based on the key findings of the BMP. Sturgeon, B., Jarman, N., Bryan, D., **Dixon**, J., Whyatt, D., Hocking, B., Huck, J., Davies, G. & Tredoux, C. (2019a). *Mobility, sharing and segregation in Belfast: Policy Report.* Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

C2. A second policy report produced by the Institute for Conflict Research, again based on the key findings of the BMP. Sturgeon, B., Jarman, N., Bryan, D., **Dixon**, J., Whyatt, D., Hocking, B., Huck, J., Davies, G. & Tredoux, C. (2019b). *Attitudes and experiences of residents of north Belfast to the 'Other' community, safety, visual displays, peace walls and Belfast City Centre.* Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research.

C3. Interview with a representative of the Northern Ireland Executive Office detailing the impact of the BMP.

C4. Interviews with representatives of the Belfast City Council and a testimonial provided by the former Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services of the Belfast City Council.

C5. Interview with a representative of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

C6. Testimonial provided by the CEO of the Northern Irish Community Relations Council.

C7. Interview with a representative of the Northern Ireland Department of Justice.

C8. A chronological list of BMP public and policymaker engagement meetings conducted between 2015 and 2017.

C9. The animation that featured in the Department of Justice's Peace walls' exhibition in November 2017.

C10. The 'Stitches and Stories' event at the Ulster Museum, including video footage of the cross-community quilt-making workshop, photographs of the completed quilt, and follow up audio interviews with participants. Available on request.