

Institution: Nottingham Trent University (NTU)		
Unit of Assessment: D28 – History		
Title of case study: <i>Voices of 68</i> : Managing the legacy of the past in the Northern Ireland Peace Process		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 - 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role:	Periods employed by submitting HEI:
Chris Reynolds	Professor	2007 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - December 31, 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact: The research-driven <i>Voices of 68</i> project has changed how Northern Ireland's 1968 civil rights movement is remembered and, in so doing, has provided an innovative and influential blueprint on how the difficult legacy of the past can be managed as part of the Northern Ireland peace process. Through the co-creation of physical and digital oral-history-based exhibitions, the project directly informed National Museums Northern Ireland's (NMNI) treatment of this period and shaped its broader methodological and theoretical approach. It has inflected policy discussions on how to address the legacy of 'The Troubles'; informed and influenced how this period is taught and learned at GCSE level; shaped local, national and international perspectives around the 50th anniversary of this seminal period; and provided a platform for former activists to construct a new, inclusive narrative on this crucial chapter in N. Ireland's recent past.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research: The year 1968 is a common reference point and watershed moment in contemporary society; a transnational story of social revolt that shook governments around the world and inspired radical change. The mass civil unrest and nationwide strikes that rocked France in 1968 are seen as pivotal in the evolution of French society. This <i>Mai 68</i> 'moment' was the initial focus of Reynolds' research. In his 2011 monograph [R1] he argued that these events have been portrayed in an increasingly reductive light to the point that they are seen less as a nationwide crisis and the largest strike in French history, but more as a bon-enfant tantrum led principally by a spoilt generation of Parisian students. He contended that the memory of 1968 has been cultivated in such a way that undermines its true magnitude.</p> <p>The <i>Mai 68</i> research led to Reynolds' involvement in a Leverhulme/AHRC project: <i>Around 1968: Activism, Networks, Trajectories</i>. Led by the University of Oxford, it produced oral testimonies from 475 former activists in 14 countries, offering new insights into the political and lifestyle radicalism around 1968. Within this programme, Reynolds addressed a lacuna by comparing events in N. Ireland with those of the iconic <i>Mai 68</i> to make sense of how and why the memory of 1968 in the 'Troubled Province' has been marginalised. In his monograph [R2] he argued that the positive aspects of civil rights protests in N. Ireland in 1968 were 'buried' by the onset of the Troubles. Peace has enabled a re-examination of 1968, not solely as a dark turning point in N. Irish history, but as a time when N. Ireland had an opportunity to take a different path. Reynolds concluded that N. Ireland did indeed experience its own '1968' and should be included in the transnational narrative.</p> <p>Reynolds' work to rehabilitate the memory of this seminal moment for N. Ireland continued through a collaboration with NMNI that sought to re-engage the public with this period. This facilitated the development of an innovative, multi-faceted methodological and theoretical approach, combining museum studies, oral history, education and the conceptualisation of agonistic memory, through which divided communities are brought together to address the past in a constructive way, not predicated on consensus [R3]. In a co-authored article with NMNI's Director of Collections, Reynolds argued that their success in bringing together contested historical perspectives provided valuable lessons for the broader challenge of dealing with the legacy of N. Ireland's past [R4]. Through the deployment of oral histories within the trusted environment of the national museum space, and with a focus on the creation of educational activities, this research has advanced nascent theoretical discussions around the notion of agonistic memory [R5]. It has helped to shift the conversation about the N. Irish and transnational events of 1968 [R6], while the innovative approach provides a case study for other post-conflict societies struggling with the legacies of their own difficult pasts [R3, R4].</p>		

The broad findings of this body of work that have fed directly into a programme of public, schools and policy engagement can be summarised as follows:

- The peacetime era affords opportunities to re-examine 1968 and recalibrate the memory of this period; N. Ireland should be written into this transnational story of revolt and its current absence from the narrative must be understood in relation to the post-1968 onset of the Troubles.
- A recalibrated perspective has facilitated the exploration of a constructive and inclusive approach to managing contested pasts, with an emphasis on the theory of agonistic memory.
- Oral history has a significant role to play in providing an effective methodological approach to managing N. Ireland's difficult past.
- The Museum and education sectors constitute particularly potent vectors and stakeholders in the effective deployment of this innovative methodological and theoretical approach.
- The case of 1968 and the NMNI collaborative project can be a blueprint for how to negotiate the broader and delicate question of N. Ireland's contested past.

3. References to the research: The high quality of the underpinning research selected here is indicated by its broad geographical and disciplinary reach. One can also point to the rigorous external peer review process that brought such research to publication and how this body of work has become a point of reference for the broader, vital question of dealing with the past in Northern Ireland and beyond.

R1 Reynolds, C., *Memories of May '68: France's Convenient Consensus*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011.

R2 Reynolds, C., *Sous les pavés...The Troubles: France, Northern Ireland and the European Collective Memory of 1968*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014.

R3 Black, G. and Reynolds, C., 'Engaging Audiences with Difficult Pasts: The Voices of '68 Project at the Ulster Museum, Belfast', *Curator*, 63: 21-38, 2020.

R4 Reynolds, C. & Blair, W., 'Museums and 'difficult pasts': Northern Ireland's 1968', *Museum International*, 70(3-4):12-25, 2019.

R5 Reynolds, C. and Parr, C., 'Northern Ireland's 1968 at 50: agonism and protestant perspectives on civil rights', *Contemporary British History*, 2020.

R6 Reynolds, C., 'Beneath the Troubles, the Cobblestones: Recovering the "Buried" Memory of Northern Ireland's 1968', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 123, Issue 3, 1: 744-48, 2018.

4. Details of the impact

Background: Despite the undoubted progress that has been made in N. Ireland since the onset of peace in 1998, it would be wholly inaccurate to suggest that the Province's problems have been completely solved. There are many areas that provide grounds for the perpetuation of divisions. One of the most challenging is how to deal with the difficult legacy of the past. This has become a significant element of the peace-building process and a top priority for political parties within N. Ireland as well as for the London and Dublin governments. The coming together of the academic rigour and independence of Reynolds' research into 1968 – with its initial objective of writing the N. Irish events into the transnational narrative – and NMNI's independence and drive for an inclusive representation of the past, created a project whose 'narrative hospitality' provided a safe space for divergent narratives to meet, supporting communities on all sides to move forwards.

Pathways: Around the publication of **R2**, Reynolds was invited by NMNI to explore a direct translation of his research into how this period was to be presented in the permanent gallery of the Ulster Museum in Belfast, N. Ireland's third most popular visitor attraction. The subsequent five-year partnership led to a multi-faceted project developed in four phases. An early decision was made to deepen the collaboration via a complete overhaul of the section dedicated to N. Ireland's 1968, drawing on oral history testimonies conducted by Reynolds. This second stage saw the development of relations with N. Ireland's curriculum body for the design of an extensive education programme that has so far resulted in direct interactions with 750 pupils and reached hundreds more through digital resources tailored to the GCSE curriculum. The third stage saw the development and curation, by Reynolds, of a new, expanded temporary exhibition entitled *Voices of 68*. This free exhibition was hosted at the Ulster Museum to mark the 50th anniversary in 2018; it was accompanied by a three-day, public-facing event and a travelling version produced in both physical and digital formats. The travelling version was made more scalable

and versatile through the use of augmented reality to access video content on mobile devices and an accompanying interactive digital resource developed by a NI-based creative arts organisation The Nerve Centre, published on Apple's iBooks store. Complemented by public-facing discussion events, it has been hosted at 31 venues around the UK, Ireland, mainland Europe and the United States, reaching an estimated 50,000 visitors in local public libraries, museums and city-based heritage centres. The fourth stage saw an adapted version of *Voices of 68* incorporated into the permanent gallery of the Ulster Museum in August 2019. Over the period during which *Voices of 68*, in its different forms, was on prominent display in the Museum's main Modern History gallery (next to the popular Discover History Zone and the critically acclaimed Troubles and Beyond gallery), the Museum received 3.1m visitors.

Impact

Influencing policy debates around the legacy of NI's past as part of the peace process:

The research-driven, collaborative approach has provided a blueprint for addressing the legacy of conflict in N. Ireland, in particular 'The Troubles', and has had a direct impact on political bodies grappling with this mission. It has exemplified how inclusive representation and storytelling is a model for reassessing the recent past openly and constructively in order to confront and manage contentious histories. The 2014 Stormont House Agreement announced the appointment of the 15-member Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT). FICT was established in June 2016; its remit includes advising on how N. Ireland can effectively manage the legacy of its contested past. An independent member of the Commission reflected on the *Voices of 68* project as a *'fruitful example of just how to respond to the challenge of managing the legacy of the past'*. He said it *'could provide a framework ... to help ensure that future generations are provided with the tools that will enable them to avoid the contested past from perpetuating the divisions that continue to provide such a challenge in Northern Ireland'* [S1]. A key FICT workstream involves an analysis of how N. Irish history is taught. The Commissioner highlighted the direct impact of the educational strand of Reynolds' project on the deliberations of the FICT commission. He described how *'as author of the unpublished chapter on Education, in the draft FICT report ... the project has helped shape [his] thinking [and] influenced [his] conclusions on how teaching Northern Ireland's contested history might be appropriate in a society emerging from conflict'* [S1].

In May 2018 the UK Government launched a public consultation on *Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past*, which sought to *'help people address the impact of the Troubles' 'in order to support true reconciliation and healing at a societal level'*. NMNI submitted its response with the 1968 project front and centre for how museums can assist this vital element of the Peace Process [S2]. NMNI's CEO pointed to Reynolds' project as central to their submission and how its impact *'will continue to be very important in the future as discussions continue over how we overcome the challenge that is the legacy of the past'* [S3]. NMNI's Director of Collections noted that *'state-led initiatives such as the Stormont House Agreement have 'consistently referenced' oral history as 'a mechanism for dealing with the legacy of the past'*. He said the *Voices of 68* project *'provides a positive, practical case study and has inevitably influenced this on-going debate'* [S4].

Shaping NMNI's representation of N. Ireland's contested history and magnifying the prominence of the organisation's role in managing the legacy of the Province's past:

The success of the *Voices of 68* exhibition and its positive feedback saw a version of it afforded a prominent space in the permanent history gallery of the Ulster Museum in August 2019. This has facilitated sustained engagement between the Museum and its international visitor audience in the portrayal of a hugely significant moment in N. Ireland's past. The collaboration and its underpinning research have had a direct and significant impact on N. Ireland's national museum that goes beyond its representation of this period. The Director of Collections explained how this project has facilitated a *'re-purposing'* of NMNI's approach that, as *'an exemplar'* of how museums can work with academia, and *'has had a significant influence on [their] strategic thinking as an institution'*. He wrote: *'Voices of 68 has provided a model that we will seek to deploy in our treatment of other themes and periods in Northern Ireland's recent past'* [S4]. These sentiments were echoed by the NMNI CEO, who pointed to the incorporation of *Voices of 68* into their permanent gallery as its greatest *'lasting and visible impact'*. She described the project as radical and ground-breaking, the impact of which will *'continue to be very important in*

the future’ both in terms of the museum sector and the debate on the legacy of N. Ireland’s past. She also highlighted the project’s success in engaging ‘*different and difficult to reach audiences*’ like teachers and students [S3].

Transforming how the period of 1968 is taught and learned in the N. Irish education sector:

In partnership with the NMNI education team, a collaboration with the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) – a public body under the Department of Education – and the History Teachers Association of Northern Ireland (HTANI) has ensured this project’s direct impact on how N. Ireland’s 1968 is now taught and studied at GCSE level in the Province. Underpinning this were the development of a series of study days at the Ulster Museum and creation of online, interactive resources tailored to the curriculum and student needs. The study-day series, attended by 750 pupils to date, is linked to the permanent, temporary and travelling exhibitions, and offers pupils and their teachers a day of activities including lectures by academic experts and talks by protagonists of the 1968 period. The digital learning resource provides teachers and pupils with activities to undertake before, during and after a visit to the *Voices of 68* exhibition. They are available on the Ulster Museum and the CCEA websites and are in use by teachers across the Province’s schools (hit count at the end of the impact period: 2575), extending the project reach far beyond those students who have the opportunity to attend the study days.

A CCEA education manager [S5] described the project as a ‘*trailblazer*’, commenting how it ‘*has made it easier for teachers to confront the difficulties of teaching such a sensitive area of our recent past*’ in the context of her experience of teachers being ‘*frightened to teach this period*’. She wrote: “*The inclusive, multi-perspective approach ... helps teachers take the inherently difficult issues back into the classroom and delve deeper in a much more constructive fashion.*” She concluded: “*Given the importance of education to our future in Northern Ireland, I believe that this project offers up significant lessons in terms of the ongoing and very difficult debate around how we deal with the legacy of the past as part of the peace process.*” The HTANI Chairman described his interaction with the project as a ‘*highlight*’ of the academic year that provided an ‘*exceptional educational experience*’. Acknowledging a ‘*temptation ... always to avoid taking up the challenge of teaching such divisive moments*’, he provided evidence of sustained impact: “*I will absolutely be applying the lessons learnt from my interaction with this project when dealing with 1968 in my future teaching* [S6].” Feedback from students attending the study days demonstrated clear evidence of a positive impact on their levels of understanding. Comments [S7] included: “*I’m just glad that I’ve achieved this knowledge and know that I can speak out about it and I can retain this and speak to my future generation and my future family [about it]*”; “*They have changed my perspective as now I understand more of the backstory*”; “*It has changed my view of how the world was affected by civil rights movements in 1968/69*”; “*That 1968 was a period of change not just of civil rights but fashion, music and opinions*”; “*People should talk more about 1968.*”

Changing public perspectives on the N. Irish events of 1968 and the broader question of managing the legacy of NI’s past, locally, nationally and internationally:

Through permanent, temporary, digital and travelling exhibitions, public-facing events and in-depth media coverage, this project has inflected and shaped perceptions of N. Ireland’s 1968 in the Province itself, Republic of Ireland, the UK, Europe and the US. The central place acquired by the Ulster Museum as a trusted and independent vector in shaping public perceptions of the past in N. Ireland, coupled with a partnership with the Civil Rights 50th Anniversary Committee, enabled this project to influence strongly the nature of commemorative events amid a surge in interest. Iconic activist and civil rights leader from this period, Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin) explained how the project shaped local perspectives: “*Chris’s piece of work allowed people to engage, totally on their own with the exhibition, with the narrative, [...] to make their own journey into this safe space.*” She said the project’s approach ‘*enabled a move away from the defensiveness that so often defines how the past is treated in Northern Ireland*’ [S8]. The sense of breaking out of the long-prevailing divisive and insular narrative was reflected in many visitor comments [S7]: “*We are often told it was just a Northern Ireland thing but it was clearly part of a bigger social movement*”; “*The civil rights movement in NI clearly followed other events in USA and Europe. The student protests in Paris and other European cities provided an example to young people in NI*”; “*It should be taught in schools in Britain alongside Martin Luther King as an example that nothing is black and white and that we should always look at every side to see how*

it all influenced events”; “It gives me a more rounded view of the times, I think I had more of a republican narrative”.

Reynolds undertook consultancy roles for local and national media outlets (UTV and RTE) and a series of extended videos were published on the NMNI YouTube channel to enable museum visitors and the public to delve deeper into the project materials; these have amassed 5,750 views. The *Voices of 68* exhibition and direct input from Reynolds (acknowledged in the credits) influenced the content of the documentary *1968: The Long March*, broadcast on RTE One in August 2018 to 300,000 viewers. The lead researcher said the influence of the project was ‘*radical*’ for those working on the film. Pointing to the inclusivity of the narrative constructed, she described its ‘*value and reach*’ in providing lessons for contemporary challenges as ‘*profound*’ [S9]. In reaching an American audience, the project supported a key part of N. Ireland’s international relations strategy, namely forging links with the US, according to the Deputy Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau (NI’s diplomatic presence in the US and Canada) [S10]. In February 2019 the Bureau co-hosted *Voices of 68* and a panel discussion at Boston College – noteworthy in itself given how a previous NI-focused oral history project at this institution had caused global controversy. Noting how the project ‘*established a strong connection between NI and the Civil Rights movement in the US*’, the Deputy Director said the project had ‘*influenced [his] thinking in terms of potential collaborations*’. He wrote: “*I will be looking for other examples of academic work that can ‘bridge’ into a wider discourse and play a key role in the NI Bureau’s public diplomacy mission* [S10].”

Providing a platform for former activists and protagonists from 1968 to shape a new narrative of a crucial turning point in N. Ireland’s recent past: The project provided a platform for historical actors in 1968 to surface their experiences as part of public representations of these events. The inclusion of hitherto marginalised voices in the co-production of project material enabled a redefined and more inclusive narrative of N. Ireland’s 1968. The creation of such ‘*narrative hospitality*’ opened up opportunities for sectors of the N. Ireland community, who neither traditionally visited the Museum nor assumed their stories were meaningful for others, to contribute to shaping a new, more constructive and inclusive narrative. Reynolds interviewed people from a cross-section of N. Irish society, using their feedback to make improvements in each iteration of the project, and involving them in public-facing events. The project had a transformative impact on participants, many of whom previously felt marginalised, and not only on how they now perceive their participation in 1968, but also how their knowledge can contribute to how this history is passed on to future generations. McAliskey outlined how this project drew her in by respecting and validating all perspectives, allowing people to ‘*participate without judgement*’ [S8]. Fellow project participant Maurice Mills, retired DUP councillor, may well have a very different perspective on this period but saw his involvement as a ‘*glorious opportunity to have [his] say on how this important period played out. [...] The fact that such opposing views were brought together is an important aspect of this project*’ [S11].’ The NMNI CEO underlined the significance of successfully assembling such diverse voices – ‘*people ... you would never have expected to have been involved*’ – saying that ‘*the challenge that this represents is not to be underestimated*’ [S3].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 Corroborating statement - FICT commissioner.

S2 NMNI (2019) Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland’s Past: Response from NMNI.

S3 Corroborating statement - Chief Executive, NMNI.*

S4 Corroborating statement - Director of Collections, NMNI.*

S5 Corroborating statement - Education Manager, CCEA.

S6 Corroborating statement - Chairman of HTANI and Head of the History Department, Magherafelt High School, Northern Ireland.

S7 Report containing student feedback from the GCSE study days at the Ulster Museum and feedback from members of the public who visited the exhibition.

S8 Corroborating statement - A 1968 activist and project interviewee.*

S9 Corroborating statement - Researcher on RTE documentary film on 1968.

S10 Corroborating statement - Deputy Director, Northern Ireland Bureau.

S11 Corroborating statement - retired DUP councillor and project interviewee.*

*Participant in the process of impact delivery