

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 22 Anthropology and Development Studies		
Title of case study: Shaping Policy on Shared Space and Contested Flags in Northern Ireland		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2019		
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:
Dominic Bryan	Professor	1999-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-present		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study evidences how Bryan's research impacted government policy for creating non-sectarian shared spaces in the context of changing identities and peace building in Northern Ireland. Since August 2013, Bryan's work has had the following impacts:</p> <p>Impact i shaped public policy on shared space</p> <p>Impact ii increased stakeholder participation</p> <p>Impact iii changed public and political perspectives on shared space and its benefits</p> <p>Impact iv enhanced the development of policy around 'shared space' through detailed discussions with government agencies, political parties and stakeholders</p> <p>Impact v formulated specific discussion over a code of conduct and the legal context for cultural performances</p> <p>Impact vi informed high profile public debate.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The 1998 Multiparty Agreement for peacebuilding in Northern Ireland acknowledged the 'sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes' and the need to 'monitor this issue and consider what action might be required' (see 1998 Multiparty Agreement). Contestations over culture and identity in the public arena have been a key issue in the uneven development of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Projects led by Bryan, since 2000, entail rigorous ethnographic and historical research and quantitative analyses of attitudes, behaviour and policies to identify the importance of civic or 'shared space', the practices around the use of symbols and rituals and the utility of human rights in peace building [1,6,7]. A series of co-authored interdisciplinary reports highlight the powerful role played by key stakeholders, including the police, key government departments and local councils in acts of boundary maintenance through ritual and symbolic activity in dealing with the past [2,3,4,5]. Bryan's research demonstrates that contestation is not a by-product of politics but a crucial part of place-making and identity formation [6]. These studies also examine the importance of mediation in negotiating political tensions arising in contested events and public spaces and in the building of social cohesion by delineating alternative forms of ritualised and symbolic shared spaces [2].</p>		

Between 2002–2010, Bryan acted as PI on two ESRC research grants and Co-I on a further ESRC project, which explored different dimensions of the use of symbols in the period after the signing of the Multiparty Agreement in 1998 [6,7]. These studies resulted in further analysis of policies of shared space [6] and a major publication on civic space in Belfast [7]. From 2002-2005, Bryan headed a team of four researchers, based at the Institute of Irish Studies at QUB, in evaluating the effectiveness of new policies on shared space [2]. From 2006-2010, he led another interdisciplinary group of four QUB researchers, funded by the NI Executive Office in mapping how flags are used to create territory by exploring public attitudes and understandings around them [3]. In 2014, funding from the Community Relations Council and the Irish government resulted in new primary research led by Bryan as PI and Paul Nolan independent researcher, with QUB scholars from Law and Sociology, who undertook an extensive review of the impact of the dispute over the flying of the Union flag at Belfast City Hall [4]. In 2015-16, Bryan and Nolan extended the research to examine attitudes to public space and possible solutions to the disputes over flags [5].

The initial research and the reports [2,3] applied anthropological methods and theory in analysing conflict and the use of symbols. The reports examined the legal options for resolving disputes over the popular flying of flags and surveyed the existing policies of Government and local Councils. Crucially, the research identified the failure of policies introduced by Government in 2005 [3]. The research also looked at specific disputes to attempt to ascertain best practice in conflict resolution, and placed questions in the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) to assess public attitudes to aspects of symbolic conflict [3]. Finally, large-scale geographical surveys revealed the scale of the demarcation of space using flags and ethnographic case studies looking at local meanings attached to these practices, including the sense of threat felt by some [3].

The Flag Dispute [4] comprised a detailed examination of the controversial decision by the Belfast City Council on 3rd December 2012 to reduce the number of days that the Union flag flew on the City Hall. The research examined the effect of policing on loyalist groups who protested against the City Council's decision. The study drew on a range of data, including interviews with 60 people, a review of print and broadcast media, an examination of social media, analysis of data provided by the Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service, and extensive use of Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) records. The research team also created a detailed data base of all public order events which took place in Northern Ireland between December 2012 and March 2013.

The report's authors concluded that, among a number of factors, the actions of political parties in the Council had helped precipitate public order conflict. The report also documented the alienation that existed amongst some of the protesting groups, a consequent increase in flag flying in other areas, and failings in community relations' policies [4].

Flags: Towards a New Understanding (2015) included a new set of surveys on attitudes towards the flying of flags and examined the level of support for particular policies. In addition, it identified weaknesses in the utilisation of current legislation and recommended the policy measures most likely to receive widespread support. As a result of these research insights, Nolan and Bryan authored a potential code of conduct [5].

3. References to the research

1. Bryan, D. (2000). *Orange Parades: Ritual, Tradition and Control*. London: Pluto Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18fs351.430> 430 citations (source: Google Scholar).
2. Bryan, D. and G. Gillespie (2005). *Transforming Conflict: Flags and Emblems*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies. ISBN 085389 8782
3. Bryan, D., Stevenson, C., Gillespie, G. and Bell, J. (2010). *Public Displays of Flags in Northern Ireland* Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast. ISBN 978-0-85389-727-9.
4. Nolan, P., Bryan, D., Dwyer, C., Hayward, K, Radford, K., Shirlow, P. (2014). *The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest* Belfast: Institute for the study of Conflict and Social Justice ISBN 9781909131248
5. Nolan, P. & Bryan D. (2016). *Flags: Towards a New Understanding* Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University Belfast.
6. Bryan, D. (2015). Parades, Flags, Carnivals and Riots: Public Space, Contestation and Transformation in Northern Ireland, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. 21, (4): 565-573. DOI: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/pac0000136>
7. Bryan, D., Connolly, S., and Nagle, J. (2019). *Civic Identity and Public Space: Belfast 1780-2020*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN-13: 978-0719086366.

4. Details of the impact

As summarised above, the research has had the following five key impacts:

Impact i, Shaping public policy: Bryan's research was central to securing key areas of agreement over shared space between the five largest political parties in Northern Ireland. In June 2016, Bryan was appointed by the Northern Ireland First and Deputy First Minister to act as one of two co-Chairs of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition. The Commission was established under the Fresh Start Agreement of 2015 to find a workable and sustainable solution to the sensitive issues of flags and identity. The Director of Good Relations in the Executive Office (TEO) noted that Bryan was appointed "on the basis of his knowledge and expertise, judgement and creative thinking, and a background in stakeholder engagement" [A]. He further commented that Bryan's input, drawing on his research, helped move the thinking of political parties into a new position, "...ultimately producing agreement in a number of key areas including the assessment of the legality of the popular flying of flags and bonfires" [A].

Impact ii, Increasing stakeholder participation: The Commission had 15 members including 7 representatives of political parties. During the four-year lifespan of the Commission, Bryan chaired the majority of the 287 meetings, including 12 public meetings and 18 meetings with key sectors of Northern Irish society (100 stakeholder groups), engaged with relevant Government departments and held meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Assistant Chief Constable of the PSNI [A, B annex c]. The changes effected from these meetings are outlined in the following impacts:

Impacts i, iii & iv, Shaping public policy; changing political perspectives; enhancing discussions with government departments: The Northern Ireland Executive Office has summarised Bryan's leading role as managing and focusing the work of the Commission, preparing and drafting papers, as well as chairing and mediating contested positions at meetings. Bryan specifically brought his academic research to bear upon key issues of

cultural identity by interrogating the position of the political representatives, presenting a model of culture and cultural identity for the final report and drafting substantial sections of the final report. These report sections include chapters on ‘Cultural Identity and its Expression’, ‘Leadership for a Shared Society’, ‘Public Space’, ‘the Public Good and the Arts in the Public Space’, ‘Symbols and Emblems’, ‘Conflict and Cohesion’, ‘Flying of Flags on Street Furniture’ and ‘Flags of Flags on Public Buildings’ [B]. These documents took the discussion of policy in new directions. The Executive Office noted that Bryan ultimately produced ‘agreement in a number of key areas, including the assessment of the legality of the popular flying of flags and bonfires’ [A, B]. The Director of Good Relations additionally noted that ‘a number of these papers were in turn circulated to government departments for ‘sense checking’ leading to some engagement between departments and revision to the papers’, which further resulted in a reconsideration of policies. The Executive Office observes, “As co-Chair at the Commission, Bryan was the key person in that process” [A].

In October 2017, confidential legal advice provided to the Commission by Legal Counsel to the Executive Office on the use of flags in Northern Ireland “drew significantly” on findings contained in Nolan and Bryan’s 2016 study [5]. This advice reviewed legal issues concerning the flying of flags from street furniture, such as lamp posts [A].

Furthermore, in 2020, the research was drawn upon by the Northern Ireland Executive Office during an equality screening exercise, which is a statutory obligation with regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. This exercise extensively used Bryan’s research into the existing Joint Protocol in relation to the Display of Flags in Public Areas [A, C].

Impacts i & v, Shaping policy; developing a code of conduct: The use of research evidence, particularly survey results on public attitudes in order to ascertain policy solutions on flags on lampposts and the development of a code of conduct for flags can be found in the Commission’s final report [B ch. 11]. In evidence given to the Commission, the Northern Ireland Equality Commission outlined the impact of the research, noting it “was pleased to engage with Bryan and Nolan in the research, ‘Flags: Towards a New Understanding’, which provides a sound and comprehensive evidence base on which the potential for voluntary protocols and monitoring arrangements may be further explored” [F]. The research has also impacted policy development at Belfast City Council where Bryan helped to define ideas of ‘common good’ and interculturalism in the 2019 *Belfast Good Relations Strategy* [G]. The Good Relations Manager at Belfast City Council noted that Bryan had “facilitated key discussions at a meeting where... an agreed understanding of what constitutes shared space was established” [G].

Impact vi, Informing high profile public debate: *The Flag Dispute* (2014) and *Flags: Towards a New Understanding* (2016) generated extensive media attention and public debate [D]. The media in Northern Ireland and beyond, including the BBC, *The Wall Street Journal* (03.01.18) and *The Guardian* (12.08.19) have drawn on Bryan’s expertise and research on shared space to provide objective and informed commentary on the contentious status of flags and statues. US *National Public Radio* quoted Bryan in examining spatial division in Belfast (18.11.14), as did *France 24* (08.05.20), while *The Belfast Telegraph* covered the key findings of the 2016 report (17.02.16). Bryan was interviewed by Mark Carruthers on the prominent BBC TV programme, *The View* (27.06.19), exploring political blocks to policy changes over cultural contestation. Additionally, Director of the Irish American Studies Programme at Charleston College commented, “Dr. Bryan’s insights about public memory will help inform our public debate about commemorating the

Antebellum South” (16.04.2018) [D]. Public scrutiny was extended when report findings shaped evidence given by Bryan and Nolan to the Central Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly (16.03.16) and were referenced in a debate by MLAs at Stormont (27.09.16) [E].

Bryan’s research was further evidenced in work undertaken by the United Nations. He was a key informant in the UN Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and was cited in the report (H). He also acted as advisor to the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, Fabian Salvioli, particularly in relation to commemorative practice in public space (I).

Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Testimonial, dated 22nd January 2021, from Acting Director of Good Relations and Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC), the Executive Office, Northern Ireland Executive.
- B. Final Report from the Flags Identity Culture and Tradition Commission (delivered to the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland July 17, 2020). (See particularly pp.95-96, 98-101,106).
- C. Draft Northern Ireland Executive Office Equality Screen Assessment, Flags Policy (2020). This Assessment reviewed the Joint Protocol with regard to the Northern Ireland Executive’s statutory obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.
- D. Extensive Media commentary on Bryan’s work, on his research with the Commission and on shared space, including commentary from the US and France.
- E. Evidence given to the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, 16/3/16. Research quoted 27 September 2016 (Hansard Vol. 118, p.95).
- F. Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ‘Engagement with the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition Commission’, October 2016, p.7.
- G. Letter, undated, from Good Relations Manager, Belfast City Council.
- H. UN Report A/68/296 (9 August 2013) from Farida Shaheed, Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights.
- I. UN Report UN A/HRC/45/45 (9 July 2020), from Fabian Salvioli, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence.