Civil Society Leaders' Experiences of Peacebuilding in Londonderry/Derry City, Northern Ireland: Transforming Cultural and Psychological Barriers

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Abstract

This article reviews the empirical data the second author collected from 120 semi-structured interviews with the leaders of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and funding agency development officers conducted during the summer of 2010 in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. The research explores 44 Derry City respondents' experiences and perceptions regarding external economic aid in the Northern Ireland peace process. To this end, this article explores the role of economic aid from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (EU) Peace and Reconciliation or Peace 3 Fund in engaging with civil society in transforming psychological and cultural barriers towards building sustainable peace in Londonderry or Derry City. Themes emerged inductively from data. It includes the CSO leaders' and funding agency development officers' perspectives on building peace and both funds' impact on the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. CSO leaders and funding agency development officers acknowledge the importance of external economic assistance support in development and forging cross-community contact projects. The interviewees also highlighted issues related to political participation, community competitiveness, and psychological barriers that emerge from CSOs working with both programs. Some of the conclusions are related to broadened peace process interventions to a multi-articulated approach that includes different areas of peacebuilding intervention.

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Northern Ireland: Transforming Cultural and Psychological Barriers

Leonardo Luna and Sean Byrne

This article explores the experiences and perceptions of 44 Civil Society Organizational (CSO) leaders and funding agency development officers within Londonderry or Derry City in Northern Ireland. These CSOs received funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and/or the European Union (EU) Peace 3 Fund. The second author conducted semi-structured interviews with these leaders during the summer of 2010. The data is analyzed from a critical and emancipatory peacebuilding perspective to understand the potentials and challenges of CSOs using external international aid to create and develop cross-community contact and peacebuilding projects. Therefore, our inquiry focuses on what are some of those perspectives regarding the CSOs peacebuilding efforts supported with economic assistance to implement projects to build peace in Derry? What are the experiences of CSOs leaders in implementing those cross-community peacebuilding projects? What are the respondent's perceptions of the external economic assistance in building peace in Derry City? The 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA), the 2006 St. Andrew's Agreement, and the 2014 Stormont House Agreement ended the 30-year war; provided for a devolved power sharing government; and clarified issues around decommissioning weapons, policing, and former combatants yet the hostile polarization continues between two competing communities.

We believe that the political events surrounding Brexit affected Northern Ireland peace process. In addition, we consider that the ongoing EU Peace 4 program as the aid recipients experience many of the same challenges encountered by our research participants such as poverty, youth migration, unemployment, the loss of jobs, uncertainty, and the return

of political violence. In this context, there is a need to critically reflect on the IFI and EU peacebuilding programs to explore their strengths and challenges that have a direct implication for the current EU Peace 4 program. In this study, we explore some of the peacebuilding projects directly impacted by the IFI and the EU Peace 3 Fund that invested over €2 billion to build the peace dividend in Northern Ireland (Khan & Byrne, 2016). The interviewees were from Derry and the Border Counties where the discrimination against the minority community led to the formation of the 1968 Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, and the shooting dead of 14 civil rights marchers in Derry on Bloody Sunday, 1972 by British paratroopers (Byrne, 2008).

The article begins by describing the context of the conflict and evolution of the IFI and EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund. Second, it outlines the concept of civil society and its relation with the critical and emancipatory peacebuilding approach. Third, the methods of data collection are then described. Fourth, the interviews of 44 IFI and EU Peace 3 Fund grantees and funding agency development officers are analysed in relation to economic aid and community peacebuilding projects. The article concludes with a discussion of the respondent's perceptions of and contributions to the peace process in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Conflict Context

The Northern Ireland conflict is embedded in ethnoreligious identities, deep economic cleavages, and the manipulation of politics and religion by political elites (Dixon, 2007). The 30 years Troubles were a geopolitical ethnopolitical conflict that left psychological and physical traumas on the civilian population dealing with their cultural legacies that have kept both communities apart as social inequality and discrimination; a damaged infrastructure; deprivation; and economic chaos impacted those relations (Byrne et al., 2009). The conflict also involves the collision of two ethnocultural narratives. Both

narratives reinforce cultural identity, history, and knowledge as the conflict became encoded within the ethnic identities of both communities while the epistemologies of the Other are excluded and that group is constructed as the enemy Other (Senehi, 2009). The Northern Ireland conflict is a complex social phenomenon that necessitates using a multidisciplinary framework that includes economic, historical, psychocultural, and political issues, as well as religion and demographic dimensions to analyze its deep roots (Byrne, 2008).

In 1972, the British Government took direct control of Northern Ireland and appointed a Secretary of State to implement Direct Rule from London to administrate the province legally and politically. This intervention purse strings that reduced the risk of violent conflict while the Irish Government worked in 1985 with the British government to introduce the 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement (AIA) that was a little short of joint authority (Byrne, 2008). Similar to many other protracted ethnic conflicts, the Northern Ireland conflict was also influenced by international affairs. In the mid-1990s, the United States pressured the British government to negotiate with Northern Ireland's to reform the policing service, decommission paramilitary weaponry, and the emergency legislation (e.g., the Prevention Against the Terrorism Act and Direct Rule), and withdraw British combat troops from Northern Ireland (Byrne, 2008).

The international dimension brought an economic aid package with the introduction of the IFI through the signing of the AIA, and the EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund after the 1994 reciprocal Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries ceasefires (Rahman et al., 2017). During the 1990s, international actors started to use economic assistance around the world as they articulated their goals, policymaking frameworks, and bureaucratization in what some scholars describe as the "institutionalization of an aid regime" (Woodward, 2013). In the Northern Ireland case, the use of the international economic aid became visible with the

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signing of the 1985 AIA by the British and Irish governments that clarified to the international community the possibility of using economic aid to promote socioeconomic development in societies transitioning out of violence. In 1986, both governments established the IFI "to promote economic and social advance, to encourage social and cultural contact, dialogue and reconciliation between Nationalists and Unionists throughout Ireland" (Buchanan, 2016, p. 86). Australia, Canada, the EU, New Zealand, and the United States provided funding to IFI. In the beginning, the IFI focused on supporting disadvantaged economic areas and after the 1994 paramilitaries ceasefires, the EU became the largest donor increasing its annual contribution to the IFI (Byrne et al., 2009). By 1995, the IFI started to support CSO's conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts and by 1999, the IFI had created new Regeneration of Deprived Areas, Community Capacity Building and Economic Development programs. By 2006, the IFI reorganized its support of CSO activities under four general titles, namely Building Foundations, Building Bridges, Integrating and Leaving a Legacy (Buchanan, 2016). All of the IFI's financial support of project activities ceased on December 31, 2015. In 2014, the EU created a new Peace IV program (2014-2020) with emphasis on children and young people, and an investment of €270 million (Kołodziejski, 2020).

In the past, the IFI was criticized for emphasising large-scale development projects building white elephant and unnecessary services rather than to supporting more local CSO projects (Byrne et al., 2009). These programs had limitations related to their complexity and bureaucracy, while assessments found missed learning opportunities, the lack of sustainability of CSO projects, and a low uptake in the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) community (Buchanan, 2014). The IFI and EU Peace and Reconciliation programs have also reinforced liberal democratization and marketization over prioritizing local CSOs agency

(Creary & Byrne, 2014). In Northern Ireland, people's perceptions of the IFI and EU Peace 3 funding has varied. For example, respondents in some studies in Belfast, Derry, and the Border Area see external funding as an important facet of peacebuilding while other studies have criticized the culture of dependence of CSOs on the international community; the inflexibility of both funders' structure; and the bureaucracy of the administrative and reporting processes (Byrne & Irvin, 2002; Byrne et al., 2009).

The Role of Civil Society Organizations

Civil society's role in the peacebuilding processes is essential and over the past fifteen years we have witnessed an increase in civil society peacebuilding initiatives (Paffenholz, 2013). Peace initiatives in different conflict milieus promoted by the international community supported local CSOs to nurture a constructive dialogue between the states and local communities (O'Brien, 2005). These peace enterprises also try to engage local communities in democratic policymaking processes by way of a plethora of programs and projects. However, external aid agencies have paid little attention to conflicts of interest, the allocation of resources, and power relations within and between CSOs and other agencies (Skarlato et al., 2016). This assessment not only points out the complexity of working with CSOs but also the richness and opportunities that emerge from this work. Some of the questions that emerge from this complex dynamic are related to the nature of CSOs' peacebuilding modes; the tense relationships between external funders and CSOs; as well as the possibility that CSOs might achieve their goals and contribute to peacebuilding.

CSOs play different roles in conflict milieus and in peacebuilding processes. For example, CSOs provide services when state institutions cannot, and they can guarantee human rights and peacebuilding democratic values through civic education, training, and advocacy as well as by providing in-group socialization, mediation, monitoring, protection,

public communication, service delivery, and social cohesion (Paffenholz, 2010). CSOs can also sustain communities' security needs by way of the creation of peace zones, civil society initiatives for human security, humanitarian aid, international accompaniment, and protection activities (Paffenholz, 2010). In addition, CSOs can analyze what is happening on the ground and provide guidance for international decisionmakers and local advocacy groups that include local everyday voices as part of the discourse. CSOs have the potential to advance attitudinal changes to forge a culture of peace within societies; facilitate constructive initiatives between conflicting armed groups, local communities, and external agencies; as well as providing humanitarian aid when state institutions are in turmoil (Paffenholz, 2010).

On the other hand, while CSOs with local and/or external support can build local capacities and networks to forge new peace opportunities that positively engage local communities sometimes they fail to provide for social justice and sustainable development due to a lack of transparency (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019; Paffenholz, 2010). Consequently, external aid agencies must continuously monitor the activities of local CSOs and recognize that changing local people's attitudes does not necessarily effect wider societal change (Paffenholz, 2010). Peacebuilding efforts work best when an ethnic group works to change the enemy image of another ethnic group that lies at the heart of their conflict. Consequently, peacebuilding CSOs might have to specialize as they work constructively with local and international institutions, community groups, and with their organization's staff to implement a broad peacebuilding process that realistically can be challenging for some CSOs because they require implementation time; measurable impacts procedures; and staff capabilities to implement projects on the ground.

CSOs from an Emancipatory Perspective

International peace support agencies consider CSOs as the bulwark of democracy. For example, in the 1998 Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) acknowledged that the development of civil society was crucial for the successful implementation of democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Belloni, 2001). The DPA described civil society as "essential to a democratic society" and indispensable in promoting "the healing of the wounds of war, to protect the peace," and in strengthening the state building process that included human rights, democratic institutions, and security and police reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina that are central to liberal peacebuilding (Belloni, 2001, p. 167). Nevertheless, liberal peacebuilding targets both the formation and bolstering of democratic institutions using abstract liberal ideas and processes instead of highlighting people needs (Paffenholz, 2013). Liberal peacebuilding is also related to the ethical double standards applied to local issues, the socioeconomic and political coercion of local communities, and the complete lack of concern with local communities' general welfare (Thiessen, 2011).

Peacebuilding is complex and challenging, necessitating the formulation of reconciliation processes to better cross-communal relations to advance constructive social change that build relationships centered in love, respect, and trust, rather than fear, accusations, and violence (Lederach, 2005). Authentic peacebuilding necessitates working with local communities to support CSO projects that transform people's perceptions and provide them with the necessary skills to build their capacities in a process of ongoing dialogue and negotiation to transcend the dynamics of deep-rooted conflict that requires a long-term perspective, which empowers local people and societal institutions (Lederach, 2005). Therefore, the aforementioned discussion leads us to ponder whether liberal

peacebuilding's short- and medium-term implementation processes, which include general peacebuilding recipes concentrating on specific laws and state institutions should outweigh constructive conflict transformation that utilizes a long-term peacebuilding implementation plan centered on local communities and their needs, relationships, and social transformation (Lederach, 2005).

Since the 1998 GFA, the British and Irish governments supported through the EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund, and the IFI, have adopted a civil society approach to transform the Northern Ireland conflict to build trust, openness, and reconciliation among the PUL and CNR communities (Byrne, 2001). For example, some CSO projects focus on grassroots social transformation that includes youth; women and peacebuilding; cross-community development; economic development and disenfranchisement; and marginalized groups and social inclusion that are connected to emancipatory peacebuilding (Byrne et al., 2018). Local CSOs empower local people's agency in a bottom-up process that is embedded in emancipatory peacebuilding meaning that, "resources are not imported and imposed by outsiders, but draws upon local knowledge and processes" (Thiessen, 2011, p. 121). Therefore, framing local CSOs' role in peacebuilding processes under an emancipatory framework necessitates a critical analysis of external actors' conditions to become involved in local peacebuilding as well as understanding the impact of those demands on local communities and on the overall peacebuilding process itself (Thiessen, 2011). In addition, it suggests that the planning and execution of peace interventions must ensure that external actors listen to local communities, and embrace local nonviolent conflict transformation structures (Thiessen, 2011).

The critical and emancipatory framework illuminates that the local's voices must be included in field research to capture how grassroots perceive the role of economic aid in

peacebuilding and whether the peace dividend is being built. One way to use that critical analysis is to look at the tensions that exist between the local communities, politicians, and the funders. For example, Bendaña (2006) inquires about the relation between international economic agencies, governments, and NGOs in implementing macroeconomic policies to alleviate local poverty. In these cases, CSOs can act to advocate local people's demands for structural changes that are critical in promoting social justice (Bendaña, 2006). An emancipatory framework can also be used to analyze CSOs by focusing on local communities' agency. Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) address critical agency in their analysis of ethnic conflicts with regards to what they call the "local turn." The local turn places emphasis on:

> everyday emancipation, political awakenings, resistance, questions about the role of the state and authority of international actors and donors, as well as the problems raised by the hierarchical state-system, ideological donor-system, and the hidden arms trade and the goals of emerging donors. (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 773)

Methodology

In the Summer of 2010, the second author carried out 44 individual interviews with community development officers working for the EU Peace 3 Fund and/or the IFI as well as CSO leaders in Londonderry or Derry City. The qualitative strategy of data collection was made through one-on-one semi-structured face-to-face meetings lasting between one to two hours. The interviews were performed in people's workplaces or in other settings conducive to their comfort level. This methodology is framed under a qualitative method that provides in-depth stories of the research phenomena from people's lived experiences (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Druckman, 2005). Each interviewee was asked ten open-ended questions to

elicit their ideas about the role of economic assistance and CSOs in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. The interviewees' stories explored the CSO leaders' experiences and perceptions about the effect of the economic aid, the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict, and the peacebuilding process itself. The research participants were involved in a myriad of peacebuilding projects related to economic development, cross-community relations, and sustainable peacebuilding. Following the research ethics protocol, we have ensured the anonymity of each participant by using pseudonyms. In addition, all recordings were transcribed and destroyed after transcription. Each person signed the research ethics protocol consenting to his or her participation in the research. The themes and analytical categories emerged inductively from the data. Forty female and eighty male respondents were interviewed in Derry and the border counties of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone, and we acknowledge that the lack of gender parity in the participants is a serious data limitation in this article.

Building Peace in Northern Ireland

The research participants' narratives describe their views of peacebuilding and the role of the European Union's Peace 3 Fund and/or IFI in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. Their stories are categorized into 1) analytical perspectives used by those organizations to build peace in Northern Ireland; and 2) the impact of the IFI and the EU Peace 3 Fund on the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process.

Analytical Perspectives Used by Some CSOs to Build Peace in Northern Ireland

The semi-structured interviews included a question related to the respondent's perceptions of the IFI and the EU Peace 3 Fund in Northern Ireland. One of the themes that emerged from the narratives was the respondents' perspectives concerning the methods CSOs must use to carry out their peacebuilding activities. The stories below are connected

with the contact hypothesis, cultural transformation, and the role of political and religious leaders in peacebuilding. For example, John commented on the significance of cross-community contact. He reported on this in the following manner:

> Well a lot of community groups are sort of saying there is still an underlying sectarianism. It has not been eradicated and it will take a long, long time for that to happen. So, you just feel if it gets, if it suffers and it is not on the ground that people might resort to old stereotyping labels attitudes and sort of feel that certain sparks could reignite some of the things that happened in the past. So, what we are saying is that if young people are actually meeting each other on a regular basis or adults on a regular basis respecting each other; then, the chances are that it will never go back to what happened.
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> You know too many people saying, "oh, I have met too many friends." I mean when I'd do courses in x organization, I would always say to young people there was so many mixed areas in this town and now they are very minimal. It's really new developments are kind of mixed integrated housing whereas the rest of the city you know it's definitely one single identity housing estates.

John believes that bringing people from both communities to live together provides an opportunity to tackle group stereotypes to eradicate the sectarian prejudice that exists between both communities. John's CSO focuses on intervening with youth and changing their attitudes via mixed communities. Likewise, John's idea is also reflected in Joanna and Brad's stories with regards to sectarian behavior. This is what Joanna had to say on the issue:

> I think we are probably more polarized. I listen to my children and I listen to young people that we encounter and I think the divisions are as strong if not stronger. We all have to take....There is an awful lot of bitterness left from the Troubles and there's a lot of people that feel very, very serious that a sense of injustice and it is not resolved and that we have a solution that has no chance to comment on and be a part of.

And you know they talk about a democratic deficit in Northern Ireland and when you talk about where we are here now. I mean we are very, very polarized and there seems to be less of an opportunity to come together…. Work is one place that people can come together and of course as we have more unemployment… there is still a lot of work to be done.

Similarly, Brad notes that Northern Ireland continues to remain a very segregated and divided society and that the external aid has helped CSOs to build better cross-community relations.

So, it is important that we do have this funding and I firmly believe that without the continual reaching out and the cross development of our community. And you know I would have a fear that we would slip back into the bad old days and we would all go into our own trenches again, and there would be no reaching out. So, the funding from Europe and the funding from the various agencies have proved very worthwhile in creating this better understanding and obviously the good relations that have sprung from it.

Joanna focuses on the sense of injustice remaining in both communities and the need of working on bringing people together. Brad acknowledges the support provided by the IFI and the EU Peace 3 Fund and how the economic assistance has been significant in implementing cross-community contact in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. He also articulates that contact is complemented with cross-community development and is a real opportunity to improve cross-communal relations. Similarly, Simon recognizes the importance of contact development yet he sees it as one stage within a long-term peacebuilding process that also includes economic development. Simon reports on this issue in the following way:

We understand that in communities like ours that have suffered multigenerational unemployment and poverty that a play strategy for the area is not going to solve the economic difficulty that people have, of course it is not, we understand that. But we are also pragmatic in the sense of trying to engage the community in such a way as to say, "Let's make a start with something, let's do something and let's deliver what we can, of course we have ambitions, of course we would like to do more, but let's do what we can." And I think that would have proved to have worked for us and we continue to deliver on that basis.

On the other hand, some participants mentioned the need to work for cultural transformation. The cultural issue is related to communication styles; the use of symbolism, practices, and traditions; as well as local people's knowledge about the causes of the conflict. However, cultural transformation is not an isolated action. It has to be implemented as part of structural social changes that include the reduction of crime, drug consumption, and other antisocial behaviors. For example, Charles expresses this point as follows:

When we go and deliver citizenship [knowledge about both cultural traditions in Northern Ireland] it is a mixture because there is so many issues that affect young people and not just community relations. So, you would focus a bit on community relations, symbols, traditions, make them aware of the background to the Troubles, the causes, and how things could be and you know the consequences of keeping the Troubles going and the affects and so on.

But we also recognize that there are other issues affecting young people like antisocial behaviors, crime, violence, an increase in crime, drugs awareness. And even with all the scandal that has been breaking up in the past year there's a lot of child protection issues. So, I mean there's community relations but we also feel there is a lot of social issues too that we want to sort of let young people talk about and learn about.

Under the same framework, Brad also underlines the significance of culture in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process. He agrees with the idea that Northern Ireland has a mixed culture that includes both PUL and CNR communities, and people from other cultures, and rural areas. Brad notes the importance of respecting cultural traditions and communities' ways of living to tackle some of the conflict's causes. Brad highlighted the significance of implementing a traditions tolerant culture as follows:

> I think the Belfast Agreement was something that had to happen whether we liked it or not. But I think by agreeing to peace doesn't mean to say you give up your culture or you give up your history. There has to be tolerance within everyone that all cultures have to be accepted and we have become a mixing pot here in Northern Ireland lately because you know we have had people from all over Eastern Europe coming to live in our city to find work. So, therefore there is more than two cultures or two traditions in Northern Ireland now and you know we all have to respect that there are other traditions. If we can learn to tolerate traditions, then there is no more cause for conflict, and that is something we must learn to accept.

Many participants also mentioned the key role played by political and religious leaders in the peacebuilding process. Some participants noted that the messages transmitted by those leaders helps to strengthen or diminish local community peacebuilding initiatives. For example, John communicates about the type of images transmitted by leaders that can reflect some sense of peace development in Northern Ireland. He reported on this issue as follows:

> Well, I'm assuming there has been a lot of barriers and politicians have been broken down too. There have been images over the past two years, which people would have thought you'd have been put in a straight-jacket ten years ago if you'd have thought you know you even mention those images. But the fact of Gerry Adams sitting anywhere near Ian Paisley or Martin McGuinness

shaking hands with Ian Paisley and laughing, you know that image would have been just, you'd have been locked up, but it is a reality now.

So, I mean there has been a major, major development up there. I'm sure there is elements of mistrust and there can be some. You know they have been tested on a number of occasions of how strong a body they are. But so far, they seem to have come through it.

Likewise, Jordan emphasizes the need for the grassroots to work with politicians to lead and to implement the peace process. He focuses on the relationship between politicians, local communities, and the wider society as critical in creating a genuine peace architecture for Northern Ireland. He reported on this issue as follows:

And another example of that is that broadly speaking the politicians has never been a focus of the peace process you know as if they are not part of the problem. So, they are the people who adjudicate and say it is delivering well to the masses and to the communities and those grassroots people who are not rich, and is the money being equally spread about.

Where actually a genuine peace program should be about the transformation of them not the sort of an assumption that that's somehow happening. But it's not like, it's not happening. But we don't need intervention on that. We need intervention with the masses with the problems, with the masses and their screwed-up attitudes. I don't think anybody's ever talked about that project.

In the same direction, Brad also recognizes the role of religious institutions in nurturing good relations among both communities and CSOs. He expresses his ideas on this issue in the following way:

We also recognized that if we wanted to continue to have our commemorations and celebrations then we would have to win the goodwill of a number of people from the Roman Catholic community. So, lo-and-behold although we had no expertise and no advice or guidance, we set about trying to create that goodwill. We set about trying to explain our background, why

we had parades, why we had commemorations, why we had celebrations. So, we set about trying to explain that to anyone that wanted to listen to us.

Now we were probably a bit naïve at the beginning. We were probably a bit nervous at the beginning. But you know through experience and through the goodwill of the Roman Catholic community who wanted to come on board who wanted to understand what we were about, then we created and built that good relationship.

In conclusion, some research participants believe that creating social spaces to bring people together is significantly important in order to break down stereotypes. In addition, these participants also recognize that values such as respect and tolerance, which are found in the PUL and CNR cultures, can be used as a foundation to build peace in Northern Ireland. Finally, they made it known the magnitude of the role played by political and religious leaders in making peace. These participants disclosed some examples whereby political and religious leaders have helped to move communities forward to work to create more peaceful coexistence. However, they also revealed that there is a real need for grassroots CSOs to work more closely with those political and religious leaders including those from both communities to create joint peacebuilding and reconciliation projects that promote constructive relationships.

Sectarian divisions, segregated neighborhoods, and polarization continue to divide both communities yet the funding has assisted peacebuilding CSOs to nurture cross-community contact and reconciliation. As it was expressed above, relationship between politicians and local communities under an empathetic level and permanent dialogue helps to emancipate grassroots movements by resonating their voices and practicing democracy. In addition, dialogue and cultural tolerance understood as the respect and promotion of transformative diverse traditions empower individuals and promote peaceful relationships.

More needs to be done by politicians and the government to tackle socioeconomic inequalities to provide economic opportunities and jobs for local people and especially for youth so that they can have a bright future.

The Impact of the IFI and EU Peace 3 Fund in the Peacebuilding Process

In this research, most of the questions were addressed to inquire about community development officers and CSO leaders' perceptions about the impact external economic aid has had on Northern Ireland's peacebuilding process. The respondents' stories varied from being more optimistic, recognizing the value of implementing the aid in Northern Ireland, to more critical perspectives highlighting the negative effects of the bureaucratic process imposed on local CSOs by international organizations, and the barriers created for CSOs trying to get access to them.

The Significance of Implementing the IFI and EU Peace 3 Fund in Northern Ireland

We now focus on the CSO projects perceived to be successful and supported by the IFI and EU Peace 3 Fund to build peace within Northern Ireland. Those projects can be framed as physical infrastructure development, people engagement, leadership skills development, and breaking down psychological barrier types of projects.

Related to physical development for example, Charlie underlines the significant impact of the funds on the construction of community centers and playgrounds as well as services to bring people together. His story about the physical development of CSO-driven projects are explicated as follows:

> From our own perspective, it had a huge impact you know. All those funders have I mean at times its to get the balance right. If you look back the last ten fifteen years and see you know physical development in terms of community centers and play parks and services that every community should have, aligned to the kind of less quantifiable outputs in terms of its impact on good relations

and sometimes it is more difficult to measure. But certainly, if you were to look at the statistics in terms of crime and other indicators then you know there has been a reduction in levels of consequences and antisocial behavior and a lot of it is attributed to IFI and to the political people who support for the European Union peace programmed initiatives.

I'm full of praise for it you know if you're looking at it. I've been working with them very closely for a number of years and to say that apart from the levels of bureaucracy. I think they deserve a lot of credit in terms of both funding package needs.

On the other hand, some participants highlight the effects of the funding on the relations between communities. In some cases, there is a perception that both funders help to create good relations between the PUL and CNR communities that were difficult to achieve before the arrival of financial aid. Brad expresses his ideas about this theme as follows:

Well, I think our projects have been an overwhelming success and the reason why they have been an overwhelming success is because they have engaged people from the other community and I mean by the other community the Roman Catholic community. And with those people involved with us and with their eagerness to come on board and share with us the Maiden City Festival then that obviously has been something that has created the good relations and the good rapport between two communities and again without that funding that would not have been possible.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was in terms of skills development, especially for community leaders. Some participants narrated that the funding helps leaders to improve their peacebuilding abilities and, at the same time, it provides a sense of justice in the community. Michael reports on this issue as follows:

I would say our programs are capacity and I would think that you know if I think of a project…. I think it has built the capacity of middle level community leaders to go out there and do their job better and engage people on issues they

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hadn't engaged with them on before with more confidence. And maybe that leads to them being engaged in a personal community memorialization process, which allows that community to feel they have got a better sense of justice.

However, there is a belief that more work needs to be done in education, childcare, domestic abuse, and health care as structural problems place people in a very vulnerable state. Sophie highlights this point, especially as she refers to women's struggles to achieve a balance in their lives. This is what she had to say on the issue:

> For women and what determines their mental health cross-Border, the Troubles didn't necessarily emerge as the first issue. The key issues that emerged were we're not getting proper education, we're not getting access through to education, we don't have affordable holiday childcare, if we are working we're juggling work-life balance, you know the supports are not there. We are living in abusive relationships.

> And I mean we have seen huge influence here…of a national increase post-conflict of violence, sexual, domestic societal against women and this seems to be a pattern. So, these are the huge issues that people are saying on the streets and the workers who work with them and the particular target groups who are coming from marginalized communities like minorities, lone parents, women living in areas of disadvantage, older women. These are the issues that are paramount.

> Now we moved on and in order to respond to all of that we secured cross-party cross-sector agreement by a number of agencies, that's councils, health, Department of the Environment to look at what they could do to improve. So, as a result of that there was huge commitments made by organizations, which is here on the Border, where they said that they would make specific improvements in relations to those areas.

On the other hand, some participants acknowledge that the external funding works in the sense of removing the psychological barriers aroused in the conflict. This has been possible thanks to cross-community and cross-Border peacebuilding activities carried out by CSOs and encouraged by the support of both funds. Tom brought this idea up in his interview. Here is what he said on the issue:

> But I mean thankfully the committees on either side of the Border because the first ten or fifteen years of EU Peace 1 and 2 was really about keeping their own house in order. But I think you know in the coming years well as long as the funding is there and continues to be there will be more scope for that cross-Border activity. And getting young Protestants as well to recognize that you know the merits of Donegal.
>
> And there is still a mentality there within Loyalist areas, for example, for your weekends off and for holidays you travel east to Portrush and various other Northern Irish resorts, and never consider the beauty of Donegal and the coast line in the Republic of Ireland. You know that is coming from, it's generational things. It's just about breaking down that kind of psychological borders there in trying to get people to realize that the importance of solving them and doing it in the south of Ireland as well.

In conclusion, both funders are perceived as having a positive impact in the Northern Ireland peacebuilding process creating the peacebuilding architecture, cross-communal relationships, leadership training, and in eradicating negative stereotypes and sectarian prejudice. However, the interviews also made it clear that the funding does not accomplish all of the CSOs' expectations with regards to the peacebuilding process. Next, we explore some of the respondents' ideas that underline how the external funding has had an adverse impact in both communities' dynamics.

Adverse Impact of the IFI and EU Peace 3 Fund in the Peacebuilding Process

CSOs also perceive that some of the funders' efforts have negatively affected some community dynamics that do not positively contribute to peacebuilding. Those areas are related to the lack of development of democratic processes, the emergence of competitiveness within and between both communities, and the creation of new psychological barriers to peace. In relation to the deficit of democratic processes within Northern Ireland, Roger mentions some of the existing problems with community development, especially the relations among local citizens, the state, and the peacebuilding process itself. Roger reported on this issue as follows:

> But, it's sort of interesting because there is a sort of recognition that there is something going on there that's not right between citizens and the state. And there is something in Northern Ireland that's not right between citizens and the state and between citizens and the peace program and between citizens and each other and between citizens and the new Assembly. There is a democratic deficit, like a crisis is the wrong word.
>
> There is a crisis in democracy in terms of what this community development thing means and is, and how the younger generation look at it, and how they understand what participation is in the Facebook era or whatever. You know, there's a bit of a crisis in community development actually and how it is playing itself out in Northern Ireland is in these quite stock ways of like you know is the old makings of community development going to work in the future, what's the peace programming doing.

On the other hand, Kevin highlights the competitiveness within the PUL CSOs in order to get access to the external economic aid. Despite the fact that competitiveness can be understood as a strength of capitalist innovation and what motivates political parties in the

democratic system, Kevin articulates that competition is escalating conflict and it is bringing

fragmentation into the PUL community. Kevin had the following to say on the issue:

> There is less goodwill from the Protestant community. What'll you find now
> is such a huge danger. What'll you find now is that there is a lot of
> competitiveness within Unionism in terms of getting access to funding
> streams. I mean the Neighbor Partnership Board, for example, was set up to
> streamline the community development but it has become a competitive
> dogfight. Because it is such a strong infrastructure in each of these areas,
> they're scared over their own long-term future.
>
> They're just wondering if they are going to attract funding. Plus, there
> is a competitive nature anyway where some communities will say, "Well I
> heard X neighborhood got another payout. Why didn't we get it? Or look at
> the size of their community center compared to ours?" And it is just that
> competitiveness and that is a danger and that there is a fragmentation within
> the Protestant community.

Some participants mention the creation of new mental barriers as a third area where

the funding has had an adverse impact on cross-community relations. Peter reports that this

mental barrier exists because of the partition of the island and because of some of the

requirements promoted by both funders onto CSOs trying to access their funds. For example,

the technocratic and bureaucratic nature of the EU Peace 3 Fund's application processes and

reporting procedures take peace workers away from their peacebuilding activities. It has

changed the relations between CSO counterparts working on similar issues that apparently

used to work better together before the implementation of the funding on the ground. Here is

what Peter said about this issue:

> I think it ……we have a unique problem here because I think if they could
> and they should and there ought to be more cross-Border cooperation
> particularly for a county like ours [Londonderry] that is right on the Border

with our neighbor Donegal. And I mean I have to say this…. maybe it is just a general point. But what has happened is a consequence of partition in our country so that a partition mentality has been allowed to develop.

I mean, I see examples everyday where the local Council, for example, could work in closer harmony with our counterparts in Donegal. But it has become conditioned over the course of generations not to do such a thing. Where there might even be clear economic sense in doing it, it tends not to happen. It's almost like people have built an artificial wall there that they can't break through….We have an excellent working relationship with some of our counterparts in Donegal. But the bureaucracy doesn't enable us to work with them in the way that we'd like to. You know we have the sense of two states at work here all the time [the policies and currencies are different].

In conclusion, some of the respondents underline several adverse issues that have emerged through the implementation of external funding in Northern Ireland. It seems that the implementation of the IFI and the EU Peace 3 Fund has also escalated some issues at the community level that are related to lack of access to external aid; an intransigent and hierarchical bureaucracy that makes it difficult for CSOs to deal with; and the strengthening of democracy over civil society development.

Discussion

The findings from this study do not claim to be representative of all CSOs working in Londonderry or Derry City. Yet the findings are representative of the experiences and perceptions of the 44 study participants. Nonetheless, the participants' voices in this study must be viewed as a window into the dynamics of CSOs operating in the city. The participants' stories are complex, varied, and contrasting. However, all participants have in common their experience of living and working in a city that was embroiled in a protracted conflict. The data shows that participants' perceptions about the impact of the IFI and EU

Peace 3 funding in Derry vary with regards to the outcomes of CSO projects aiming to bring people together to coexist peacefully.

Contact involves the PUL and CNR communities tackling stereotypes and sectarian prejudice, promoting cultural transformation in their place. From a psychosocial point of view, the Northern Ireland conflict can be framed as a protracted ethnopolitical conflict because of the general voluntary segregation between its predominantly PUL and CNR communities. Intergroup conflict encompasses "competition for dominance between two or more groups over physical resources, values, and/or claims to status and power" (Hughes, 2001, p. 528). At any point in their struggle for dominance over the other, either of the conflict parties can exhibit discrimination, prejudice, and/or stereotypes against each other. In Northern Ireland, encouraging cross-community contact through funded CSOs has been an important part of the peacebuilding strategy (Tausch et al., 2007). Researchers have found positive results in reducing prejudice between Protestants and Catholics and in advancing goodwill through constructive intergroup contact (Tausch et al., 2007; White et al., 2018).

These study participants confirm previous research results indicating the reduction of discrimination and prejudice using intergroup contact. However, the participants also emphasized that peacebuilding interventions require far more points of contact than what currently exists. It means that contact between the PUL and CNR communities has to be combined with various other cultural, historical, and structural factors that created opportunities for both communities to interconnect violently with each other in the past. Providing cross-communal contact is just one element of a large and authentic peacebuilding process. Many of our participants noted that other elements such as employment, political participation, reducing youth drug consumption, and encouraging social inclusion have to

work in concert alongside a robust social infrastructure that brings people together across the bicommunal divide.

Consequently, the participants' points of view are related to a multi-articulated-peacebuilding intervention process that aims to encourage both external international economic aid funders to stimulate policymaking that alleviates urban power disparities related to poverty and inequality, as well as psychological and cultural boundaries by promoting cross-communal contact. From an emancipatory peacebuilding perspective, new policies should emerge to confront structural inequalities and power imbalances that lie at the root of protracted and violent ethnopolitical conflicts (Abu Nimer, 2013)

Peacebuilding interventions can end discrimination by decreasing people's marginality and resource access inequalities. They can also encourage community empowerment and reconciliation processes that allow individual and group-based feelings of historic grievance to be expressed so that people can heal from the violent trauma they have experienced (Oloke et al., 2018). In post-peace accord milieus, physical societal reconstruction must also deal with the social and psychological scars that remain after the physical violence ends (Abu Nimer, 2013). A multi-articulated peacebuilding intervention process supported by international economic assistance agencies should prevent competitiveness within communities by restructuring, simplifying, and streamlining their CSO application and monitoring processes so they are less complicated and are more user friendly for the voluntary sector. The peacebuilding process should also undertake to support reconciliation and storytelling processes that prevent othering and the creation of new mental barriers to peace.

External economic aid agencies must also ensure the empowerment of local people's religious and cultural peace values. Religious identity is an important conflict dynamic

variable, and it becomes especially significant when political leaders mold their community's ethnoreligious identity in ways that locate their religious differences at the center of the conflict (Funk & Woolner, 2011; Campbell & Peterson, 2013). The participants also remarked that peacebuilding practitioners should preferably interconnect with their local communities through their peace values rooted in their communities' faiths and not by way of humanist and secular peacebuilding values and methods (see Funk & Woolner, 2011). Religious beliefs are often positioned to condone acts of dehumanization, whereas emancipatory peacebuilding includes religious peacebuilding efforts to provide persuasive measures to prevent the dehumanization of the other (Funk & Woolner, 2011).

Citizenship and democracy are an important component of post-peace accord peacebuilding. Critical and emancipatory peacebuilding perspectives envision state-building as a bureaucratized, fragmented, and projectized process (Stroschein, 2013). The CSO participants disclosed that there is a need to work on citizenship and democracy in Northern Ireland, especially with regards to the relationship between citizens and state institutions. Many of our participants recognized that Northern Ireland's political leaders must develop and improve their capacity building skills so that the democratic process will benefit everyday people. Working on citizenship and democratic participation aims to tackle the power imbalance between bureaucrats and politicians, and citizens as well as among different citizen groups engaged in funded liberal state-building projects. Democracy should be based on the control of the power apparatus by the citizens to reduce the power disparity and group marginalization (Morin, 1999). This runs contrary to the typical state-building formation process logic that international bureaucracies are likely to recreate institutions and programs in their own image that advance their interests without responding to local realities and the everyday needs of local people (Stroschein, 2013).

Conclusions

Peacebuilding practitioners and scholars trying to stimulate peace in societies emerging from direct violence tend to advocate for using a "hybrid peace" that includes the interaction between international actors and those on the ground (Mac Ginty, 2011; Richmond & Mitchell, 2011). Northern Ireland's peace process had shown some tentative steps towards achieving a stable peace until the New Irish Republican Army's (NIRA) recent campaign of bombings in Derry, Belfast, and Whattlebridge in County Fermanagh, the recent Brexit debacle and the call for an Irish border poll as well as the Covid-19 pandemic (Haverty, 2020; Mapping Militants Organization, 2019). Civil society has played a significant role in this peacebuilding process supported by the international community especially through economic assistance to peacebuilding CSOs.

However, there is a need to look deeply at civil society's experiences in Northern Ireland in providing key guidelines to improve peacebuilding on the ground. This study sought to understand local CSO peacebuilding actors' experiences in Londonderry or Derry City to shed some light on what has and has not worked in the peace process that could assist practitioners in leading future peacebuilding programs. The results from this study indicate the need for a multi-articulated peacebuilding approach that works at different levels, using successful intervention processes such as cross-communal contact in alliance with democratic participation; structural development; social inclusion; and cultural transformation. This study also acknowledges the importance of carrying out grassroots research to encourage community autonomy, and to validate local people's experiences and knowledge in order to strengthen peace processes (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017).

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