

## Security walls in Belfast, towards removal?

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In Belfast, local communities had been and still are affected by the civil conflict, especially in the inner city working class neighbourhoods divided along religious and political lines (Catholic nationalist republican community and Protestants unionists loyalists). Since the end of the sixties, security walls (called *peacelines*) have been built by the police and have not yet been removed, despite the official peace process and the reestablishment of local assembly and government agreed in 1998. Nevertheless, tensions remain high, violence has not disappeared; and if bombs and murders are less frequent, it has been substituted by low level violence and protracted protests on marches and symbols.

The peacelines themselves have undergone a great deal of transformation through urban renewal projects for long ago. Separation devices and walls, originally built by the military or the police have been integrated to the urban landscape and ordinary planning processes. The corrugated iron and barbed wire had been “soften”, replaced by new walls, and the new structures include strips of grass, trees, bricks and fences. Vacant and derelict land is now being used for industrial and business units or private residential developments. A new wave of transformation is beginning, as the executive stated in 2013 that walls should be removed by 2023. All agencies dealing with the peacelines (especially the department of Justice, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, social housing national agency, the international Fund for Ireland) have begin consultations with local communities to create conditions where walls could be removed. As the remaining violence and intimidation are still high, local communities living near the security walls don't want to see them to be removed completely for safety reasons. Moreover local communities living along peacewalls have undergone a high level of deprivation but still consider territorial arrangements and peacelines within the broader issues of resource allocation between the ‘two’ communities.

Negotiations then lead to the transformation of appearance of the walls (mainly the replacement of corrugated iron security gates blocking roads by glass structures or the temporary opening of these gates).

In this paper, I wish to take the opportunity to assess these discourses on the removal in front of the small scale and symbolic projects that have been realised so far. Political statement, statutory documents collected between 2014 and 2015 and interviews conducted with local policy makers will be used to this end. It will be demonstrated how local institutions compete to transform the representation of the peacelines as they have little scope to remove them and are constrained by their own will to take the local communities wishes as the main criteria for action.