Belfast THRI[VES]: Transformative Health and Regeneration Initiatives [for Vibrancy, Equality, and Sustainability]

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Transformative Health and Regeneration Initiatives [for Vibrancy, Equality, and Sustainability]

Project Report – November 2023

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Preamble/Acknowledgments

Disclaimer:

The information provided in this publication, related to the pilot scoping research, does not constitute formal commercial or health-data valuations, appraisal or recommendations. As time-based research the information should be subject to examination at regular intervals. Views expressed are independently presented by the research team and should not be taken as endorsed by funders, Council, Departments, or Ulster University.

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Executive Summary

Healthy environments are generally recognised as an integral part of the planning and delivery of vibrant places for people to live, work, play, and share (Johnson and Green, 2021; Atkinson et al., 2016). The World Health Organization's definition of health acknowledges the interplay between physical wellbeing and wider notions of social wellbeing as a fundamental right of every human being (WHO, 2020 [1948]). This right was echoed in Northern Ireland's own Regional Development strategy from 2010, which affirmed everyone should "be able to live in a healthy environment, with access to sufficient and appropriate environmental resources for a healthy life" (DRDNI, 2012: 50). Most recently, wellbeing for all has become a central tenet, in A Bolder Vision for Belfast (2021b), a visioning strategy jointly developed by Belfast City Council (BCC), Department for Communities (DfC), and Department for Infrastructure (DfI). In this context, THRI[VES] – Transformative Health and Regeneration Initiatives [for Vibrancy, Equality, and Sustainability] – applies urban-focused research to the challenge of measuring and integrating qualities associated with health and wellbeing for new projects delivered within Belfast's public realm. The research, a unique pilot partnership between Ulster University's Urban Research Lab and BCC, with DfI and DfC support, aims to develop new insights for:

- Integrating more comprehensive, evidence-based wellbeing criteria into urban development decision-making policy and practice.

- Better collecting and sharing of public-private knowledge (data, business cases, and public consultation) for more effective co-design and deliver of public realm projects, and

- Promoting more holistic cross-body frameworks for public space-focused investment and sustainable stewardship around established placemaking principles for liveable futures.

Examining how the City Centre can be an improved, inclusive, and innovative place for future generations, THRI[VES] argues for liveability as a unique framework to evaluate and deliver projects within and/or impacting on the public realm, primarily, through enhanced wellbeing priorities. It also investigates the role of public-private engagement to reframe wellbeing-based criteria and more effectively connect statutory and tactical regeneration process to more informal bottom-up evidence-based considerations that can collectively address and develop innovative solutions to tackle health, climate-change, and socio-economic stresses.

Four objectives structure the synthesis and presentation of report findings to:

- Assist Council-Executive goals to develop effective public decision-making processes to reimagine greener, healthier, more vibrant city spaces (in line with A Bolder Vision aspirations).

- Identify areas for improved cross-sector data-sharing on wellbeing, sustainability, and resilience.

- Develop evidence-based proposals to improve public-space policy and decision-making processes.

- Propose new data-sharing platforms and future collaborations to inform more effective evidence-based policy, design, and post-evaluation of new public realm projects for wellbeing.

Focusing on Belfast City Centre, primary evidence, literature reviews, and international precedents provide wider lessons about urban governance and place-management at different scales of development including:

- smaller projects (pop-ups, parklets, and meanwhile type examples)

- neighbourhood-wide visioning and masterplanning proposals, and

- city-wide to regional and national planning and regeneration project development policy.

The above project levels, discussed in report examples, acknowledge how all development and policy are interconnected, impacted by complex spatial and community decisions for local/national governing bodies.

The report highlights a need for greater shared understandings and collaboration amongst all policymakers, professionals, and the public about the terms, data, and co-production processes that inform both urban and rural development. The findings, discussions, and summary recommendations – set out below and expanded upon in the concluding chapter - are thus seen as a starting point to help improve placemaking for greater liveability and sustainable livelihood in Belfast, as an example for all villages, towns, and city centres.

Ten THRI[VES] recommendations, summarised from the research.

1. **Apply a liveability lens.**

   - Integrate a liveability toolkit to re-balance how development decisions are evaluated through more holistic, inclusive evidence-based criteria connecting wellbeing, economics, resilience, and sustainability.

2. **Strive for active accessible public places, not pass-through spaces.**

   - A higher quality public realm can be achieved by prioritising and co-producing diverse places that are truly public and managed for everyone to feel welcome to linger and enjoy.

3. **Formalise the informal.**

   - Normalise the role of short-term pilots and experiments for (re)activating the public realm and testing new uses in underused public spaces in a way that can co-create and strengthen community-centred partnerships.

4. **Avoid a failure mindset**

   - Plan stewardship as resilient dialogue-focused processes that allow for new uses and demographic change in public projects; avoid risk averse "it's always done that way" or "we know better than what's been before" approaches.

5. **Address barriers to wellbeing and engagement.**

   - Seek out innovative co-design, consultation, and place-management strategies to aid confidence in a public realm that welcomes and supports equal access to amenities, services, leisure, and opportunities for all.

6. **Recognise capacity building as a two-way process.**

   - Beware of top-down as much as bottom-up boundaries or blinkers that increase project risks while reducing effective input, understanding, and support across difficult or unspoken issues affecting the most vulnerable in society.

7. **Provide for adequate and iterative meanwhile reflection**

   - Embed time and funding to collect, evaluate, and share real-time lessons to policymakers, planners, design teams, as well the wider public as stakeholders in the public realm.

8. **Use data to motivate and support policy and practice.**

   - Set up more partnerships and training processes to help better connect, translate, and apply spatial (geographically linked) health data to decision-making on public realm projects.

9. **Apply a more intersectional, balanced approach to data.**

   - Recognise diversity within demographic groups when considering health and wellbeing data.

10. **Develop youth leadership**

   - Support wider training/placement across the public, private, and voluntary sectors with support from academic and other civic institutions, to diversify outreach and engagement capacity.

Keywords: Urban Design; Planning; Health; Wellbeing; Community Engagement; Sustainability; Resilience; Data-sharing; Liveability; Place-making; Quality of Life.

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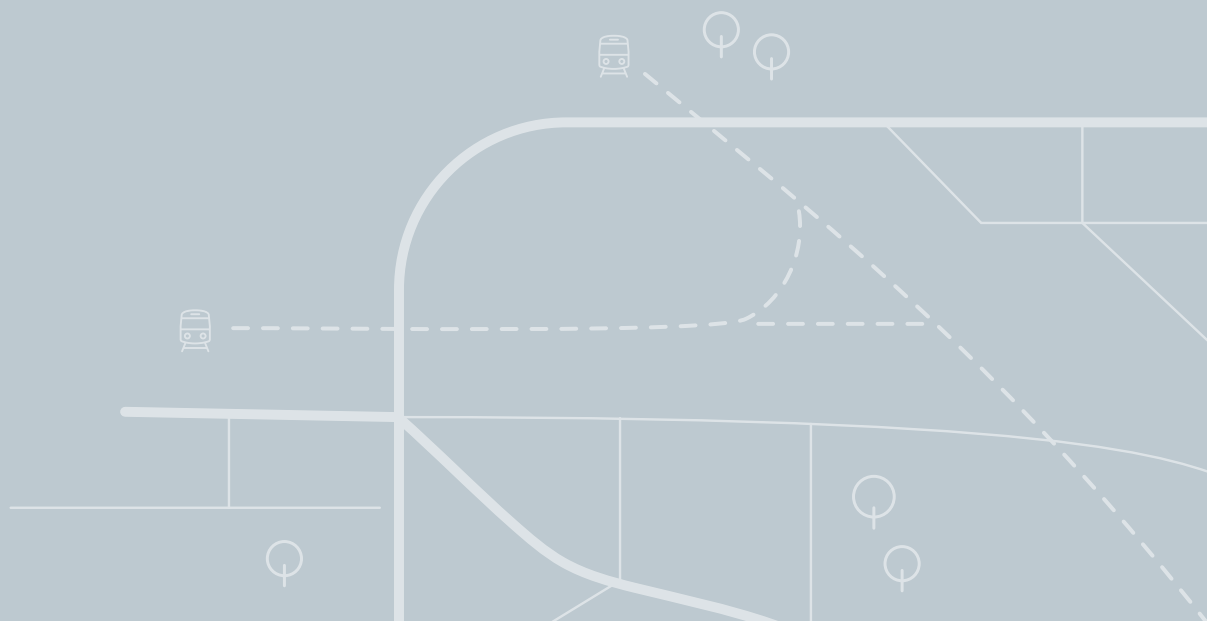
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Introduction

REGENERATION

HEALTH

SUSTAINABILITY

EQUALITY

1. Introduction: A Collaborative evidence-based approach to inclusive urban wellbeing and placemaking

In contemporary urban development, many interactive conditions of the built environment associated with creating quality places – land uses, active and permeable streetscapes, diverse and affordable housing tenure, opportunities for active living and economic livelihood, and access to natural ('restorative') environments and essential public services – are widely acknowledged to play a role in determining levels of individual physical and mental health, and societal wellbeing. The way health and wellbeing are measured in urban design and planning, however, is not well developed.

BELFAST THRI[VES] is a practical pilot research project examining decision-making processes that shape Belfast's public realm for lessons that might help improve the planning, development, and delivery of more place-based inclusive, liveable, and sustainable environments with wellbeing at their heart. The project also addresses the unexpected, sudden impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic upon Belfast, as Northern Ireland and global society from early 2020, including statutory "lockdowns"[1] enacted during 2020 and 2021, to review resulting emergency policy changes and special measures projects for their inclusive wellbeing implications.

THRI[VES] argues for evidence-based approaches for health and well-being that parallel and achieve parity with economic and climate-change assessments of meanwhile-uses and re-imagined city-centre spaces for all generations, genders, and cultures. Project lessons include how increasingly frequent challenges and threats have collectively changed macro understandings of the interconnectedness of global society to local lives and future livelihood. In this global context, focusing here on Belfast from macro, meso, and micro levels, the project has considered how public realm projects have been or might be conceived, developed, and delivered with wellbeing as a more evidence-based part of complex statutory and non-statutory (informal/under-the-radar) development processes.

> **Effective care of the environment provides very real benefits in terms of improving health and wellbeing, promoting economic development and addressing social problems which result from a poor quality environment. (DRDNI, 2012: 49-50)**
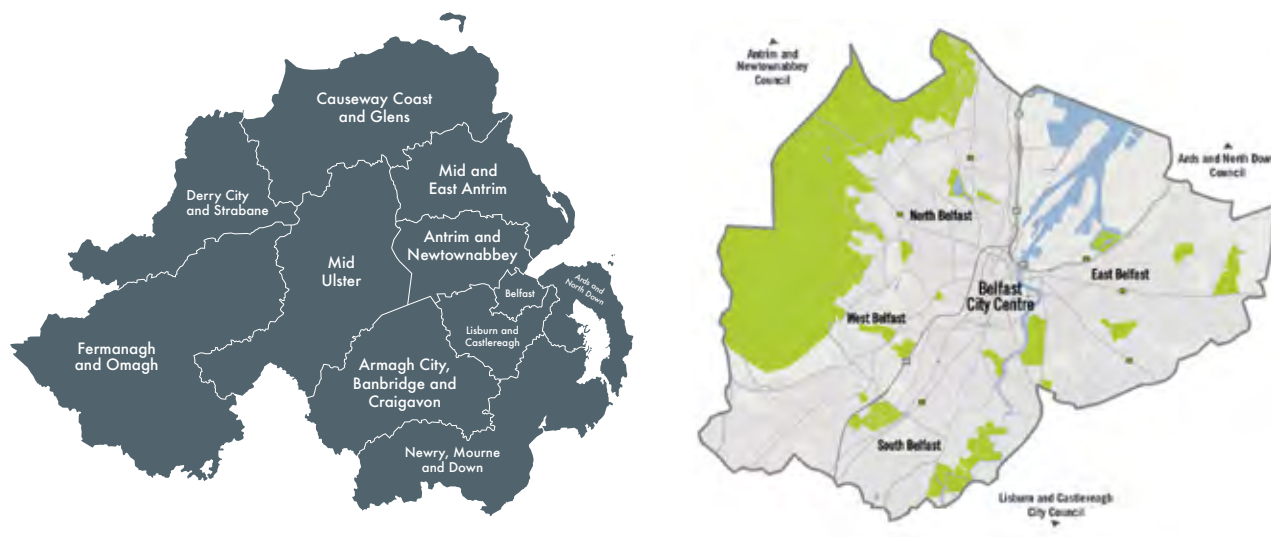
Figure 1: Context maps, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK-Ireland (Crown, BCC, 2021)

[1]Lockdowns in this report refer to the period of UK laws passed covering the period from mid-March 2020 through March 2022 that featured national and local/regional restrictions on movement, gatherings, and high-street business (Institute for Government Analysis, 2021; BBC News Northern Ireland, 2022).

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The WHO defines mental health as "as state of wellbeing in which the individual realises their abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to their community" (WHO, 2021). This connection of mental as well as physical health is acknowledged as important to a person's ability to contribute (not just exist within) a community, with "the quality of the wider built environment as a factor" (RTPI, 2020). Thus, people's surrounding built environments are associated herein with evaluative processes focused on holistic placemaking that require 'greater attention to [and research on] social connectedness, environmental responsibility, and consideration of future generations' (Atkinson et al., 2012).

Set within this global context, focusing on Belfast with international input, THRI[VES] considered how public realm projects have been or might be conceived, developed, and delivered with wellbeing as a more evidence-based part of complex statutory and non-statutory development processes. Project lessons include how increasingly frequent challenges and threats have collectively (globally and locally) changed understandings of the interconnectedness of quality public places to collective and individual livelihood. Findings argue for health and well-being criteria to parallel and achieve parity with other material assessments (e.g., economic and climate-change) for all development, from small-scale informal and temporary projects to longer-term spatial plans, for re-imagined city-centre spaces to be fully accessible and a benefit for all generations, genders, and cultures.

Definitions and types of Planning versus planning as considered in the research

For the purposes of this research in Belfast, THRI[VES] differentiates between formal , statutory Spatial Planning ("big P" processes) set within the remit of specific Council and DfI (for local authority and regional decision-making), and the broader definitions of urban planning (i.e, formal and informal/non-statutory "small p" processes) that encompass the widest "design and regulation of the uses of space [including] the physical form, economic functions, and social impacts [...] and on the location of different actitivies within it (www.britannica.com/topic/urban-planning). "Big P" planning and regeneration, overseen by professional Planners and governing authorities under specific legislative frameworks, is uniquely split in Northern Ireland since 2015 between powers for Councils, DfC and DfI; the scope and effectiveness of these processes are the subject of official critical reviews involving both levels of government and the Northern Ireland Audit Office, outside the scope of this research (DfC, 2016; DfI, 2021c; DfI, 2015a; DfI, 2021d; McAlister, 2008; BCC and Bentley, 2022; NIAO, 2022). The latter smaller p frameworks, which can include formal and statutory processes that both draw from physical, social,

economic, and political concerns also can fall within the remit of Belfast City Council Committees e.g. Planning and City Growth & Regeneration. These frameworks can also be overseen or delivered in conjunction with city stakeholders outside of the formal Planning process, working with their local community to deliver placemaking improvements to their area. THRI[VES] acknowledges the current and ongoing reviews of Spatial Planning and focuses on the latter, broader processes to contribute its findings and recommendations.

1.1 Report structure

The report draws together project analysis since January 2021 with outcomes across the following sections:

- Chapter 2: Framing Health and Place through the lens of liveability and inclusive engagement. Literature review and Exemplar studies setting the project conceptual/ evidence-based frameworks.

- Chapter 3: Belfast-focused Connected knowledge for

  liveable futures. Findings from Belfast-focused public anonymous surveys, public symposium panels, and workshops.

- Chapter 4: Reshaping public space: Opportunities for inclusive wellbeing policy and stewardship. Literature, Case Studies, and Exemplars focusing on Belfast-based and international projects.

- Chapter 5: Concluding Discussions. Synthesising the project findings and applying lessons to project objectives and recommendations.

1.2 Background

THRI[VES] developed around the following themes, which are detailed further within noted report sections:

- inclusive place-making based around wellbeing criteria (Chapter sections 2.0-2.3),

- connected knowledge for co-delivered liveable futures, (Chapter section 2.4 and Chapter 3), and

- holistic frameworks for public space-led regeneration and sustainable stewardship, (Chapter 4).[2]

The project themes link to local development policy including the Belfast Agenda (2017) and more recent joint BCC-DfC-DfI document, A Bolder Vision (2021), which set out the following Visioning Principles for 2035:

- Creating a healthy, shared, vibrant and sustainable environment that promotes wellbeing for all, inclusive growth, and innovation.

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[2]Stewardship here refers to the "care [management and maintenance] of our urban environment" as set out in Living Places: An Urban Stewardship and Design Guide for Northern Ireland [2014] (DfI, 2019).

- Fundamentally changing the centre of Belfast to prioritise integrated walking, cycling and public transport and end the dominance of the car.

- Providing lively, safe, and green streets linking inclusive shared spaces to promote resilience and enhance our built heritage.

- Removing severance and barriers to movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities to improve access for all.

From a regional perspective, the project seeks to contribute to longer-term strategies and best practice for delivering inclusive healthier places as set out by the Northern Ireland Assembly in including Regional Development for 2035, Planning Policy, Children and Young People, and Living Places (DRDNI, 2012; DOENI, 2015a; DoENI, 2016; DOENI, 2014). These are considered alongside Structured Civic Engagement principles for greater public involvement in decision-making, set out in a 2020 cross-party New Decade, New Approach (Smith, J. and Coveney, 2020) document and 2021 New Programme for Government (Northern Ireland Executive, 2021), which are in hiatus but contain important principles (e.g., within a Draft Programme Outcomes Framework) that could inform any future Government investment for:

- Our children and young people to have the best start in life

- [A] caring society that supports people throughout their lives

- [An] equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect

- Everyone [to feel] safe – we all respect the law and each other

- [Everyone to] enjoy long, health, active, lives.

- Everyone [to be able to] reach their potential.

The research also acknowledges the complex interplay of local, regional, and global intersectoral factors that impact on delivering healthy inclusive places, which are beyond the scope/reach of this pilot, including detailed analysis of health service delivery to education and employment, housing provision, social services, and criminal justice (WHO, 2005). Findings and recommendations presented in this dynamic context, aim for future research to continue in all areas with diverse stakeholders and wider public representatives including:

- The public, especially those who live, work, and visit Belfast: Inclusive engagement must include both private sector and wider community-linked organisations to better understand complex health-focused needs and decisions impacting people across the city's diverse and changing neighbourhood populations.

- Policymakers: Project lessons and discussions suggest how place-based evidence can contribute to co-produced evaluations and decision-making of policy, practice, and future public-realm project delivery.

- Project Partners, Contributors and Advisors: From cross-sector working and data sharing, disseminating expertise together with on-the-ground evidence to inform policy, practice, and further research.

- University-level academics and future professionals: Fostering innovative cross-disciplinary research and research-led teaching & learning for wellbeing, addressing real-world issues of local and global relevance.

Figure 2: A Bolder Vision, Belfast Maps (Source: BCC, 2021, combined/cropped by authors)

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Figure 3: Northern Ireland Programme for Government Draft Outcomes Framework (Source: NI Executive, 2021)

1.3 Methodology: Evidence-based and public-engagement focused approaches

Collaborative information gathering and development of the project themes and methods has been a core part of the partnership between Ulster University, Belfast City Council, DfC and DfI, which included independent advisors, and contributions to key public events and multiple outputs. As set out in Chapters 2-4, multiple data gathering methods, underpinned by reviews of literature and policy, were adopted to provide deeper insights into quantitative and qualitative information from diverse primary sources including:

• An international symposium, 16-17 June 2021: Facilitated speakers and panels representing government, professionals, business, academic, university students, and community-voluntary groups (Appendix A).

• Workshops, Autumn 2021: Three semi-structured online roundtable sessions, following on themes raised in the public symposium, with invited organisations representing: Businesses and built environment professionals, Government Departments with key roles delivering urban change, and Northern Ireland-based voluntary groups/charities (Appendix A).

• Anonymous public surveys, Summer 2021: Online questionnaires through JISC, by Ulster University (Ch 3).

• Local Case Studies: Three Belfast public realm projects, as developed by Belfast City Council, Department for Infrastructure, and Department for Communities with private sector BIDS from 2020-2022 (Ch. 3), and

• International Precedent Exemplars: Urban health/ placemaking focused research and practice (Ch. 2 & 4).

Belfast Case Studies

Case Studies refer to the Belfast focused projects studied through primary observation and desk-top research, The examples as set out below and in the location map, Figure 4, are discussed in depth in Chapter 4 to illustrate how different parts of the public realm were adapted and reimagined through different procurement processes undertaken by Belfast City Council, NI Executive, and the private sector Business Improvement Districts (BIDS). The collected studies, represent a breadth of functions, drivers, planning considerations, and partnerships, which are discussed in the context of local and international lessons.

1.0 Cathedral Gardens Park – re-developed green space and leisure/play park: A BCC-led 2-year meanwhile-use project from 2020-2022 that introduced new activities and fixtures into an existing public plaza in Cathedral Quarter, adjacent to Ulster University's Belfast Campus and St Anne's Cathedral.

2.0 Cycle Lanes: Dublin Road-Linenhall Street to Shaftesbury Square corridor network extensions: Examples of DfI-led projects, both as COVID-19 emergency measures and extending longer-term strategic infrastructure for pedestrian/cycle lanes and road closures/traffic calming.

3.0 Linen Quarter BID pop-ups and social/cultural hub at Brunswick Square: A public-private collaboration between BCC and the Linen Quarter BID, representing local businesses, to develop new commercial/cultural uses on existing public streets in response to COVID-19.

For each study, to the extent possible while each project was in different stages of procurement, data gathering included mapping current/proposed public realm changes and applying a modified version of the widely regarded Place Standard Tool (Architecture & Design Scotland, 2020), which employs a range of evaluative criteria, illustrated as radar graphs. Analysis focuses on before/after place and liveability aspects.

International Exemplars

International Exemplars refer to the following four projects:

- Urban Health Collaborative, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA: Leveraging data, research, education, and partnerships to improve health in cities. A cross-disciplinary academic centre providing health and built environment focused data research.

- Eke Panuku Development, Auckland, Tāmaki Makaurau, New Zealand: Why public space matters: Auckland's Public-Private Partnerships and Place-led Approach to Urban Development. An Auckland Council-controlled development partnership to deliver urban regeneration.

- Seattle Street Sink and Stay Healthy Streets Initiative, Seattle, WA, USA: Lessons on inclusive policy and collaborative design interventions during COVID-19.

The projects were selected through a review of internationally recognised examples with relevance to the challenges under examination in Belfast. The organisations/institutions who helped to deliver each contributed directly to this research through supporting data and taking part in the public symposium held in June 2021. Studies of each are presented as outtakes in in Chapters 3 and 4.

Figure 4: Belfast Case Studies

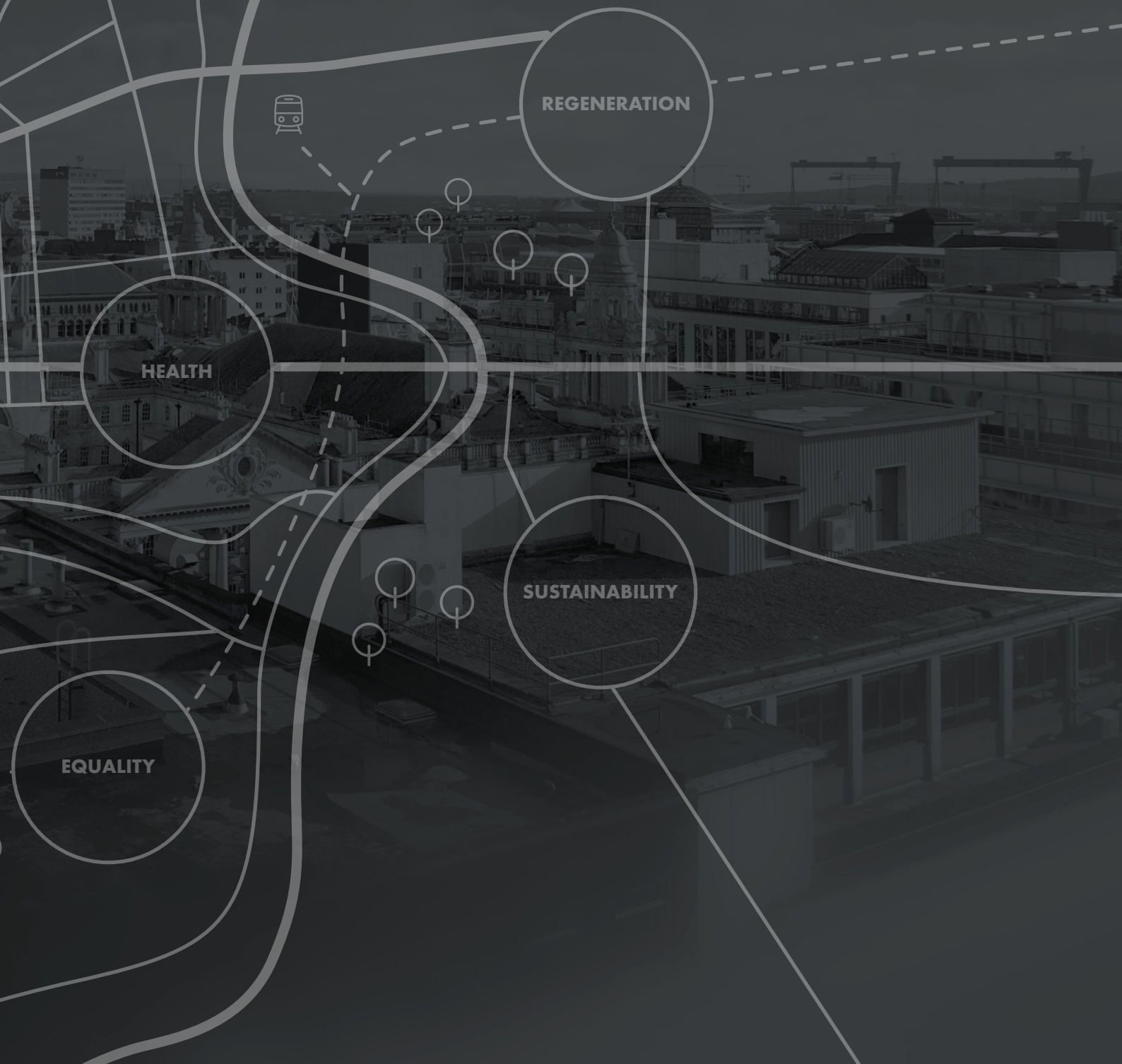1. BCC, Cathedral Gardens, City Plaza Meanwhile Uses

2. DfI Cycle Lanes, Dublin Road Network

3. BCC-BID collaboration, Social Hub street closure

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Health and Place

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2.0 Literature review: Framing Health and Place through the lens of liveability and inclusive engagement

Liveability is a term that THRI[VES] adapts and proposes as a lens or framework to jointly consider health and wellbeing with place-making and other factors impacting on people's quality of life – a practical tool for further research and refinement as a core research output. This chapter sets out the project definitions for liveability and place within the research. Latter sections present how the framework applies to health and wellbeing as an evidence-based toolkit and the challenges for locating and applying complex evidence (information, datasets) to inform development and policy.

2.1 Defining Urban Liveability

Definitions for liveability include all aspects of natural, built, and social environments – from services, business, infrastructure, energy, education, crime, and culture to more technical, design, and infrastructure-based perspectives (Tannakoon & Kulatunga, 2019; Kashef, 2016). There are also variations in measures associated with hard economic and health data or zero carbon targets, and more 'softer' qualitative indicators for liveability such as quality of life, happiness, tolerance, and – as this study examines – wellbeing (Estévez-Mauriz et al., 2017; Kashef, 2016; Lowe et al., 2015; Antonescu, 2017). From a wellbeing perspective, definitions applied to this research align with the concept of healthy urban environments that argue for urban health and liveability as one and the same (Badland and Pearce, 2019; Lowe et al., 2015). A challenge, highlighted in the literature on liveability [livability in some spellings] is the lack of a single common definition due to many complex interacting factors, which this research addresses in its findings.

Liveability, like many (often contested) terms currently applied to urban development including place and placemaking, can appear vague and subject to different perspectives depending on many factors of priority, profession, and project purpose. The application of such terms to development projects and analysis risks being regarded as "characteristics of a buzzword," with subjective and objective values or "dimensions" (after Haarhoff et al., 2016: 05) that mean "different things to different actors," and can also be seen as more appropriate in academic versus practice discussions (McArthur and Robin, 2019). This research has sought evidence-based means to objectively investigate "the way in which the physical environment may influence behaviour positively or negatively - and in this way enhance or diminish liveability (Raman, 2010; Pacione, 2003), however the range of data collected about places, particularly the public realm, are always subject to people's (even researchers') "perceptions of how the urban environment impacts their

urban living experiences, and shapes their cognitive construction of liveability" (adapted from Losciuto and Perloff, 1967).

For THRI[VES], the definition of liveability is associated with (urban) democracy and governance, which emerged out of policies for livable cities [sic] in Dutch spatial planning during the 1950s and developed more widely since the 1990s to include "the social composition of urban neighbourhoods" (Kaal, 2011). Liveability as applied here has become an adaptable framework for different population groups (McArthur and Robin, 2019: 1714) and complex conditions and factors affecting health and wellbeing in small areas of inner-city neighbourhoods (after Chi et al., 2011; 2020; Quick, H. et al., 2019). For larger scale "problems" such as noise and air quality across neighbourhoods and metropolitan areas, there is a tendency for wellbeing "trade-offs against other broad economic objectives" (Stevens, 2009: 378) and a vast array of other decision-making factors including those from spatial/statutory planning, sustainability, connectivity, and epidemiology perspectives, among many (Raman, 2010; DfI, 2022b; Higgs et al., 2019; Gallagher and UUPEC, 2017; Martino et al., 2021; Wiryomartono, 2020; Florek and Giovanardi, 2015; Dsouza et al., 2021/10/22).

2.2 Recognition for place-driven health and wellbeing

A definition of health established by the WHO in the mid-20th century includes wellbeing as a subset of an individual's physical, social, and mental state and recognises "complete" health itself, at its highest attainable standard as the fundamental right of every human being (WHO, 2020 [1948]; Freestone and Wheeler, 2015). In place-based development policies health and wellbeing can often appear synonymous, interchangeable. There are common themes that link people's immediate environment to their physical and mental health; shared understandings that came to the fore globally during the COVID-19 pandemic, which also raised the profile of public realm development and liveability significantly.

Importantly, place-informed policy linking physical and mental wellbeing and environmental factors has a longer provenance in legislation enacted across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland respectively prior to COVID-19. For example: The Scottish Government's Public Health Priorities (2018: 02) recognised that "health is first created [...] in our homes and our communities, in the places we live and through the lives we lead." The English and Welsh Governments recognised the importance of healthy environments and the role of place and placemaking in protecting physical-mental health and wellbeing, and people's abilities to protect their livelihoods (Welsh Government, 2020; Johnson and Green, 2021; Local Government Association, 2018). And in Northern Ireland,

the first UK region to enact statutory requirements for Spatial Planning ("big P" decision-making as set out in Chapter 1) to be informed by formal community planning engagement processes, there have been requirements "supporting good design and positive place making" for several years (DOENI, 2015b).

The incorporation of wellbeing and place into governmental systems is also part of an evolution towards a comprehensive societal and built environment-informed understanding associated with resilience and the notion that wellbeing can have "no form, expression or enhancement without consideration of place" (Atkinson et al., 2016: 03). Thus, place is also well established as part of the resources, assets, and perceptions that THRI[VES] draws on as important to both individual (subjective) and more broadly evidenced (objective) societal wellbeing. In effect, improved qualities of place are seen to enable human flourishing and social connectedness, to challenge types of development practice/policy that are increasingly associated with poor wellbeing and poor influences on healthy activity (Badland et al., 2017).

By extension to this research, place – its locational factors, qualities, assets – thus requires greater appreciation in decision-making process to balance individual wellbeing and prosperity, and in professional and government bodies to influence priorities promoting liveability as collective (societal) wellbeing. Despite many positive shifts in aspirations, practices, and key policies with health and wellbeing drivers, there remains an identified lack of joined-up approaches to delivering and learning from development projects (buildings, spaces, amenities, and supporting civic infrastructure). Similarly, there are challenges identified across sectors for professionals, policymakers, and people generally to collaborate effectively, sharing data and co-producing quality environments that embrace holistic notions of health, wellbeing, and placemaking.

2.3 Mapping liveability, health, and placemaking in Belfast

For its analysis of public realm projects in Belfast, THRI[VES] adapted evaluative methods from established toolkits for categorising and comparing datasets associated with liveability and with placemaking. The first such model, "Domains of Liveability," derives from research in Australia focused on better connecting health and sustainable cities (Lowe et al., 2015). The second is the "Place Standard" evaluative tool created by Architecture & Design Scotland (2020), which sets out a range of categories through which researchers, community groups, and public authorities can gather and compare quantitative and qualitative information– statistical data and real life experiences – about specific projects and locations. Lowe et al.'s 11 "domains" of liveability, Figure 5, are meant to inform a snapshot of a particular location; for example, a 'local

residential neighbourhood environment. The Place Standard Tool, a WHO and Healthy Cities Network recognised method, uses an increasing quality scale of 1-7 to translate complex "relationships into a simple set of questions" based on a similar range of "observable" categories (Hasler and Howie, 2020). Overlaps in indicators include, for example, "crime & safety" and "feeling safe"; "public open space" and "streets and spaces" as applied in each model.
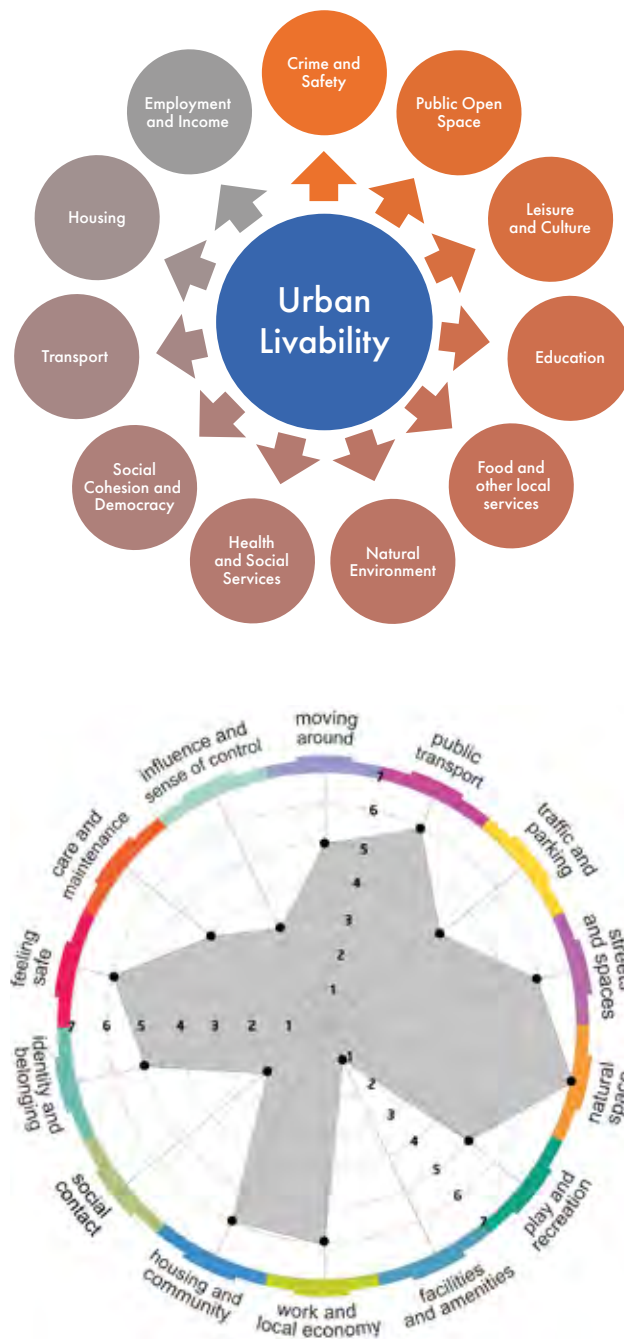
Figure 5: Domains of Liveability (Lowe et al, 2015) and the Place Standard Tool (Architecture & Design Scotland, 2020)

Similarly structured models include The Age-friendly City and Opportunities for Child-friendly cities (Figure 6), which also integrate common indicators around the built environment, social cohesion, transport, and support services among others; these are illustrated to highlight how such frameworks have become pervasive over the past fifteen years, and provide flexible tools for specific, yet transferable, challenges to be assessed and compared at local, metropolitan, and regional levels. By examining pathways between various domains, complex quantitative and qualitative datasets can be categories and more objectively examined and evaluated, applying different weightings and actions. For this study, liveability and place are inter-linked for lessons about built environments, infrastructure, policy, and people to promote lifelong health and opportunities. As has been argued previously and is discussed further in Section 2.4, evidence (hard and soft information from data repositories and people's lived experience) can then guide policy and evaluate progress more effectively toward integrated urban development and governance (the effective inclusion of people and communities in decision-making and collective measures across governing bodies and the public-private sector) to deliver and care for projects in the public realm. Governance here is referenced as part of the widest, varied, and often informal "small p" forms of planning, set out in Chapter 1.

The best intentions in planning amount to nothing if a city's urban governance system—or lack of an urban governance system—does not allow good plans to be crafted and realised. For instance, projects may never get started, may be derailed, may be done shoddily, may turn out to be white elephants or, in the worst case, may actually harm the city in the long run.

(Centre for Liveable Cities, 2014: 30).
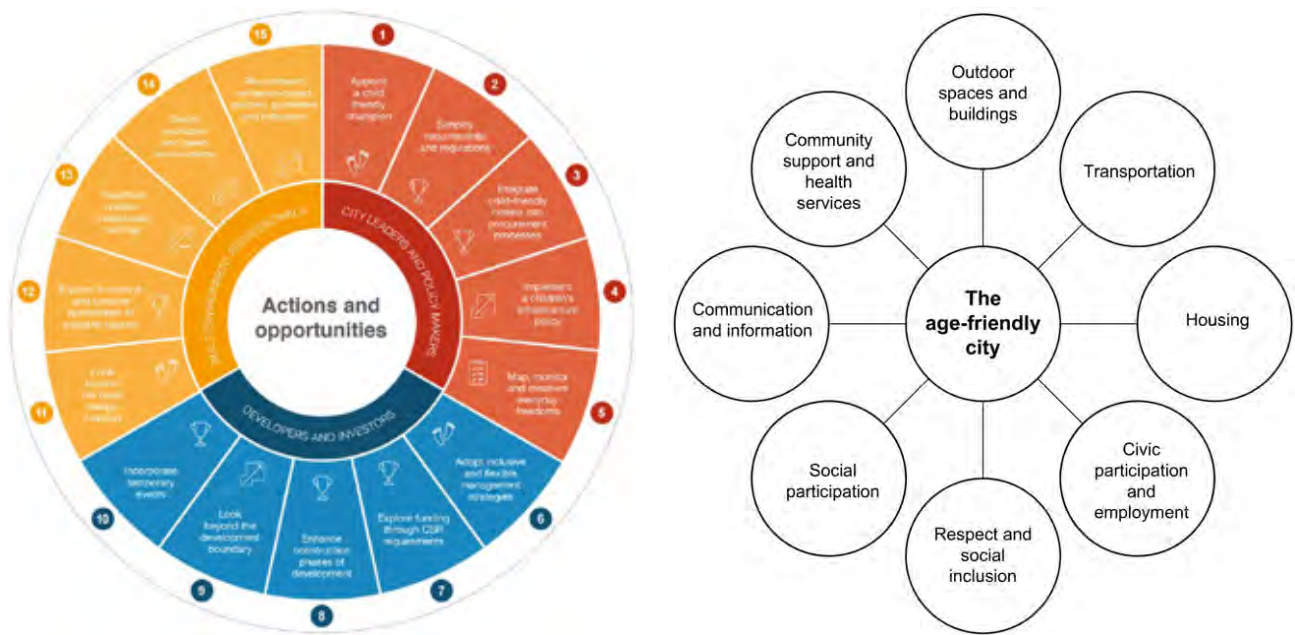
Figure 6: Comparative models, Age-friendly cities (WHO 2007) and Child-friendly cities (ARUP, 2017)

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2.4 Data for healthy places: Using information to guide health policy and action

Data, a collective term, refers broadly to information about people, things, organisations, activities, and systems. An exponential growth in data over the past ten years can be traced to technology advances, and the pervasiveness of systems that collect and monitor all aspects of people's lives in ways that are not always immediately noticed or understood. Such information can take the form of data within institutions and agencies such as hospital and schools – their processes, systems, activities, and outcomes. Data are also generated by people and about people – their behaviour, interests, location, and movements. Data can tell us about our environment, levels of pollution, weather forecasts. Geospatial data on smartphones and other devices help us navigate cityscapes and places we have never visited before; when we arrive, they can point us to places to visit. Data is thus an integral and continually challenging part of everyday life.

One example of why the issue of data is relevant to city centre liveability and societal wellbeing can be drawn from Belfast City Council's responses to a disastrous 2018 fire that gutted a large historic building serving as retail flagship at the heart of the city's primary retail district. A threat of building collapse meant street and business closures in the building vicinity, leading to loss of footfall and trade for several months.[3] BCC and other government departments set up a City Centre Regeneration Task Force, requesting all retailers and "umbrella city centre organisations" to share "any data sets they use to measure performance e.g., trading figures, geographic and demographic information, etc. "This helped to "inform a more joined up and targeted approach going forward" (BCC CGRC, 2019) and demonstrated the potential for further conjoined sharing, both between the private-public-voluntary sectors and across sectors and political/geographic boundaries.

Another impetus and example of better connecting and utilising information on health and the built environment arose from COVID-19 when data sharing became an essential part of everyday public life. As threats increased, daily figures and new ways of communicating information about the rate of infection, hospitalisations, and deaths were rapidly developed by government and media. At a city centre level, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and arms-length bodies such as Belfast City Centre Management continued to track economic and physical impacts through changes in vacancy rates, trade, footfall, and transport – as people shifted more to socially distanced pedestrian and cycle modes, and access to the city was restricted.

Data is also crucial to government policy, at local and national level; to help achieve liveable places, valuable information needs to be adequately gathered in a timely manner and shared at strategic to more detailed, local – "granular" - levels. It must also, to be effective in achieving inclusive aims for governance, community capacity-building, and public involvement in decision-making, be made accessible in content and communication formats to the wider public. When communicated in transparent, coherent, and streamlined outputs, data can clarify what is happening to a population's health education, security, and social mobility. It has enormous benefits for creating a sustainable transport infrastructure, building businesses, and securing employment – in other words, data is vital to maintaining a competitive and successful economy. With appropriate use, data can show where the big social challenges lie and offer evidence-based and efficient solutions that will be of significant benefit to all people.

In UK, access to data is now being opened to academic and other agencies. In Wales, the SAIL databank (https://saildatabank.com/) is a partnership between government and academia which permits the linkage and analysis of dozens of administrative data sets covering health, education, and the criminal justice system. Northern Ireland however, despite all the tight and sensible governance that has been implemented, lags other UK jurisdictions in the freedom to use data for the public benefit.

Proactive attempts to address and better manage data in Northern Ireland include a joint partnership between the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency (NISRA, 2021), Ulster University, and Queen's University Belfast in a UK-wide Administrative Data Research Centres [ADRC] scheme (ADRUK, 2022). The scheme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC], includes centres set up over the past five years in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland's Centre includes oversight from UK-wide Strategic Hub and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to link data created by government and public bodies across the UK and provide access in the regional information (NISRA is the main repository of information on the general population in Northern Ireland. The aim is to support vital research for evidence informed policy decisions and consequently, more effective health and other public services (ADR-UK, 2022).

A significant challenge in Northern Ireland to obtaining policy relevant data is the current interpretation of the Digital Economy Act, which does not permit linkage of health data (NISRA, 2021), unlike the other nations (UK Public General Acts, 2017). There are limited datasets that have been made available to academics and other interest groups to undertake research. Under EU-UK General Data Protection Requirements [GDPR] provisions exist for sharing personal data for limited statistics and research purposes.

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[3] Figures at the time from Belfast City Centre Management [BCCM], one of the main organisations providing support and data collection across the public and private sector, showed a 49% reduction footfall in the immediate area and adjacent retail mall, Castle Court (BCCM, 2022; McConville, 2019).

However, The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) remains restricted, with no access to more finely grained data at community or neighbourhood level - super output areas (NISRA, 2019). Without this granularity, it is difficult to research areas such as the determinants of health and educational inequalities or how to improve safety in specific neighbourhoods, or highlight the risks posed to mental health by poor transport and housing.

Another challenge is the perceived lack of trust people can have about providing data – personal or commercial information and particularly health related - and making such raw data available for government or academic use, albeit for different reasons. In Northern Ireland, according to a longitudinal study of over 1200 respondents by Ulster University, a general wariness about how personal data will be used remains prevalent; e.g., consent dropping from 75% to as low as 25% where personal information would be available to third parties outside the original research team, and prioritising individual consent even when such processes for larger groups/population sub-sets might mean abandoning research (Robinson et al., 2018). Such barriers, and potential barriers, to wider availability and transparency of data are understandable in the context of data breaches and identity theft or wider implications. They do however, place severe limitations on research and by extension to advice available to policymakers, the private sector, and members of the public on targeted health issues, as areas for continued engagement and improvement.

> **Data is knowledge. By having access to more of it, combined with the ability to analyse it through modern techniques, we get greater insight into what works and what does not – both in terms of selling products and services, and in terms of making our own processes and practices more efficient.**
>
> **National Data Strategy, 2020**

Exemplar 1:
Urban Health Collaborative. Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Leveraging data, research, education, and partnerships to improve health in cities.[4]

The Drexel Urban Health Collaborative (UHC) is an urban health focused research centre within the Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health in Philadelphia, one of the poorest large cities in the US. The Collaborative's mission is "to improve health in cities by increasing scientific knowledge and public awareness of urban health challenges and opportunities, and by identifying and promoting actions and policies that improve population health and reduce health inequities" (Urban Health Collaborative, 2022). As an award-winning centre, it is recognised for community services with a commitment to health as a human right, "to leverage the power of data, research, education, and partnerships in order to make cities healthier, more equitable, and environmentally sustainable" (Urban Health Collaborative, 2022).

The UHC both collects and analyses data in an academic context, and builds external capacity with community groups, decision-makers, and other institutions through information exchanges and training. Information collected by UHC about the built environment includes pedestrian street networks, "walkability" and "bikeability" scoring, and mapping park-based recreational facilities among several types of geographic datasets (Urban Health Collaborative, 2021a).

In West Philadelphia, UHC gathered data including views on "self-rated health," connected to more granular physical spatial mapping spatial, such as on the number of tobacco stores per sq. mile in a study area compared to greater Philadelphia (Figure 7). This technique evidences heightened health risks that could impact on planning policy and also target behavioural change actions (Urban Health Collaborative, 2021b).

[4]Contributing information and case study support provided by Gina S. Lovasi, PhD, MPH. The Urban Health Collaborative Co-Director and Dornsife Associate Professor of Urban Health at Drexel University. https://drexel.edu/uhc/

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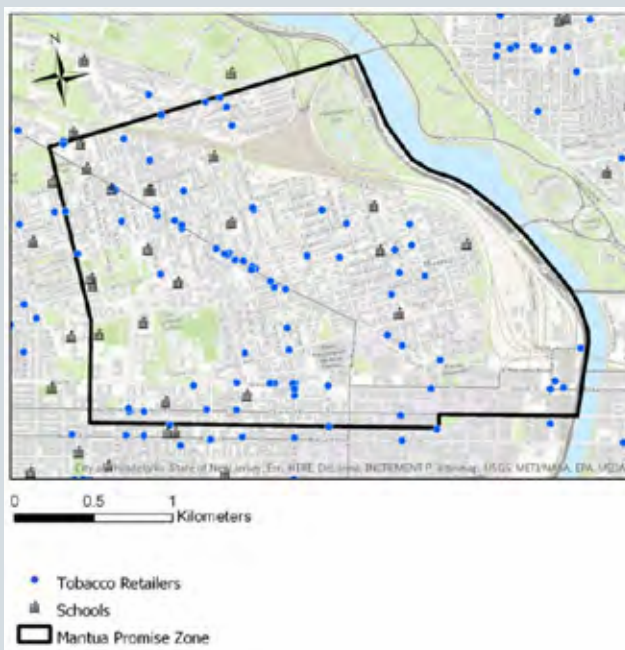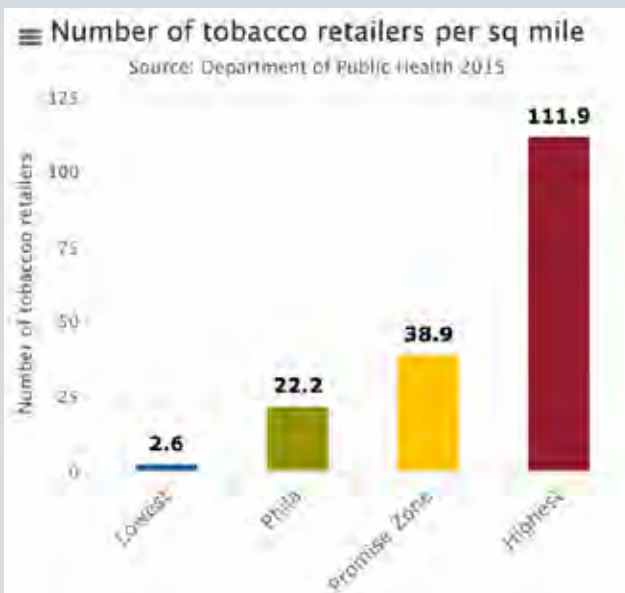
Figure 7: UHC West Philadelphia - mapping the physical presence of tobacco retailers as a community health threat (UHC, 2022)

Small Area Data Estimation:

Recognising the challenge of collecting granular data to assist more targeting project evaluations and more effective policy and practice interventions, UHC developed an enhanced method for "small area data estimation" using what they describe as spatial and temporal "smoothing" (Quick et al., 2019). This technique (see Figure 8 for an example) recognises that health data in smaller neighbourhood study areas can be limited by fewer events being measured, or by a smaller pool of available/ willing research participants. "Spatial smoothing" refers to applying information from one area to another nearby, "based on the idea that areas near each other are often more similar than areas which are farther away from each other." "Temporal smoothing" is when information from the same neighbourhood is applied from a different point in time, "based on the idea that a given place is often similar over time." These methods help account for individual factors related to health, adjusted between different neighbourhoods (Quick et al., 2019; 2020).
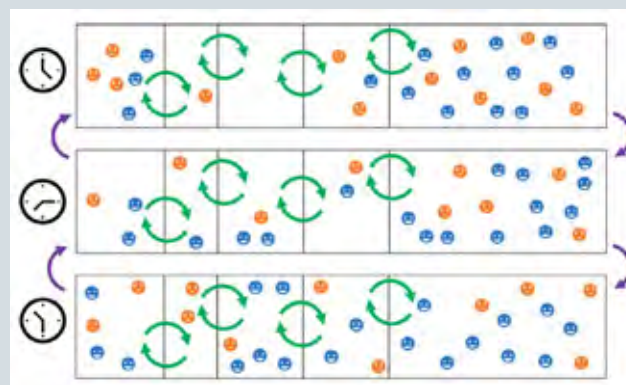
Figure 8: Small area data estimation model using spatio-temporal 'smoothing' to estimate more reliable values (UHC, 2019)

What is a community health profile?

A health profile uses existing data to describe the health of a neighborhood or community. The data used are often called "indicators" of neighborhood health status [...] to help residents and health advocates take advantage of resources to plan new programs or services to improve community health. It can also be useful over time to see whether improvement efforts have created positive change.

(Urban Health Collaborative, 2021b)

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Engaging Youth Wellbeing: Rights to play and fostering life-long opportunities

This outtake highlights the need to better include children and younger people as 'critical consumers of urban spaces' in designs ad policy promoting play as social, economic and health opportunities (Freeman, 2019).

Creating cities and urban spaces that are shared and more health-focused for all requires providing spaces and experiences that optimise health and wellbeing (Ergler et al., 2021). All levels of development can work better to significantly shape children's well-being (del Pulgar et al., 2020) and more actively engage younger voices and needs in early visioning ("small p") processes and later ("big P") statutory planning processes. Government and council have also been encouraged to support "children's ability to play out and to access sufficient time, space and permission for play in the public realm [as] a matter of spatial justice" (Russell et al., 2020). In Northern Ireland, the Children's Services Cooperation Act [CSCA] (2015), sets out requirements "designed to improve co-operation amongst Departments and Agencies as they deliver services aimed at improving the well-being of children and young people" (CYPSP, 2022). The CSCA defines 8 parameters including economic, environmental, and well-being outcomes in a "Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People" for 2017-2027, Figure 9.

Figure 9: CSCA 2015- 8 parameters for child friendly wellbeing outcomes (Source: CYPSP, 2019)

PLAY: Explicit, Integrated and Stealth Approaches

An important outcome of the CSCA strategy, supported by A Bolder Vision for environments promoting wellbeing for all, is that children and young people should enjoy play and leisure. Examples here of developments that support play include explicit, integrated, and stealth approaches (see Figure 10, Figure 11):

- Cathedral Gardens, Belfast (: A meanwhile redesign in place from August 2020-2022 (see Case Study 1), that featured explicit, exuberantly colourful landscape and play equipment. The project brought an entirely new younger demographic to a previously under-used inner-city plaza and was developed from innovative regeneration strategies, which included workshops with design consultants and children.

- Adelaide Street, Belfast: An example in Belfast's Linen Quarter of "incidental play" as stealth-based approach featuing bespoke installations to replace car parking and support families from nearby apartments with limited recreation space (McLaughlin, 2022a; MMAS, 2022; OGU Architects, 2022).

- Barking Square and Alfred Place, London: Two examples of award-winning UK regeneration projects that demonstrate how public-private development can sensitively and seamlessly integrate play spaces alongside other aspects of civic development such as housing, retail, offices and public services.

Importantly, integrating play need not take a singular gated/separated approach in city spaces, nor does the inclusion of spaces allowing play need to exclude older persons or other more typical 'target' populations for urban regeneration. If well maintained and managed, providing places for children and younger people can extend benefits to all users, improving diversity and permeability of access along with socio-economic vibrancy as evidence for greater public and private investment with development policy support (Golden et al., 2015).

> **Children are a kind of indicator species. If we can build a successful city for children, we will have a successful city for all people.**
>
> **Enrique Peñalosa, Mayor of Bogotá, Columbia (Thomas-Bailey, 2014)**

Figure 10: Explicit & Stealth Play: Cathedral Gardens, Belfast, Park Hood; Adelaide Street, Belfast, OGU Architects + MMAS Architects (BCC 2020, Joe Laverty 2022)

Figure 11: Stealth & Integrated Play: Barking Sq, London, muf architecture/art; Alfred Pl, London, LDA Design; (Golden 2015; 2021)

VIBRANCY

(3)

Data collection and Analysis

3.0 Belfast-focused Survey Findings: Connected views on liveable futures

The following insights about Belfast City Centre derive from an online survey undertaken using the JISC platform through Ulster University, which gathered 216 anonymous responses between August and September 2021. Key survey themes focused set questions on people's perceptions about:

- Liveabilty of Belfast

- How the city is currently performing for users across a range of given health and wellbeing themes

- Recent (temporary and longer-term) changes in the city centre

The survey aimed to snapshot how the city was perceived to be performing across a range of thematic statements, aligned with established domains of liveability, defined and discussed in Chapter 2, categorised as follows:

- Safety and Inclusivity, including perceptions of individual safety, crime, and population diversity.

- Transport and Connectivity, including active travel options and sustainability.

- Housing and Services, including tenure and type diversity and accessibility to public support services.

- Environment and Public Spaces, including green and blue spaces, and uses for all ages and cultures.

- Community and Social Participation, including consultation awareness and engagement.

Online anoymous surveys: JISC Platform

Overview

- » 216 responses - strong response from general public
  - 194 (89.8%) member of the public
  - 9 (4.2%) business community
  - 7 (3.2%) academic community
  - 5 (2.3%) community/voluntary sector
  - 1 (0.5%) statutory organisation

- » Balanced gender:
  - 99 (46.5%) Male; 105 (49.3%) Female
  - 8 (3.8%) Prefer not to say; 1 (0.5%) Non-binary

- » Age profile: still missing more of the teen-young adult and other voices
  - 1 (0.5%) 15-19; 40 (18.7%) 20-29; 46 (21.5%) 30-39; 69 (32.2%) 40-49; 41 (19.2%) 50-59; 16 (7.5%) 60-69;1 (0.5%) 70-79

Figure 12: Survey graphic - overview of respondents, demographics (Authors, 2023)

Figure 12 shows the breakdown of the 216 responses: nearly 90% identifying as members of the public with an overall near equal gender balance from those identifying as male (46.5%) or female (49.3%) compared to 0.5% (1 person) selecting Non-binary, and 3.8% who gave no gender identity preference.

Of note, regarding wider engagement aims of this research, is the age profile of respondents: 91.4% were between 20-59, with 8% between 60-79, and only 0.5% between 15-19. As one of Europe's youngest cities and a city with a fast-growing population over 65 years old, the lower number of respondents from these important age-groups ages is a gap in the findings that contrasts with census data for Belfast, which shows the same age groups comprise around 10% and 6% respectively (NI Census 2021). Lower engagement from younger persons and particularly from poorer older populations has been highlighted in other research as a challenge to reach more marginalised groups, many of whom may have less access to online (non-face-to-face) interaction or were restricted during/since COVID-19 (Sprague Martinez et al., 2020; Coveney, 2020).

3.1 Survey: Public perceptions on the liveability of Belfast city centre

From those responses received, answers to an opening question provided one word to describe each participant's perceptions of Belfast as a liveable city, without prior prompts or leading information on the term. Illustrated as a word cloud (Figure 13), 'People' was the most prominent choice. Qualitative words like social, compact, accessible, and affordable also stand out with friendly, lively, walkable terms next. A lesser emphasis than expected on words like transport, walkability, greenways and pedestrianisation suggests a need to better harness or promote these health and wellbeing linked travel behaviours to the public. The varied views on what constitutes liveability underlines the complexity of applying a holistic definition and decision-making model to the city's development, and highlights a need for a flexible framework.

A second word cloud (Figure 14) illustrates responses with key words to describe perceived challenges for Belfast becoming more liveable city, again without further prompt, with the following highlights:

- a high proportion of respondents indicated cars, traffic, transport, and connectivity as built environment factors, in addition to long-term social problems of politics, sectarianism, and inclusivity.

- Environmental quality related terms also include walkability and congestion that align with the liveable domain of 'transportation' and needs to tackle environmental and health costs of vehicles.

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- Social responses illustrate the complex array of physical, social, cultural, and political liveability challenges that are all recognised as integral to increasing health and wellbeing priorities in Belfast.

- When surveyed about healthy lifestyles, how Belfast supports and delivers on qualities of investment in liveable places, over 90% replied that the city centre (i.e., it's built-environment) has an important role for supporting healthy lifestyles for its citizens (those responding that it is fairly or very important), See Figure 15. The question and 'reading' of healthy lifestyles, as a highly subjective topic, was left open for respondents however reading answers together with the first words gives a sense of the overall meaning. It remains unclear – and an area for future research to delve into – what consensus if any exists on how such a city centre should look or what balance of the prioritised terms is appropriate. What is more significant, if also generalised, is the combined majority of 57% who responded to the extent to which the city currently is seen to support healthy lifestyles. The middle ground of 41% who felt the city 'somewhat' supports lifestyles, indicates some tentative steps towards health-promoting place qualities; further research is also required here.

Figure 13: Survey outcomes - What makes Belfast a liveable city (Authors, 2023)

Figure 14: Survey outcomes: Greatest challenge to making Belfast more liveable (Authors, 2023)

Online anoymous surveys: JISC Platform

Sample outtakes: Healthy and the City

Importance that Belfast city centre supports healthy lifestyle for its citizens

Very important	167 (78%)
Fairly important	31 (14.5%)
Important	7 (3.3%)
Slightly important	5 (2.3%)
Not at all important	4 (1.9%)
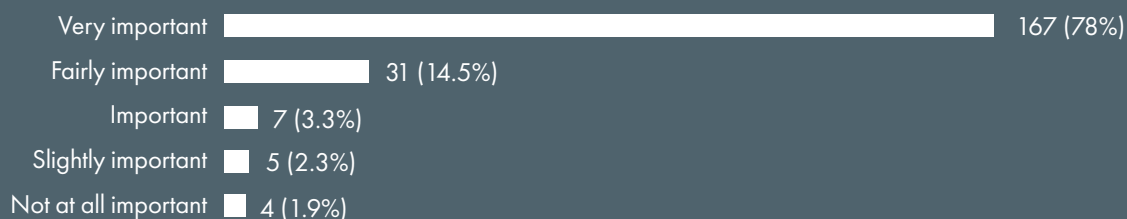
The extent to which the city currently support healthy lifrstyles

To a great extent	3 (1.4%)
Somewhat	88 (41.3%)
Very little	101 (47.4%)
Not at all	21 (9.9%)

Figure 15: Survey findings - perceptions on Belfast as a healthy city (Authors, 2023)

3.2 Survey: Long-term concerns, the changing city and environmental quality perceptions

Online anoymous surveys: JISC Platform

Sample outtakes: Future 'long-term' concerns

Pace of change of physical environment	59 (27.7%)
Pace of economic growth	67 (31.5%)
Availability of job opportunities	85 (39.9%)
Impacts of climate change	108 (50.7%)
Developing on new/green sites	70 (32.9%)
Technological change that impacts how we live work and play	52 (24.4%)
Availability of amenities (e.g. transport hubs, workplaces or shools)	89 (41.8%)
Having affordable housing options for comfortable living	111 (52.1%)
Having inclusive facilities and spaces for all	78 (36.6%)
Living in an environmentally sustainable way (e.g. recycling activaly, consuming responsibly)	98 (46%)
Improving efficenty of public transport network	134 (62.9%)

Figure 16: Survey Findings-Perceptions on long-term concerns (Authors, 2023)

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Figure 17: Survey findings - public perceptions - highest future priorities for Belfast, film version of graphics (Authors, 2023)

A detailed breakdown of people ranking their long-term concerns in Figure 16 shows public transport efficiency at the highest majority (63%) above housing (52%) and then climate change (50%), Figure 17.

Related public viewpoints on the city centre's performance on 'Transport and Connectivity' were mixed:

- 63% respondents perceived it as a safe city centre to walk - perhaps with many pedestrianised areas and through traffic calming before and during the COVID-19 crisis

- An equal 63% felt the city centre does not provide an environment that encourages or supports walking and cycling, perhaps due to disconnected and often blocked cycle lanes, weather, etc.

Importantly, and a challenge to BCC's and DfI's aspirations for Active Travel Hubs and cycle lanes (see Cathedral Gardens and Dublin Road Case Studies), are findings that:

- 70% of public respondents viewed the city centre as not safe to cycle in, and 63% felt there is less than adequate provision of safe and secure bike parking (63%).

As a compact city centre that is generally accessible, with relatively short routes by foot or cycle between many destinations compared with others in the UK and Europe, Belfast could take positive steps toward wellbeing if it could address low public opinions on the quality, integration, and affordability of active travel options and public transport provision. As it is from the survey:

- The vast majority (80%) of respondents agreed the city centre is congested with vehicular traffic, a very clear indicator of negative impacts on perception that include air quality and noise pollution.

Of interest to those aiming to encourage and support greater use of public transport networks, the results of a separate Belfast Chamber of Commerce survey of ci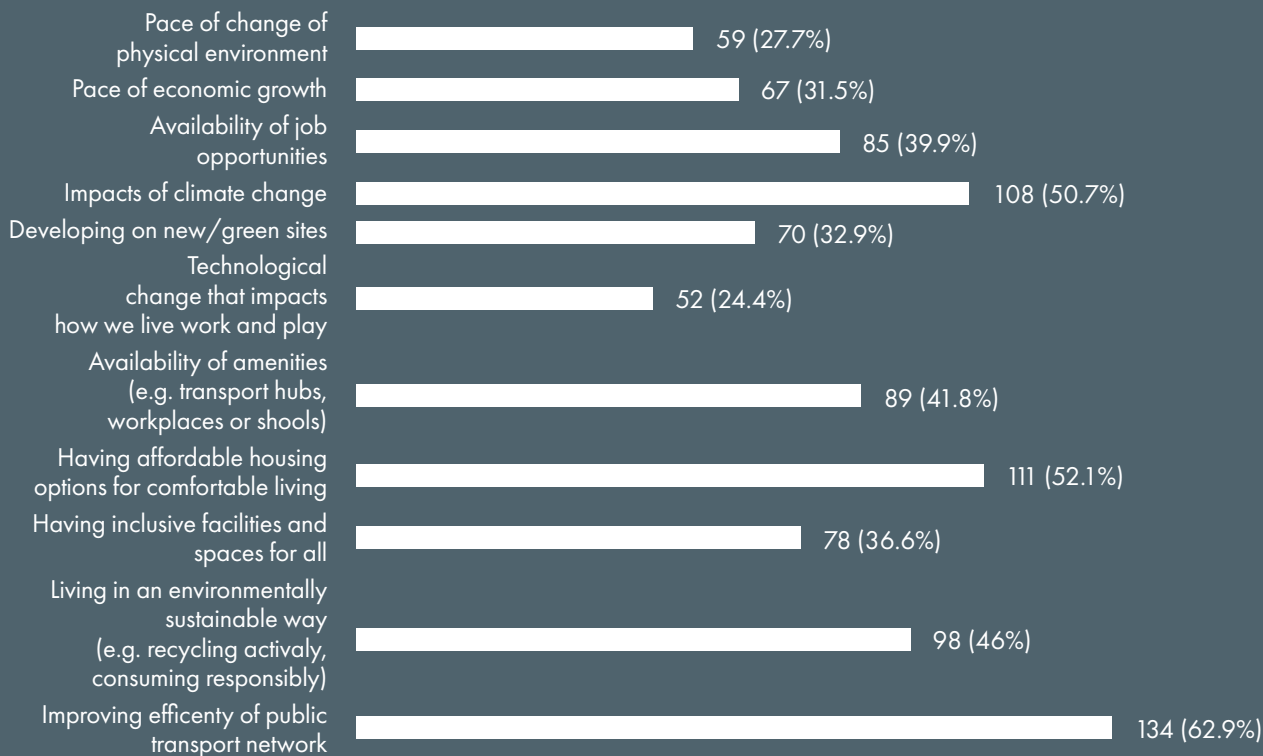ty centre businesses (Belfast Chamber, 2021) from April 2021 – a few months prior to the THRI[VES] survey and examined here for comparison:

- For businesses, contrasting THRI[VES] public findings, climate change ranked bottom (9%) as a concerning challenge to business recovery, while public health was the top business concern at 54%.[5]

- A clear statistical majority from businesses responded in favour (55% yes to 45% no) of measures to make it MORE difficult for private cars to drive through the city centre.

As Belfast is known for a high level of cars per capita, and the issue of car access and parking comes up in studies about Dublin Road Cycle Lane objections, Case Study 2, this latter result is surprising, suggesting cycle lanes and public transit priorities might be regarded as of economic benefit to business recovery. If so, for further research, these varied findings suggest that economic evidence for efficient transit, focused on links between transit-oriented development (TODs) and housing/retail/commercial investment might have more traction than carbon reduction, clean air, cyclist/pedestrian safety or affordability-based arguments.

The comparison between THRI[VES] and Chamber surveys, while only a snapshot, suggests how economic evidence, if translated through a liveability lens, could help achieve change and lead indirectly to meet public views on positive sustainable and wellbeing targets as well as A Bolder Vision aspirations for modal and behavioural shifts to active travel.

[5]Surprisingly, perhaps, in that same Belfast Chamber survey, only about a third felt that a Brexit/NI Protocol (36%) or lack of footfall and withdrawal of Government support, e.g., furlough (35% each) were big challenges.

This type of connected evidence and critically assessed cross-sector views might also help improve how new public spaces use public-private investment to combine active travel hubs with other commercial features that might cater to more than the minority of 30% of the public who already feel safe to cycle or may not be fully aware of more isolated Travel Hubs when visiting Social Hubs (something that is a potential enhancement in Blackstaff Square, Case Study 3, for example).

Looking more at housing, the quality of spaces and support of all lifestyles around the city centre:

- A strong majority (69%) responded that the city centre is not an attractive place to live,

- 51% felt that the city does not provide quality housing that is value for money to buy, and a higher percentage (61%) view poor value for money in relation to rent.

- Mixed responses were received in relation to the city being diverse and exciting and LGBTQ+ inclusive.

A key observation here is a lack of diverse housing types, with many qualitative comments acknowledging that there appears to be a concentration towards student accommodation and luxury apartments. In terms of both housing and service provision, particularly for families, many responses indicate the city centre lacks basic amenities to encourage more diverse intergenerational urban living, for example:

- Only 20% agreed Belfast has a range of quality green spaces which are linked with healthy urban living,

- A similarly low percentage (25%) felt the city has public spaces to relax and socialise.

- Additional areas of long-term concern include similar levels of response for job opportunities, availability of amenities, and living environmentally.

This is followed by inclusive facilities and spaces for all, developments on greenfield sites, and the pace of both economic growth and change in the physical environment. Lower concerns were raised around the pace of technological change.

'Safety of streets and areas' ranked second in priority (24%), below 'more pedestrian and cycle provision' (29%). Across 'Safety and Inclusivity' statements, the results are mixed: Just below the majority of respondents agreed that the city is friendly and welcoming (49.5%); few still that it is a safe place (45.6%). Safety and inclusivity findings are key components to the provision of spaces and facilities to attract and support families in the centre, including safe and healthy streets/spaces for children's play and creation. Safety is an issue often linked with perceptions about the state of a city including its cleanliness, which have been an ongoing issue raised about Belfast for many years (Lowry, 2008).

By comparison with another 2021 Belfast Chamber survey, present business members in the Chamber expressed more extreme negative views on environmental quality:

- 80% replied to the Chamber that the city is not "safe or very safe for staff, customers, visitors, etc,"

- Almost two-thirds of 400 businesses surveyed by the Chamber rated the city centre's cleanliness as very poor or poor (Webb, 2022; Harte, 2021).

Part of the public and commercial safety and cleanliness issues, perceptions and realities, have been associated with divided responsibilities for how the city functions between the Council, NI Executive Departments, BIDs, and others leading to uncertainty and perceived intransigence (Webb, 2022).

3.3 Survey: Future decisions and citizen's voices in Belfast City Centre

Final survey questions, Figure 18, focused on whether people feel they are able to contribute to decisions that affect them, and if they feel that citizens (all those whose daily life and work activities are in the city of Belfast) want a greater say in how the built environment develops. These questions sought views that are relevant to both this research and to ongoing evaluations outside the research about what are referred to in Chapter 1 as "big-P" statutory Spatial Planning consultation – legislated decision-making processes overseen by Planners within local council authorities and/or Dfi for regional considerations – and "small-p" processes that may be formally overseen within councils but often fall outside typically statutory routes and include aspects of tactical/grassroots engagement, as set out further in Chapter 4. Asking about citizens ability to contribute to decisions was, by extension to other questions, meant to gauge how people saw themselves and other member of the public impacting on development decision-making in Belfast, beyond just providing opinions. The terms "decision" and "affect" – being subjective – encompass all types of physical, political, or personal circumstances.

- 57.4% disagree or strongly disagree that they are able to contribute to decisions affecting them, a figure that must be regarded in the context of complex variables. However, the differences between those disagreeing and the 11.4% who agree or strongly disagree is significant in any context; it demonstrates a general sense of people's feeling of a lack of influence in their lives, affecting quality.

Influence, here, is linked with "control over one's situation," which is associated with "a sense of wellbeing [...] from believing that there is something that we and our neighbours can do to improve our areas and address local problems" according to UK charity The Quality of Life Foundation (2021). "Influence and a sense of control" are also conjoined criteria in the Place Standard tool applied to the THRI[VES] Case Studies in Chapter 4.

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From the follow-up questions crucial findings include an overwhelming majority (75.6%) replying that they want a greater say in how the city develops. The apparent appetite from citizens who responded to the survey for more meaningful ways to engage highlights differences in public perceptions in the context of multiple BCC, DfI, DfC, and BID consultations on all forms of development and policy, that meaningful public engagement is still seen as lacking in the city.

The survey results, and wider observations on engagement practices, raise a concern that there remains a disconnect in the definitions and applications of key terms across the spectrum of citizen participation that is part of the challenge to changing process post-COVID 19. The survey and wider research findings also suggest a need to actively avoid simply turning back the Planning clock to reinstate past statutory methods (image and post-design focused) – and taking advantage of a window of opportunity to link more informal planning (non-statutory and parallel council methods) into the full range of council development processes with the public.

The next Chapter addresses the above themes through three Belfast case studies. Selected small to medium scale public realm projects focus on the interplay of complex decision-making and development mechanisms that seek to address the priorities and challenges highlighted in the survey for Belfast's aims as a liveable city.

Citizens are able to contribute to decision that affect them

Strongly agree	3 (1.4%)
Agree	21 (10%)
Neutral	65 (31.1%)
Disagree	86 (41.1%)
Strongly Disagree	34 (16.3%)

57.4%

Feel that citizens want greater say in how the city develops

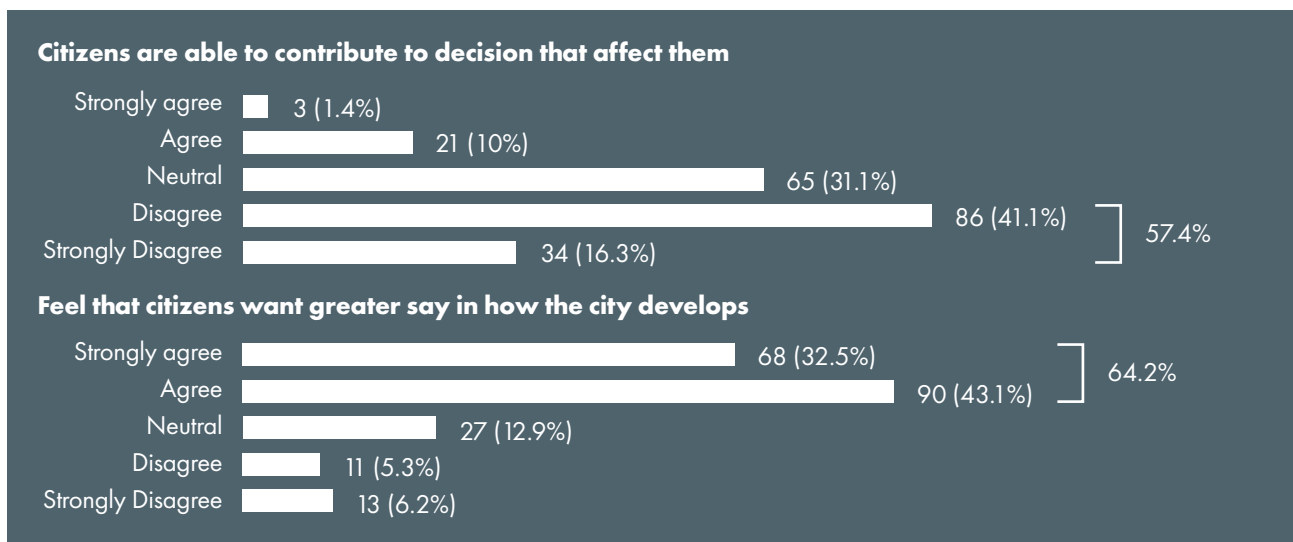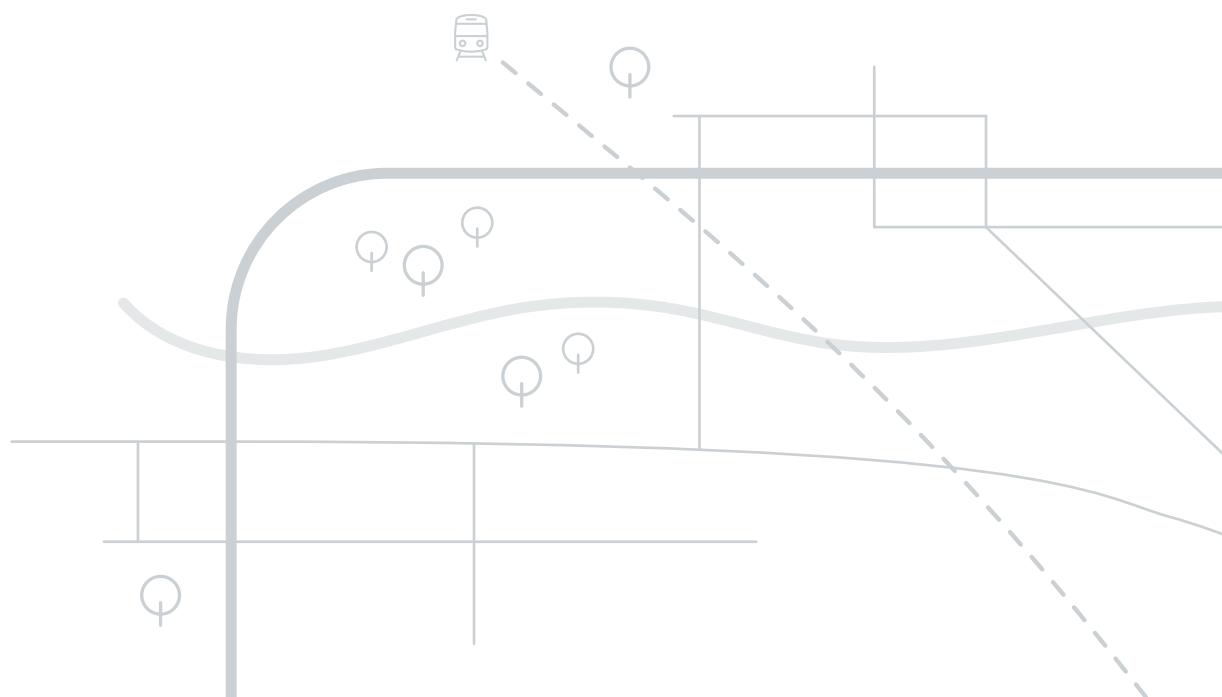|	
Strongly agree	68 (32.5%)
Agree	90 (43.1%)
Neutral	27 (12.9%)
Disagree	11 (5.3%)
Strongly Disagree	13 (6.2%)

64.2%

Figure 18: Survey Findings-Perceptions on long-term concerns (Authors, 2023)

VIBRANCY

(4)

Reshaping public space

REGENERATION

HEALTH

SUSTAINABILITY

EQUALITY

4.0 Reshaping public space: Opportunities for inclusive urban liveability, wellbeing, and governance

The value of public spaces to the quality of life people expect and deserve in contemporary cities cannot be underestimated. As the UK Design Council has observed, public spaces are a "vital part of everyday urban life [...] our open-air living room, our outdoor leisure centre" (Design Council, 2014). They are the networks of social activity that can define or alter how people view their local environment and themselves as individuals, qualities that help create a sense of place from spaces that can be well-established or recent additions to a city's character. When such spaces are subject to change – or when new public spaces are being created – the process for development can be often be seen as contentious and exclusive, top-down. Handled differently however, there are plenty of examples and opportunities where collaborative co-design approaches help to develop new places that local and wider visitor can enjoy equally. The latter examples are seen as collectively contributing to liveable cities as presented in Chapter 2.

This chapter examines different aspects of both top-down and co-designed development through three case studies of projects in Belfast. The chapter begins with a discussion on the opportunities for improving liveable qualities in the public realm to drive other building and infrastructure development and delivery processes (statutory and non-statutory). It presents comparative lessons on economic, sustainable (environmental) and well-being factors impacting policy, investment, design, and long-term management of public facing projects, and reviews the recent impacts and considerations for such projects from COVID-19 lessons. Finally, it presents in-depth analysis of Belfast, applying a lens of liveability and placemaking analysis along with comparative lessons from two remaining international exemplars.

> **The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.**
>
> **David Harvey, The Right to the City (2008: 02)**

4.1 Liveability in the public realm through Open Urban Environments and Soft Spaces

A significant factor in the development of public spaces, at least since the late 20th century, has been the increasing reliance of public-private 'delivery mechanisms' – combinations of financial institutions and developers linked to property-led regeneration models – one of many dynamic, and volatile aspects of an increasingly globalised and privatised urban society (Golden et al., 2015). Regeneration has become a highly contentious term as a central tenet of urban planning and design, often regarded as one monolithic form of (re)development. However, regeneration mechanisms are more often more complex layers of private-global capital and local government aspiration/policy. The 'public-ness' of new and redeveloped spaces can also be complex to navigate as many open urban areas that appear public are more often under private control and have regulated access/activity as well as heightened surveillance. Such control and overlapping of both financial and management responsibility are a necessary part of the economic norms of the contemporary city that directly influence how such spaces are used, and by whom, with subsequent impacts on how they might be evaluated through factors contributing to liveability and inclusiveness as well as economic considerations. Spaces that support diverse managed and impromptu public-private activities and movement/permeability to other parts of city can be compared with more restrictivess, less diverse places as open versus closed environments, see Figure 19, (Golden et al., 2015). Open characteristics are considered more contributory to liveability and healthier aspects of place that foster accessibility, a sense of local identity, and belonging for all users (after Architecture & Design Scotland, 2020; Project for Public Spaces, 2022).

The complexity of who decides and determines uses and access to the public realm is also part of the changing nature of development, characterised in different terms including "hard" spaces – those seen to favour more top-down capital, property-economics driven models (Sager, 2015) - and more "soft spaces" those seen as developed through more collaborative top-bottom approaches, diffusing power and policy beyond the rigidities of existing systems (after Rafferty and Blair, 2019; Walsh et al., 2016; Walsh, 2015; Allmendinger et al., 2015). New models however, those that call for "safe, resilient, sustainable and inclusive cities" are often still dependent on older institutionally "embedded" frameworks (Kaika, 2017) that can carry inherent tensions between key decision-makers and the wider public on what priorities should apply to deliver more health and wellbeing focused outcomes, and how to implement more flexible, open processes effectively (Tsouros, 2015; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010).
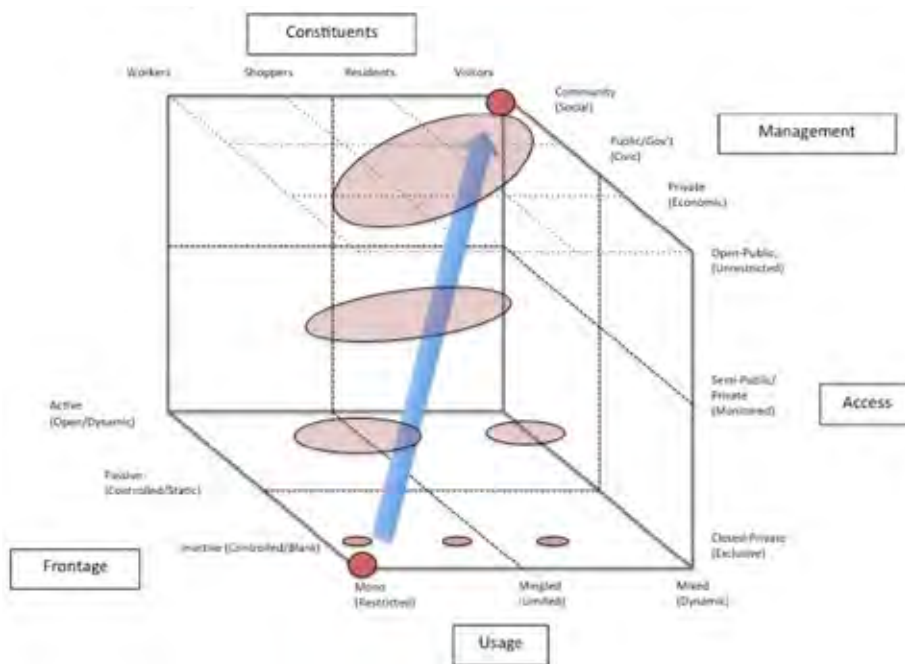
Figure 19: Open vs Closed City Space Qualities: - promoting shared liveable places with maximised diversity (Golden, 2015)

4.2 Covid 19: Adapting the public realm in rapid responss to urban health threats

The impacts of COVID-19 in Belfast included changes to infrastructure and disruptions to services delivery and both visioning and statutory planning processes from March 2020 through March 2022, in line with UK and NI legislation. COVID-19 put a global spotlight on the pivotal role of the quality of the public realm in supporting both immediate population health threats and contributing to a city's resilience to combat climate change as part of a macro-community and longer-term sociology-economic and heath inequalities at micro levels.

At local levels, rapid forms of legislation for social distancing prevented people moving around or even sitting still in public. Closures of greenspaces – parks and urban to rural open areas Important for physical and mental health – were shown to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in society (Burnett et al., 2021). Children and elderly people's challenges – their physical and mental health needs became more visible as isolation from everyday activities in school and communities very quickly became the unexpected norm. Responses studied during the pandemic highlighted a need in cities for more active and nature-based places to be developed, places for passive and active social mixing including play (Gehl Institute, 2021). Efforts to create both safe and supportive spaces in cities resulted in the redistribution of users of public spaces and amenities through "pop-up" projects aiming to ameliorate the impacts of lockdowns, isolation, and social distancing across all of society.

Figure 20: COVID-19 reactions - socially distanced queue systems and suspended seating as the new norm 2020-2022 (Golden, 2022)

Figure 21: COVID-19 reactions - Office closures including public access to government services, ongoing restrictions (Golden, 2021)

Figure 22: COVID-19 reactions - park and playground closures from March 2020 (Belfast Telegraph, PACEMAKER BELFAST,2020)

Changes felt almost immediately include patterns of consumption impacted by the sharp rise in reliance on technology that shifted everyday activities online (i.e., homeworking and schooling). In town centres and business/retail districts, changes accelerated shifts toward online shopping by reducing/removing people's daily commutes and in-city working, activity on which many small businesses rely for trade. Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities from a lack of diverse housing and access to amenities and services became evident from early 2020 (Gehl Institute, 2021; RTPI, 2021b).

An important aspect of changes to "big P" processes in Northern Ireland were legislative changes that came into force as early as May 2020 through the Planning (Development Management) (Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 (Northern Ireland Statutory Rules, 2020). This statute affected pre-application planning consultations (PACC) by removing the requirement for a public event as part of a set formal processes. A further amendment to The Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland), was the relaxation on enforcement in Part 5, pertaining to alternative use of land on a temporary basis (DfI, 2020a). Both measures were set out as safeguarding the broader needs of development processes to continue during periods of statutory social distancing; the latter relaxation supporting economic activity in the city, as cafés could circumnavigate social distancing rules with outdoor seating, for example.

Examples of such relaxations had varying results in Belfast, from direct use of the footpath for tables and chairs, to innovative and increasingly common 'pop-up' measures to use additional public spaces in parking spaces, additional vacant areas, and entire streets for temporary measures including retail café, library, cycle storage and seating, landscape-green planting, and leisure-play facilities. Pop-up developments, as referred to in Section 4.3 discussions on "lighter, quicker, cheaper" and tactical/ guerrilla urbanism have much longer provenance in global placemaking. During the COVID-19 Pandemic creative pop-up projects became pervasive through social media, and more accepted at municipal and private levels as

a means for council, businesses, and communities to try and maintain or create social cohesion and support wider socio-economic resilience (Reynolds, E., 2020).

In Belfast, parklets of varying sizes and material/design for new seating areas and space for bikes and planting first "popped up" in Linenhall Street West, see Figure 24, and Ormeau Road, Figure 25, a few months after lockdowns began. Larger examples in Belfast, which form part of this report's in-depth case studies include extending networks of bicycle and pedestrian lanes along Belfast's Dublin Road (Case Study 2) and a partly private operated "social hub" across the full width of an existing street, Brunswick Street, in the city's Linen Quarter (Case Study 3).

Figure 23: COVID-19 response, early Council-DfI social distancing measures in parking spaces, September 2020 (Golden, 2020)

Figure 24: COVID-19 response – Linenhall Street parklet in former parking bays, Belfast, July 2021 (Linen Quarter BID, 2022)

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Figure 25: COVID-19 response - co-design and cross-sector partnership, Ormeau Parklet October 2020, OGU Architects + MMAS Architects (Image Source: BCC, 2021)

Figure 26: COVID-19 response –Union Street closure, "tactical regeneration" for safe socialising and economic activity (BCC, 2021)

> Responding to the [coronavirus] pandemic, we have learned a great deal about working in partnership with others, not just across central government, but within sectors too, including local government, private sector, community and voluntary, and, of course, our academic institutions. We have had to move quickly and decisively.
>
> **Minister Deirdre Hargey, Department for Communities, June 2021.**

> The covid crisis has brought unprecedented challenges and has fundamentally changed the way we live. However, there is no doubt that it is also created an opportunity for us all to take a closer look at how we travel, especially in our times and cities.
>
> **Minister Nichola Mallon, Department for Infrastructure, June 2021.**

4.3 Belfast: Collective Governance - wellbeing opportunities through co-delivered public places

Collaborative working models which span professional, public, and government sectoral boundaries are argued as most effective to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes with the widest support as inclusive and vibrant places. However, implementing these types of co-design and even more collaborative co-production delivery models is recognised as an area of design, development, and planning in need of more innovative approaches to overcome "sectoral barriers" and to enhance social, economic, and environmental well-being" (Rafferty and Blair, 2019:178). This latter argument for cross-sectoral visioning and delivery models promotes linkages rather than competition between spatial, economic/tourism, and wellbeing/liveability factors by fostering greater "coordination of place-based policy, co-design, alignment and cooperation between the hard and softer spaces of our current systems of governance" (Rafferty and Blair, 2019:181).

In Belfast, non-statutory engagement processes (sometimes referred to as informal, though not to be confused with unorganised or unsanctioned public consultation) occur at all development levels involving local government, business, professional practice, and the public. Informal processes can be both socially and economically beneficial; they can be set up to test and consider how investment in public spaces might proceed before larger and longer-term capital commitments. They can provide value for money by focusing investment on earliest stage co-developed visions that draw on the widest range of cultural-demographic diversity relative to both a particular place and wider (more formal) spatial planning policies. Such early visioning, which is different to typically structured external design consultant/top-down approaches, requires more upfront investment but presents opportunities for placemaking to be more authentically driven by aims of longer-term , community cohesion, connectivity, and access to socio-economic opportunity for all.

Different approaches to the above types of informal visioning and public engagement include well   established practices such as "lighter, quicker, cheaper" strategies (2011) and others including "tactical" and "guerrilla" urbanism; these names typically refer to very short-term initiatives (hours, weeks, to months) driven or carried out by public/voluntary grassroots organisations or individuals in the public realm – sometimes, as the latter name suggests, without any formal support or sanction. Key differences in previously discussed 'regeneration' vs the above 'urbanism' approaches (both of which tend to target similarly underused and negatively perceived city spaces) are that former targets established regeneration areas with specific outcome goals, while the latter – as some of the names suggest – may a) not always be sanctioned and/or b)be more open-ended, less policy-specific bottom-up experiments (Lydon and Garcia, 2016; Hou, 2020).

4.3.1 Tactical Regeneration and Social Value

A co-design term with a specific meaning to Belfast City Council is, "tactical regeneration", which applies many positive grassroots informed methods that lie outside of statutory planning to more formal methods within the remit of the Council City Growth & Regeneration Committee. Tactical regeneration is described as one of the "six cross-cutting pillars" in the Council's Future City Centre (FCC) Programme – A Bolder Vision linked strategy in line with the Belfast Agenda and other local policy. The City Growth & Regeneration Committee describes applying this approach "alongside other interventions, in helping to achieve the overall objective of a reimagined city centre" (BCC and Reynolds, C., 2022: 3.1-3.3) through:

"Proactive, simple and creative interventions that are relatively quick and low cost [...] "

"A temporary form of place-making [...] that can inform long term change and act as a catalyst for future permanent projects"

In keeping with a grassroots informed approach, the Council promotes Tactical Regeneration as a co-design process involving two main methods of collaborating with others, including traders, designers, craftspeople – professional/ academic partners to local groups (BCC and Reynolds, C., 2022: 3.6):

"Tried and Tested', "a back to basics, replicable approach."

"Try and Test", "a site-specific approach involving small to medium scale interventions in the public realm, vacant sites, or buildings."

A related effort to change development approaches and evaluative processes for projects in Belfast can be seen in key targets set out in the Council's five-year draft Social Value Plan (BCC, 2021) that demonstrates a willingness to move past an "as is" approach toward more progressive tactics that allow more "non-commercial considerations." In addition to economic factors, the plan proposes greater weighting for social and environmental criteria in development decisions and for policy and to move away from more limiting commercially prioritised guidance. Social Value tactics also aspire toward future decision-making that is more "consistent and transparent" with more "structured and robust monitoring."

In the next section, case study projects from Belfast and selected international examples pick up on the nuances of tactical and traditional development methods, policies, histories, and lessons for placemaking with a health and wellbeing focus, and co-design and production opportunities examined in greater depth.

Co-Production

Co-production is a concept and practice that is recognised by organisations like Northern Ireland's Housing Executive [NIHE] as crucial to including lived experience to deliver on their strategic goals to tackle systemic social-physical challenges, e.g. housing need and homelessness (NIHE, 2022). At the core of co-production, according to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, are deepening relationships between professionals, government, private and voluntary sectors, and people (citizens or 'service users') who can effectively contribute to targeted responses in local areas; this is seen differently to "general participation or partnership working between organisations" and "co-design," where people are "just [sic] involved in coming up with ideas" (NCVO, 2021; NIHE, 2022). Updated models of participation, e.g, Figure 27, promote co-design and co-production as top goals (NCVO, 2021), going beyond previous engagement models as a deeper process of working together with local people from early stages through delivery.

In the context of this research, co-design and co-production are areas with local input and buy-in to help:

- identify less obvious health and wellbeing issues in a particular area,

- widen the input and scope of who are stakeholders in a project's visioning stages to help inform later design more holistically through a liveability lens, and to

- help budget for management and services that go beyond initial design and day-1 delivery of new projects to address longer-term changes and community needs.
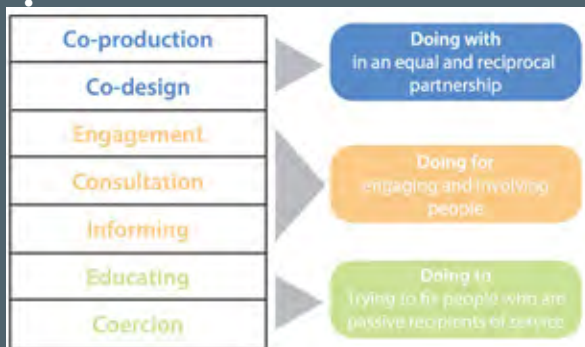
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Figure 27: Co-Production Model of Citizen Participation, New Economic Foundation (Source: NCVO 2021)

Case
Study

1

Case Study 1: Cathedral Gardens: Child-friendly approaches and meanwhile places

Context:

Cathedral Gardens, Figure 28, is an example of an extended meanwhile type of project (a 2-year installation of semi-permanent new/modified surfacing, equipment, and furniture). The £393,000 project was funded by Belfast City Council with £93,000 from the Department for Communities. It was designed prior to COVID-19 through a trial process with consultants Park Hood Landscape Architects (Park Hood, 2020), which included public consultation with significant input from children and younger persons (BCC, 2020; McConville, 2020).
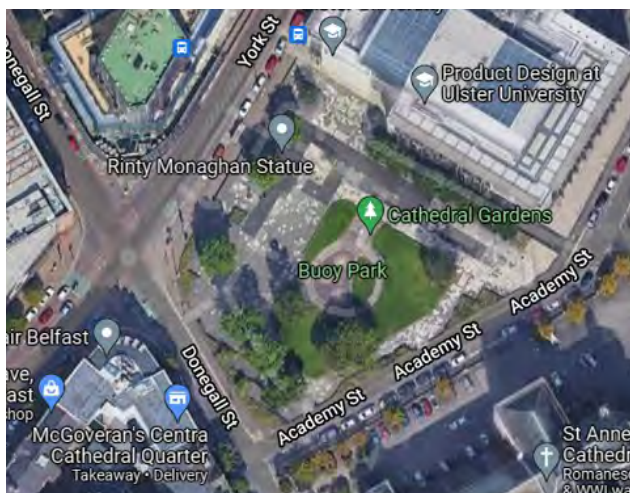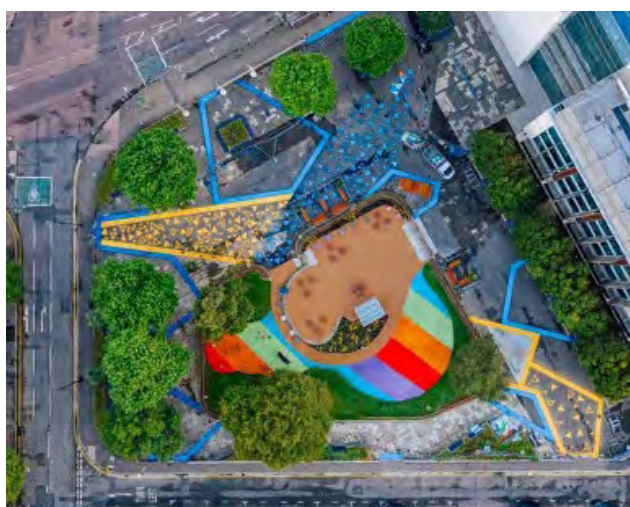

Figure 28: Cathedral Gardens, aerial view before (b) and after, 2020), top (Google Maps,2019; BCC, 2020)

Sometimes referred to as Buoy Park, due to previous sculptures that occupied the site, the existing open space was a legacy from WWII bombings. It sits at the northern end of Belfast's central business district (CBD), within the area known as The Cathedral Quarter that borders the Ulster University Belfast campus (a separate £250-360 million pound development) and both the 42.4-acre Inner North West and 12-acre Inner North East ; these latter areas are due to undergo separate regeneration schemes. Surrounding neighbourhoods along the Crumlin, Millfield, and Lower Shankhill Roads to nearby New Lodge and Sailortown are some of the poorest Wards in Belfast. High levels of poor health and socio-economic deprivation, crime, addiction, anti-social behaviour, and suicide in these areas collectively lead to some of NI's lowest life-expectancies in Northern Ireland. For active travel options, there is a well-used cycle-rental station and good surrounding public transport bus connections. The heart of the Cathedral Quarter is within 5 minutes' walk, and the central business district and City Hall are 15 minutes away for pedestrians.

Council and Executive proposals aimed at improving the run-down space as part of larger area regeneration plans from 2013-2016 never fully materialised (Development, 2013; DfC, 2015; DfC, 2016; Belfast City Council, 2015). In 2019, Belfast City Council undertook a new play-centred approach with stakeholder consultation prior to COVID-19 and delivered the new park during the first months of the COVID-19 lockdown. It opened in August 2020 with new meaning in a period of widespread public space restrictions and subsequently received international recognition as "significant" COVID-19 response for reinventing an underused public area with play and children as core drivers versus more typical meanwhile regeneration projects that focus on events, shopping, and hospitality (RTPI, 2021a; Schoder and Norris, 2021; Lubell, 2020). In a separate assessment of the project, the Urban Land Institute cited how "the most successful public realm interventions and associated programs have challenged assumptions—and ultimately altered perspectives—on entrenched policies and public realm needs" (Schoder and Norris, 2021: 32). A new scheme is under development through separate consultants since Summer 2022, see design image Figure 33 (Belfast City Council). Colour remained an anecdotal talking point from early co-design stages with school children as recognised stakeholders (rare in city centre development as reviewed in Chapter 2).

Figure 29: Cathedral Gardens before-after images 2018, 2021 (Golden, 2018; Kernoghan, Belfast Live, 2021)

Figure 30: Cathedral Gardens Belfast, from Ulster University Belfast campus (Golden, Apr/Oct 2021)

Figure 31: Cathedral Gardens, coloured artificial landscape, screening, and play equipment/grass, Autumn 2020 (BCC))

Figure 32: Cathedral Gardens - removal of play equipment and surfacing, August 2022 (Golden, 2022)

Figure 33: Cathedral Gardens - proposed permanent design image for next phase implementation.

Background:

The background to the meanwhile development, what prompted the Council to approach the scheme as an opportunity to rethink both that particular space and how the City goes about its design development, are important aspects to understand the hurdles, success, and overall lessons. The city's investment in a meanwhile vs permanent-installation was itself a shift that traces back to a key traumatic event on 28 August 2018, when a prominent historic building and primary retail premises in the heart of the city's retail district was near completely destroyed by an accidental fire (Christodoulou, 2018).

Post-fire, with resulting health & safety street closures and debates about the building's future causing a dramatic drop in footfall, the city learned valuable resilience and disaster response lessons that also changed people's perceptions and values for city centre spaces. Refusing calls to tear down the listed building, BCC instead undertook a large-scale programme of events, with innovative local partnerships to encourage social and economic life to continue in the city centre. These measures included tourist and family attractions such as a ski slope, and other family friendly zones in the former bus/car corridors along a central Royal Avenue route leading to the City Hall. Other environmental improvements included outdoor temporary seating and tables, enhanced street lighting and street art to aid pedestrian wayfinding (McConville, 2019).

> **After we trialled the pop-up park at Castle Place with the Department for Communities, the feedback was that people wanted to see our city streets and open spaces be a more welcoming place for children and families.**
>
> Alderman Frank McCoubrey, Lord Mayor of Belfast, 2020 (BCC, 2020)

The Council was already working with interdisciplinary firm Arup on child-friendly initiatives including a widely recognised Belfast Urban Childhoods Masterplan and Cities Alive: Designing for Early Childhood report that evidenced connections between urban spaces supporting healthy child development and wider benefits for all citizens from cleaner air, inclusion, and tackling loneliness (Williams et al., 2017). Bolstered by the success of play uses at Royal Avenue, BCC undertook conversations to engage stakeholders as part of Playful City in line with the City's Cultural Strategy to transform public spaces (BCC CGRC, 2019; Scott, 2019; Zvobgo, 2019). Through these initiatives, co-designed temporary design proposals for Cathedral Gardens were established and with DfC funding proceeded on the basis of creating a child friendly green space as a two-year test-case to inform longer-term DfC Streets Ahead 3 and 5 phased public works.
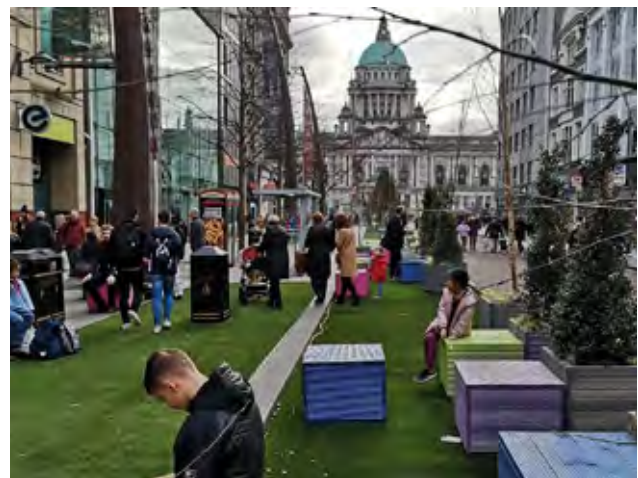
Figure 34: Pedestrianised pop-up spaces, Bank Buildings-Royal Avenue (L: Kernoghan-IrishNews, 2019; R: @cllr_petermcrey, 2020)

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Place-based assessment

High-level studies of the meanwhile version as of Autumn 2021 and the previous site as documented in 2019 were undertaken using the Place Standard Toolkit (see radar graphs, Figure 35 and Figure 36). These studies, like the toolkit, are aimed at fostering discussions that can contribute to future development of place-driven wellbeing policies and refinement of evaluative liveability models.

Figure 35: Modified Place Standard Tool Assessment- Before, Cathedral Gardens Belfast (Authors, September 2019)

Figure 36: Modified Place Standard Tool Assessment- After, Cathedral Gardens Belfast (Authors, September 2021)

Figure 37: Cathedral Gardens - new uses and users, observed, October 2021 (Golden 2021)

Demographic shifts of users changed as a direct result of the new scheme from August 2020. The previous park, observed in 2019 scoping studies for this research, remained a seldom-used space other than for anti-social drinking and drug-use or by small groups of university students and construction workers, outside of structured cultural events. From the opening months the new park drew in more teens (particularly those skateboarding, using scooters and bicycles), observed in many areas of the park in small to medium sized social groups. Important for the city's aspirations for increasing its residential draw the new users were not confined to a single group or type; increased numbers of people with very young children, families, and diverse age groups over different weekday and weekend periods 'peacefully enjoying' the colourful 'hillocks', 'hamster wheel' and sound-based play equipment that were some of the parks' oft-debated features. Other observations include:

• Surfaces are relatively flat and generally lack steps or have other sloping surfaces to leave the majority of hard-surface areas accessible. With focused budget constraints, surfaces inside the main developed public space were subject to limited upgrade or repair, covered in tarmac. Wider access issues remained from surrounding poorer quality pavements and wide busy traffic streets (IMTAC, 2018).

• Existing surfaces were enlivened with coloured triangles and shapes on previously plain paving and tarmac, in addition to the main visual rainbow feature landscape. The impact of shapes on visually impaired or neurodiverse users was a concern for The Alzheimer's Society, RNIB, and Inclusive Mobility & Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC, 2018; O'Dell, 2021; Transport for All, 2021).

• Primary colour, while a totem for aesthetic debates, added visual interest and marked the new park out as an explicitly play-focused meanwhile experiment aimed at trialling something different.

• Built-in benches and moveable seating and picnic tables were well-used, depending on times of day for a variety of users. Other seating options that don't conform to more static bench or chairs included playful fixtures and the undulating hillocks as diverse and informal lingering activity areas for lounging, conversations, and small group gatherings that are often associated with successful places.

Anti-social challenges and Pro-Active Stewardship

The review also documented challenges on the site from anti-social behaviours including alchohol and drug abuse and increased incidents of vandalism to the artificial surfaces and to the popular bench/table seating areas, which led to the latter being removed as of March 2022 (BCC, 2020; Leebody, 2022). Increased destructive activity through Summer 2022 ultimately wrecked the surfacing and much of the park equipment, while extremes of drug-use and violence included the death of a young woman in July 2022 (Balfour, 2022; Smith, R., 2022).

Figure 39: Cathedral Gardens - vandalism, fire damage to artificial surface (Golden, July 2021; CQ Belfast, 2022)

The extent and impacts of anti-social aspects of public places cannot be minimised nor dismissed as related to the meanwhile use design itself; they are long-standing challenges and health threats that were displaced in the first months of operation following the 2020 opening and returned throughout 2021. The above issues also reflect complex social and political causes that fall between several management/governance areas including the role of Council, Department for Communities, the PSNI, and wider wellbeing social services to meet challenges that are not isolated within Cathedral Gardens and fall outside the scope of this research to address.

However, the visible concentration of physical and social deterioration in the final months of the 2-year meanwhile use highlights the importance for the next Garden, transitioning to the more permanent new designs to carefully consider the root causes of anti-social challenges. The removal of play equipment and explicit activities for younger and older together within any new space is equally unlikely to redress endemic anti-social challenges without more innovative measures that involve the wider public. Stewardship, as discussed in Chapter 1, is most successful as co-managed (public-private-community) oversight of public realm projects beyond day-1 delivery. In experimental and more deeply challenged spaces, stewardship will require deeper considerations and budgeting for managed uses and personnel or bespoke processes to develop greater community ownership, especially where little has previously existed.

Additions to the space to accommodate a new Active Travel Hub since summer 2022 are small positive steps to embed managed uses that promote health and provide a day-time presence in the space (see Figure 40). Such installations also need to be part of a holistic approach such as calls within the Council to "look at better ways of getting more resources onto the streets to support those most vulnerable essentially," especially for night-time hours and increased problems of homeless, mental health, and addiction crises (Edgar, 2022).

Figure 40: New Active Travel Hub as installed with bike docks for the next phase of Cathedral Gardens (Golden, 2022)

Lessons:

Cathedral Gardens - at the crossroads of residential, university, retail, and cultural city areas – should be recognised as a significant, if short-term success in diversifying uses and fostering new play/leisure/lingering opportunities. The final period of deterioration must be regarded in the wider context of the area's long-term challenges and avoid labelling the overall experiment as a failure, or a tendency to address the younger users as a monolithic group and seek a return to top-down design process or more play-constrained spaces.

Interventions in urban spaces that do not have a history of stable, active public uses require measures that:

1. Prepare a methodology with adequate funding to continue dialogue about uses and issues that may arise from changing demographics, and new stakeholders over time.

2. Develop new/experimental designs with more everyday/evening street-level activity – fostering the oft-cited need for 'eyes on the street' (after Jane Jacobs); if active frontages are limited, use other means to include managed activities that combine public and private services for health and leisure.

3. Invest in funds and skills capacity for longer-term, tailored stewardship (planned care, maintenance, and ongoing engagement specific to the needs of each place for the full duration of any meanwhile project).

BCC's Test and Try approach, linked to its Tactical Regeneration and grassroots informed engagement is a step forward in how the city develops and remains an area where capacity across multiple sectors needs to improve to adopt and apply such measures. As examples in Chapter 2 and this study illustrate, positive aspects of integrated play support liveable cities, improve diversity when space are well managed as much as well designed to support wider neighbourhood economic and socially minded regeneration.
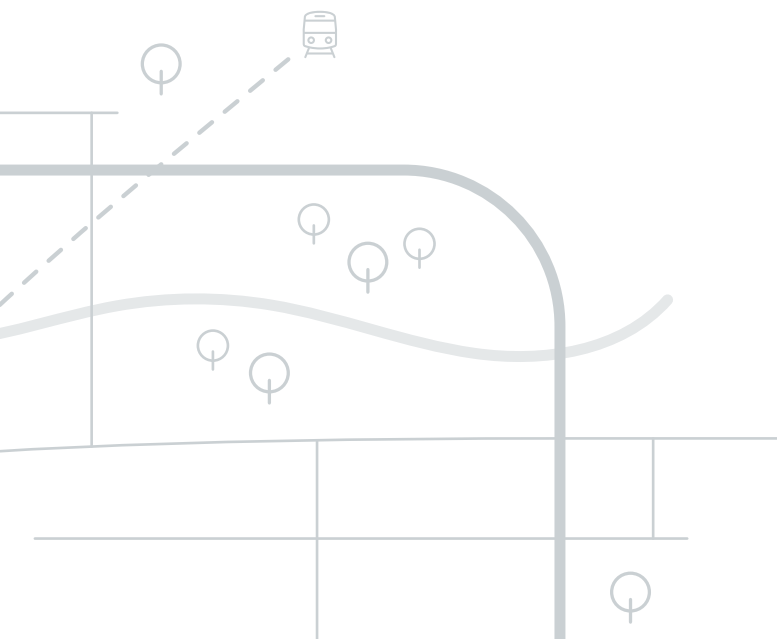
Exemplar 2:
Auckland City Council and Eke Panuku Development, Auckland, NZ:

Why Public Space Matters: Public-private partnerships and place-led approach to urban development[6]

Eke Panuku Development Auckland is an Auckland Council-controlled organisation that delivers urban regeneration in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) as a mix of public and private development and management. The Eke Panuku name derives from the indigenous Maori language, and means "to move forward together to succeed," which is the organisation's stated vision. Auckland was awarded the title of Most Liveable City in the Global Liveability Rankings in June 2021 (Economist Intelligence Unit).

Context: Strategies balancing commercial, public good, and placemaking priorities

Eke Panuku's organisation, Figure 41, is based around three "levers": a sound commercial strategy, investment in public good, and placemaking, which the organisation defines through three approaches:

• First, designing for human activity, interaction, and wellbeing.

• Second, by creating signature programming for destination spaces.

• Third, "Do Learn Do;" working with local people on smaller scale experiments before undertaking significant change, learning together, iterating, and building relationships for the future.

Wynyard Quarter, 2007-2017 Place and people focused public-space-led regeneration

• The redevelopment of Auckland's Waterfront over a 10-year period focused on redeveloping previously industrial waterfront into new public space called the Wynyard Quarter through a sustainable place-led framework, Figure 42(Eke Panuku, 2014). Based around public, all-age activities with a mix of public space and amenities that are given priority waterfront

[6]Contributing information and case study support provided by: Frith Walker, Head of Placemaking, Eke Panuku Development Auckland, Aotearoa. www.panuku.co.nz/

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status, supporting housing and other private investment, Wynyard provides transferable lessons for how Belfast City Centre and Belfast Harbour might review approaches to the River Lagan (Queen's Quay) and Belfast Lough (Titanic Quarter), and the "Maritime Mile".

Lessons derive from initial Wynyard principles, well before construction in 2007; "big moves that will create the structure of the place" as illustrated in Figure 44. Key moves to connect the waterfront to a new public park and to historical silos inform the delivered design axis, outlined in red in Figure 43. The network of public space around which projects came together by 2017 (ten short years in development terms), is an important aspect to how Auckland Council decided to use their major land-ownership. They prioritised the history of both the industrial marine sector and indigenous people with the development of public space and connections to the water as a starting point ahead of the later building projects shown in gray in Figure 43.
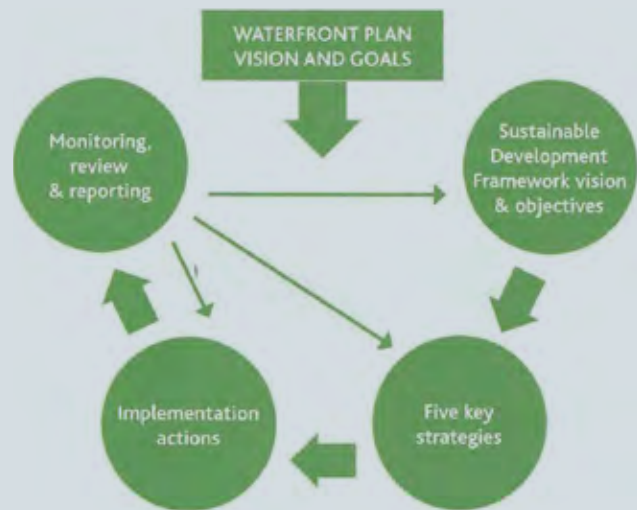

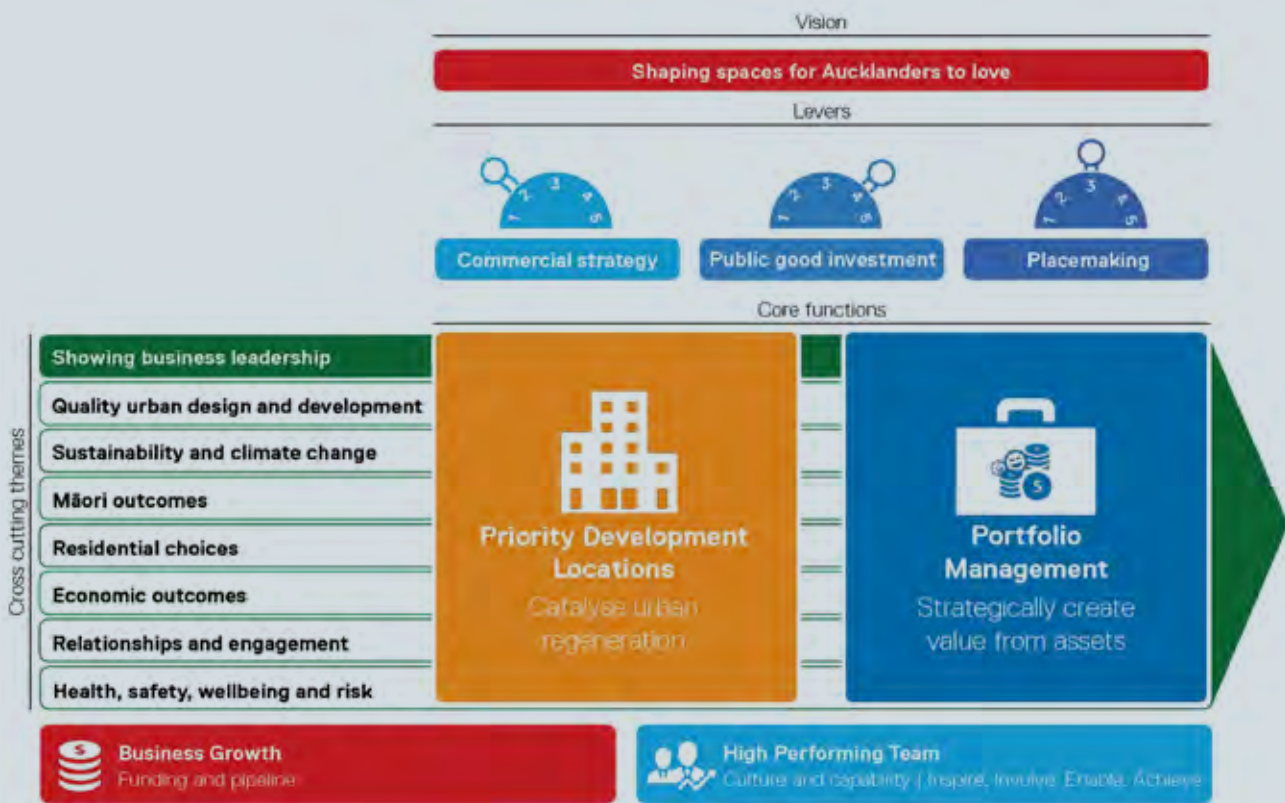Figure 42: Sustainable Place-led Waterfront Development Framework (Eke Panuku, 2021)

Figure 41: Eke Panuku place-based sustainable strategies for council-controlled development (Eke Panuku, 2021)
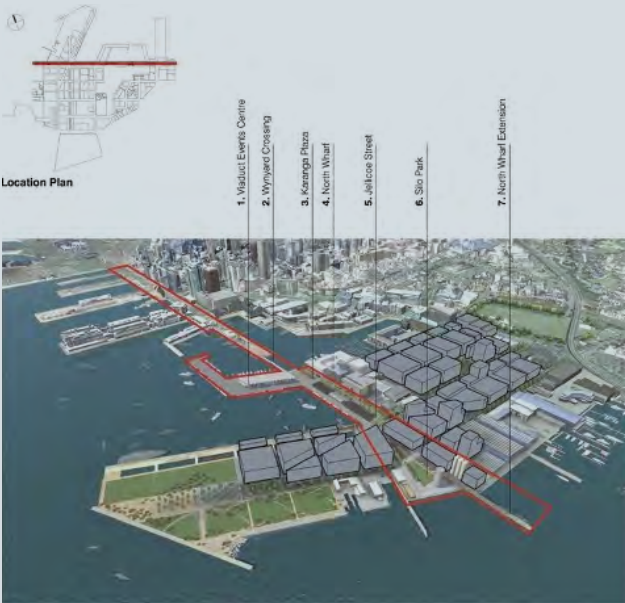
Figure 43: Eke Panuku - Wynyard Quarter: Industrial land with public space masterplan principles aerials (Eke Panuku, 2014; 2021)

Figure 45: Eke Panuku, Wynyard Development, before, 2007, and after, 2017 (Eke Panuku, 2021)

Wynyard's linear park concept had strong commercial and private investment roles in its delivery, which also has ties to development contexts in Belfast. The distinction for Auckland, is in the Council's primary focus on "populated places" that bring value to private sector investments (e.g., apartments and an "innovation precinct") and to support other public amenities. Eke Panuku, as the public authority managed delivery vehicle demonstrated how international investment can be viable, perhaps increased in value, while public space, heritage, informal and formal leisure, and play can be maintained and enhanced that support economic vitality, sustainability, and wellbeing equitably.

"**Placemaking** consciously introduces strategies of enticement, encouragement and reinforcement sufficient to ensure that strong patterns of public use take hold of, and gradually possess, a specific physical setting."
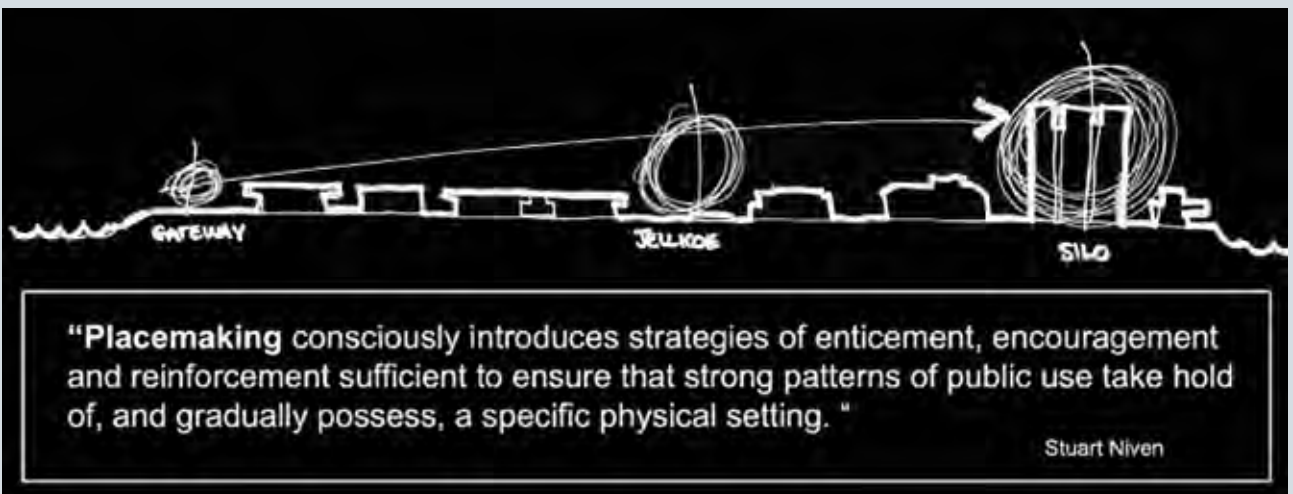
Stuart Niven

Figure 44: Eke Panuku, Wynyard Quarter, placemaking principles with public use as central development catalyst (Eke Panuku, 2021)

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Key aspects that align with liveability frameworks include the investment in both heritage and all-age activities as shown in the provisions of a new "Silo Park" around themes of human activity and significant programme-led investment integrating historic elements, Figure 46.

Notably, the park balances cultural spaces for festival type events (Figure 47) with space for sports for children through adults to use freely – space purposely "left" and not developed, including a playground with half-court basketball, which runs counter to many such trends to reduce unstructured play and unfettered access in new development.. These purposeful approaches are what Eke Panuku's Head of Placemaking Frith Walker described as "sneaky stuff, creating interventions and activations that give people the opportunity and reason to get into these places" and which avoid "some grand utopian future" in favour of "an infinite succession of presence" (Walker, 2021).
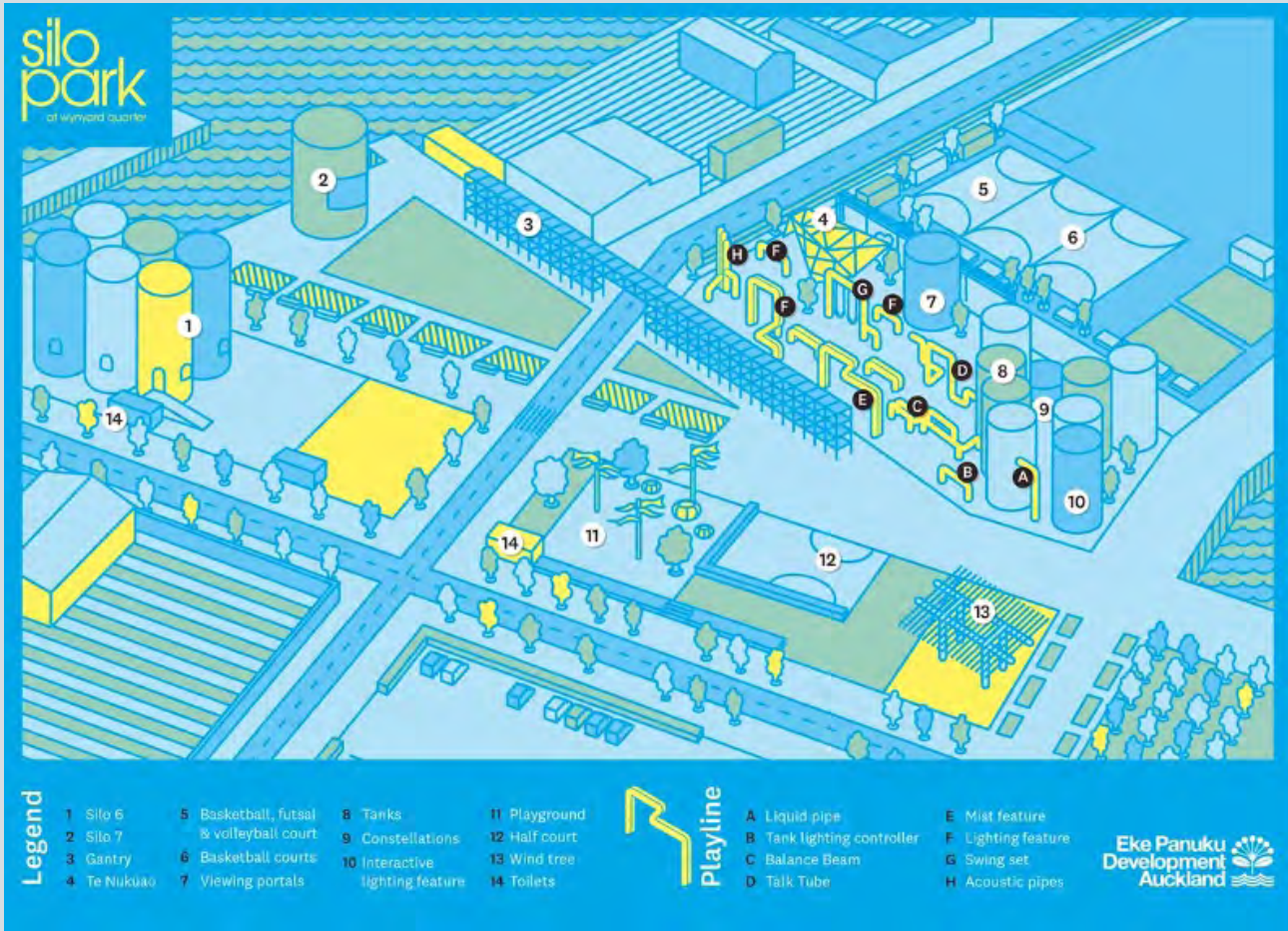

Figure 46: Eke Panuku, Wynyard Quarter, emphasis on shared public spaces in key urban locations (Eke Panuku, 2014)

Figure 47: Eke Panuku, Wynyard Quarter, all-age recreation, heritage, and culture in public-private development (Eke Panuku, 2021)

Figure 48: Wynyard Quarter: Play as a central feature of development, Place by Design (Eke Panuku, 2021)

Case
Study

2

Case Study 2: Dublin Road Cycle Lanes: COVID-19 responses and active travel public initiatives

Context:

The NI Department for Infrastructure cycleway and quiet street projects are examples of Executive-driven planning, health, and social distancing projects since May 2020 (in tandem with BCC and others) in response to the impacts of COVID-19. Lessons here address the complexities of adapting public streets for these initiatives, undertaken rapidly and while public consultation limitations were in place. Consideration is given to interventions for cycle lanes within the Dublin Road area (Figure 49) and surrounding urban neighbourhood to city-wide contexts. The study includes a background on decision-making, jurisdiction, ownership, and longer-term infrastructure and community planning for transferable lessons on city-wide connections, safer travel, and placemaking in support of a healthy liveable city centre.

New pedestrian areas and cycle lanes in Belfast, including street closures and new road layouts for social distancing were initiated by DfI on the Dublin Road and in other areas including Hill Street in the Cathedral Quarter from May – August 2020. Starting with temporary traffic cones and signage, experiments at Hill Street reduced traffic for a few months but did not have longer-term measures adopted due to ongoing negotiations between DfI, BCC and local businesses (Hughes, 2021). The Dublin Road lanes however - from Shaftsbury Square, north through to Ormeau Avenue and Linen Quarter streets – connected with existing cycle routes and have extended temporary uses into more permanent separating infrastructure, installed and refined in stages since late 2020 (See Figure 50 to Figure 53).

DfI came under criticism from area businesses, who raised historic – and oft-cited business concerns for reduced income from the removal of car parking in favour of in-highway cycle lanes (Mercer, 2020).[7] Substantive evidence challenges such economic concerns by demonstrating how such provision creates "hard economic value and jobs," and further contributes indirectly to liveability value through its impacts on air quality (Blondiau et al., 2016). International research further shows economic criticisms also often over-estimate the number of vehicle-based visitors and per-capita spending by vehicle users, while under-estimating the numbers and spending power of both cyclist and pedestrians or those using public transport (Jaffe, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2011; Blondiau et al., 2016). Regional examples include: a 2011 Dublin study, which found that bike and car-based monthly spending on Grafton Street was nearly equal; a 2014 UK-focused government report cited by DfI, which found a greater than 5.5:1 "mean benefit to cost ratio (BCR) for walking and cycling interventions in [Great Britain]" (Department for Transport, 2015); and a 2019 Belfast-focused survey, which found multiple benefits for the city and people across economic, social, health, and climate factors (SUSTRANS, 2020). The SUSTRANS report, with DfI, is a comprehensive examination of the wider issues specific to cycling in the city.
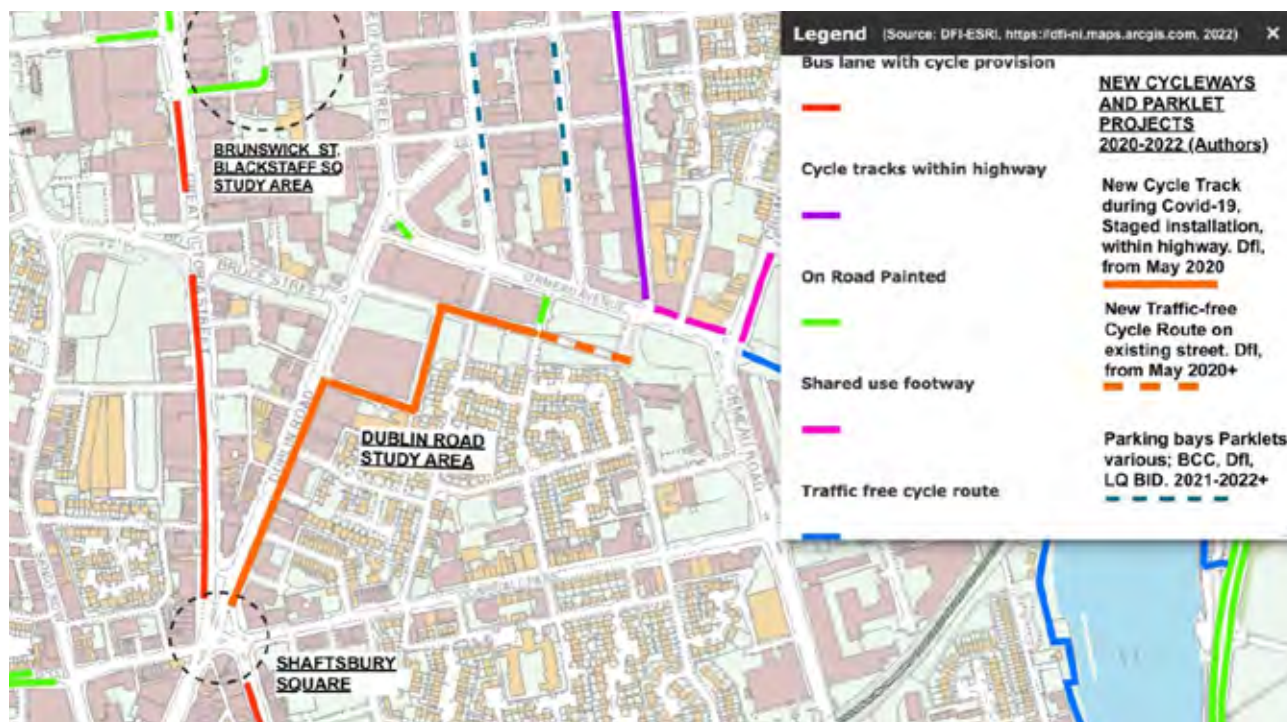
Figure 49: Dublin Road Case Study area map showing existing/new cycleways (DfI-ESRI, 2020, modified by Golden, 2022)

[7]"There are currently and estimated 39,000 car parking spaces in Belfast city centre": approximately 13,000 on street, 15,000 off street, and 11,000 private spaces (Mercer, 2020)

Figure 50: Covid-response, first road closures and quiet streets, Hill Street and Bankmore Street, May 2020 (Golden, 2022)

Figure 51: Temporary to semi-permanent cycle lanes at Dublin Road; l:May r: June 2021 (Golden, 2022)

Figure 52:, DfI road closures, bike/pedestrian routes, Bankmore St, off Ormeau Ave, September 2020 (Golden. 2022)

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City-wide cycle network context:

While changes at Dublin Road were enacted as part of social distancing rather than economic reasons,[8] lessons here balance constraints from multiple perspectives beyond the coronavirus pandemic. Dublin Road is importantly part of an existing network (e.g. Figure 53) that links city development plans along what is referred to as the Belfast's Civic Spine, from South Belfast through the City Centre to Ulster University (BCC, 2019). Strategic studies by the Department for Communities [DfC] from 2013 (Figure 54) and the more recent BCC-DfC-DfI A Bolder Vision (Figure 55), indicate how related city-wide connections have been examined across multiple Council/Executive departments for many years, awaiting delivery as the city centre profile has changed and shifted to include more northward development since 2012.

Figure 53: DfI, Established bike lane infrastructure, Alfred Street, from 2016, and new Dublin Road cycle lights (Golden, 2022)
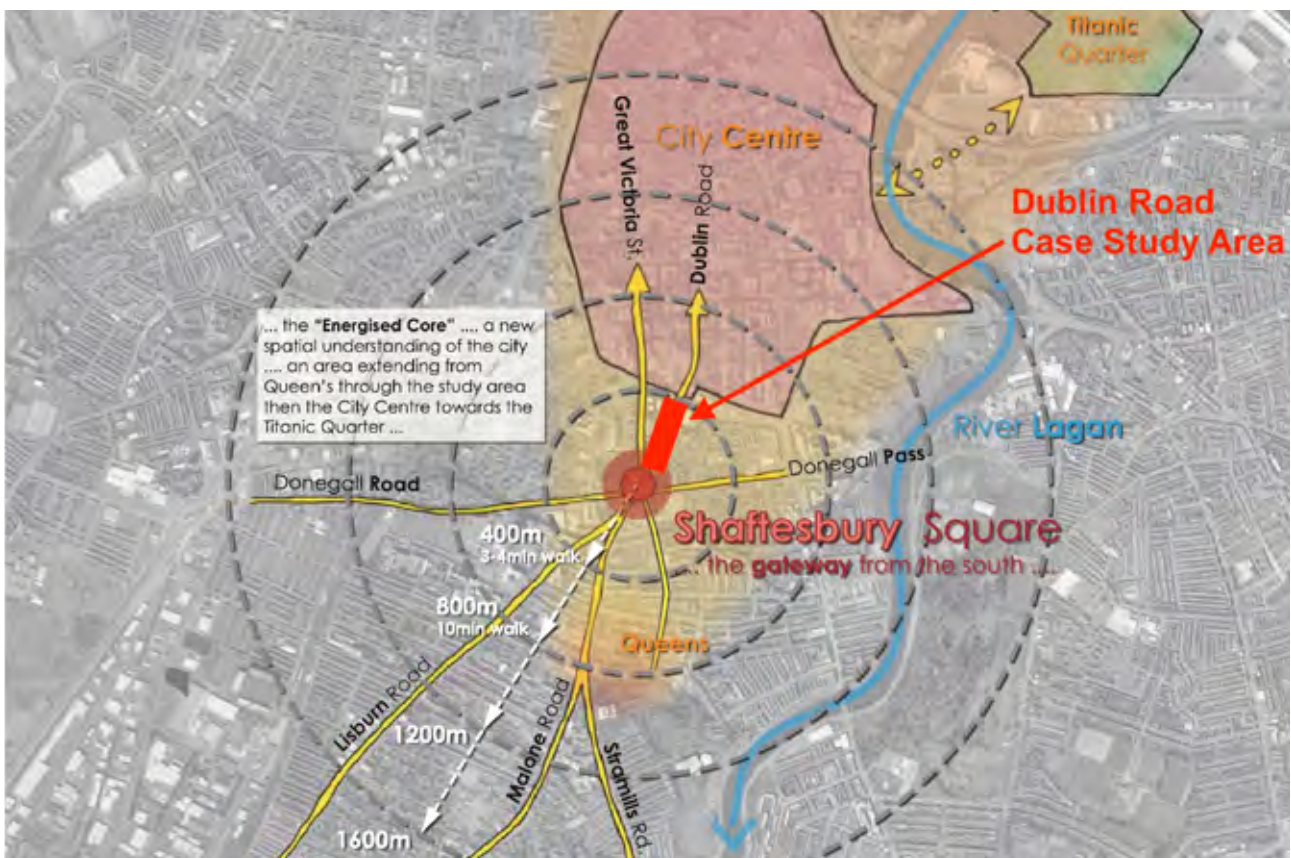

Figure 54: Dublin Road on DfC study of strategic city connections (Authors, 2022; DfC, 2013, modified by Authors, 2022)

[8]DfI cited assisting key workers travel during periods when transport and other car-based options were limited (DfI, 2020b)

In A Bolder Vision, for example, the Civic Spine includes Ulster University and Cathedral Gardens to Queen's University Belfast and Botanic Gardens with a "focus on people". The Spine also crosses proposed E/W connections from the city's new "Weaver's Cross/ Belfast Grand Central Station" transport hub (Translink, 2021; DfI, 2018; Translink, 2022).

Various connected strategies, of which Dublin Road and Shaftesbury Square are also one part, include decades-long debates over a car-focused Inner Ring Road that has evolved into greener public-transport and blue-green infrastructure centred concepts in more recent City and Linen Quarter BID strategies.

Similarly, cycle lanes in Belfast have evolved from NI-wide proposals, first set out in a 2014 paper from the then Department for Regional Development, titled "Northern Ireland Changing Gear" (DRDNI, 2015), which took legislative cues from the Welsh Active Travel Act 2013. Belfast specific plans have been further defined with cycling networks in DfI reports including 2021's "Making Belfast an Active City" (DfI, 2021a), and a 2022 Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan (DfI) with individual named projects timetable through 2035.

The 2014 DRD report promoted both the economic benefits and the social value of cycling, defining the latter as "allow[ing] people to interact and engage with their surroundings, their community and their neighbours."

Figure 55: A Bolder Vision - Civic Spine and Guiding Principles, Belfast (BCC, 2021)

Figure 56: Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCC, 2015: 101)

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It also highlighted cycling's important place-health aspects of inclusion and personal wellbeing in urban as well as rural environments (Department for Transport, 2015: 10). Place-health can be read as part of this shift toward local adjustability at neighbourhood level and emerging NI planning policy that promoted wider public engagement and input on infrastructure projects. DRD's report also adopted the UK Department for Transport's Manual for Streets' " Road User Hierarchy" (Figure 59) with pedestrians and cyclists ahead of vehicle-based users. Recognising cyclists as a non-homogenous group with different needs (e.g., more skilled road cyclicsts compared to casual users and those with less road confidence), the report clarified the hierarchy as referring to users considered the most vulnerable rather than establishing a required "priority to pedestrians and people on bicycles at every location" and (DRDNI, 2015: 21).
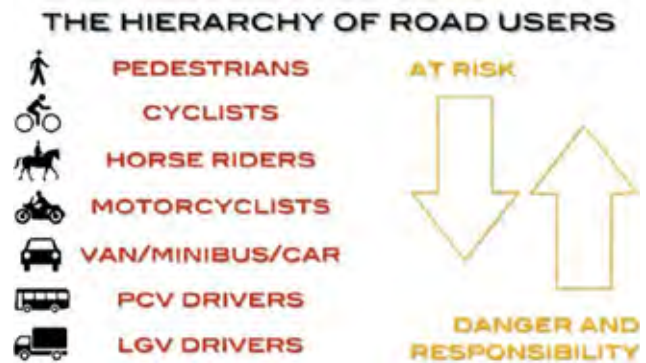

Figure 59: Road-user heirarchy as included in The Highway Code, UK, 2022

Figure 57: Linen Quarter BID Bankmore Street Vision for a linear park, housing and offices (LQBID, 2019)

Figure 58: 2022 Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan (DfI, 2021)

Place-based assessment

A visual observation and desktop analysis of the Dublin Road was undertaken in mid-2020 as part of scoping works for the research, and then again more formally in Autumn-Spring 2021-2022 using The Place Tool. The visual study focused on cycle-lane changes; long-term economic trends or detailed cyclist-pedestrian rates during and after the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions are outside the scope.

As illustrated in Figure 61 and Figure 60, perceived place-gains from the new lanes are modest when considering multiple Place-tool factors:

- Streets and spaces already benefit from wide pedestrian pavement areas and established outdoor activity along mixed retail, hospitality, and commercial frontages. Although these public/private areas have undergone a period of change, decline and re-development over several years, the installation of cycle lanes themselves was not able to address existing infrastructure clutter (advertising, road signage, service boxes) along the pedestrian areas.

- Segregated cycle lanes reduced vehicle-use substantially and removed car parking along one side of Dublin Road. The cycle lanes themselves have, however, been narrowed in late 2021 to share the highway with both bus and re-introduced car lanes as shown in Figure 61; the change followed public feedback on the impacts to transport and emergency services (DfI, 2021b). Access to/from buses in the current layout requires crossing the cycle lanes from the footpath via mini-zebra crossings which presents a safety issue for passengers, and cyclists, and exacerbates challenges for people with visual and mobility impairments.

- Extended in-highway lanes provide safer separation between cars, cyclists, and pedestrians from Alfred Street through Bankmore, Hardcastle and Marcus Ward Streets and then along the Dublin Road, up until the junctions at Shaftesbury Square where they abruptly run
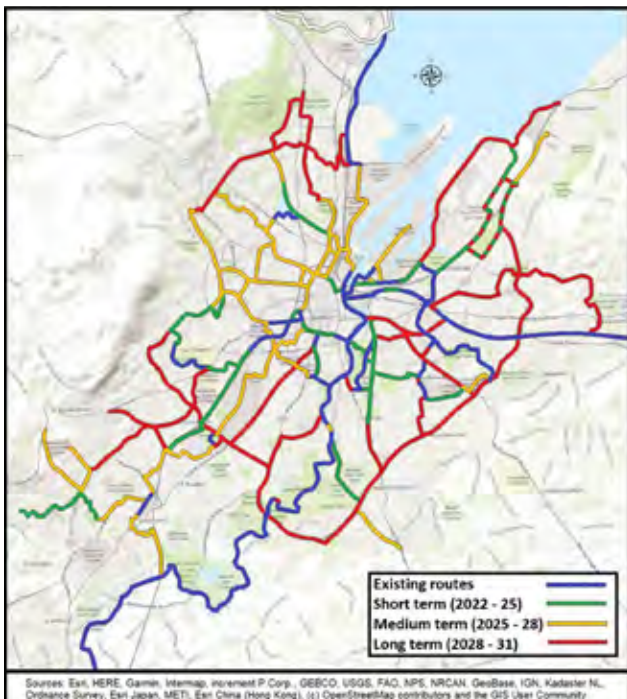
into several lanes of vehicles with little room to safely continue, especially if less confident as a cyclist. Test runs on Belfast Bikes, and observations of the new routes captured the poorer quality of more isolated stretches of lanes at Bankmore as well. Weaknesses at Bankmore and Hardcastle include users having to get from the more active Alfred Street down isolated streets lined by fenced-in Council/Executive-controlled car-parks and the back of the Ormeau Baths complex to reach Dublin Road. There is no overlooking from housing, retail or commercial buildings. Therefore, these areas of the route score lower from place, security, and identity perspectives.

- The lack of continuity, separation/ ease of navigation for cyclists and pedestrians at both Shaftesbury Square and Bankmore areas remain weak points to overcome long-term success of the Dublin Road lanes. An unexpected outworking of safety and quality of life issues for seamless cycling and walking routes beyond the Dublin Road are new citizen-led groups who have come together to help grow a "consensus [...] that there is a need for shorter term action" to address the worst areas such as Shaftesbury Square (Kenwood, 2022). Open Botanic is another grass-roots effort that is informing active travel and healthy street strategies for Botanic Avenue and surrounding areas (QUB and DfI, 2021).
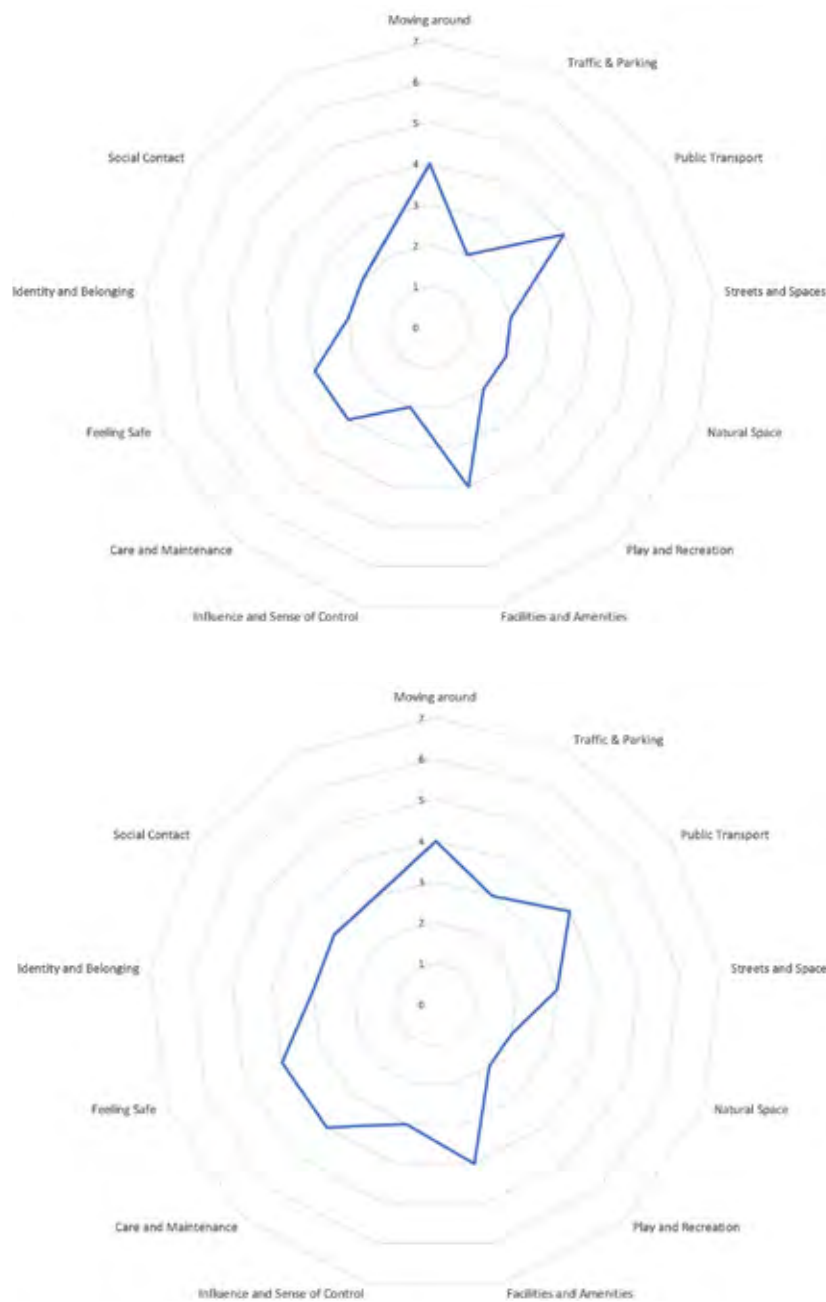
Figure 60: Modified Place Standard Tool Assessment- Dublin Road cycle corridor-Before, top; After, bot (Authors, 2019/2021)

Figure 61: Dublin Road Cycle Lanes, April 2022 (Golden, 2022)
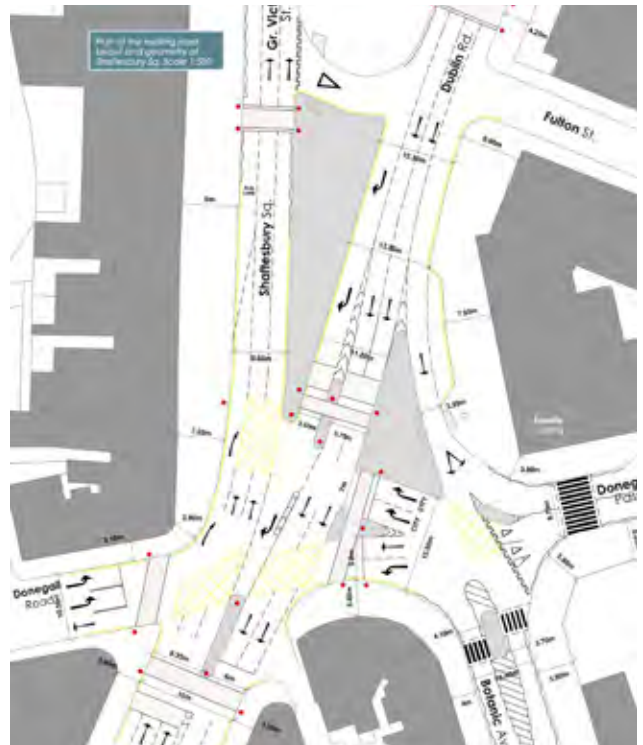

Figure 62: Disconnection of Dublin road cycle lanes at Shaftsbury Square junction (Google Streetview, 2022; DfC, 2013)


Figure 63: Redeveloped cycle-pedestrian street transition, Dutch example (@fietsprofessor, Urban Cycling Institute, 26.04.2021)

Lessons:

Cycle routes are often contested additions to urban areas that have a history of less dense development and perceptions of loss of business income from loss of parking. Active streets are however, supported by evidence of improved economic and of health benefits from cycle-lane investments in terms of business/retail spending and from better air quality and improved cyclist visibility/safety.

International examples of bold changes for non-car users such as Dutch redevelopments, Figure 63, illustrate the extent to which redesign can be achieved. Such measures, if enacted in Belfast, might help set out by DfI to improve cycling continuity and entice the 44% "large cohort of the population" with no intention of cycling to change their views (DfI, 2021), and d BCC's aims for "a lively interesting pedestrian experience"(BCC, 2015). As proactive measures taken in emergency situations, to tackle COVID-19, the interventions to integrate bus, cycle and pedestrian routes at the Dublin Road, while also reducing car use is an overall positive improvement toward improving healthy life choices and inclusive connected city centre communities. Challenges remain to bring wider stakeholders on board to implement
a wider, seamless and robust network more formally across the city, and to do so in ways that support the most marginalised to access everyday destinations and public services safely. Future proposals can develop even stronger ambitions from economic arguments to target more routes along active street frontages vs quieter side/back streets and promote greater visibility of cyclists, as well as improving the health and aesthetic qualities of the public realm. Future cycle/pedestrian and active travel proposals can also benefit from strengthened grassroots partnerships to ensure more formalised Tactical Regeneration schemes achieve further co-design and delivery aims across the public-private sectors.
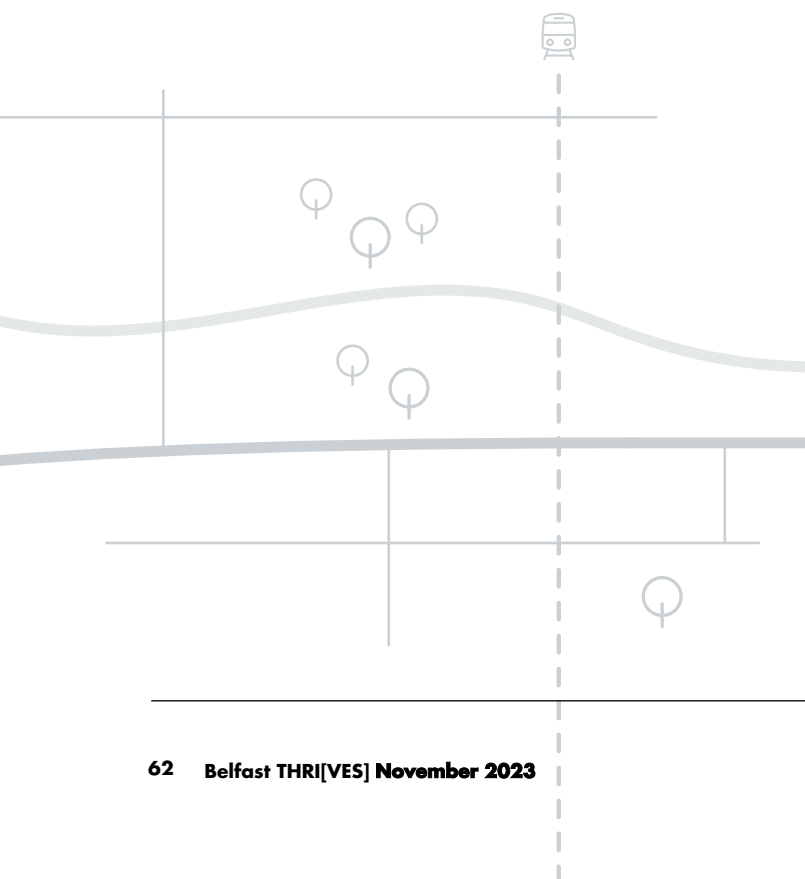
Case
Study

3

Case Study 3: Linen Quarter Brunswick Street Social Hub: Public-private partnerships and street closures

Context:

The Brunswick Street Social Hub, in Belfast's Linen Quarter (see map Figure 64) is an example of a Council-DfI and business partnership with Belfast Linen Quarter Business Improvement District (LQ BID)[9] that began in June 2020 to develop an existing public street as a mixed public-private outdoor recreation, hospitality, and retail space in response to COVID-19 lockdowns. The project, which aimed to open by April 2021, completed in May 2022. It was funded with £300,000 from DfC's COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme and additional LQ BID contributions. The Hub was as part of a wider £500,000 package of COVID-19 driven Linen Quarter interventions by the BID, DfC and BCC which including parklets, timber 'boardwalk' pavement widening, and other bespoke installations presented previously in Chapter 2.

This study draws lessons from both the public-private partnership process and the implications for public and private uses for place-based evaluations in relation to liveability. Importantly, the Hub operator, Bachus Group,

to has exclusive use of 112 of 192 proposed new seats as "covers" for the café/bar (Linen Quarter, 2021; McLaughlin, 2022b). Given the primary research period from Spring 2021 – early 2022, the main observational periods are prior to the Hub opening, based on observations during construction in March 2022 and limited follow-up visits immediately after completion for project images; analysis of post-opening operations and commercially sensitive information are outside the research scope. The chosen Hub location, between Franklin Street and James Street South is near Belfast City Hall, the future Belfast Transport Hub and adjacent to/within a short walking distance of hotel/hospitality venues. Brunswick Street itself is a short north-south stretch of road that turns E-W and becomes Amelia Street at its southern end; both streets flank a mostly paved plaza, Blackstaff square. Around the Hub are two hotels, two restaurants, an office entrance, a site under development and little active frontage; the street and s quare have been typically underused and act primarily as pass-through spaces to/from Great Victoria Street and Great Victoria train/bus station to the East, and the rest of the Linen Quarter, City Hall, and Central Business/Shopping district to the West and North. Amelia Street has some ground floor restaurants, entertainment venues, office entrances, and social housing as well as the Belfast Homeless Services Centre.

Figure 64: Linen Quarter boundary map showing Brunswick Square and other COVID-19 project locations (Linen Quarter BID, 2021)

[9]LQ BID is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established in 2018 "to support the area by creating and promoting a vibrant, contemporary, secure and sustainable destination" for those who work in it." www.linenquarter.org
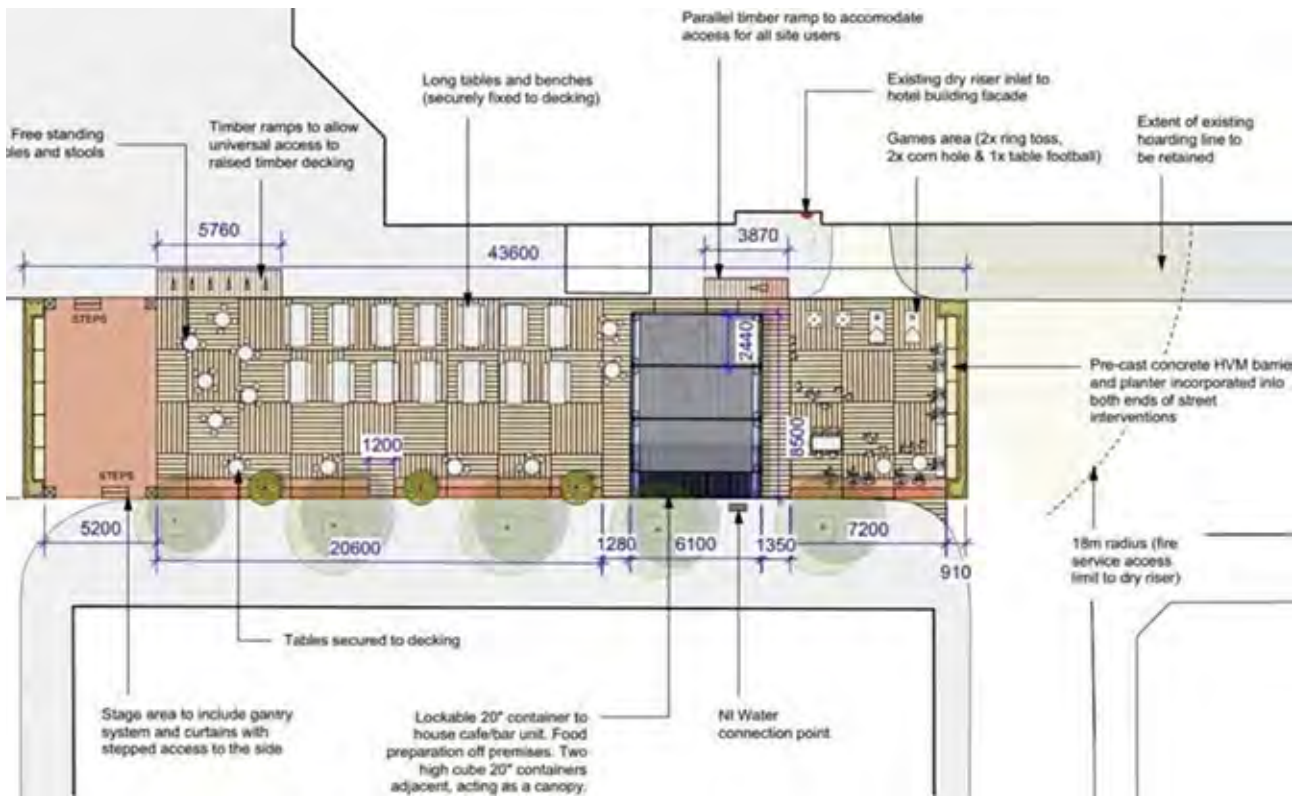
Figure 65: Brunswick Street Social, LQ BID final design consultation planning proposal (LQ BID,2021)

Figure 66: Brunswick Street Hub,as completed (clockwise from t-l), view from James St S; FLAXX seating and ramp balustrades, new coloured planters in Blackstaff Square (Golden, June 2022)
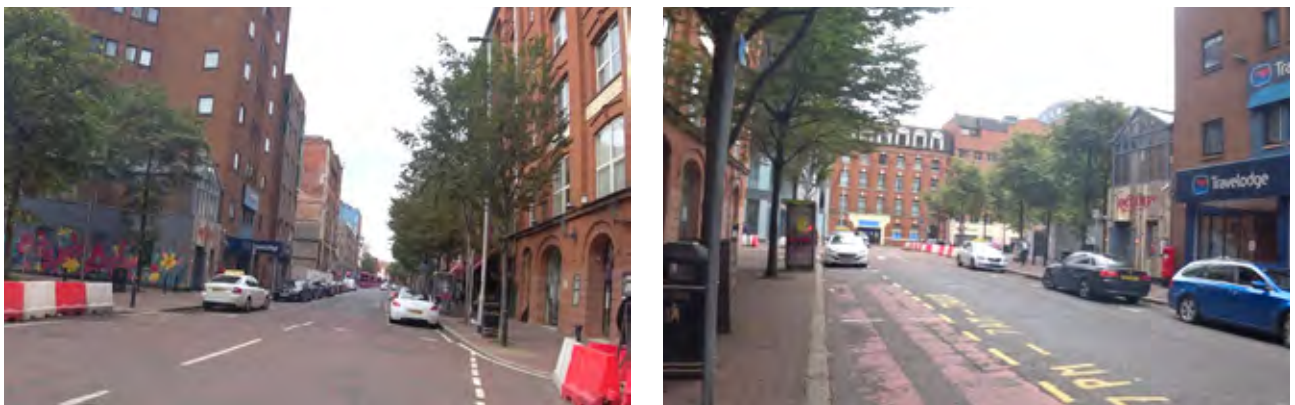

Figure 67: Brunswick Street view north (l) and south (r), pre-HUB installation (Golden, 2020)

Figure 68: Brunswick Street, Blackstaff Square, Amelia Street views, cycle hub, bins, businesses (Authors, March 2022)

Background:

The Social Hub was proposed as a pop-up socially distanced and licensed casual entertainment space after the then DfI Minister for Infrastructure enacted COVID-19 emergency measures. Intended to open during the lockdown periods in 2020-2021, the project underwent a few iterations and online consultation before planning and other infrastructure delays pushed approvals and start of construction back until early 2022; the café/bar could not open until May 2022, after the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

As set out in Section 4.3, the impacts of COVID-19 on health and everyday life (in Belfast as globally) prompted concerted cross-departmental support for city centre businesses in addition to NI and UK-wide funded business furloughs and other investment mechanisms. In the first period of rapid emergency measures including street closures, new schemes for parklets and outdoor seating for much needed social distancing took shape and drew inspiration from international examples, pervasive on social media at the time. Early versions, published in June 2020 (See Fig 73), presented a decked 'boardwalk' approach with open, landscaped areas and curving paths, seating, and planters (Love Belfast, 16 June 2020).

Figure 69: Brunswick Street, early-stage boardwalk-type design proposals, 2020 (Irish News, 18.06.2020)

The initial approach was promoted as "a destination for families as well as other types of users," including children's play features and sun loungers to "attract people of all ages," and artworks to advertise the Linen Quarter, inspired by a public "regeneration vision" from a pre-COVID-19 consultation in 2019 (Breen, 2021). By October 2020 however, from public consultation proposals, newer proposals produced by the BID with consultants Planit, I.E. Limited had shifted toward more dedicated business uses with separated seating and bar/cafe-focused designs similar to the ones finally approved.
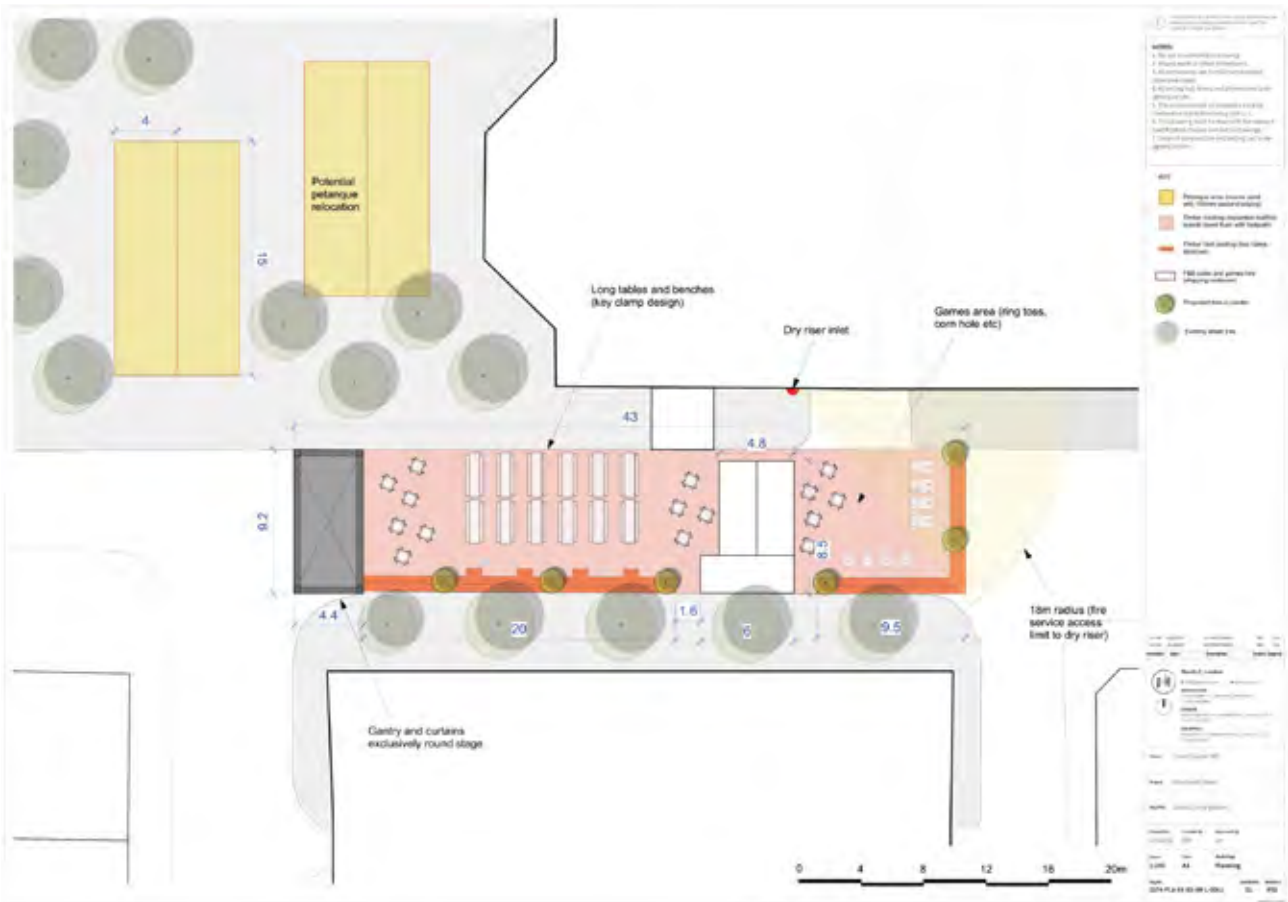
Figure 70: Brunswick Street, design proposals, Planit.i.e-Limited, 2020 (Source:LQ BID,12/2020)

As seen in Figure 70, Planit, I.E.'s scheme indicated timber scaffolding boards – proposed to be set flush with the surrounding pavement - and a separate petanque games area within Blackstaff Square. Subsequent iterations for planning consultations during January to March 2021 (Figure 71) add visuals of colourful timber decking - shown as open and level to footpaths and to Blackstaff Square – and coloured cladding with integral graphics for the new café/bar (Linen Quarter, 2021).

In July 2021, planning permission was delayed until December 2021 due - according to news reports and the BID – to the process of securing utilities connections (Canning, 2021). Construction did not begin until March 2022 by which time, as shown in Figure 72, the progress versions had changed to include higher decking levels requiring additional steps, large areas of ramps and the significant addition of timber edge balustrading.

Figure 71: Brunswick Street Social, planning stage consultation images and indicative design model (LQ BID, 2021)

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Figure 72: Brunswick Social, in progress images from Blackstaff Square to raised deck area and balustrade (Authors, March 2022)

Figure 73: Brunswick Social, in progress images from Brunswick Street to new container hospitality unit (Authors, March 2022)

The complete hub as seen in June 2022 (Figure 66), has moveable timber bench/table seating (similar to the type used at Cathedral Garden) and fixed timber benches in designated areas to either side of the brightly primary coloured re-used shipping containers for "Flaxx" café/bar. Surfaces have similarly brightly painted timber decking with plain but substantial surrounding timber balustrades and concrete planters. Colourful metal planters and a new boules court are located within the adjacent Blackstaff Square. The Square was not redeveloped with more extensive material changes because its planned revitalisation remains a part of separate DfC plans under Streets Ahead Phase 5, as shown in the wider area proposals in Figure 74, with no current delivery date (DfC, 2021a).
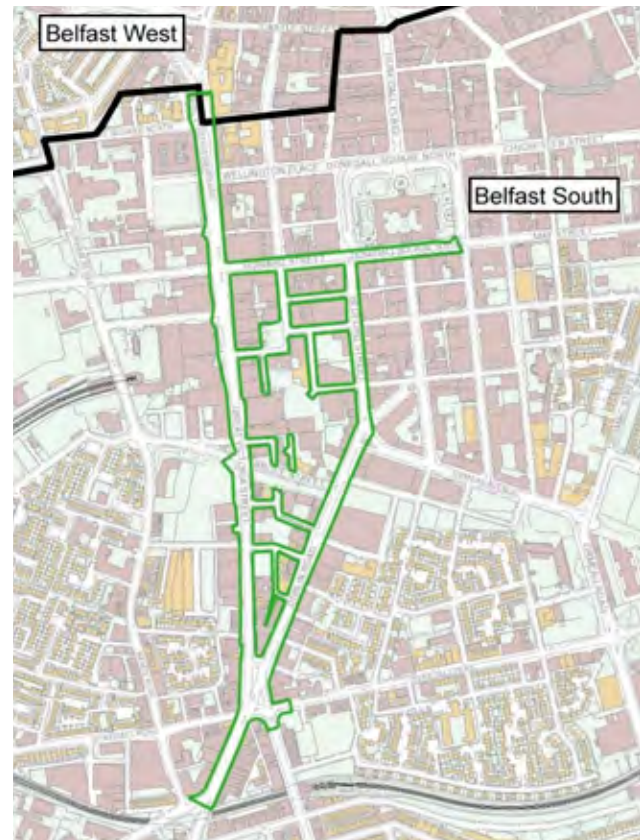

Figure 74: Streets Ahead Public Realm Scheme, Phase 5 boundary (DfC, 2021)

Place-based assessment

The Place-based assessments for Brunswick Street was completed prior to street closures and during construction with a short update for the delivered version based on site visits at different times of day/week.

Observed prior to development in 2021, the streets and plaza at and around the new Hub score collectively low: underperforming, lacking clear definition and purpose on many aspects of the Place Tool (Figure 75). Despite hotels and some ground floor restaurants and bars, there is very little active frontage and views onto/from the pedestrian levels, which impacts on social contact, feeling safe, and the quality of spaces. Brunswick Street is further challenged by hoarded empty sites at the HUB awaiting development. During visits the street was typically occupied by service vehicles for the hotels and acted as a short-cut for vehicles (taxis, mostly) to Great Victoria Street.

At Blackstaff Square, apart from limited numbers of people using the Belfast Bike dock, the space and the streets were typically viewed as pass-throughs rather than destinations; occasional private hospitality and licensed activities associated with specific bars and restaurants, out-of-hour or as seasonal uses have been observed to change the environment, but these are not a permanent feature. Also, while there are trees throughout the Square, there was very little sense of either a natural green space or a formal place due to poor upkeep (partially due to prior construction on the Square for infrastructure upgrades) and rubbish.

Overall, there was no indication of play and recreation (particularly for older and younger persons) and the overall space lacked a sense of belonging associated with the types of visitors, e.g., families, sought by LQ BID.

Applying the Place Tool from an accessible, permeable, liveability perspective to the Hub as seen in May 2022, there is a mixed outcome on changes to the wider area evaluation from mid-2021 with observations below:[10]

- As constructed, the kerb-to-kerb spanning higher level-changed decking and prominent timber balustrading (compared to proposed flush-set images) have an effect of reducing the area's and the scheme's overall permeability – reducing previous routes through and across for both cyclists and pedestrians. The balustrading adds to a sense of exclusivity, in terms of who can/might perceive it appropriate to walk through and within the new space.

- The balustrading also has a significant physical impact on footpaths to either side and to service/delivery access (separate to mobility access to the hub itself); delivery vehicles were observed parking in/across the closed street with those delivering goods having to negotiate the narrow footpath between new planters and hoarding to the adjacent hotel entrance, Figure 77. While early schemes appear to have similar issues around the footpaths, the earlier design (i.e., as in Fig 69) a more conducive to movement.

- Illegal parking was observed in the closed street, outside and up-against the hub enclosure, Figure 66. While such uses are outside the control of the operators, the available option to park – further restricting pedestrian/cycle access and user visibility – must be seen within the scope of the street closure design and the management of the areas outside the enclosed hub itself.

- Colour in the Hub is used to create a festive atmosphere that brings some identity to the generally bland square but, unlike the use at Cathedral Gardens for play and children, appears primarily for people likely to avail of licensed entertainment - central uses of the FLAXX operations. The aesthetics of primary colour, from anecdotal feedback, also did not appear to be as contentious an issue compared to feedback about Cathedral Gardens.

- Moveable timber furniture was retained at the Hub despite issues of vandalism leading to their removal previously at Cathedral Gardens. Time and usage will tell if there are similar problems for the Hub, or whether the day/evening commercial aspect of FLAXX highlights how different management regimes (more than the typesof users) are key to keeping more flexible and sociable fixtures in other public realm projects.

- It was not clear from the use of benches, primarily in the café and very sparce furniture other than a table and plank-type bench/perches whether an increase in seats claimed by FLAXX (250 vs "around 180" as originally planned) equates to more than 70 public seats or if 180 seats are now part of the exclusive operator's areas.

When compared to early proposals, which featured a large area of landscaped, open informal seating, loungers, and more emphasis on children's play the closed approach appears as a missed opportunity. The above are areas where the evaluation of such public investment, and use of public spaces requires further review.

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[10]The Place Tool evaluation was redone at construction and at the time of opening however impacts from the managed operation, starting after the research period, do not figure into findings on the physical area; further research would be required to better understand and adjudge the economic and social impact within the wider findings below. Similarly, future research could assess and reflect further on the statutory planning and private commercial decision-making/investment processes that resulted in the delayed completion beyond COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. These latter aspects inform discussion intended to identify areas where such processes, different levels of statutory approvals and the very nature of developing such as tactical versus more traditional routes affect the public realm and can be scrutinised for future lessons.

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Figure 75: BEFORE - Brunswick Street & Blackstaff SQ- Modified Place Standard Tool Assessment (Authors, 2021)
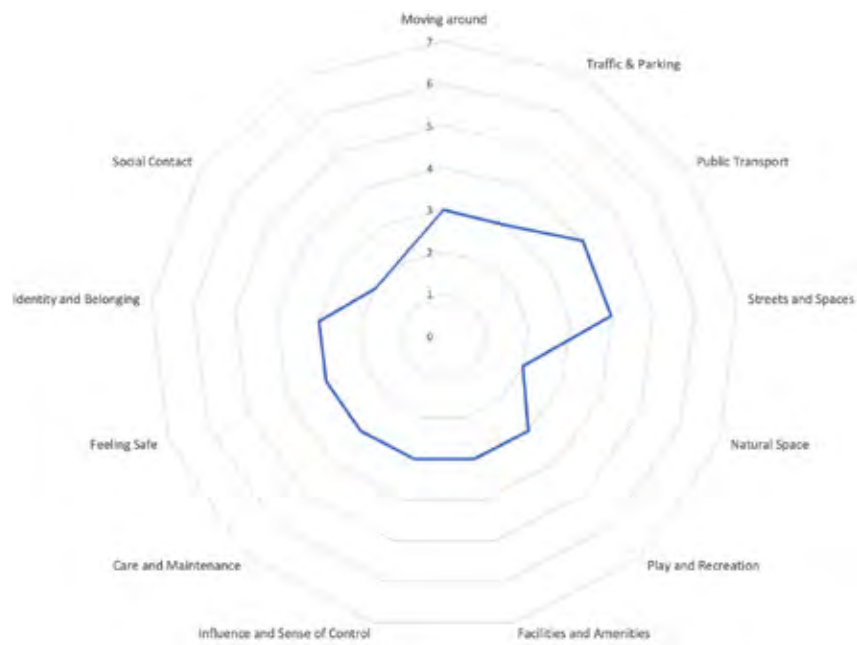

Figure 76: AFTER-Brunswick Street & Blackstaff SQ- Modified Place Standard Tool Assessment (Authors, 2022)

Figure 77: Brunswick Street Social, in-progress construction with access and servicing at Travelodge Hotel (Authors, March 2022)

Lessons

As a proposal to enliven underused spaces, Brunswick Hub is, on paper, a positive aspirational approach to bring more activity to lesser used and mainly pass-through types of spaces. However, such decisions and their implementation should be subject to further scrutiny and stakeholder engagement, when impacting large areas of the public realm over extended periods of time (years in this example), different to pop-ups in smaller parking spaces or installations lasting weeks-months maximum.

BCC's Test and Try Tactical Regeneration strategy, described at the start of Chapter 4, offers an existing local policy that could be more effectively applied to such proposals for quicker, flexible experiments with built-in evaluative measures for different emergency (COVID-19), reimagination (FCC), or long term (Streets Ahead) project scales. By involving private sector partners, balanced commercial needs can benefit from public subsidy but should also take lessons on evaluating schemes for social value and enhancing permeable, inclusive public realm qualities. While economic data and operations are outside the research scope, certain operational aspects such as the commercial exclusivity of a large proportion of "seated covers" are relevant to considerations of changes in the public realm that prioritise liveability and publicly accessible aspects of control, amenities, and recreation.

As a COVID-19 intervention the resulting commercial operation in the public realm began and will continue long after the identified emergency health rationale for investment have ended. The delivered space can therefore be evaluated after a time to determine to what extent the investment in the Hub delivers on economic and social aims for the local area. Valuable lessons can also be drawn in a different way from the public-private partnerships that could inform development processes for other examples in the city, especially should future 'emergency' conditions arise. Such lessons could help address the speed needed for such pop-up responses with robust health and economic criteria, viewe viewed against lags from more formal (less flexible) statutory systems, and the balance of investment in the public realm for wider overall public benefits.

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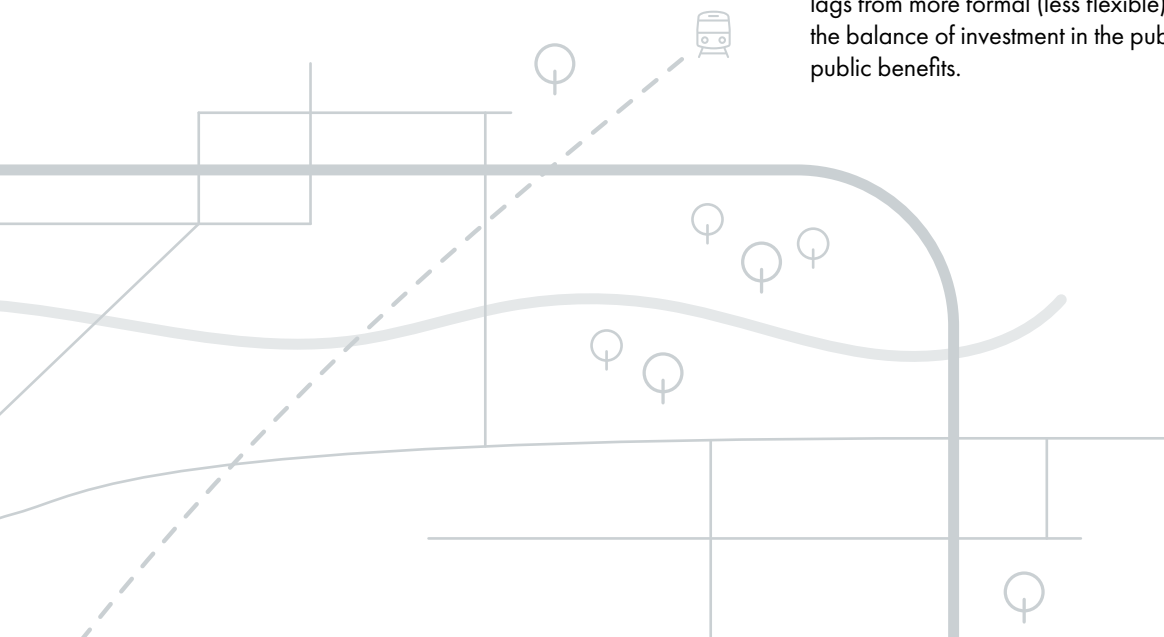
Public-Private Placemaking in the Public Realm

Three examples of pre-COVID-19 placemaking projects that bring commercial activity into the public realm and balance lighter, quicker, cheaper development approaches with flexible partnerships and stewardship of public spaces are shown in this outtake, as food for thought for future social hub projects:

1. New York's Madison Park

   A mix of fixed buildings for a franchised café uses provides recognisable identity and retail provision in a small, busy city park. Moveable furniture and signage ensure the surrounding seating and spaces are maintained as fully publicly accessible; no seating as "covers" and joint park/business management.

Figure 78: Place-making with private-public amenities in New York's Madison Square Park (Golden 2022)

2. Pop-up public parklet with extended pedestrian area on a former traffic lane of lower 5ᵗʰ Avenue

   A busy avenue corner, given a new, and reversible identity using spray-on/removable road coatings that do not impede existing infrastructure. Moveable seating combines wtih moveable sculptures, safety barriers, and small vendor mobile food carts.

Figure 79: Place-making with private and public amenities, pop-up park at 18th Street and 5th Avenue (Golden, 2022)

3. Street transformation – commercial parking uses to new landscaped public street in central London

   A full street redesign from car-dominated service road to shared all-ages landscaped park, service access, play-spaces, and flexible uses for public, commercial and cultural use. The first transformed from What was transformed as a space for all users, public in nature yet allowing for access to businesses and for cultural and commercial uses. The first area park in 25 years, designed to improve air quality, support greater biodiversity and reduce flood risks.

Figure 80: Alfred Place, London, West End Project; before – car dominated service street; through-space (Camden, 2020)

Figure 81: Alfred Place, London, West End Project; before – car dominated service street; through-space (Camden, 2020)

Figure 82: Alfred Place, London. As-built shared commercial, landscape, play on existing street, LDA Design (Golden, 2022)

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Exemplar 3:
Seattle Sink and Seattle D.O.T. Safe Streets Initiatives: Macro-Micro responses to COVID-19

Quiet Streets, Cycle Lanes, and Hygiene focused sustainable design.[11]

Seattle Stay Healthy Streets and the Seattle Street Sink are very different scale responses to COVID-19 that impact on the public realm and address long-standing health and socio-economic stresses common to many cities. Both projects began as grassroots efforts before being formally adopted for implementation in Seattle.

PROJECT FOCUS: SEATTLE HEALTHY STREETS

Seattle Stay Healthy Streets [SSHS] is relevant to development lessons for Belfast that change the use of a public right of way through cycle/pedestrian lanes and calmer streets. Seattle's Department of Transportation launched SHSS in April 2020 as a social distancing response to allow more public space for walking, cycling,

and recreation early into the coronavirus pandemic. The city adopted a grassroots-based cycle-walking network called Seattle Neighbourhood Greenways in 2015 to limit but not fully restrict vehicle access within residential streets. That scheme included improved crosswalks, shallow speed bumps, and signage to discourage car traffic. In April 2020 the city's Mayor upgraded select Greenways to fully closed Stay Healthy Streets in response to COVID-19, piloting temporary barriers before permanently closing around 20 miles (around 32Km) or "1% of the roughly 2000 miles of residential street right of way" in Seattle.

For a city with the second highest per capita car ownership in the US, the SHSS extension garnered national headlines (Jackson and CNN, 2020; Associated Press, 2020) and was seen as "one of the better initiatives to come out of the [coronavirus] pandemic" (Duke, 2021), "a welcome step toward making more health and equitable use of Seattle's public rights of way, which account for 30% of the city's land area" (Mohler, 2021).[12] The extensive action to implement SHSS was possible in part due to the existence of the community led network and the Seattle Mayor's elected role with cross-sector powers to act even before SDOT

Figure 83: Seattle Healthy Streets - network map and examples (Credit: RMohler, SDOT, 2021)

[11]Contributing information and case study support provided by: Rick Mohler, Associate Professor of Architecture, University of Washington College of Built Environments, Co-Chair Seattle Planning Commission https://www.cleanhandscollective.org/seattle-street-sink

[12]The project received $2.5 million from the Federal American Rescue Plan Act, which provided direct emergency funding to state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments during the COVID-19 pandemic (The White House, 2021).

officials had undertaken public consultation for full road closures. Such decisions, taken without consultation – or with relaxed consultation processes – became a common global aspect of local authority responses to COVID-19.

A less expected aspect of the city-wide rollout, considered to be a straightforward health and public realm initiative, were race-related concerns that came to light only after a later consultation by SDOT. From 9000, "overwhelmingly supportive" responses, a large majority in favour "were those who identified as white, while some black indigenous and people of colour […] raised concerns about law enforcement protocol on the closed streets, and how established cultural practices would be maintained" (Mohler, THRI[VES] Symposium, 16 June 2022). Others "reported incidents of racism directed toward people of colour, travelling the routes" (Mohler, THRI[VES] Symposium, 16 June 2022). This division highlights contested aspects of inner-city race, culture, and socio-economic inequality, not just confined to the US, and to the complex, contested nature of consultation on the public realm.

PROJECT FOCUS: SEATTLE STREET SINK

The Seattle Street Sink presents lessons about a small-scale community-based network of handwashing stations designed in response to a lack of public hygiene infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is focused on provided such services to homeless communities[13] and was shared via open-source prototypes and DIY videos. As a product and design-focused micro project to reach more marginalised groups, lessons here extend to how measures to foster inclusivity might be seen as integrated features in the public realm, and how such measures might become more widespread.

Context and Actions

When Washington State enacted its stay-at-home orders during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Seattle's homeless population was left with few opportunities to wash their hands in business restrooms and other public buildings that shut down, exacerbating existing public hygiene facility issues. The city provided temporary stations that proved inadequate in number and required the constant emptying of grey (dirty) water. A local advocacy group Real Change, which had been lobbying for expanded hygiene facilities initiated the Street Sink project through $5,000 jumpstart funding in partnership with the University of Washington, public health experts, and a landscape architect.

After research into other hand-washing facilities from DIY versions to custom stainless-steel fixtures – all of which had cost-function challenges – the team focused on lightweight off-the-shelf tub, fittings, soap dispensers, and fixed water supplies with landscape-based drainage that could be self-assembled. Green stormwater technology, with planting sourced from Seattle's approved stormwater list, was an essential solution to filter contaminants and pathogens for grey water discharge to adjacent landscapes or city storm drains. The image below shows the design as both a technical drawing and with colourful planting within its galvanised steel tank.

Figure 84: Seattle Street Sink, innovative cross-disciplinary sustainable responses to COVID-19 (Seattle Street Sink, 2021)

[13]Seattle is the 18th largest US city, but it has the third-largest population of people experiencing homelessness.

Figure 85: Seattle Street Sink, COVID-19, hygiene, and marginalised homeless persons (Real Change, 2020; Nowlin, 2018)

Figure 86: Seattle Street Sink, replicable, open-source sustainable proposals for local hygiene (Seattle Street Sink, 2021)

Lessons:

By December 2020, the grassroots effort developed into a formal Seattle City Council funded project. It also inspired at least six spin-offs across the United States through DIY videos and open-source data, and was awarded a 2022 American Institute of Architects Small Projects Award for "an exceptionally resourceful and clever approach to an urgent basic need" (www.aia.org/showcases/6503982-the-seattle-street-sink). Several lessons arise from this overall successful process and adoption by the city:

• First, moving from bottom-up to top-down, was described by the Sink team as a "neither swift nor transparent" process due to bureaucratic hurdles from City funding, and stringent state requirements for water treatment and accessibility, with delays until Summer 2021 from the urgent Spring 2020 threat.

• Second, a public outreach campaign and volunteers were required to help establish locations and infrastructure, not covered by the city contract.

• Third, while strategies to address marginalised populations and less "tourist-business" friendly city

challenges like homelessness were controversial and divisive - among both residents and elected officials - the public health and economic crisis prompted by COVID-19 brought such long-term crisis matters to the fore requiring all sectors to collectively develop inclusive solutions to build-back better.

For Belfast's wider liveability and inclusive wellbeing aspirations, the Seattle Sink response is relevant to local challenges of supporting and tackling similar types of social and health which were exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, including lack of access to social services and a need for specific provisions to tackle the acknowledged crisis of homelessness, drug-related deaths for homeless persons (NIHE, 2022; Fox, 2022; Carrol and Hattenstone, 2022).[14] The inclusions of projects in Belfast like the Seattle Sink can be part a reimagined public realm, along with greater investment/provision for access to advice (a duty under The Homeless Persons Advice and Assistance Regulations (Northern Ireland 2011). Such considerations might extend to other public sector services as part of more co-produced design, planning, procurement, and long-term stewardship processes that deliver on the city's Bolder Vision for a more liveable, equitable, and resilient society.

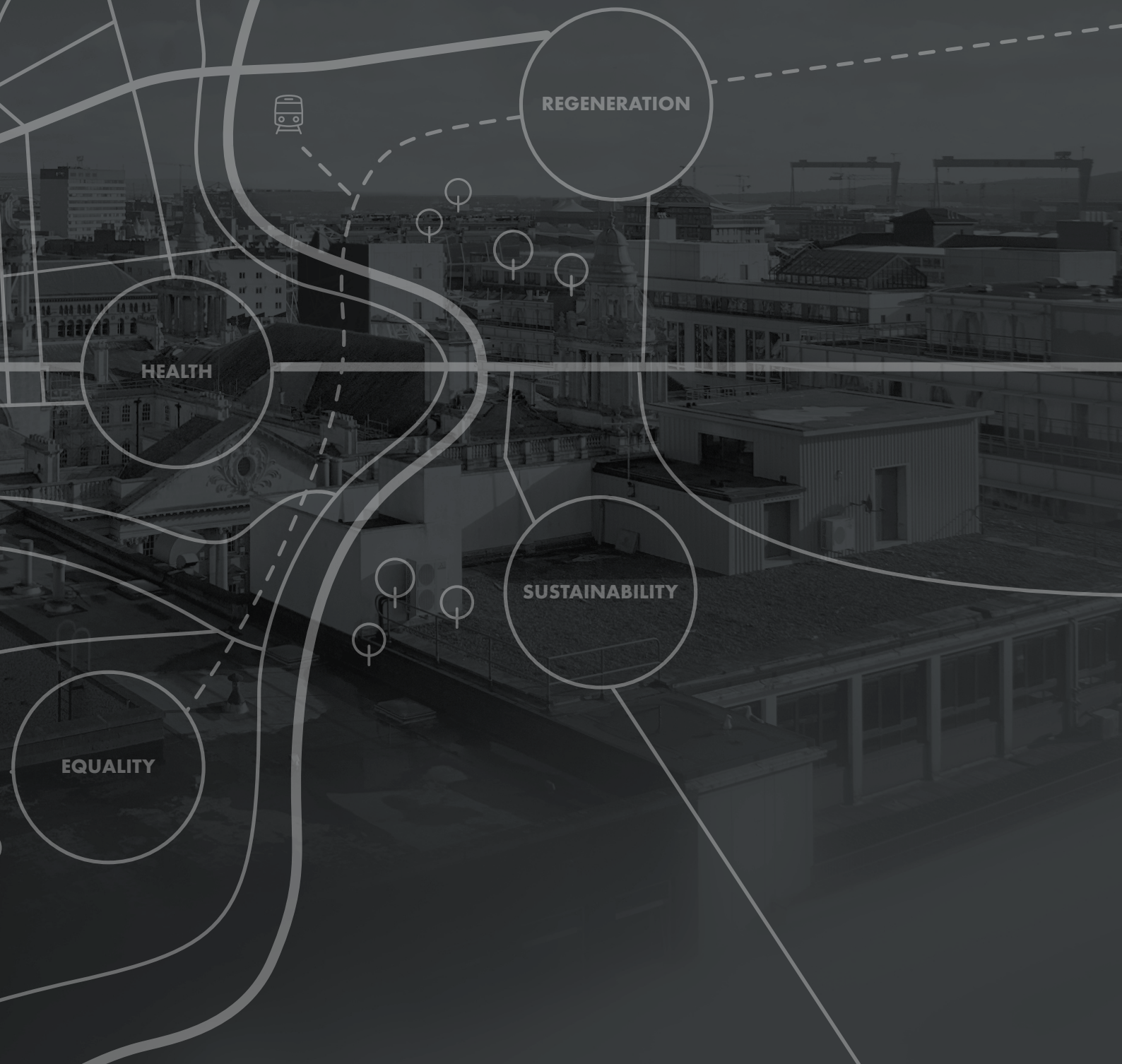[14] NIHE assessed more than 15,000 applications from individuals who presented as homeless, and from this they made 9,000 placements in temporary accommodation, part of increasing demand over several years (NIHE, 2022).

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Concluding Discussions

REGENERATION

HEALTH

SUSTAINABILITY

EQUALITY

5.0 Concluding Discussions: Project lessons and recommendations

THRI[VES] has highlighted both positive opportunities as well as significant challenges for Belfast. Lessons suggest areas for improvement on aims to integrate more comprehensive wellbeing criteria into decision-making policy and practice, improve how public-private knowledge is collected and shared, and to promote more holistic frameworks for sustained, and sustainable liveable futures. The following sections collate project lessons aligned to the four research objectives and recap the THRI[VES] Project Recommendations with extended insights for future action:

1. Assist Council-Executive goals for more effective public decision-making processes to reimagine greener, healthier, more vibrant city spaces, in line with A Bolder Vision.

1.1. Delivering A Bolder Vision's liveable and healthy, inclusive communities aims requires more inclusive and innovative participatory mechanisms. Fully engage more people in meaningful debate and innovative processes to co-produce and articulate shared outcomes.

1.2. Uncertainty around the future of the city centre continues pre-Covid-19 trends for online retail and shifting patterns of local-global trade. Radical changes in working and living appear to be long lasting, with visiting/shopping figures anecdotally rebounding more quickly.

1.3. There is a recognition, from COVID-19 temporary, emergency measures that interventions driven jointly by multiple sectors (e.g. infrastructure, regeneration, transport, business, and voluntary groups) are positive ways to move beyond what is often perceived as rigid and slow-progress development systems.

1.4. Mixed and bottom-up inspired co-design initiatives need to be supported by more flexible project development processes and regulatory systems. Recognise variations between very short, medium, and longer-term projects to deliver more effective, value for money, and successful outcomes.

1.5. Belfast and the NI Executive departments (DfI and DfC) must address uncertainty about who has/should have powers to implement projects in the proper scale and timeframes to deliver on Visions to continue to re-cover, re-imagine, and re-vitalise Belfast City Centre through programmes for 2025 through to 2035.

2. Identify areas for improved cross-sector data-sharing on wellbeing, sustainability, and resilience

2.1. Develop more nuanced information about gender, age, culture, abilities, and about marginalised groups including homeless persons and the increasingly diverse migrant populations in and around the city.

2.2. Treat each group who has traditionally, and more recently lived in or uses the city centre in either regulated or less/unregulated environments as individual rather than a monolithic data perspective.

2.3. Data spread across multiple organisations is not always seen as available at needed local neighbourhood levels, making it difficult to effectively tailor analysis and co-production methods at granular level, defining the who/what/where about local 'communities' and targeting strategies to meet their needs.

2.4. In addition to addressing the multiplicity and internal limits of dataset refinement, there remains a need to expand upon limited types of datasets in Northern Ireland that have been made available to academics and other interest groups to effectively analyse linkages to health-wellbeing factors.

3. Develop evidence based proposals to improve public-space policy and decision-making processes.

3.1. Address language and cultural barriers for ethnic minorities and migrants in the city that may be in addition to economic barriers or feeling part of the city, affecting health through isolation and disconnection from services.

3.2. Create more effective and timely feedback loops about government visioning and development projects for the public to become more aware of how decisions are realised; address a disconnect in survey responses from the public, who do not feel engaged in government efforts to include more local voices.

3.3. Develop more enhanced hybrid methods for reaching the most marginalised voices across and within increasingly diverse city centre neighbourhood populations. Apply more "small area" analysis to overcome low numbers of city centre residents and low response rates to development processes.

3.4. More joined up governance, management and investment was raised as a concern across all sectors to promote active travel and enrich the urban realm for economic and social vibrancy while respecting, protecting, and enhancing the quality/sustainability of Belfast's built environment for new generations.

3.5. A need for more systematic ways to evaluate issues including environmental health, environmental justice, and the quality of the built environment across the city, the relationship between environment and equity, especially for vulnerable communities.

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4. **Propose new data-sharing platforms and collaborations to inform more effective evidence-based policy, design, and post-evaluation of new public realm projects for wellbeing.**

4.1. Policies should better address and share data on gender minority ethnic group concerns for physical safety, and perceptions of being safe from harm in public spaces to improve civic participation. Evidence gathering – statutory and hard data - was not, yet, seen as acknowledging people's perceptions, which become barriers to more use of the city centre.

4.2. Use opportunities to present pedestrian-active-travel choices to city centre stakeholders with more evidence of both economic and social wellbeing returns, as well as delivering on sustainability targets.

4.3. Areas for improvement in the delivery of innovative public places include increasing how public-council services are themselves included and supported (financially and through management programmes) in ways similar to support provided for economic activity such as in-door/out-door retail/hospitality.

4.4. Earlier development stage engagement at project inception should emphasise co-produced visions rather than relying on limited consultation with visualisations after designs are substantially complete. Co-production platforms that openly share data with communities can be better value for money, reduce consultation fatigue, and silos from top-down processes and within communities themselves.

4.5. Develop cross-sector platforms to balance choices about funded projects and uses catering for core business, student, and tourism demographics with innovative approaches for diverse and less-included population groups including younger and older persons, homeless persons, migrants.

Project Recommendations with chapter relevant signposting and extended descriptions:

1. **Apply a liveability lens. Ch.2**
   Integrate a place and health-focused liveability toolkit to re-balance evidence-based criteria for development decisions. Better connect inclusive economics to wellbeing, resilience, and environmental sustainability. Acknowledge the contested nature of concepts and terms applied to placemaking to remain open to adapt indicators for statistical and experiential evidence to specific health, climate, and socio-economic stresses in a given urban-rural development.

2. **Strive for active accessible public places, not pass-through spaces. Ch.4**
   Public realm projects – from pop-up experiments or medium-term meanwhile uses to long-term strategic plan delivery - should strive for welcoming and inclusive outcomes that encourage social interaction, lingering and leisure activities supported by unfettered public rights of use and access, pedestrian/cycle permeability, and managed public-private services. Appropriate programming should enable public-private stewardship.

3. **Formalise the informal. Ch 4**
   Policies, statutory processes, and practitioner training should normalise non-statutory types of creative engagement. Streamlining short-term pilots and placemaking experiments in the public realm can create and strengthen community-centred partnerships. Experiments on public realm projects - activentions (activating engagement with the public) have been shown to reveal deeper, earlier lessons than post-design consultation. Such lessons deserve greater weight in project development from earliest visioning, to pilot and throughout statutory decision-making.

4. **Avoid a failure mindset. Ch4**
   Effective stewardship of meanwhile projects in the public realm requires adding time and capital budgets for meaningful engagement with public and private sectors. Experimental projects, those without commercial operative oversight are especially vulnerable; plan for risk, unexpected uses, and demographic change; and things 'going wrong' during project lifespans. Use changes as co-learning opportunities (in development as in life) to adjust design and/or management, and to maintain end-user dialogue vs static dogma.

5. **Address barriers to wellbeing and engagement. Ch4**
   Language and cultural complexities across society in addition to physical and economic factors can be barriers to being or feeling part of the city for marginalised groups, minorities, and migrants, which can extend to health impacts and public service pressures.
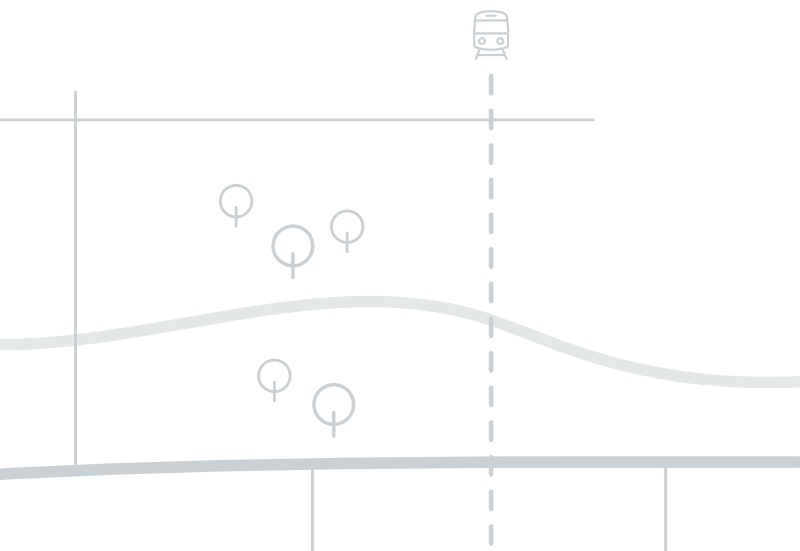
6. **Recognise capacity building as a two-way process. Ch2**

   Top-down as much as bottom-up boundaries and blinkers can reduce effective input, understanding, and support across difficult or unspoken issues affecting the most vulnerable in society, increasing project risk and costs. Deeper engagement (including overcoming unconscious biases) requires social as much as physical capital building across institutional and organisational boundaries, and between professionals, policymakers, and the public from early visioning to delivery on resourcing, capacity, and sustainable stewardship.

7. **Provide for adequate and iterative meanwhile reflection. Ch4**

   Pop-ups and meanwhile projects benefit from embedded processes to collect, evaluate, and share real-time liveability and place-based lessons to policymakers, planners, design teams, as well the wider public as stakeholders in public realm changes. Lessons from partnerships, capacity-knowledge and experience building should be applied to avoid an "it always been done that way" or "we know better than what's been before" approach, which contributes to practitioner and consultation fatigue.

8. **Use data to motivate and support policy and practice. Ch2**

   By developing more effective local and global partnerships, Northern Ireland can learn how to better use data to influence policy and to work with others to

   identify future health and wellbeing focused policies and interventions. More granular qualitative/ quantitative profiles, with suitable translation can adjust for anomalies in collection within small and/or low population wards.

9. **Apply a more intersectional approach to data. Ch2**

   Recognise that health and wellbeing data on or from each group who uses the city is always nuanced, never monolithic: What might look welcoming for one person from one traditional demographic might be very different for people from ethnic minorities, gender minorities, for example, and for people of differing ages, sets of abilities/disabilities, and other backgrounds.

10. **Develop youth leadership. Ch2**

    Formalise youth training and placement across the public, private, and voluntary sectors with support from academic and other civic institutions to diversify outreach experience and foster skills to identify liveability-wellbeing issues through more effective community engagement. New roles and successful models can emerge to support valuable capacity-building and sustainable leadership that foster long-term partnerships to achieve the above goals and future visions.

Next steps:

Develop appropriate Action Plans involving continuing engagement with project partners, the public and new contributors/stakeholders. It is envisaged that such progress can build on the report findings including policy level breifings, and internal Department-Council efforts to seek consensus on refining short-medium term impact targets.
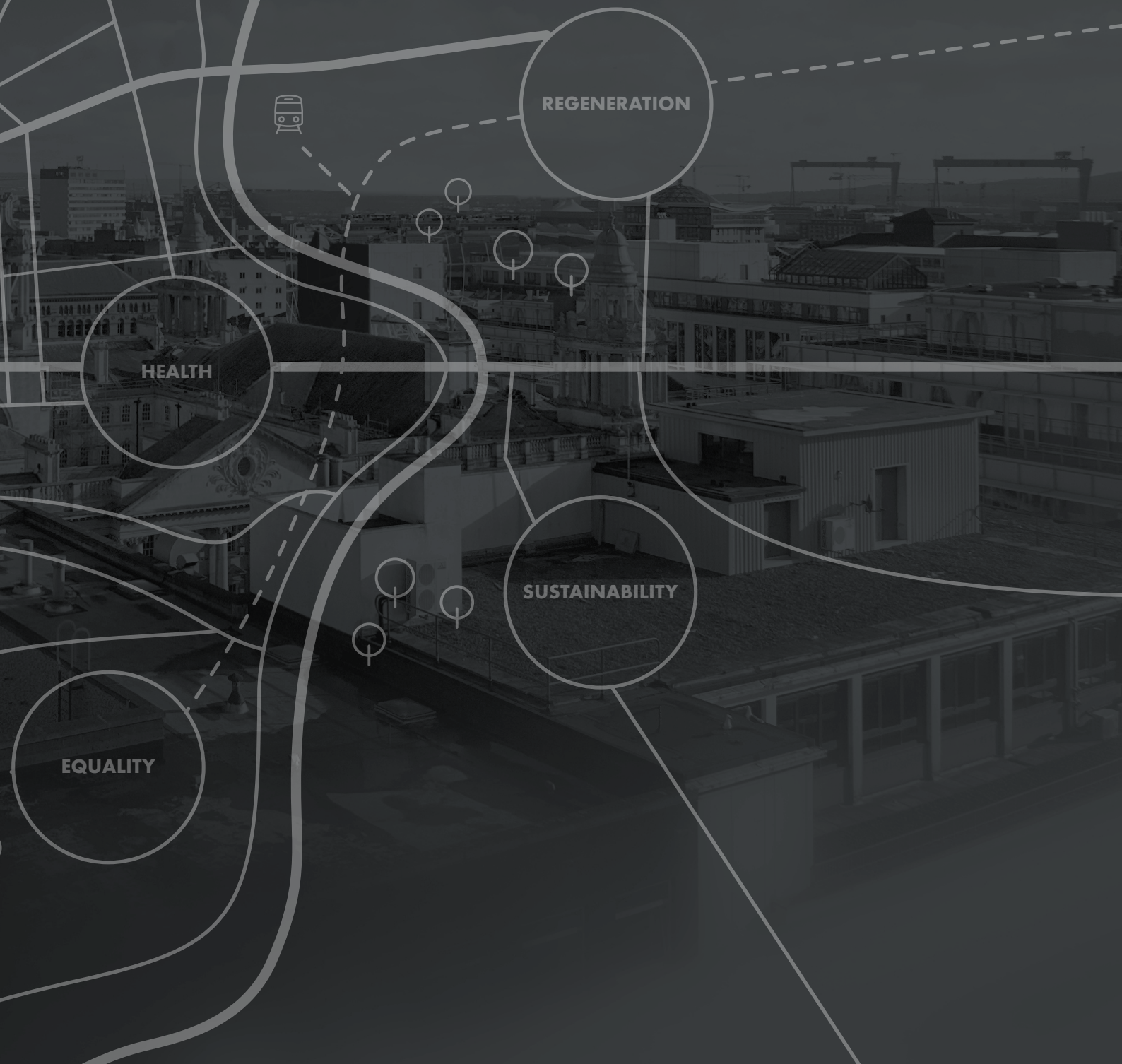
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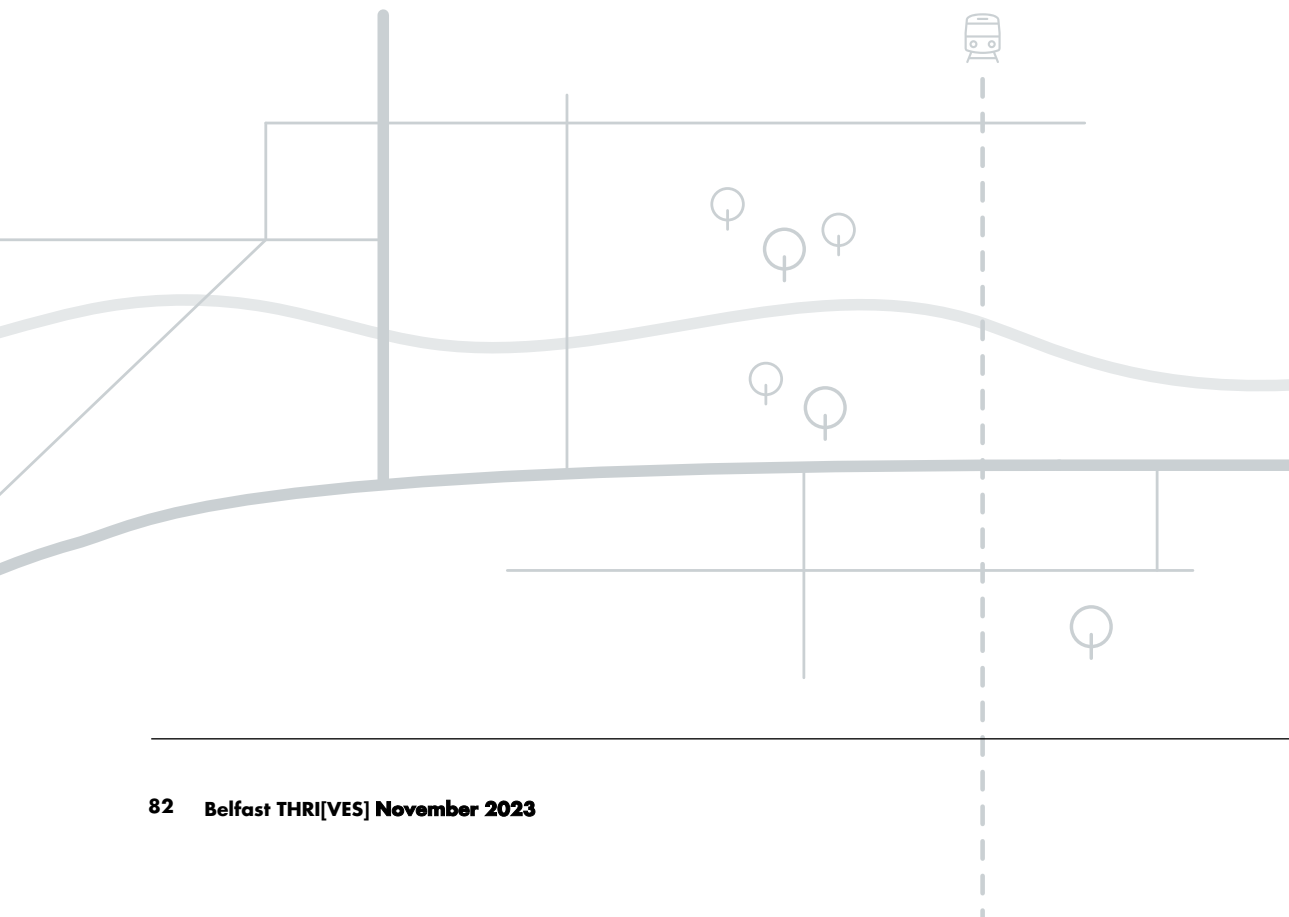
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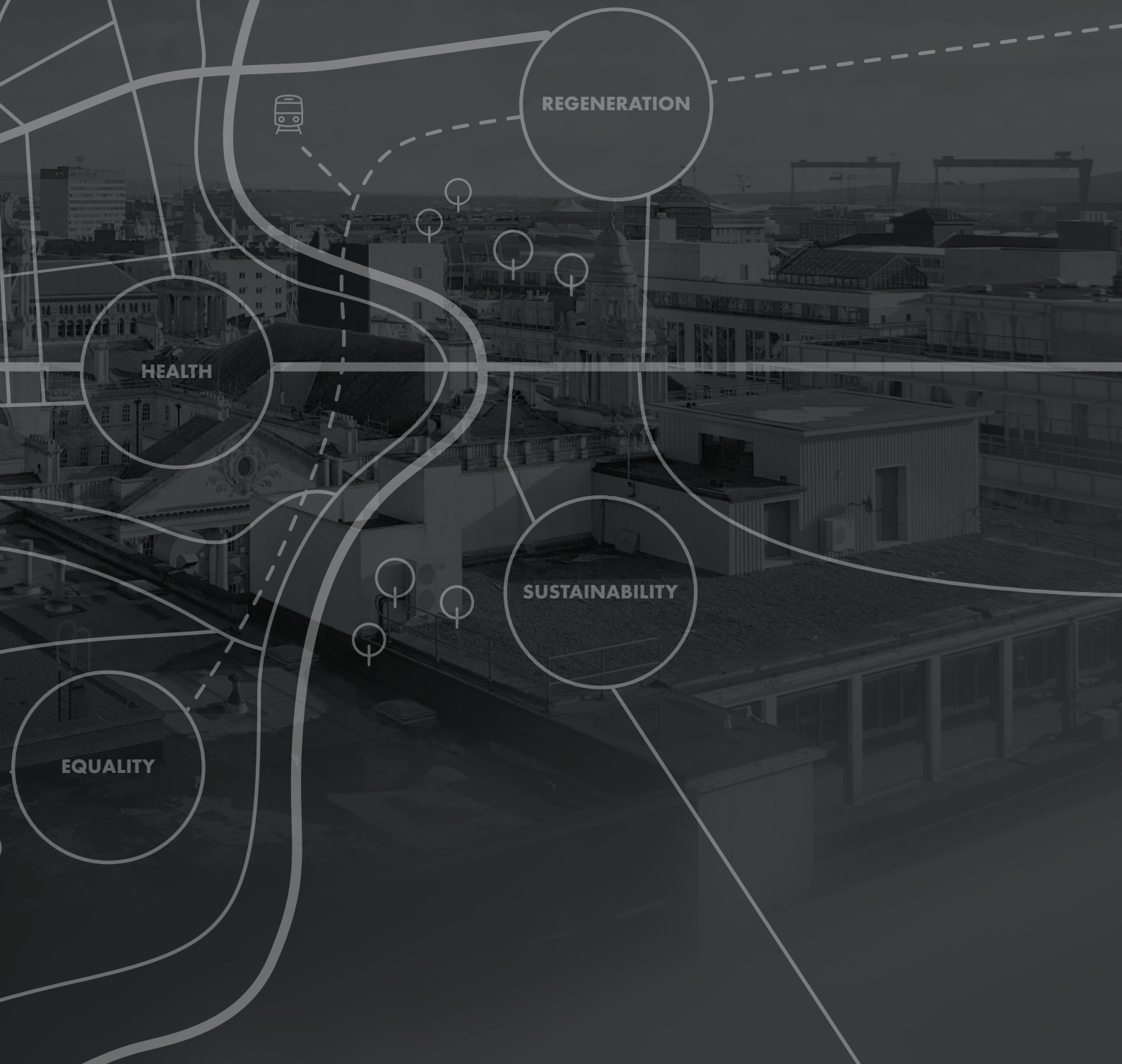Wiryomartono, B. (2020) Livability and sustainability of urbanism. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

VIBRANCY

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Appendix

REGENERATION

HEALTH

SUSTAINABILITY

EQUALITY

Appendix 1: Public Symposium and Facilitated Panel Sessions

On 16th and 17th June, Belfast THRI[VES] hosted a free online Webinar and Symposium to share and explore lessons on balancing the needs of people, business, and public services in decision-making to transform city spaces into more connected, inclusive, liveable, and sustainable places.

Video recordings of both days, including the full line-up of speakers and presentations noted in the following programme recap can be accessed through the links below:

Belfast THRI(VES), Symposium Day 1: 16th June 2021 - https://vimeo.com/564573167
Belfast THRI(VES), Symposium Day 2: 17th June 2021 - https://vimeo.com/564579076

16th June 2021, 6-8pm GMT: International Lessons on Urban Health and Wellbeing

Host and Facilitator: Dr Wendy Austin, MBE, Journalist and Broadcaster

Welcome, Host Introduction, and Launch

THRI[VES] Introduction, Dr Saul M Golden RIBA, Project Principal Investigator, Ulster University

Keynote speakers (15-minute presentations each).

- Dr Gina Lovasi, Co-Director, Urban Health Collaborative, Dornsife Associate Professor of Urban Health, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA: **Leveraging data, research, education, and partnerships to improve health in cities.**
- Rick Mohler FAIA, Co-Chair, Seattle Planning Commission; Associate Professor of Architecture, University of Washington; Seattle, USA: **Lessons from The Seattle Street Sink and Stay Healthy Streets Initiative.**
- Frith Walker, Head of Placemaking, Panuku Development Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), NZ: **Why public space matters: Auckland's Public-Private Partnerships and Place-led Approach to Urban Development**
- Pagan-Lilley Phillips, Programme Manager, Public Practice, Access and Inclusion Advocate, London, UK: **Planning for the Public Good: Advocacy and Action to Build Local Council Capacity and Drive Forward Better Shared Urban Futures**

Discussion and Q&A with Speakers, Facilitated by Dr Wendy Austin, MBE

Evening Session Close; Dr Saul M Golden; Dr Wendy Austin, MBE

17th June 2021, 9.00am – 12.30pm and 1.00pm – 3.00pm:

A Belfast View to Healthy Futures + Next Generation Research on Healthy City Futures

Session 1: A Belfast View
Host: Dr Saul M Golden

Keynote Speakers, followed by THRI(VES) Belfast Panel Introductions

- Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development, Belfast City Council: Future City Centre Programme – reimagining and revitalising our city centre spaces and places.
- Liz Loughran, Director of Transport Policy, Department for Infrastructure: Active Travel & Partnership Working

Liveable cities: Where is the evidence and how should we use it?
Chair: Professor Gerry Leavey, Director Bamford Centre for Mental Health & Wellbeing

- Administrative Data Research NI, Elizabeth Nelson, Public Engagement, Comms & Impact Mgr;
- Belfast City Centre Management, David Scott, Project Manager;
- Belfast Healthy Cities, Joan Devlin, Chief Executive;
- Mental Health Foundation, Shari McDaid, Head of Evidence and Impact for Scotland and NI;
- Ulster University, Kieran Carlin, Phd Researcher.

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Public voices & public places: Engagement for vibrancy and equality

Chair: Professor Duncan Morrow, Director of Community Engagement, Ulster University

AGENI, Mandy Wilson, Head of Health & Wellbeing;

Belfast Charitable Society-Clifton House, Paula Reynolds, CEO;

Bryson CARE-Migrant Help, Lilian Vellem, Senior Client Advisor;

Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC), Michael Lorimer, Director;

NI Women's European Platform, Jonna Monaghan, Director.

Balancing private investment & public interest in sustainable healthy places.

Chair: Dr Gavan Rafferty, RTPI, Lecturer in Spatial Planning & Development, Ulster University

• Belfast Chamber of Commerce, Simon Hamilton, Chief Executive;

• Department for Infrastructure, Catherine McKinney, Senior Planning Officer

• Linen Quarter BID, Christopher McCracken, Managing Director;

• Ulster University Youth Forum, Andrew Holmes, Student Representative;

• Urban Scale Interventions, Mura Quigley, Associate Director.

Session 1 Overview and Research Next Steps; Session Close. Dr Saul M Golden

Session 2: Next Generation Capacity Builders

Host: Dr Gavan Rafferty

Keynote Speaker and Q&A Session

• Erin Donaldson, MRTPI, Planning Women of Influence 2021; Founding member of Women in Planning Network NI.

MSc Planning, Regeneration, and Development Research Presentations

Facilitator: Dr Linda McElduff, Lecturer in Planning, Course Director MSc Planning, Regeneration and Development, Ulster University

• Jonah Carty: Regeneration and community-stakeholder engagement for greater liveability.

• Niamh McDevitt: A review of walkability assessment tools in Northern Ireland

• Niall Carr: Smart Cities and privacy challenges – managing safer places

• Lauren Coulter: River walkways: Impacts of blue-infrastructure on individual health & wellbeing

Panel Discussion and Q&A with Speakers and Respondents, Facilitated by Dr Linda McElduff

• Professor Janet Askew, RTPI, Consultant Town Planner, Past-President RTPI 2015

• Susannah Boyce, MSc PRD, UPLAN (Ulster University Society of Planning Students)
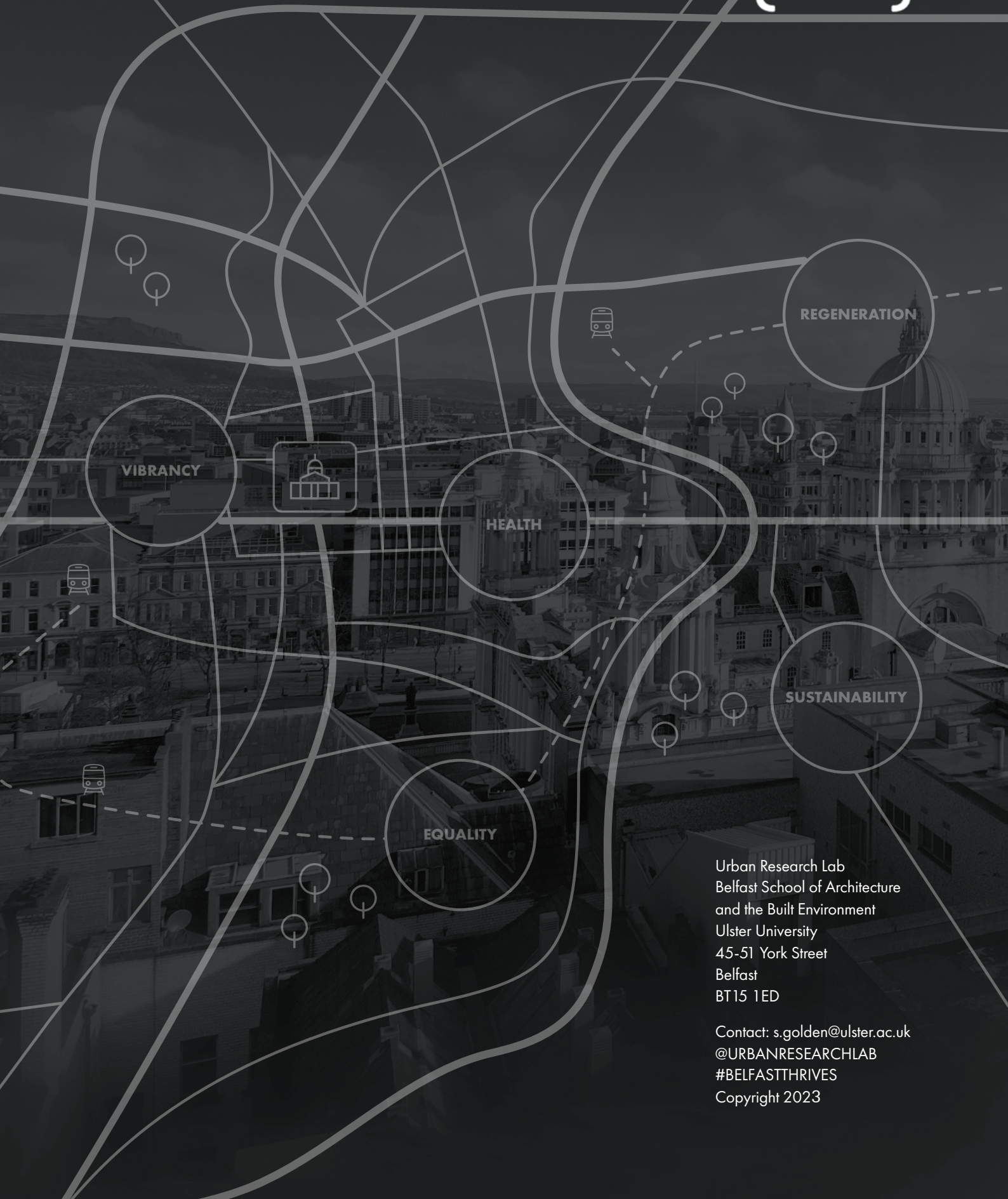
The symposium panels were facilitated by members of the research team and advisory group with relevant experience; Separate round-table discussions, independently facilitated by Urban Scale Interventions, were anonymised to allow more open follow-up semi-structured conversation from the June symposium and:

• Gather experienced views about how best to develop longer-term policy and transferable proposals from projects in Belfast, focusing on the liveability and health-focused planning/management of public spaces;

• Examine/draw transferable lessons on cross-sectors and cross-government level adaptations and management of public spaces in Belfast for analysis on their inclusivity and wider health impacts;

• Review experiences with public engagement, gathering participant's experience/views on the transparency of public (government/council) and private investment decisions, where these impact on reimagining city spaces.

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