



Subject:	Invitation to join International Shared Societies Project
Date:	21 st June 2019
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services,
Contact Officer:	Nicola Lane, Good Relations Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To advise members of a further request to participate in the international Shared Societies Project involving 5 other countries in Kosovo from 10-16 th September 2019.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to consider and agree the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• That Belfast City Council agrees to participate in the project in September 2019 to contribute to the discussion and explore how the project is developing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a report on the project after the event would be brought back to the Council through the Shared City Partnership for further consideration • Given the nature of the project, The Chair and Vice Chair of the Shared City Partnership or their nominees would be the most appropriate participants to attend. • Given the challenging time commitment from 10-16th September 2019, if required Officers will investigate the options for timing, which will yield the most benefit to Council.
3.0	Main report
3.1	The Council has received a request for up to 2 participants to be part of an international shared societies project.
3.2	This new five year project began last autumn, and an invitation was extended to Belfast City Council (BCC) to join as a partner organisation in August 2018. The decision was not to join at that time, but the organisers are hoping that fresh consideration can now be given to the idea.
3.3	The organisers would like to have Northern Ireland involved in the project: academics and people who have the practical task of implementing policies in a divided society. The academics who were first contacted were asked to suggest a practitioner organisation. They suggested the Council as an organisation with much to share from its experience in trying to create a shared city ethos, and the Council would still be the first choice.
3.4	The project which is a 5 year programme aims to bring together six countries to work collectively to create a deeper understanding of the idea of a shared society. It will bring together theorists from universities and practitioners who have to contend with real life cultural conflict on a day to day basis.
3.5	The opening residential seminar took place at the Arab-Jewish peace centre, Givat Haviva, in Israel in October 2018. The next residential event is planned to take place in Kosovo between September 10 th and 16 th this year
3.6	It has been designed as a shared learning experience and has secured funding for the first year from the German Peace Academy. Funding is being sought for the following years from EU Horizon 2020 project and other funding bodies. The countries involved are Belgium, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Israel/Palestine and Kosovo.

Participants from Northern Ireland

3.7 The academics who were contacted about the project thought that BCC as a practitioner organisation would have much to share from our experience of creating a shared city ethos. The academics who will be attending are

Gráinne Kelly, a Ulster University lecturer in Peace and Conflict Studies at INCORE, (International Conflict Research Institute).

Paul Nolan, an independent researcher who produced the first three Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Reports for the Community Relations Council.

Professor Mari Fitzduff is from Brandeis University, Boston. Mari is an international conflict resolution specialist who was previously the first director of the NI Community Relations Council, and the first director of INCORE.

Content

3.5 This is not a conference per se but rather participants will be expected to deliver presentations, talk knowledgeably about the Council's work in relation to a shared city, methodologies, current thinking and participate in discussions. Each country will describe its experiences, exploring both the achievements and the frustrations, and engage in discussions with the other partners. An annual report will be compiled distilling the learning from the sessions.

Context

3.6 The experience of the other 5 countries involved will assist with our own discussions around shared societies and contribute to the implementation of our good relations strategy. Members will note that the concept of shared space and services features heavily in the Good Relations Strategy through 2 of our outcomes and this is an issue which remains highly challenging to the City. The impact on relationships, labour markets, the inefficient use of services and facilities, significant urban blight, poverty and educational disadvantage are all characteristics of divided areas.

3.7 We need to reconnect our city to ensure it continues to be recognised as a globally competitive, cohesive, welcoming, outward looking and forward-looking city with opportunities for all.

3.8 **Belgium** is a prosperous member of the European Union, but a country with three very distinct internal cultures: the Dutch-speaking region of in the north, the mostly French-

speaking Wallonia region in the south, and the German-speaking cantons in the east. In 2010/11 Belgium did without a government for 589 days.

Germany, the heart of European social democracy, which is now struggling with issues arising from immigration. This is not just a recent phenomenon. In the 1960s and 1970s, the German governments invited "guest workers" ([Gastarbeiter](#)) to migrate to Germany for work in the German industries. The largest immigrant group came from Turkey, and some generations on there are unresolved issues about the extent to which the host country and the immigrant communities experience a shared sense of citizenship.

Bosnia-Herzegovina The Bosnian war concluded in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Accord, but since then the country has experienced an unhappy form of 'peace without reconciliation'. A complex constitutional architecture has led to the segregation of Bosniak, Serb and Croatian communities, but the Nansen Dialogue Project has created links extending across **Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Macedonia.**

Israeli/Palestinians. The Middle Eastern partnership in this project is not between Israelis and the Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza, but rather with the Palestinians who live within the state of Israel. The Givat Haviva Centre, which would be the official partner organisation, was created in order to build solidarity between Israeli peace activists and the Palestinian community in Israel. It is a recipient of the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education for its longstanding work in promoting Jewish-Arab dialogue and reconciliation.

In **Kosovo**, the issue of ethnicity and national identity and has been bubbling on the back burner ever since the new republic was created in 2008. There are those who want to re-draw the national boundaries to align them more closely with Serbian and Albanian ethnic identities. Against this backdrop, there are those who want to build a shared society within the existing boundaries.

3.9

Decisions Required:

If Members are minded to agree to the Council's participation in the project, a decision could be taken to participate in the event in September to explore how the project is developing.

A report on the project after the event would be brought back to the Council through the Shared City Partnership for consideration.

	<p>Given the nature of the project, The Chair and Vice Chair of the Shared City Partnership or their nominees would be the most suitable members to attend.</p> <p>In addition, it should be noted that 7 days is an exceptional time commitment and there is a possibility that nominated Members may wish to look at participating for a shorter period. The most appropriate option will be investigated.</p> <p>3.10 <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The cost to Council would involve the participants' daily expenses which can be met from existing budgets. The costs of travel and accommodation for the first seminar will be covered by the Peace Academy grant as outlined in the report.</p> <p>3.11 <u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural needs Assessment.</u></p> <p>The rationale for participating in the project is to look at how to create and sustain shared societies which will have a positive impact on equality and good relations.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Invitation to join International Shared Societies project – 10-16th September 2019.</p>