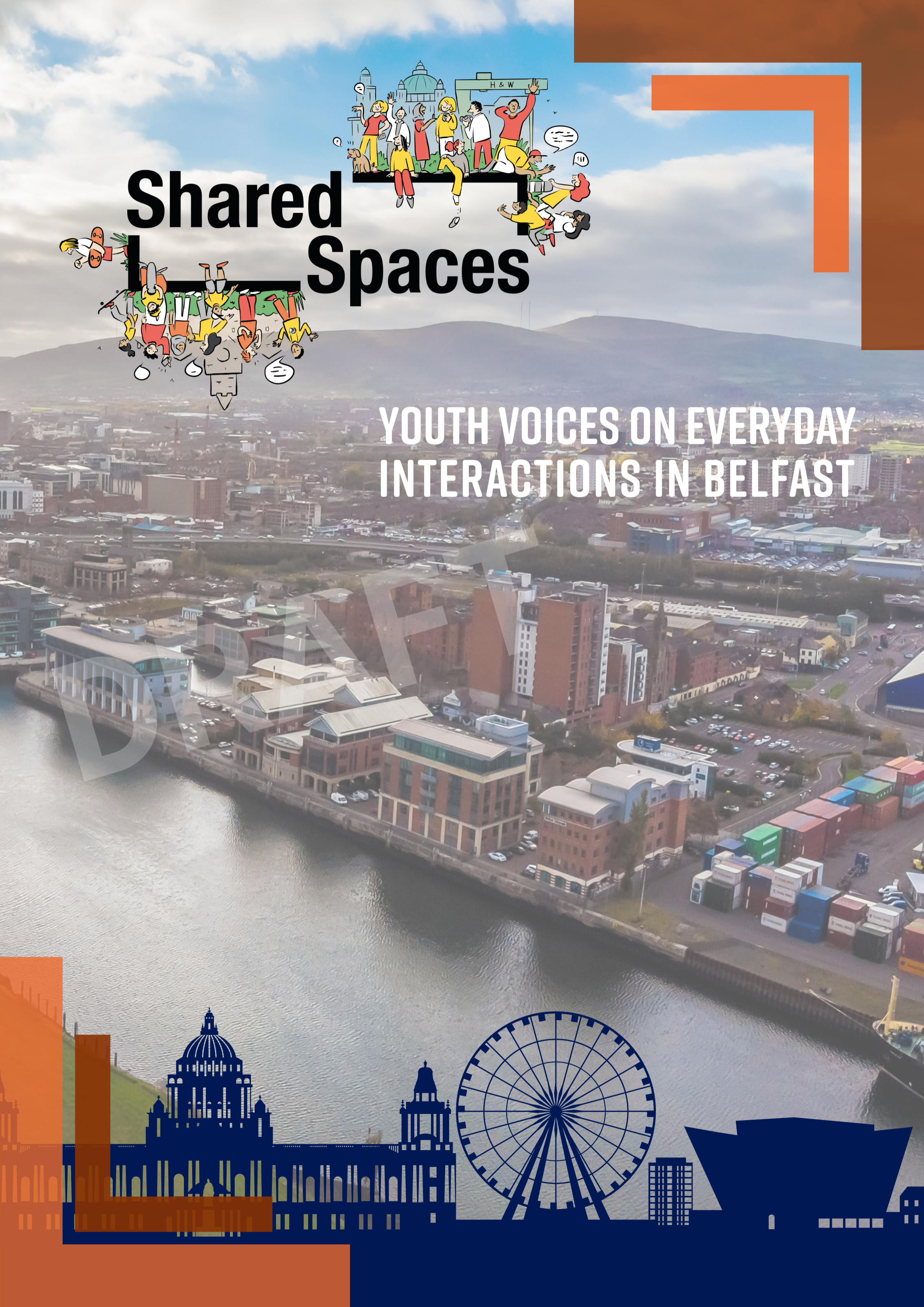


Shared Spaces



YOUTH VOICES ON EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS IN BELFAST





“

I was brought up to think that they're horrible people and they're just out to hurt you. But like we're all the same, we just have different religions.

”

Anonymous (Protestant, female)



The Shared Spaces Project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, explores the factors that influence whether or not young people in Belfast and Bradford choose to interact with people from different ethnic, religious or racial groups. We are interested in how individual characteristics, school environments, family and the wider community shape young people's interactions and friendships.

As part of the project, 10 young people aged 16 to 18 were asked to photograph the places in Belfast where they meet others and to discuss how these spaces facilitate or inhibit interactions more generally as well as those between Catholics and Protestants. We hope that their photos and comments, a sample of which are presented here, will contribute to a new understanding of young people's perceptions of everyday social life in Belfast. And, that this will offer important insights for researchers, civil society organisations and government officials interested in building stronger community relations.

Shelley McKeown Jones
Professor of Social Psychology
University of Bristol
September 2023

PUBS & BARS

That's a Wetherspoon pub in Newtownards and I live 5 minutes away from there, I'm pretty much in there all the time. It's just a good place to go, like I just moved to Newtownards so I don't really know that many people there. But just to go there, have a wee drink and then... I don't know, conversations, like you meet all sorts of people, mostly Protestants, and I'm Catholic... so I just get to connect and **we sort of pass our differences and just have a wee giggle, a wee laugh and wee drink.** I've made so many friends in Spoon's.

Anonymous (Catholic, female)

Wetherspoon is mainly a food bar, so you go and get food. [...] It's a nice place to go to, but there is... **it's the bars where it's mainly to one side, like there's IRA bars you would call them, where it's all Catholic people.** Also there would be Republican people as well... **and the same for other places where it's heavily Protestant.** So yeah that's... there are bars where it's mainly one, but it's mostly mixed.

Anonymous (Catholic, male)

Young Person: That's the bar I go to on Friday and Saturdays. It's good, so it is. There's definitely Protestants and Catholics that go to it [...]. **I don't think anyone knows who's Protestant and who's Catholic unless obviously you ask, but there's never any fighting or anything.**

Researcher: What kind of area is it in?

Young person: It's a Protestant area so it is. [...]

Researcher: And would you say it's like that in the rest of the area as well like the whole street, or it's just this particular bar?

Young person: It's just like certain bars. **If you go to the Shankill I know there's bars that a Catholic wouldn't want to go into because I don't know what would happen, probably a fight will start.** But that bar like it doesn't, nothing's ever really happened from I've been going to it, no fights or anything.

Anonymous (Protestant, female)



SQUARES

This is St Anne's, it's not got a good reputation. I'm not going to lie to you, they call it Heroin Square. I was there with a friend a few weeks ago and some guy was shooting up in front of us, we had to leave. But I don't know, for some reason every time I come up to Belfast to meet my mates we just go up there to have a wee drink and... yeah, **it's got a bad reputation, but I've had so many lovely conversations with strangers there from all sorts of backgrounds, from all over the place.** [...]. There's also a lot of tourists there, I see a lot of tourists from like Dublin just wandering about, I've had loads of conversations with them.

Anonymous (Catholic, female)



Sarah: City centre, right in the middle, so it is. A lot of people walk past it this way. [...]

Researcher: When you walk past City Hall, what do you look at, what do you feel like?

Sarah: Not much I just like the building, so I do. I think it looks really nice, yeah.

Researcher: Do you hang out with your friends in that area?

Sarah: Yeah.

Researcher: From both communities or...

Sarah: Yeah.

Researcher: So another place that's quite welcoming you would say?

Sarah: Yeah I'd say so.

Researcher: Do you agree with that, the others?

Young Person: The town is probably the safest part. Well after... at night time, no, but the day yes.

Sarah: Yeah night time's a bit...

Young person: It's full of... drunk people, drug use, stuff like that.

Sarah (Catholic, female)

Young person (Catholic, male)



STREETS

Young person: That's up the road Divis tower, it's a big block of flats at the bottom of West Belfast, and I use that as a meeting point with my friends, because I live in a different part of Belfast. And nearly all of my friends are from West, so I would meet them at Divis tower and we would go to wherever we're going. But it's just like a landmark that like I always know - Divis tower, I'm not that far from my friends, my friends are going to be here. It's not that hard to get to, it's right on the main road, it's just always been the meeting point.

Researcher: Would you meet friends from all communities there?

Young person: Yeah, all of my friends, no matter where we're from. **I have friends from North, East, South, West - we all meet at Divis tower, it's just like the spot. Because it's not that far from the city centre, but if you live at the very top of West Belfast it's also not that hard to get to.**

Anonymous (Protestant, female)



I don't know what it used to be, but it's an abandoned building now, and it's down North Street [...]. And it's beside all the vintage shops and stuff, there's a shop that sells all the old sweets that you used to get in the olden days. And then there's like a vintage record shop. But I see that building more or less every single day when I go past it. But actually I'd want to know what it was before. **I love abandoned buildings, but I just think it's so sad because you lose the legacy of what it used to be and people who used to meet up there, and then they just sit and rot away.**

Magy (Catholic, female)



Young person: That's like the Protestants and Catholics building a peace wall, separating it so it is, and the peace gates as well. [...]

Researcher: Would you rather this wall exists or not?

Young person: No. I **don't really see the point at all, because like Catholics come in with the Protestants, and Protestants goes in with the Catholics... just doesn't really matter apart from like when there's fighting and all.** Because there was loads of fighting down on that main road. [...]

Researcher: I see you took that picture during the night, so you wouldn't like feel unsafe necessarily because of the fighting, because you go there at night to walk the dog for instance?

Young person: That's where the fighting normally happens at night. **During the day it doesn't bother me, but at night if I see a big group of people I refuse to go down there, because I don't want to get hit on my head with a brick or something.**

Anonymous (Protestant, female)



BUSES

It sounds wrong, but I hate people being really really close to me. So sometimes I'd be so annoyed that someone sits beside me. But then actually I feel like... especially if it's old people... like if it's someone in their 20s or something they'll just ignore you. **But if it's like a wee old woman or a wee old man they'll sit and be like "Where are you going?" and stuff, and then sit and tell you about their day.** Sometimes I would help them with their shopping and stuff. Say if you see a wee old granny going about with like six bags, it's mental. How can you see a granny holding bags and just let them.

Magy (Catholic, female)



Young person: I took this photo of a Glider, it connects East Belfast to West Belfast – **it goes from the Protestant area to the Catholic area. That obviously mixes people, and it takes you to new areas.** [...]

Researcher: Do you sometimes speak to someone you don't know on that bus?

Young person: Yeah, like if you're sitting on the bus and say maybe the older people would sit and have a conversation with you, and you would be speaking to people you would never dream of speaking to. And they would tell you about their day and what they're doing, it's like... it's just fun. I love talking to people, [...] like **they're telling you about their backgrounds and what they've been doing and where they're from. And then you tell them about you, and it's just fun to get to know new people.**

Anonymous (Protestant, female)





RESTAURANTS

Young person: It's called Tea House, they do different kinds of coffees, teas, and some sort of lunches as well. **I usually just go there, grab something to eat or drink, sit there for a wee bit with friends and chill out a wee bit.**

Researcher: How long would you spend there typically with your friends?

Young person: Mostly only around half an hour, just to talk and then drink away, and then after go out for food. [...]

Researcher: Castle Court, is it the kind of place where you speak to someone you don't know?

Young person: It depends. Maybe if you're sitting down and someone asks sitting next to you. I wouldn't really see it... maybe in Tea House more.

Anonymous (Catholic, male)

Sarah: The Tea House, I go there all the time, so I do, with my friends as well to sit and talk you know.

Researcher: I think you said in your caption that people were really kind in that place.

Sarah: Yeah the workers are really nice, so they are.

Researcher: What do they do to kind of make you feel...

Sarah: The way they talk to you, and how helpful they are.

Sarah (Catholic, female)



PARKS

Lewis: It's just a really nice place. Also in Orangefield Park it can be quite rough as well. But you know even though a place is rough you can see nice sights like that, and you feel relaxed.

Researcher: So what do you mean it can be pretty rough? It has that reputation?

Lewis: Sometimes, like especially around summertime, a lot of people can be doing drugs, they can be doing anything, could be drinking... you know, things get out of hand there. It depends on what time you go up as well, especially during the night.

Researcher: And does it have anything to do with people's community background or it's mainly other issues that...

Lewis: I think it's just people being irresponsible, or doing bad stuff for no reason. Or maybe there is a reason, you never know... Otherwise it is a Protestant area, but... yeah, it can be rough at times.

Researcher: So if you go there you try and go during day time instead of night time possibly?

Lewis: Yeah definitely, just go during the day I'd say. Don't go there after maybe the limit of 7 o'clock.

Lewis (Protestant, male)

Lauren: These two are Dunville Park facing where I work on the Falls Road. [...]

Researcher: Tell us a bit more about this park in terms of how people mix or not. How is it?

Lauren: I wouldn't say it's very mixed, I would say it's mostly Catholic because it's on the Falls Road but... You see families and dogs, people mostly walk around in it like usually, there's wee exercise bikes as well, you see people on them every so often.

Researcher: Is it like... There was another park, someone said that's a bit rough at night - this one is not like that necessarily?

Lauren: During the day no. Daytime it's all right, but see here, this is where the actual wee kids' park is, there were big slides that were burnt down and all so it's mostly closed off, because it was getting burnt. [...] This used to be a big water fountain that worked... it used to work back in the day. It's still there but it doesn't work no more. But it's a nice wee walk through.

Lauren (Catholic, female)



BUS STOP / CHURCH

Researcher: This bus stop you said was in front of that church, right?

Rob: This church is in front of that. This is right beside it.

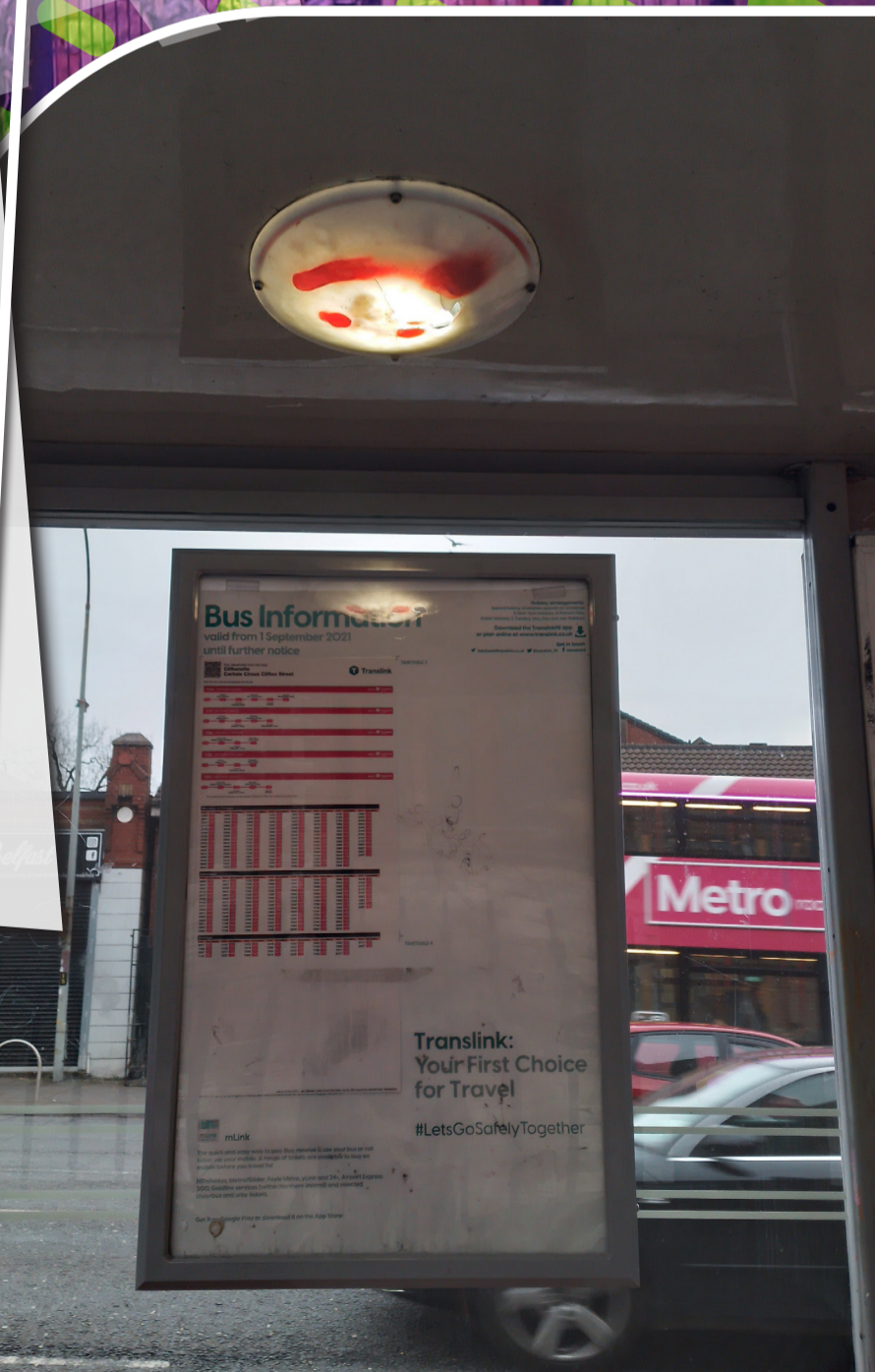
Researcher: They're like opposite each other. Do you know if it's a Protestant or a Catholic church?

Rob: I'm assuming it's Catholic.

Researcher: Okay. Does that change anything in terms of waiting for your bus in front of it?

Rob: No I don't care. I'm also not religious, so... I don't go to church anyway, like even if I were religious I don't think I'd be going to church. I don't think I'd go to a Protestant church. No hate or anything just... but um... **I think it's pretty. I've never went inside because I don't go to church, but it's really nice.**

Rob (mixed, trans male)



YOUTH CLUB

Young person: My youth club. I thought just take a picture of it because the wifi, the wifi isn't working, why not try conversation. So there you are.

Researcher: Why do you think the youth club... why do you think they put that there?

Young person: Because that was taken – everybody's on their phone, they never talk to each other so...

Researcher: Is it a mixed club, or mostly Catholic or mostly Protestant?

Young person: To be honest there's only like one Protestant, the rest are all Catholic. [...] He's the odd one out.


Researcher: How did he end up there?

Young person: He's on placement.

Researcher: Okay. Does he get along with the others normally?

Young person: He does, yeah.

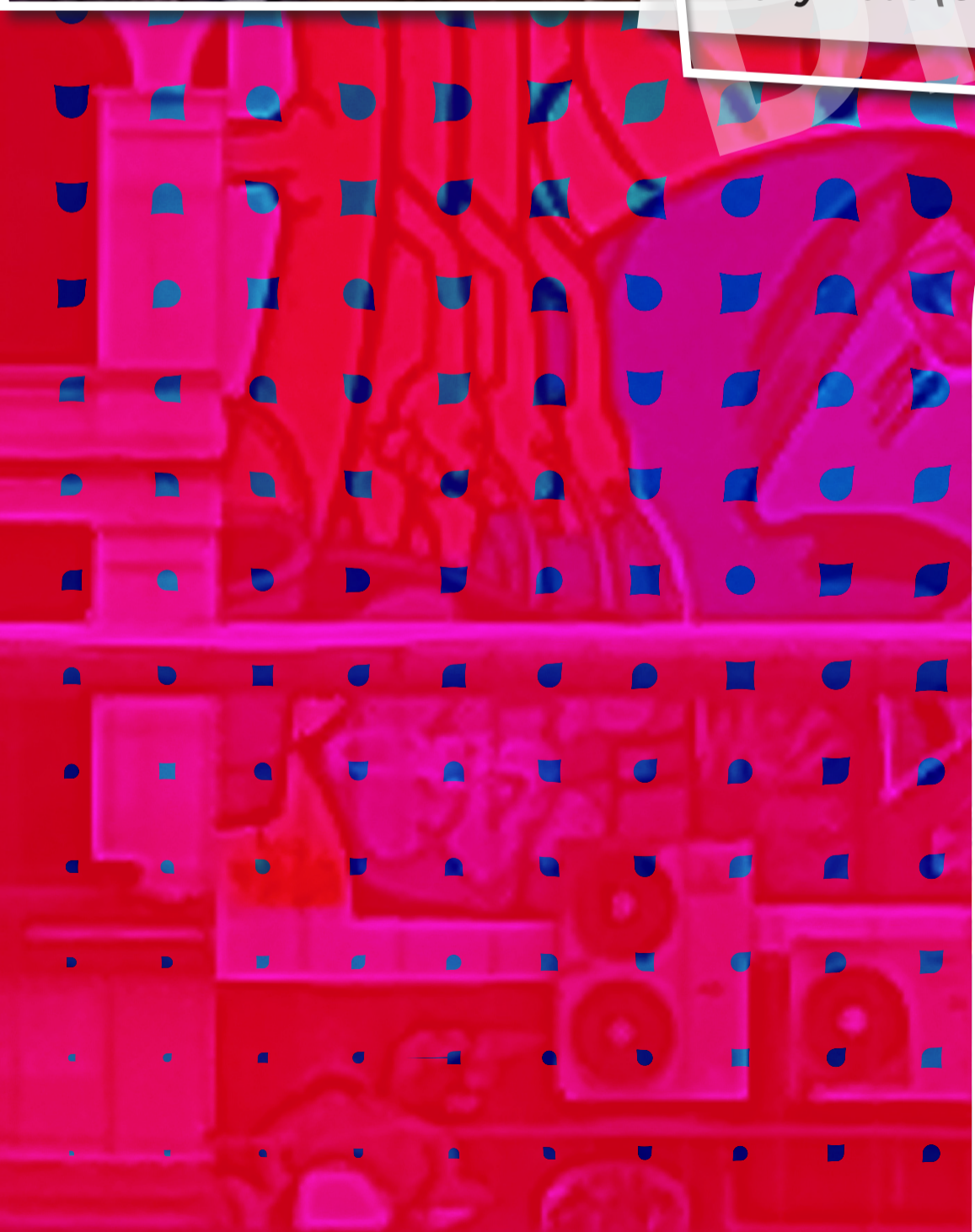
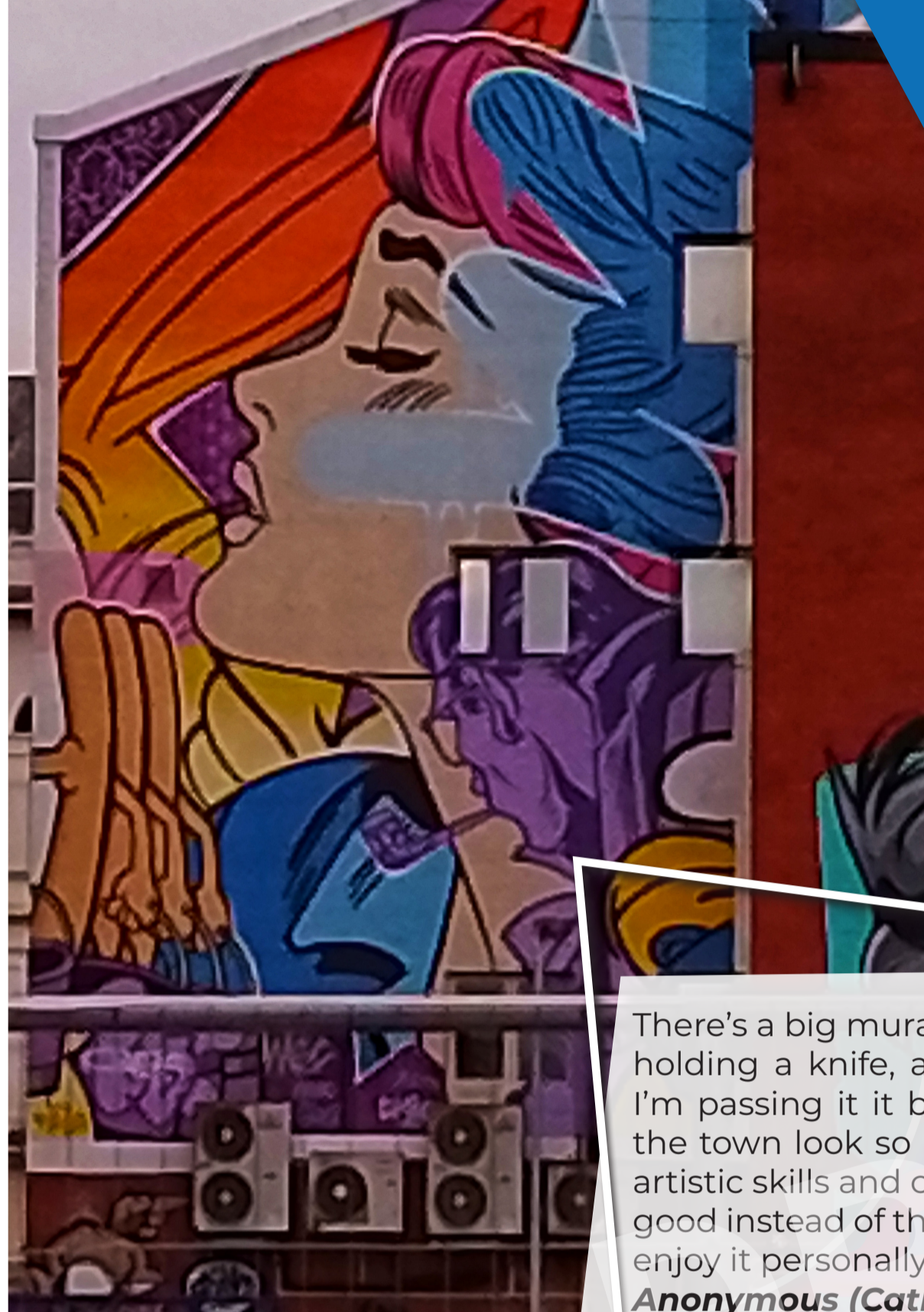
Anonymous (Catholic, male)

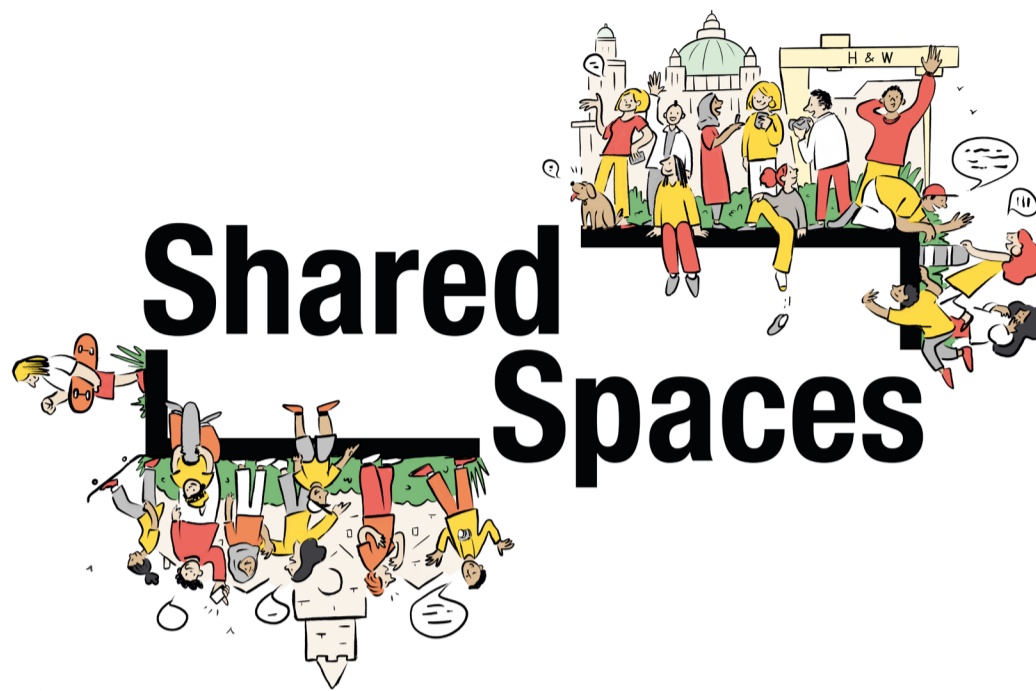
IF THE *wi-fi* 
ISN'T WORKING
Why not try
CONVERSATION

GRAFFITI

There's a big mural where I used to live and it's a crab holding a knife, and it's just funny. But I like when I'm passing it it brightens up my day, and it makes the town look so much nicer. People are using their artistic skills and creativity to make something that is good instead of the negatives. So I really appreciate it, enjoy it personally.

Anonymous (Catholic, female)





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Whenever I was brought up, they were heavily influenced by what they grew up with.

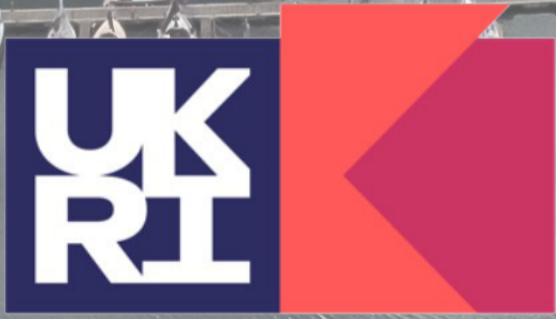
In the older days there was something called the Troubles [...]. It was like a war I'd say, the Protestants and the Catholics. So it was a different time back then, and they tried to teach me and raise me about that and tried to get me converted to one side. But over the years I've realised that there's no really fuss over it. Why just stay to one side when you can be happy with both, you know what I mean?

”

Anonymous (Catholic, male)



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