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Similarities and Divergences in Attitudes Toward Georgian Irish Heritage

Similitudes y diferencias en las actitudes hacia el patrimonio georgiano de Irlanda

Semelhanças e divergências de atitude face ao património Georgiano na Irlanda

Keywords | **Palabras clave** | **Palavras chave**

Colonial, Conservation, Legislation, Ireland, Dissonant heritage

Colonial, Conservación, Legislación, Irlanda, Patrimonio desacorde

Colonial, Conservação, Legislação, Irlanda, Património dissonante

Abstract | **Resumen** | **Resumo**

This paper makes a comparative analysis of the treatment of Georgian heritage in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (Éire). It assesses this treatment through a review of listing practices, lost houses, and the parallel evolution of planning policies along with the historical reasons for this, analyzing the nature of the drivers of and limits to the conservation of the Georgian buildings of Ireland. NI and Éire share most of the factors that led in the early twentieth century to significant heritage loss, and later to the creation of effective and inclusive conservation legislation. Our study shows that the political mindset in Éire is what has most discouraged listing and conservation, along with a lack of key legislation as passed in Great Britain but not in Ireland prior to partition, due to the political context.

En este artículo se hace un análisis comparativo del cuidado del patrimonio georgiano en Irlanda del Norte (NI) y en la República de Irlanda (Éire). Se valora dicho cuidado a través del estudio de las prácticas de protección, las casas abandonadas y la evolución paralela de las políticas urbanísticas junto con los motivos históricos para ello, mientras que se analiza la naturaleza de los factores y las limitaciones para la conservación de los edificios georgianos en Irlanda. Irlanda del Norte e Irlanda comparten la mayoría de los factores que, a principios del siglo XX, condujeron a una pérdida importante de patrimonio y, posteriormente, a la creación de una legislación sobre conservación inclusiva y eficaz. Nuestro estudio muestra que la mentalidad política en Irlanda es lo que más ha desincentivado la protección y conservación de este patrimonio, junto

a la ausencia de una legislación eficaz como la que fue aprobada en Gran Bretaña pero no en Irlanda antes de la división debido al contexto político.

Este artigo faz uma análise comparativa do tratamento do património Georgiano na Irlanda do Norte (IN) e na República da Irlanda (Éire). Avalia este tratamento através de uma revisão das práticas de listagem, casas perdidas, e da evolução paralela das políticas de planeamento, juntamente com as razões históricas para tal, analisando a natureza dos fatores impulsionadores e dos limites da conservação dos edifícios Georgianos na Irlanda. IN e Éire partilham a maioria dos fatores que levaram no início do século XX a uma perda significativa do património, e mais tarde à criação de uma legislação de conservação eficaz e inclusiva. O nosso estudo mostra que a mentalidade política no Éire é o que mais desencorajou a listagem e a conservação, juntamente com a falta de legislação chave, como aquela que foi aprovada na Grã-Bretanha mas não na Irlanda antes da separação, devido ao contexto político.

Introduction

This study investigates the concept of dissonance in heritage by analyzing the value attached to colonial heritage in post-colonial contexts and the consequences of this for planning policy and conservation practices through a comparative analysis of attitudes to Georgian buildings and the evolution of conservation legislation in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (Éire), reflecting on the links between political complexity and ideology in planning legislation and heritage construction.

The views taken by postcolonial publics of colonial heritage and the relationships developed with it are varied. But some patterns may be identified regarding how such heritage may be experienced and treated by independent peoples and nationalist governments. At independence, the general view was often characterized by resentment, since colonial buildings and monuments often conveyed messages of hegemony, civilizing mission, and superiority – strong ideological themes aimed at the colonizers as much as at the colonized. This affirmation of dominance led to a hostility to these symbols of colonialism, recalling what the formerly colonized people see as suffering and a denial of their culture and identity.

"What is Irish is good; what is foreign is bad and therefore Fitzwilliam Street must go" (Ryan 1963, as cited in Parkinson et al. 2015: 208). Our hypothesis sets out from this quote, representative of the 1960s Irish attitude toward Georgian heritage in particular: that an antipathy toward British heritage is what caused its poor treatment, and that an absence of such antipathy toward this heritage may have created the opposite situation in NI.

The concept of dissonance in heritage may point us to the reasons for the adoption of particular planning policies and help us understand how political complexity and sociocultural and economic differences determine decision-making in different societies. Associations between buildings and ideas or memories could be central to establishing a conservation philosophy based on social values shaped by history and culture.

Methodology

Aim

Our aim is to apprehend the process by which colonial buildings are viewed as dissonant heritage and the relevance of this to planning legislation and conservation practice within a post-colonial context, exemplified by a comparison of attitudes to Georgian heritage in NI and Éire.

Objectives

Our methodology involves both quantitative and qualitative data, illustrating shifting perspectives in conservation practice:

- Assessing the treatment of Irish heritage

- Political issues rooted in sovereignties and the politico-religious divide, particularly in NI
- Parallel comparison of the evolution of planning policy in NI and Éire, and the reasons for this
- The current situation of heritage listing and protection in the two Irelands

First we quantify listed Georgian buildings in both Éire and NI, highlighting listing patterns and tendencies through the numbers of listed buildings by period of construction along with potential biases in conservation practice in the two Irelands, with reference also to ruined or demolished country houses. The Georgian period considered here is 1714-1830, although precise figures about heritage are difficult to obtain for NI due to a lack of data (Officer in Communities NI 2019). Our second part reviews relevant literature and conservation legislation so as to identify the underlying reasons for conservation efforts or for neglect leading to demolition. We review planning policy documents in order to get an insight into the change in Irish perceptions of heritage, in parallel to historical events and changing political and economic situations. Finally we assess how colonial heritage has been treated, so as to detect drivers of and limits to heritage conservation.

Initial Data

Listed Buildings

According to the databases of listed heritage in Éire (Fig. 1) and NI (Fig. 2), the vast majority of listed buildings are of the Georgian and Victorian periods.

Ruined or Demolished Country Houses

The data for ruined or demolished country houses come from the "Lost Ireland" project, recording historic country houses that have been spoiled over the years, with details of the cause and their present condition. These data are in turn based on *Vanishing Country Houses of Ireland* by Knight of Glin (David Griffin et al.), supplemented with other sources.

In Éire, some 624 country houses have been lost for multiple reasons, some unknown:

- About 250, i.e. nearly half, were burned in 1919–1923 by the Irish Republican Army due to their symbolic associations, and never restored
- A number were demolished for redevelopment

Figure 1. Listed buildings in Éire by period

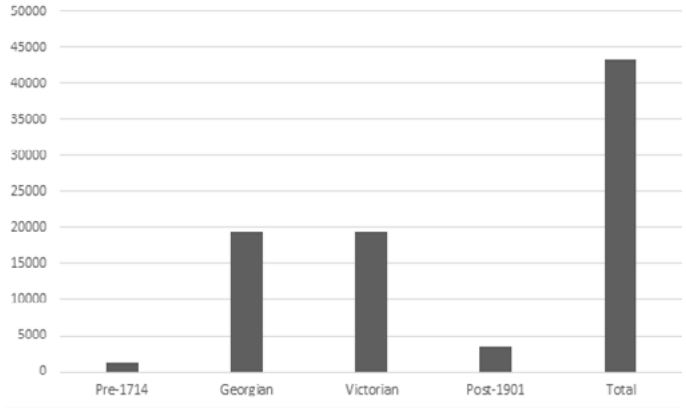


Figure 2. Present situation of listed buildings in NI by period

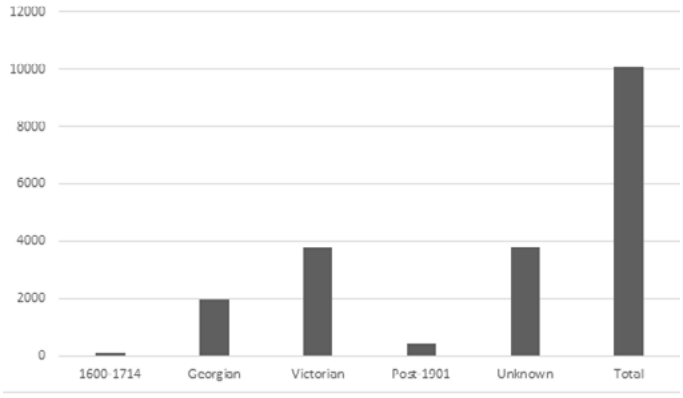


Figure 3. Reasons for the loss of Irish country houses

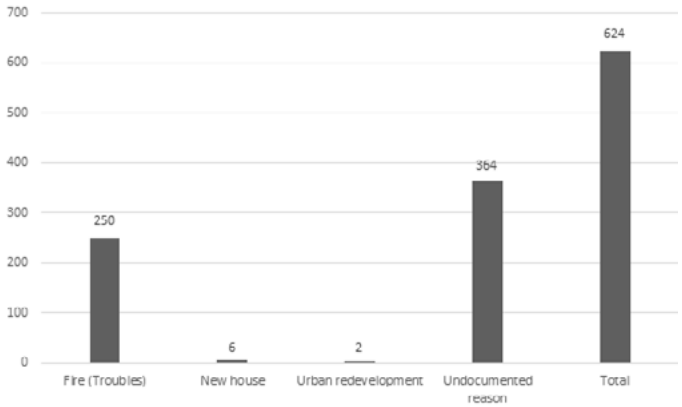


Figure 4. Present condition of country houses in Éire

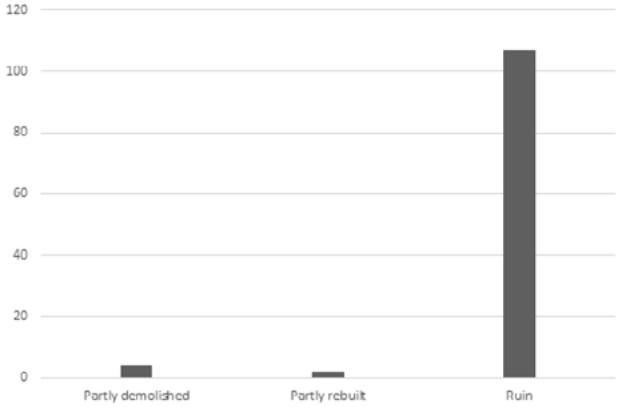


Figure 5. Reasons for losses of country houses in NI

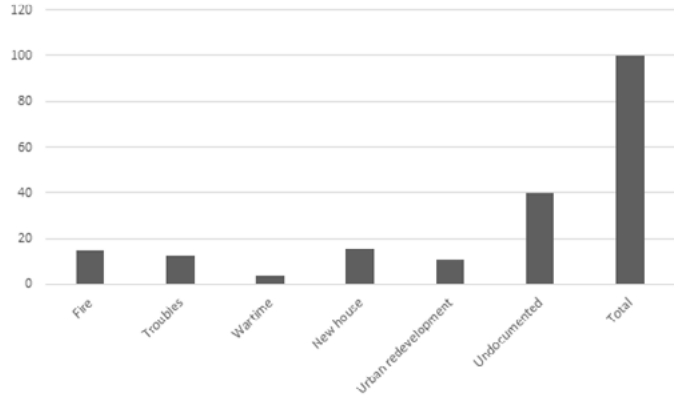


Figure 6. Present condition of country houses in NI

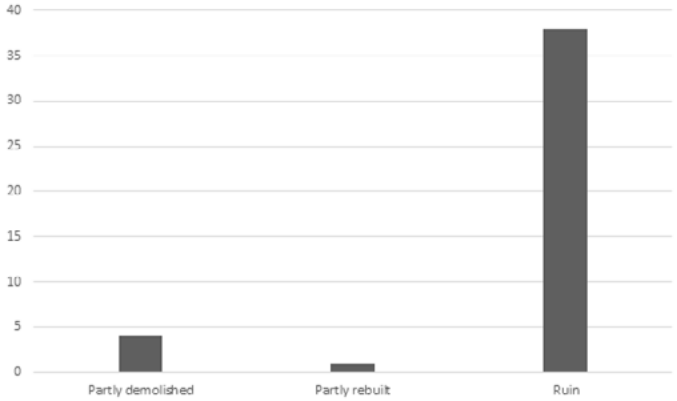
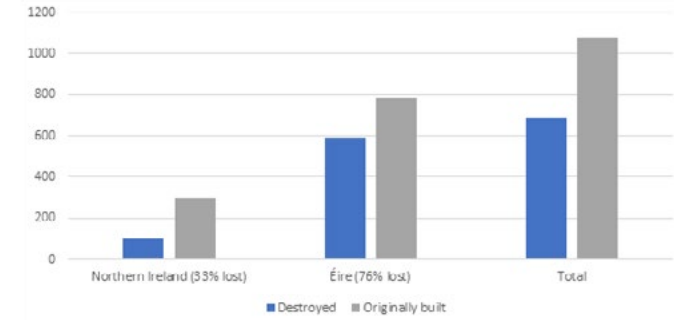


Figure 7. Rate of loss of Irish country houses



Most damaged or abandoned country houses remained as ruins or empty shells and were not redeveloped. A small proportion were partly rebuilt or wholly restored to some version of their original state.

In NI, some 100 country houses have been lost – a difference due partly to the smaller size of NI as compared to Éire, but the rate of loss is also less than half that in Éire.

Discussion

Early Conservation in Britain and Ireland

Before partition, Irish concern for conservation materialized in the Irish Church Act (1869), a starting point for the conservation of disused churches by classifying them as National Monuments. This act also had the tacit aim of weakening the Church in Ireland by transferring control from religious institutions to the secular state. Later came the Ancient Monuments Protection Act (1882), empowering the state to purchase monuments by putting them into guardianship. A first list of Scheduled Monuments was made including 50 ancient ones, all prehistoric structures, as the act did not cover Roman or medieval heritage. These two acts are seen as decisive stages in the evolution of conservation practice in the UK.

In 1908 a divide emerged between Great Britain and Ireland as the Royal Commissions on Ancient and Historic Monuments were established to promote an understanding of archaeological, built, and maritime heritage, providing authoritative information to decision-makers on conservation matters (Royal Commission of Wales). No such commission was created in Ireland, and this was to impact on post-partition conservation (Fry 2003 and McClelland 2017). The Ancient Monuments Consolidation Act (1913), allowing protection to be enforced over scheduled monuments' owners and introducing fines for infringements was likewise not applicable in Ireland. Consequently at the time of partition there was a legislative disparity, which was carried over to NI and Éire after partition.

Post-Partition Conservation Legislation

As of 1922, planning and conservation were delegated by Westminster to the NI Stormont administration, and its first post-partition legislation was the Ancient Monuments Act (1926), giving the NI government conservation powers similar to those in 1913 British act and creating a statutory body: the Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee – later "Council". This had members with a range of experience in archaeology and preservation of structures of historical or cultural value.

From 1921 to 1976 the Ministry of Finance, as senior government department, managed ancient monuments and was responsible for various units offering related public services: Land Valuation, Registry of Deeds, Ordnance Survey, etc. The result of this arrangement was a general inefficiency (Fry 2003), since although the minister was officially responsible for heritage protection, there was no clear attribution of responsibilities within the ministry itself nor any officially appointed staff to deal with these matters. According to Fry (2003) they were managed by the Work Division (or Branch), as the most closely related

Figure 8. The four historic regions of Ireland

department. Yet the Division lacked the required staff and funds and was a large organization with many tasks – a situation that hindered NI conservation practice, which after 1922 continued to rely on the deficient pre-partition heritage upkeep system.

However, at Stormont there was more interest than in Éire in preserving heritage, albeit hindered by adverse political and economic conditions, understaffing, and weak organization of NI conservation mechanisms, despite their early establishment. Indeed, NI legislation assumed a need for exterior funding, unavailable after partition. The legislation also gave no conservation responsibilities to local authorities, which were therefore not bound by law to act. For this reason the Finance Ministry kept accepting new monuments into its care, as no other body legally had to or could do so. To increase revenue, Westminster sought to shift conservation funding from taxpayers to ratepayers, but as none of these were keen on becoming the owners of monuments in view of the cost of their preservation, the move was unsuccessful. Thus everyone disclaimed responsibility.

The source of the NI legislative weakness was Westminster's disinterest in Irish matters as of the 1900s, as the prospect of Ireland becoming separate did not encourage lawmaking. One aspect of this early British disengagement was the creation of a Royal Commission for Ancient Monuments in England, Scotland, and Wales, but not in Ireland. This is seen as a key step in the improvement of conservation practice in Britain (Fry 2003 and McClelland 2017). Consequently neither NI nor Éire benefitted from a finance plan as required for conservation. Only in 1950 was the Archaeological Survey created, responsible for making an inventory of NI ancient monuments in what was the first attempt at having protected buildings cataloged by a professional body, prior to which there had been only voluntary initiatives. Today their work is part of the NI Historic Buildings Record.

Likewise, after independence, Éire struggled with economic stagnation due to national reorganization and a shortage of capital. This resulted in a "benign neglect" (Negussie 2003: 18) of Irish urban landscapes, with limited planning developments. Buildings remained legally unprotected and the first post-partition Monuments Act came into effect only in 1954 and with limitations, excluding occupied housing and religious buildings in use. Additionally, it protected pre-1700 structures only, excluding buildings of British styles in what may be seen as a move against colonial heritage, as Georgian and Victorian buildings were perceived as a testimony of a resented history (Negussie 2003). This act can therefore be regarded as an add-on to the 1882 Ancient Monuments Act.

Such non-inclusive legislation resulted in political inaction. The 1913 British act detailed funding for conservation, enabling the government to allocate money, but the introduction of such a system in NI after partition would have required legislative gymnastics and "no one in Stormont nor Westminster considered the move possible" (Fry 2003: 169).

In response to the poor condition of heritage in NI, after the war the Ancient Monuments Advisory Council appealed to the ministry for more government involvement. But the government had merged the budgets for conservation and construction and most funds went to redevelopment, as reconstruction was urgent. The lack of funds was also often due to misappraisals of the budgets needed for conservation projects, due to a skill shortage (Fry 2005); while England had a staff of 500 inspectors of ancient monuments after WWII, NI had ten. The imperial contribution (catering for colonial troops that fought in World War I) was another issue (Fry 2005) that was resolved only in the mid-1930s, forcing the country to fund housing and social care rather than conservation. The Westminster Labour government's solution to this was to redistribute tax revenue, whereas previously NI had had only NI tax income. With better funding it was able to initiate conservation projects, albeit focused only on ancient monuments and excluding legally occupied structures, whereas in Britain the amendments to the 1913 act extended protection to occupied buildings. So both practical and financial issues impacted conservation practice and heritage was not a priority.

The Voluntary Sector's Response

As little imminent threat was posed to Irish heritage at the time, there was little public awareness of conservation matters. Early voluntary mobilization included members of the Anglo-Irish elite sympathetic to their British heritage. In Éire in 1948 the National Trust for Ireland – An Taisce – was founded as "an independent charitable voice for the environment and for heritage issues" (An Taisce 2019), although it focused chiefly on the natural environment until built heritage started to be threatened (Negussie 2003). Ten years later the Irish Georgian Society was created, focusing first on Georgian country houses and

then on more urban heritage. Thus the early attempts at saving historic buildings in Éire came from civil society associations seeking to make up for the absence of effective statutory protection (Parkinson, Scott and Redmond 2015). The state's small share in ownership of heritage buildings and its reluctance to own more buildings "led to attempts to create independent property-owning trusts to safeguard great historic buildings of national importance on behalf of the public" (Negussie 2006: 1820). One issue with such groups, however, was their focus on certain types of heritage and not on others, with funds being directed accordingly (Sengupta 2008). Even so, their practice of restoration could be effective (Figs. 9 - 12).

The Role of the State

Meanwhile, heritage conservation took a turn for the worse in Éire. In the 1960s the country received foreign investments resulting in new urban developments, and a combination of the need for cleared sites and the latent negative perception of the Georgian buildings forming a significant part of urban centers along with weak planning regulations led to a series of demolitions for redevelopment. A first attempt at regulation was the Planning and Development Act (1963), which set out general conservation concepts but lacked practical guidance as "there was nothing in the act that defined what you meant by preservation" (Planner 1 2000, as cited in Negussie 2003: 19).

Concurrently, amid government changes, legislative action was initiated as of 1963 in NI to catch up with Britain, and there was considerable progress between the 1926 and the 1971 Planning Acts. But this legislation remained ineffective due to the authorities' lack of commitment and to its not echoing the voluntary sector's concerns. Frustrated by a lack of reciprocity, and despite the O'Neill government's efforts, in 1972 Westminster ordered the dissolution of the NI Parliament and proclaimed Direct Rule, deeming the collaboration of the Stormont government unsatisfactory.

As in NI, Éire's listing system languished for decades due to factors such as a lack of guidance in development plans, understaffing, and a lack of conservation expertise. For a long time conservation policies overlooked the interiors of historic buildings and the vague definition of conservation powers left Irish heritage in constant danger of alteration, damage, and demolition.

Exemplary of the complex Irish situation were the country houses erected across Ireland, usually by members of the Anglo-Irish elite. These represented wealth and power and were negatively viewed by most Irish nationalists, leading many such houses to be targeted in the Troubles. Attempts at restoring them often sparked a social uproar. Moreover, a weak conception of the "public good", seen as secondary to the principle of property rights, resulted in high levels of owner-occupancy and low public ownership of buildings, and a state of political paralysis.

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Figure 9. Demolition of Georgian townhouses in Mountjoy Square, Dublin (RTÉ Archives)

Figure 10. Fitzwilliam Street Lower, looking south-east from the corner of Merrion Square (Irish Architectural Archives)

Figure 11. Fitzwilliam Street Lower E.S.B. Head Office (Irish Architectural Archives)

Éire also appears to have had an inefficient distribution of responsibilities across the various levels of government resulting in slow progress in conservation policy, partly to be explained by the colonial label attached to its heritage (Negussie 2006). It is in these changing economic and urban contexts that the National Institute for Physical Planning and Construction Research was set up in 1964 to manage planning at state level, although it is considered to have had little positive effect on heritage (Negussie 2003).

The 1960s saw an ever greater loss of Georgian buildings in Éire, arousing public concern. Bodies such as An Taisce and the IGS took on the role of watchdogs (Negussie 2003: 18), monitoring planning applications and physically mobilizing against demolitions. Some changes to conservation and planning policies were achieved through these actions, with the introduction of protection for interiors. But the number of statutorily protected buildings remained low, partly because the Irish state was concerned about the legal battles it could face in the event of large-scale listing of private townhouses within an ethos of priority for property rights (Negussie 2003). The safeguarding of Irish heritage thus rested mainly with the voluntary sector through the organization of trusts and associations of students and professionals.

Voluntary actors played a non-negligible role in resisting the demolition of Georgian buildings, "providing building inventories, restoration and management of heritage property, monitoring of planning applications and lobbying for policy and legislative reform" (Negussie 2006: 1813). Although most redevelopment plans went ahead and many Georgian buildings were knocked down in cities, voluntary bodies succeeded in raising conservation awareness in civil society (Negussie 2003). Moreover, the economic stagnation of the 1970s positively impacted Irish heritage by bringing a halt to redevelopments, except for transportation projects, although the government continued to prefer renewal to conservation.

Figure 12. Victorian houses demolished in Belfast at 95-107 North Street (*Belfast Telegraph* 2016)

Figure 13. Site of the demolition of the previous houses before they could be listed, in 2016 (*Belfast Telegraph*)

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The Wind of Change

Significant legislative progress was made with the National Monuments Acts of 1987, giving the state more powers to protect historic buildings. This protection was extended to post-1700 structures, representing a new approach (Negussie 2003). Student associations also formed new movements in support of Georgian heritage, mainly in Dublin, such as Students Against the Destruction of Dublin. Likewise, north of the border, a series of Planning Acts including conservation provisions were enacted during Direct Rule.

In the 1990s, more effective conservation policies were put into place, principally due to pressures from the EU, for on signing the Granada Convention in 1997, Éire had to review its legislative and administrative measures for the protection of built heritage. In return the EU provided funding for conservation-led urban regeneration.

Éire's heritage conservation legislation was thus improved, and in 1998 a new urban renewal plan was issued with specific planning guidelines, new decision-making procedures, and more power for local authorities to regulate conservation with a more democratic approach to planning.

Similarly, with Direct Rule, conservation policy finally progressed in NI. As of 1974 the "listed building" label was introduced, stemming from the earlier loss of historic buildings through redevelopment or damage linked to the Troubles (McClelland 2017). But Irish conservation philosophy has remained different from that in the UK, as conservation areas are not yet strongholds, listing focuses on individual structures, and planning permissions are still granted for renewal of assets – in both NI and Éire.

Dissonant Heritage

In the framework provided by Tunbridge & Ashworth (1996), and with a comparative reading of NI and Éire conservation history, Ireland is an interesting example of dissonance with colonial heritage due to the associated memories (Parkinson et al. 2015). It is also an example of issues in the transmission of heritage (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996), with many Irish actors being alienated by the character and design of cities such as Dublin and desiring their redevelopment, while in NI other factors (albeit sometimes similar) prevented the establishment of good conservation practice despite good intentions. This shows that, beyond dissonant feelings for any particular

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legacy, it is ultimately the law that determines the fate of heritage; strong conservation legislation can protect it from those inclined not to, and good intentions alone, whether in institutions or civil society, cannot substitute for this. The transmission issues in the Irish case are similar to those in other decolonized contexts, such as in the Caribbean, where certain heritage assets such as slave plantations and mills were abandoned and not treated as heritage or used for tourism.

The Irish example also highlights that some elements often relevant in colonial remembrance, such as race, language, geography, and culture, are not prerequisites for dissonant feeling, although the Irish case, by opposing notions such as "Irish" and "British", "Celtic" and "Anglo-Saxon", and "Catholic" and "Protestant", does involve religious and potentially ethnic differences, the latter historically even preventing the Irish from being considered as "White". This shows that heritage is strongly associated with national identity, which itself transcends ethnic, religious, linguistic, and racial boundaries, as also seen in Russia and Ukraine. It shows that the building of national identity is a complex process that can take place even after centuries of foreign domination and regardless of how short the geographic distance is between colonizer and colonized.

Finally, Belfast and other NI cities continue to be the theater of political grievances through heritage appropriation, particularly with the use of highly symbolic mural paintings and shrines to fallen fighters. These "land holdings", as can be seen on the Falls Road, are identifiable with other cases of conflict where physical presence on the ground is key to the struggle, such as between Palestine and Israel, or in the Basque Country vis-à-vis the French and Spanish governments, or in Cuba vis-à-vis American expansionism.

Matrix for Assessing the Treatment of Colonial Heritage in Ireland

In keeping with our research and the various aspects of Irish heritage studied, the following matrix sums up the historical drivers of and limits to the appreciation and conservation of colonial heritage in the two parts of Ireland.

Table 1–Assessment matrix. Author's work.

Figure 14. Nationalist mural painting by Ardoyne Avenue (Extramural Activity)

Figure 15. Loyalist painting in Belfast (Liam McBurney/PA Wire)

Figure 16. Garden of Remembrance (Stock Photo)

Figure 17. Mural paintings on the Falls Road, Belfast(Rossographer)

Indicator		Northern Ireland	Éire	Comparison
Nature of limits to heritage conservation	Psychological (refusal of heritage, not listed or protected)	✗	✓	Different
	Practical (lack of material means or knowhow)	✓	✓	Similar
Nature of causes of heritage losses	Voluntary (replacements)	✓	✓	Similar
	Accidental (attacks, fires, war damage)	✓	✓	Similar
Alterations	Optional	✓	✓	Similar
	Compulsory	✗	✗	Similar
Nature of the drivers for heritage conservation	Economic (tourism)	✓	✓	Similar
	Identity-related	✓	✗	Different
Source of stronger policies and legislation	Supra-national (foreign)	✓	✓	Similar
	National (own)	✓	✗	Different
State responsiveness to the voluntary sector	Low	✓	✓	Similar
	High	✗	✗	Similar
Were heritage losses related to inefficiency of legislation?	Yes	✓	✓	Similar
	No	✗	✗	Similar

Table 1: Assessment matrix.

Conclusion

The evolution of conservation practice in NI and Éire has been mainly determined by the legislation framing conservation practice, passed in the early twentieth century in Britain but not in Ireland.

The two Irelands show similarities in their heritage situation, with a comparable evolution and ineffective legislation that failed to protect built heritage at partition in 1922. The complexity of the antagonized political context created an unfavorable climate for democratic processes of decision-making and heritage management by governments and local authorities. Yet both Irelands benefited from active involvement by the voluntary sector, which mobilized early in defense of Anglo-Irish heritage. But these groups did not receive significant reciprocity from the government and so legislative weakness allowed similar situations to develop in Éire and NI, with opposition to the preservation of colonial heritage from nationalists conflicting with a mobilization of Anglo-Irish and loyalist communities wishing to celebrate it. The voluntary sector's involvement appears to have had marginal effects, lacking the organization and distribution of responsibilities, expertise, funding, and professional input needed to ensure effective conservation. This situation was exacerbated by socioeconomic aspects: underfunding, understaffing, and urban redevelopment.

But the two Irelands also shared drivers of engagement in heritage conservation, and both were prompted by external factors to provide stronger conservation legislation. In NI, despite Stormont's will to engage in heritage conservation, it was political instability and Direct Rule from Westminster as of 1972 that led to a stronger framework. In Éire, although there were some legislative advances, it was in the 1990s, with the Good Friday Agreement and EU investments into Éire with requirements attached for standardization of planning and conservation legislation, that the country truly engaged in inclusive conservation practice.

In conclusion, though psychological motivation played a role in the demolitions of Georgian buildings, as borne out by the damage being greater in Éire than in NI, indicating a link between heritage resentment and destruction, this was made possible by two circumstances: the absence of protective legislation, and rapidly growing economies triggering heritage destruction, encouraged by certain political stances in Éire. The reconciliation of the nations and peoples involved in the construction of their shared heritage could be the key to its protection and celebration.

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Biography | Biografía | Biografia

Samir Belgacem

Samir is a PhD candidate in Heritage Conservation Studies at the Department of Archaeology of the University of York, England. His professional practice has been focused on architectural and urban developments as part of the historic evolution of cities and other places, and his research interests focus on the establishment of heritage conservation practice based on the values of civil society in Algeria. He is a licentiate member of the Royal Town Planning Institute, and a student member of ICOMOS. For his MSc at the University of Dundee he was awarded the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Prize on getting the best overall marks in the MSc Spatial Planning programs, and he received the Global Excellence Scholarship Award for his architecture studies in Blida, Algeria.