

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF CONSOCIATIONAL GOVERNANCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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*“And the battle's just begun
There's many lost, but tell me who has won?
The trenches dug within our hearts
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters
Torn apart.”*

U2 – *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, (Album *War*, 1983)
<http://www.u2.com/music/lyrics.php?song=23&list=s>

Abstract

The Thesis deals with the political and social sustainability of the present political system in Northern Ireland. By assessing the factors that influence this, the Thesis regards the consociational system in place in Northern Ireland as being sustainable, given certain significant points. The first regards the political behavior of the four parties in the power-sharing system (the Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Féin, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Social Democratic and Labour Party); in a game theory assessment of political cooperation, it is showed that cooperating produces better results than defecting, for any of the given parties. The incentives for cooperation, and the present political, security and social environment offer the necessary conditions for a sustainable consociational system from a political point of view.

The second type of factor to influence Northern Ireland's political system is represented by the external actors. The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, through cooperation amongst themselves, and economic and political influence ("consociationalism-imposed" policies) in Northern Ireland, represent important guaranties of political and social sustainability.

If the consociational system works at a political level, then, at community level, antagonism should soften in a given period of time, as a result of government policies, the cooperation model that they present and internal initiatives. The final chapter analyses all these factors, concluding that much work is still needed in cross-community relations, in a society still divided and where current prejudices and intolerance can produce negative effects.

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Introduction

The case study on Northern Ireland is part of a larger academic debate, regarding the effectiveness of applying the consociational model to divided societies characterized by ethnical, social, economic or religious cleavages. Northern Ireland represents a significant study case: it is a deeply divided society where the consociational governance has a long history of failed implementation attempts. What makes the current power-sharing government able to provide with positive results? The research question that the Thesis asks is whether the consociational system is sustainable at political and social level.

The application of the consensus model in Northern Ireland represents a source of intense debate in the academic world, the general view being that proportional representation and the power-sharing system are crucial for stabilizing the region. The available literature considers as solution to the Northern Ireland conflict the consensus model. Yet the most important aspect is whether and how long will it take for the consensus/ power sharing model to be properly politically and most of all socially implemented. The research is made on a developing subject; therefore the results offer the best possible answer with the available literature and official data. Also, due to the fact that the construction of the Northern Irish political system is taking place during the research period of the thesis, new developments might lead to changes to the original plan.

The Northern Ireland case is significant within the framework of power sharing government having in view the strong cleavages that exist within its society. Main arguments for the fragility of the present consociational system are to be identified on two levels: first, one might argue that in a antagonistic society like Northern Ireland cooperation between the two communities requires changing mentalities based on centuries of conflict (violent or not) – therefore a process that requires a long period of time. Second of all, another case for the

instability of the consociational governance is the political level: within the power-sharing government, frictions exist, and political conflict is possible.

Thesis chapter outline

The structure of the thesis is focused around the consociational model of governance provided by the 1998 Belfast Agreement, and at a more recent date by the 2006 St Andrews Agreement. These provide the theoretical and legal framework for a power-sharing/consociational governance. Social difficulties in a divided society, with a history of antagonism and conflict, offer little space for obtaining and managing solutions to decrease the negative aspect of these cleavages. The thesis will offer the entire spectre of these solutions, both from the inside and from the outside, trying to identify the best ones and also asks several questions like why is the US involvement in conflict resolution so strong, and pressures or debates pushed forward by the European Union are seen as “invisible”.

The first chapter presents the theoretical debate on the matter of consociational model of governance, stressing the importance of this type of political system in divided societies. Also, the chapter will stress the fact that although not fulfilling all the requirements of the consociational theory, the Northern Ireland political system can be framed within this theory. New consociationalism theories are presented, stressing the importance of external actors’ pressure and influence in new consociations, focusing on the Northern Irish case.

The causes of the Northern Ireland conflict represent a topic of intense debate in the literature. Acknowledging the importance of religion or ethnicity as causes of the conflict, the second chapter will stress out the importance of socio-economic causes, as primary causes. Discrimination policies of Protestant Governments, between 1921 and the beginning of the 1970s will be described and analyzed as to offer concrete and clear examples of motives for starting the violent conflict. The role that this chapter has, besides a brief historical

background, is to put the basis for a more broad analysis of social sustainability of consociational model, in the final chapter.

Failed consociational attempts in Northern Ireland will be described in the third chapter. The chapter will focus on two main directions: the evolution of political parties within the conflict and, second of all their positions regarding the consociational process.

The fourth chapter will deal with the political sustainability of the consociational model of governance in Northern Ireland. In order to assess the sustainability of such a political system, and in such complex political society, the chapter will use a game theory approach, specifically cost benefit model to analyze the choices that the political parties and external actors have: this kind of analysis should show that the two main parties of the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Democrat Unionist Party and Sinn Féin) will both win if they cooperate. The cost-benefit analysis will also show that the present incentives are obviously bigger than in previous years, and that this should make the entire political system functional. The chapter is divided in two parts: the first one deals with the internal actors, while the second one will analyse, on the basis of theories presented in the theoretical chapter, the influence and outcomes that external actors have had on the consociational process in Northern Ireland.

The final chapter will focus on describing, on the basis of existing literature and personal observation in Belfast, the nature of social antagonism in Northern Ireland. Also, the first part will describe and provide explanations for the British/Irish or Protestant/Catholic divisions and significances. The second part of the chapter focuses on the internal initiatives for the improvement of cross-community relations, first by analyzing the state of single identity activities, and later on, by analyzing the cross-community projects, and their effects. The chapter stresses the importance of the political model of cooperation offered to the social layer by the political one, that should help increase better cross-community relations.

Chapter 1. Theoretical approaches to the consociational model of governance

In order to identify whether the consociational system of Northern Ireland is sustainable or not, the Thesis will first focus on the academic debate regarding the majoritarian and consensus based models; and will identify the main reasons for which, in divided societies like Northern Ireland, with a violent background, the viable alternative is a consensus/ power-sharing political system. As a theoretical model, the Thesis will follow the consociational model of governance that Arend Lijphart presents in his book “Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries”. Also, the theoretical chapter deals with some critics of Lijphart, like Donald Horowitz.

For the second part of the theoretical framework, I will introduce more focused arguments, on the Northern Ireland debate, based on Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry’s arguments. This part will represent the theoretical basis of the Thesis, based on the first, more general approach of Arend Lijphart. Also, by presenting other solutions in the fifth chapter (Rupert Taylor – “social transformation”) different from consociationalism, the Thesis will aim to present the inside-outside solution, as well: “consociationalism should not form the basis for present or future policy action in Northern Ireland (...) instead, a social transformation that is concerned to transform the conflict by promoting participatory democracy and challenging ethno-nationalism”¹.

Arend Lijphart considers in his book “Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries” that the majoritarian system leads eventually to exclusion, quoting Sir Arthur Lewis: “all who are affected by a decision should have the chance to participate in making that decision either directly or through chosen

representatives.”² If the majoritarian system promotes the leadership of those that obtain majority, this leaves out from the political process several segments of the population. If one takes the definition of democracy that Lewis (and Lijphart) presents that would mean that non-consensual democracies are in fact not democracies.

Donald Horowitz considers that the consociational approach of Lijphart is “motivationally inadequate”, asking the question why should a winning majority offer power to a losing minority? The grand coalition and power sharing theory that Lijphart presents is considered exaggerated especially in cultural issues – “cultural issues (...) go straight to the heart of the conflict, to accord equal recognition to all cultures, religions and languages is to concede equal ownership of the state, contrary to what groups are very often willing to concede.”³ Horowitz, in a following article⁴, is not opposing the consociational theory, yet he argues that its application is problematic. He makes the point that the consociational institutions of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 are not capable of performing efficiently in a divided society like Northern Ireland. His arguments will help elaborate more the problem of institutional sustainability of the entire consensus model system in Northern Ireland.

One argument that supporters of majoritarian bring is the fact that “the exclusion of the minority is mitigated if majorities and minorities alternate in government”.⁵ This argument may be valid for some countries (like the United Kingdom or New Zealand) but it cannot be viewed as generalist. In societies that are not homogenous, the exclusion from power (even that deriving from free and fair elections) of ethnical or religious minorities

¹ Rupert Taylor, “Northern Ireland: Consociation or Social Transformation?”, in *Northern Ireland and the Divided World. The Northern Ireland conflict and the Good Friday Agreement in Comparative Perspective*, John McGarry, (Oxford University Press, 2001), 38

² Sir Arthur Lewis quoted in Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*, (Yale University Press, 1999), 31

³ Donald L. Horowitz, *Constitutional Design: Proposals and Processes*, Kellogg Institute Conference, Constitutional Design 2000: Institutional Design, Conflict Management, and Democracy in the Late Twentieth Century, (University of Notre Dame, 1999), 11

⁴ Donald L. Horowitz, “Explaining the Northern Ireland Agreement: The Sources of an Unlikely Constitutional Consensus”, *British Journal of Political Science* (2002), 32: 193-220 Cambridge University Press

⁵ Ibid, 31

might have negative consequences. In pluralistic societies (divided by ethnic, cultural, linguistic, ideological or racial characteristics) “majority rule is not only undemocratic but also dangerous, because minorities that are continually denied access to power will feel excluded and discriminated.”⁶

As Lijphart argues, divided societies need systems that promote not opposition but consensus, that include the significant minorities in the political system and that try the maximization of the majority and not winning elections on close call. In pluralistic societies (divided by ethnic, cultural, linguistic, ideological or racial characteristics) “majority rule is not only undemocratic but also dangerous, because minorities that are continually denied access to power will feel excluded and discriminated.”⁷

What is, therefore, the political and institutional sustainability of a consensus based government, basing everything on theory? For such a system to be sustainable – cooperation among actors, power sharing mechanisms, PR electoral system that provides with non-questionable results – it requires political will. In the case of Northern Ireland, one might say that the necessary conditions were not met in the previous consociational attempts. Conditions cannot be generalized and applied to other divided societies, or by considering other models of successful consociational states as being able to explain and to offer forecasts for the Northern Irish case. Each case is specific and should be analyzed separately. This statement is obviously applicable for the Northern Ireland case: although a consociational system, this one does not fulfill all the “requirements” that theory presents.

If one takes Lijphart’s favorable factors for consociation *per se*, then Northern Ireland misses a few points. Alike, if analyzing Brendan O’Leary’s definition of political consociation, the present case does not entirely fit the theory: “a political consociation is a

⁶ Ibid, 32-33

⁷ Arend Lijphart, 32-33

state or region within which two or more cultural or ethnic or national communities peaceably coexist, with none being institutionally superior to the others, and in which the relevant communities cooperate politically through self-government and shared government”⁸.

A theoretical explanation of failed consociational attempts in Northern Ireland might be found in the unfulfilling of several criteria, or favorable factors: as Lijphart’s list shows, there might still be political and institutional problems to be faced.

The success or the failure, so therefore the political sustainability of consociational governance, is based on several criteria according to Lijphart, and are as follows:

1. segmental isolation of the ethnic communities;
2. a multiple balance of power sharing between the ethnic communities;
3. external threats common to the ethnic communities;
4. overarching national loyalties to the state;
5. a tradition of elite accommodation;
6. socio-economic equality;
7. small size population, providing small government workload;
8. a moderate multi-party system with segmental parties.⁹

In a continuation of Lijphart’s work, focused primarily on Northern Ireland, John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary present three main conditions, crucial for the establishment and sustainability of the consociational model. The conditions that the two authors present are that “elites require sufficient motivation to engage in power-sharing and to take the tough decisions conducive to inter-ethnic political accommodation; elites must be free to negotiate and to lead their electorates where they might not want to go [and] there must be a multiple balance of power among the subcultures and those subcultures must be stable within society”¹⁰.

McGarry and O’Leary’s first condition, that the internal actors involved, should have ‘sufficient motivation’, refers to the fact that without incentives, the actors will not act, even if, by cooperation, the conflict is to be ceased. In the case of two or more communities, that

⁸ Brendan O’Leary quoted in Michael Kerr, *Imposing Power-sharing. Conflict and coexistence in Northern Ireland and Lebanon*, (Irish Academic Press, 2006), 26

⁹ Ibid, 27

are in a violent or non-violent conflict, to cooperate would mean to give up certain demands. Therefore, the importance of external actors' influence and pressure becomes very important. The second condition – the freedom of elites to negotiate – argues that the parties involved, either political parties or civil society, must be independent from any external factors in their negotiations. In Northern Ireland, this was not the case: starting from the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, and ending with the Belfast Agreement of 1998, the elites did not negotiate freely: they were forced by external pressures (the British and the Irish governments) to cooperate. Even the third condition that McGarry and O'Leary present – multiple balance of power – was not fully fulfilled without the involvement of external actors: the stability within the communities was not fully attained.

Consociational governance in deeply divided societies, is therefore, based on the effects of external forces. Reality has showed that, although based on internal actors, consociationalization of ethno-national conflicted societies is almost impossible without the involvement of external actors – Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina or for that matter even Cyprus. Michal Kerr, quoting Brendan O'Leary, stresses on this topic, “the modern phenomenon of externally imposed consociation, pointing out that ‘great and regional powers may be more willing to impose on small powers domestic arrangements’¹¹. External actors influence in the consociationalization process is very important for the change from classical consensus theory to a post Cold War theoretical framework.

This does not mean that general theories of consociational states are not required – on the contrary, there are a number of significant similarities between consociational states, yet the conditions and actors that represent the main building bricks are different in projects, historical legacies, and incentives for acting accordingly to the classical consociational model.

¹⁰ Ibid, 28

¹¹ Ibid, 38

Chapter 2. Historical background and causes of the Northern Ireland conflict

The second chapter of the Thesis deals with the historical background of the Northern Ireland conflict, presenting the causes of the conflict and of the continuous antagonism, as identified by the literature.

The main causes of the conflict, I argue, are mainly stemming from the significant economic, social and political gap that was widened in the researched period (1921-1972). The historical explanations of the conflict, beginning with the Ulster Plantation in the seventeenth century, or the religious/nationalist explanations are useful to portray the entire image of the Northern Irish conflict. Yet, in the end, I argue that the main causes are to be found in a more in depth analysis of the 1921-1972 period, and the discrimination and increase of inequalities for the Catholic minority.

2.1. Causes of the conflict

The rule of the United Kingdom on the region was not able to create an effective “mechanism for ethnic and religious toleration (...) the Union became the bulwark of the colonial settlers and their descendents”¹², therefore offering the more or less autonomous small populations the power to create some form of independence. The continuous denial by the British rule for the formation of a real Irish Parliament, supported by the Northern Protestants, led eventually to the increase in the number of Irish republicans that saw in violent actions a strong possibility for the creation of a more autonomous region, and of course independence. The “bloody birth” of Ireland, after the First World War, was based on

¹² Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism. Understanding Northern Ireland*, Second Edition, (The Athlone Press, 1996), 75

“a total of 557 being killed in political or sectarian violence from 1920–1922 during and after the Irish War of Independence”¹³.

As John Darby argues, in one of the basic books for the study of this topic, the conflict’s “roots lie in the social, economic, cultural and geographical structure of Northern Ireland”¹⁴. The historic roots of antagonism, as presented by O’Leary and McGarry, lie in the Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century¹⁵ and “the crises of political development which accompanied the democratic modernization of the British Isles”¹⁶. These crises represented the failure of the British leaders to create a community through the disappearance of the religious cleavage between the Catholics and the Protestants inhabitants of Northern Ireland.

Causes of the violent eruption of frustrations and centuries of segregation are considered mainly the cleavages between the communities, based on the religious matter. This theory is partly true: indeed, religion plays a very important role in the conflict but there is also the problem of national identity. Most of Protestants of Ulster consider themselves as being British, with all the benefits that come with this. Most of Catholics consider themselves Irish. Religion and national identity “have become so entwined that it is impossible to scribe priority to either of them”¹⁷. Also, the theory that causes of the violent conflict are religious divide and segregation is not supported by the two communities. In a 1991 survey regarding discrimination¹⁸, David Smith and Gerald Chambers argue, on the basis of the data collected, that religion and segregation, as perceived causes of the conflict are not important:

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troubles#The_partition_of_Ireland_1912.E2.80.931925

¹⁴ John Darby, *Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Development of a Polarised Community*, (Gill and Macmillan, 1976), 196

¹⁵ “The Plantation of Ulster” (1609) refers to the period of occupation of Ireland in the sixteenth century by the Tudor rule, Ulster being the North of the four historic provinces of Ireland. The consolidation of the territory was made, as in the history of British imperialism, by colonization: English and Scottish settlers were brought to the Island. Yet, over the years, the Scots outnumbered the English in the Northern parts and the British were forced to win again Ireland twice in the seventeenth century. The three communities (Irish, Scots and English) were divided by language, culture, religion and political rights and freedoms.

¹⁶ Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 101

¹⁷ Maurice Irvine, *Northern Ireland. Faith and Faction*, (Routledge, 1991), 173

Protestants consider religion as a cause of the conflict at 13%, and segregation as 5%. Similar results are to be found in the Catholic community – 12% for religion and 4% for segregation. The most important perceived cause are political/constitutional (Protestants – 35%, Catholic – 32%), and discrimination (Protestants – 21%, Catholics – 27%).

John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary¹⁹, in one of the most effective and comprehensive analysis of the Northern Ireland conflict, present a series of explanations for the evolution of the conflict. The authors divide the explanations for the Northern Ireland conflict in two parts: external or exogenous explanations and internal or endogenous explanations. The external explanations regard mainly the interests of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. These kind of explanations or causes are supported by the extremes – nationalists and unionists, in particular the military active components of the two communities.

The second set of explanations is the internal ones, and as the Thesis stresses, concentrated on the Catholic discrimination. The economic factors were very important in the development of the conflict, with an ongoing debate in the scientific community in this respect. The main cause of the conflict is viewed in the literature as the continuous antagonism between the majority formed by Protestants and the minority that is formed by Catholics. Although external explanations are important for the course of the conflict, the internal factors are, as Darby argues, “likely to be primary determinants of the duration and violence of the conflict”.²⁰

The causes of the conflict and of the on-going separation between the two communities are explained by O’Leary and McGarry in a very comprehensive depiction of the events:

¹⁸ David Smith and Gerald Chambers, *Inequality in Northern Ireland*, (Oxford University Press, 1991), 68

¹⁹ John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland. Broken Images*, (Blackwell Publishers 1995), 9

The present conflict is not an exotic rave from the grave of Europe's past, a 'replay' of twelfth-century feudal wars of conquest, or a 'repeat' for modern television audiences of seventeenth century wars of religion. The key ideas of nationalism and unionism, the central political doctrines that polarize the communities in contemporary Northern Ireland, were not present, and made no sense, in the twelfth or seventeenth centuries. There are 'historical' dimensions to the conflict, but many of its key characteristics and cause are modern rather than archaic, and can be seen as part of the processes of 'modernization' which have not stopped in the wider world – despite fashionable assertions to the contrary.²¹

The modern causes that the two authors talk about are to be found mostly in the twentieth century: the two communities “evolved into two mutual hostile camps who grudgingly accepted each other's existence but were willing to accept the worst of each other”²², communities that created their own myths in an attempt to apologize for any violent actions against the others. A society where a community feels threatened and discriminated will tend to develop forms of opposing the power. In this case the power took “discriminatory actions which included replacing the original proportional voting system for the Parliament of Northern Ireland with the plurality, ‘first past the post’ method”²³. This meant almost no legal possibility for the Catholics to have a saying in the political life of Northern Ireland.

The violent conflict that began in the early 1970's brought even more resentment between the communities, and after the implication of the British forces, the Catholic armed part of society began to see the British as equal enemies as well as the Protestant Northern Ireland population. According to unofficial data, over 3500 were killed from 1969 until 2001, “approximately 60% of the victims were killed by republicans, 30% by loyalists and 10% by the legitimate British, Irish and Northern Irish security forces”²⁴. The violent conflict has as effect on the long term, in the eyes of both Catholics and Protestants, a lack of trust that is to

²⁰ John Darby, *Northern Ireland. The Background to the conflict*, (Appletree Press, Syracuse University Press, 1983), Introduction

²¹ Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, 55

²² Sabine Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, (Longman, 1991), 35

²³ Brian Thompson, “Transcending Territory: Towards an Agreed Northern Ireland?”, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 6, (1999), 238

²⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Troubles#Casualties:_brief_summary

be seen from the political parties non-cooperation to consolidate the political system until the street tensions that still exist. Good examples of this street tension are the killings of the last 6 years due to the conflict of over 15 people, on different occasions.

2.2. Catholic discrimination as main cause of violent conflict

The term “hegemonic control” is used primarily by O’Leary and McGarry that consider the Protestant governance after 1920 a “particularist exercising regime (...) that had powers more extensive than those of British local government, including coercive powers, and was based upon ethnic domination and control, not simply upon political party-patronage”²⁵. The Protestant domination is to be observed from legal, economic and freedom of speech control. For example, *The Flag and Emblems Act* (1954) and *The Special Powers Act* (came into force in 1971) restricted Republican clubs and “any like organisation howsoever described”²⁶ that could have been identified as either promoting republican ideas or the Irish national state.

The beginning of the conflict in Northern Ireland is, generally, situated in 1968 when riots and public disturbance against the marches of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association began. The association had a peaceful platform, with clear political demands from an electoral reform to the unfair distribution of jobs and housing. Even if at the beginning the Prime Minister of Ireland agreed that reforms were necessary, under pressure from unionists, violence erupted in Northern Ireland. The important aspect that should be mentioned is that the Irish Republican Army began to represent for the Catholics not the offensive arm but, in their collective mental, “their legitimate defence force (...) the violence

²⁵ Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 133

²⁶ Brice Dickson, “The House of Lords and the Northern Ireland Conflict. A Sequel”, *Modern Law Review*, Volume 69, Issue 3, (2006), 383

drove the protestant population [and the Catholic one] into greater fear and more hard-line politics, encouraged the growth of paramilitary groups on both sides”²⁷.

Discrimination to which the Catholic minority was subject to in the researched period (1971-1972) can be divided into two categories: the political discrimination and the social and economic discrimination. The literature is divided on this topic, mainly arguing for a strong discrimination of Catholics like McCann²⁸ or Farell²⁹ or strongly denying it, like Walmsley³⁰. Yet these extremes should not be taken *per se* and the middle course, adopted by neither Unionist nor Nationalist authors, like Charles Brett, seems indeed to take no one’s position in particular. Brett argues that the Catholic’s discrimination “did not amount to oppression [yet] the Catholic minority received less than fair treatment from the Protestant majority”³¹.

The literature on this topic is vast, yet, as many authors acknowledge, John Darby’s analysis of the conflict, and its causes, makes one of the best compendiums of views. In 1976, Darby, admits that some of the charges against the Protestant rule are rather exaggerated, but he argues that the existing cases represent “a consistent and irrefutable pattern of deliberate discrimination against Catholics”³². Discrimination in politics, in Darby’s view, is also an important cause of the 1970’s conflict. The first automatic exclusion of Catholics from having a say in the decision-making system was the electoral system. The Protestant power took “discriminatory actions which included replacing the original proportional voting system for the Parliament of Northern Ireland with the plurality, ‘first past the post’ method”³³, that meant a Unionist government without any Catholic involvement.

²⁷ Sabine Wichert, 119

²⁸ Eamonn McCann, *War and the Irish Town*, (Harmondsworth Penguin, 1974)

²⁹ Michael Farell, *Northern Ireland: the Orange State*, (Pluto Press, 1976)

³⁰ A.J. Walmsley, quoted in John Whyte, “How much discrimination was there under the unionist regime, 1921-68”, in *Contemporary Irish Studies*, Tom Gallagher and James O’Connell, (Manchester University Press 1983)

³¹ Sir Charles Edward Bainbridge Brett, *Long Shadows Cast Before: Nine Lives in Ulster, 1625-1977*, (Bartholomew, 1978), 101

³² John Darby, 77

³³ Brian Thompson, 238

Discrimination of the Catholic minority is identifiable at two interconnected levels: political and socio-economic. Political discrimination is to be observed in the banning of Catholic organizations or meetings, censorship of media and Irish symbols and electoral practices. Considered the most important, and with the highest political and socio-economic effects, electoral discriminatory practices of the Protestant Governments is a largely debated topic. The three main issues regarding electoral discrimination are to be found in a controversial article of John Whyte: “constituency boundaries for Northern Ireland parliamentary elections were gerrymandered; the local governments franchise was unfairly weighted in favour of the unionists; and local government electoral boundaries were gerrymandered”³⁴.

Similar debates are to be found in the writings of McGarry and O’Leary, yet there is a difference in views even in the literature that acknowledges the existence of a discriminate political system in Northern Ireland. Whyte concludes that “the charges against parliamentary constituencies (...) have only slight validity [and] the peculiarities of local government franchise were also of little effect”³⁵. O’Leary and McGarry, like John Darby, present the image as unified, considering all allegations against the Stormont regime as being real: “plurality-rule and gerrymandering of constituency boundaries remained constant features of Northern Ireland local government for fifty years”³⁶.

Social inequalities made possible for the Unionist governments the guarantee that they will have domination (although 65% of population, the Protestants controlled more than 85% of local authorities). Because labour stratification remained constant in this period, the Catholics’ votes were not proportional with their numbers, and if their votes could count, then the cumulative number still would have been unjust – company directors had up to six votes. Due to the system “rich people can vote”, this pattern of franchise can be seen as being both

³⁴ John Whyte

³⁵ Ibid

religious and class-biased, since the Protestants were richer than the Catholics. An illustrative example³⁷ is given by O’Leary, when assessing the 1967 local government elections in Londonderry: although the Catholics were represented the clear majority in the region, the electoral system allowed the Protestants to get a majority of councillors. By applying the government franchise, the number of Catholic votes decreased, yet not substantially. The next step was gerrymandering the city as to produce three districts and concentrating the remaining 65% Catholics into one district.

The debate regarding whether inequality was mainly produced by discrimination (either deliberate or involuntary) is still present in the academic world. Conflict appeared and developed, according to Smith and Chambers “erupted because of inequality rather than nationalism or religiosity”³⁸, a view that most analysts – McGarry (1995), O’Leary (1996) – take as being the main (recent) cause of the conflict. Obviously that nationalist and even religious issues are significant, but the 1921s-1970s economical, social and political discrimination and inequality had a more powerful effect and triggered the escalation of violence after the 1970’s.

The literature regarding this topic is vast and rather contradictory. The statistical figures show undeniable inequality between the Catholic and the Protestant communities, in what regards electoral procedures (majority of Catholics in some cities denied rightful positions), economic and social stratification. Yet, correlating inequalities only with discrimination seems a dangerous task. More dangerous would be to put a stronger emphasis on other factors like lower education, unfavourable geographical conditions or birth-rate, and to deny the existence of discriminating factors. The conclusion of this sub-chapter is that

³⁶ Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 119-120

³⁷ Ibid, 121

³⁸ Ibid, 270

discrimination had a predominant role in the growing level of inequalities, and that other factors influenced, but in a smaller amount.

The main causes of the conflict, I argue, are mainly stemming from the significant economic, social and political gap that was widened in the researched period. The historical explanations of the conflict, beginning with the Ulster Plantation in the seventeenth century, or the religious/nationalist explanations are useful to portray the entire image of the Northern Irish conflict. Yet, in the end, I argue that the main causes are to be found in a more in depth analysis of the 1921-1972 period, and the discrimination and increase of inequalities for the Catholic minority.

Chapter 3. Consociational governance in Northern Ireland

Having in view more traditional and more recent causes of the conflict, the third chapter deals with the transition period between the majority-based governance to the consensus-based one, in Northern Ireland. The analysis will be focusing on the evolution of the political parties' positions regarding the matter of a consociational state. It will offer a historical perspective of the consociational attempts starting from the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, continuing with the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the Belfast Agreement of 1998 and finally with the St Andrews Agreement of 2006. The role that this chapter has is to assess the probability of the current consociational system, having in view previous attempts. Analyzing the causes of past failures will shed light on the possible causes of the present "attempt". Also, connected with the theoretical framework – Lijphart's consociational model and O'Leary (and others) interpretation – the consociational attempts tried in the last 30 years will be compared to see whether the theoretical framework was incorporated in the Agreements.

3.1. A bridge too far? The Sunningdale Agreement

The highest death toll is represented by the year 1972: "467 people were killed, 143 of them in explosions, and almost 5000 injured; there were 10,628 shooting incidents, 1382 explosions and 1932 armed robberies"³⁹. Direct Rule from London did not succeed to bring peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

The first attempt for consociational governance – power-sharing system, begins in 1974, when the new power-sharing executive began its sessions. Although the power sharing system seemed functional and the Sunningdale Agreement from December 1973

consociational, the power-sharing system did not function. One of the main problems of the Agreement was the issue of the Council of Ireland, which comprised 60 members, half from the Stormont Assembly, and half from the Irish Dáil Éireann, requiring unanimity. The Protestant representatives, in majority, saw the Council as a pre-Island-parliament, an attempt from the United Kingdom to “offer” Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. For the Protestants “it was easy to suspect a London-Dublin conspiracy which was aiming at an ultimately united Ireland”⁴⁰. As Paul Dixon argues, the Sunningdale Agreement and most of all the “Irish dimension” was “a bridge too far (...) Faulkner was pushed too hard in the negotiations at Sunningdale, the Irish Government did not deliver its share of the settlement and as a result the Northern Ireland Prime Minister was unable”⁴¹ to offer a feasible package to the unionists. As opinion polls, unionist opinion, newspapers articles and politician statements⁴², the power-sharing government might have functioned if the Irish dimension would have been lower.

The Unionists felt threatened, the Agreement and the Council of Ireland “strengthened the position of the anti-consociational unionists and led to their consolidation in a broad electoral front, the United Ulster Unionist Council”⁴³. Collapsed during the Unionist general strike in May, the consociational model of government “could not survive unionist outrage at the Sunningdale Agreement”⁴⁴ and resulted in a return to Direct Rule.

Another explanation for the failure of the Sunningdale based power-sharing government is to be found in the weakness of the Labor Government, a characteristic position of nationalists. This interpretation of the Sunningdale failure “blames the Conservatives for calling the February 1974 election at a vulnerable time for the executive, and the Labour

³⁹ Sabine Wichert, 162

⁴⁰ Ibid, 166

⁴¹ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland. The politics of war and peace*, (Palgrave, 2001), 155

⁴² Ibid, 154-155

⁴³ Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 199

Government for not using force to nip the UWC [Ulster Workers' Council] strike back in the bud and prevent the paramilitary intimidation which was the key to its success"⁴⁵. The UWC strike and the events that followed were viewed by London as attempts to undermine the Northern Irish constitutional framework:

“It is a deliberate and calculated attempt to use every undemocratic and unparliamentary means for the purpose of bringing down the whole constitution of Northern Ireland so as to set up there a sectarian and undemocratic state, from which one third of the people of Northern Ireland will be excluded.”⁴⁶

Besides the UWC strike and the Irish dimension problem, the internal and external political environment were unable to offer sufficient political support: the British government's policies were ambiguous. In what regards the internal aspect, the loyalist and republican paramilitaries were not invited to participate in the negotiations – therefore, their perceptions regarding the entire political system were even more anti-systemic. The Northern Irish political environment was not prepared for a consociational political system: the elites, forced or not into cooperation, should have been “capable of retaining support of their followers, and that their ethnic bloc is not divided in a way which inhibits compromise”⁴⁷. The parties' inability to form their communities into unified blocs, and their internal disruptiveness made the entire consociational process ineffective.

The failure of the first consociational attempt had two main effects: first of all “the British government, realizing the difficulties of imposing an ‘Irish dimension’, reestablished Direct Rule with the Northern Ireland Act”⁴⁸ in 1974. The other effect was a dual internal one: the majority of Protestants believed that they don't depend that much from the British politics and that they could become independent at some point; the SDLP realized after its

⁴⁴ Dermot Keogh, Michael H. Haltzel, ed., *Northern Ireland and the politics of reconciliation*, (Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993), 47

⁴⁵ Paul Dixon, 155

⁴⁶ Speech by Harold James Wilson, British Prime Minister, 25th of May 1974, Conflict Archive on the Internet, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/uwc/docs/hw25574.htm>

⁴⁷ Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, 197

⁴⁸ Sabine Wichert, 168

first national leadership experience that “Northern Ireland was a viable unit and power-sharing within it a desirable aim which perhaps could be achieved again in the future”⁴⁹.

Assessing the sustainability of the first consociational attempt requires the analysis of the actors’ positions and actions. In order to assess the current consociational political system, previous attempts offer illustrative examples of what should be done, and what not. The Sunningdale Agreement lacked cooperation between the main representatives of the two communities; the main actors of the conflict were not involved in negotiations or power-sharing arrangements; the British ambiguity during the entire process.

3.2. A framework for a solution rather than a solution? The Anglo-Irish Agreement⁵⁰

The Anglo-Irish Agreement, signed in 1985, like the previous Sunningdale and the next two agreements (Belfast and St Andrews) represents a British-Irish plan “to coerce unionists into accepting a power-sharing devolved government together with an Irish dimension [being] more a ‘framework’ for a solution rather than a solution”⁵¹. The Anglo-Irish Agreement “created inter-governmental institutions: a conference jointly chaired by the Northern Ireland Secretary and the Foreign Minister (...) it envisaged an Anglo-Irish parliamentary body”⁵² in an attempt to create a forum for discussion that could lead to cooperation between the two communities. The Agreement stated that the major decisions (status of the Northern Ireland political system or for that matter unification with the Republic of Ireland) could be taken by the majority of population – this did not come to the help of the Catholic minority that still had no possibility of attaining its purposes: be it

⁴⁹ Ibid, 168

⁵⁰ John Hume (SDLP politician) quoted in Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 238

⁵¹ Ibid, 238

⁵² Brian Thompson, 244

reforms in the electoral system or, the more extreme measures, separation from Northern Ireland and unification with Ireland.

The Agreement was viewed as “coercive consociationalism” lacking internal legitimacy, and real, effective cooperation among the Northern Irish parties. They lacked autonomy and the capacity to properly negotiate a political system that would be in the interests of the communities’ they represented.

Similar to the Sunningdale Agreement in what regards intra-community relations, the Anglo-Irish Agreement failed due to the lack of necessary intra and inter-relations in the Northern Ireland society. Just like in 1973-1974, “Northern Ireland’s political elites lacked the autonomy, confidence, and capacity to negotiate a political accommodation”⁵³ which the two communities would accept and follow. Yet, even if there existed more cohesion within the communities’ actors – especially the Protestant one, positions towards the AIA were negative. Unionists rejected Article 1 of the Agreement and condemned the following articles because of the Irish involvement in a national British affair. The power-sharing government, essence of consociationalism, was considered by Unionists as being a matter that cannot be negotiated.

3.3. Imperfect process in an imperfect peace. The Belfast Agreement⁵⁴

The Belfast Agreement, signed on the 10th of April 1998, was the result of several attempts to create a viable political power sharing system that could put an end to the violence. The Agreement is similar in many points to the first major proposal, the

⁵³ Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, 274

⁵⁴ The British Prime Minister Tony Blair quoted in Paul Sussman, “Breaking the cycle of violence”, CNN Special Coverage on the Northern Ireland Conflict, <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2000/n.ireland/overview.html>

Sunningdale Agreement (1973) that provided for a short period of consociational state during 1972-1974.

Donald Horowitz argues that the Belfast Agreement did not result from negotiations, but “was dictated by external powers (...) it is not a product a negotiation as it is the product of a planning process (...) and only the first strand was negotiated properly”⁵⁵. If one accepts Horowitz arguments, then an answer to the question why did the Belfast Agreement had few positive results, might appear. The fact that the Agreement was not the success that most people hoped for can be seen in Tony Blair’s 1999 speech at the House of Commons: the Agreement is “an imperfect process and an imperfect peace, but it is better than no process and no peace at all”⁵⁶. The British Prime Minister pointed out that it is better to have an imperfect peace system than no peace at all.

The positive side of the Belfast Agreement comes from the fact that it set the road for future productive negotiations and lead to the cease-fire announced by the IRA in 2005. The negative side comes from the fact that, as Ruane and Todd argue: “it was not the historic compromise – the balanced settlement that has been accepted once and for all; it is ambiguous, it rests on contradictory foundations and it is unstable”⁵⁷. This instability proved itself when the power sharing government and the Assembly failed to bring positive results, leading to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly on the 14th of October 2002.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed only after Sinn Féin was able to participate in the talks. The condition that the newly elected Labour Government of Great Britain put in order for Sinn Féin to join the discussions was assurance of a cease-fire. Yet, the second important Protestant party (Democratic Unionist Party) refused to participate in the talks. This, and other factors, led instead to “radically different interpretations of its provisions,

⁵⁵ Donald L. Horowitz, (2002), 199

⁵⁶ The British Prime Minister Tony Blair quoted in Paul Sussman

⁵⁷ Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, “The Politics of Transition? Explaining Political Crises in the Implementation of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 49, (2001), 938

together with delays and blockages on core issues”⁵⁸. As noted earlier in the Thesis, the Agreement is not a process of negotiations between the Northern Ireland parties, but a classical imposition of consociationalism.

3.3.1. The Agreement. Does it encompass the consensus model provisions?

The Belfast Agreement had two main characteristics: it was constructed to bring to an end the violent conflict and second to prevent such a conflict from ever appearing by creating a system that could satisfy both the Catholic and the Protestant communities. It aimed at stopping the conflict by the construction of bridges between the institutional systems of both communities, doing this by offering short and medium terms assurance for the communities.

It offers the Protestants majority the possibility of preserving the constitutional status of Northern Ireland “but provides elaborate safeguards for the rights and interests of the minority [Catholic community], guaranteeing proportionality of representation at all levels of decision-making”⁵⁹. The Protestants received the recognition of legitimacy in the eyes of Catholics (at least officially) by the cross-community/ majority rule of changing the status of Northern Ireland, and the Catholics “have been granted recognition of their aspiration to Irish unity and the right to pursue unity by peaceful means, as well as guarantees of equality within the new Northern institutions”⁶⁰ and connection with the Republic of Ireland. In this respect, it coincides with a consociational state, offering a large minority the possibility of representation in the institutional system that allows it to be actively involved in the decisions that affect it.

This Agreement, as criticised as it may be due to slow results, creates a structure that should be able to prevent future violent political manifestations. Both political entities

⁵⁸ Ibid, 923

⁵⁹ Ibid, 928

⁶⁰ Ibid, 936

(mainly DUP and Sinn Féin) are incorporated into a system that can offer stability if properly managed, and all parties demand for the cease of actual or possible violence. The consociational framework of the Belfast Agreement is characterised therefore by a structure and a legislation that “are designed to ensure that future changes in communal power resources do not produce new injustices and grievances”⁶¹. Although the text of the Agreement presents a specific consociational representation of power it is visible that it produced fewer developments than intended.

The theoretical classical consociational model expressed by Lijphart in 1968 seems to be in line with the Belfast Agreement. Its outcomes do not. Lijphart argues that for a consociational democracy to exist it has to be characterized “not only [by] a willingness on the parts of elites to cooperate but also a capability to solve the political problems of their countries”⁶². In the last three decades, the political elites were not able to cooperate or to take initiatives to resolve the conflicts among themselves in a proper manner.

Donald Horowitz considers the Belfast Agreement as being “strongly consociational” but finds certain leaks in it. He argues that it is consociational because “it provides for a grand coalition, power sharing by proportional inclusion of parties in the executive, a certain amount of cultural autonomy, and group vetoes to assure Protestant and Catholic communities”⁶³ that important acts are not taken with the exclusion of one of them. Yet, the classic consociational model is not respected to the full in the Belfast Agreement. This appears to be typical, because theory does not always apply to the complex aspects of reality

⁶¹ Ibid, 930

⁶² Arend Lijphart, “Consociational Democracy”, *World Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (1969), 218

⁶³ Donald L. Horowitz, (2002), 194

– “politicians under the pressure of events are capable of coming up with similar arrangements without any necessary recourse to an elaborate theoretical backdrop”⁶⁴.

Horowitz finds two flaws that for the Belfast Agreement: the first one relates with group vetoes and the second one to the electoral system. In what regards the group vetoes, the Good Friday Agreement in order “to ensure key decisions are taken on a cross-community basis [they require] parallel consent or a weighted majority”⁶⁵. These mean first of all that decisions have to be taken by majorities from both the communities and the second one 60% of the voting members and 40% of the delegations taken separately. The second drift of the Belfast Declaration from the consociational theory deals with the electoral system: the single transferal vote adopted does not represent the best solution. The consociational theory “prefer[s] list-system proportional representation, in order to attain thoroughly proportional legislative delegations of parties”⁶⁶ for the power to be divided in a proportional manner.

3.2.2. Follow-up

The lack of trust and history of cooperation between the two communities at a political level resulted in the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in the last four years. The outcomes of the Belfast Agreement, on a political scale are not as good as the supporters of this Agreement presented in 1998. Outcomes of the Agreement came later, and after strong external pressures: the cessation of fire and the IRA decommissioning in September 2005 and the late power-sharing government of 2007 after almost 9 years. The prime objective – that of removing the risk of violent out-breaks, was accomplished. The other one, the creation of a functional consociational state is yet to provide results, due to the recent establishment – 8th of May 2007.

⁶⁴ Paul Bew, “The Belfast Agreement of 1998: from ethnic democracy to a multicultural consociational settlement?”, in *A farewell to arms? From ‘long war’ to long peace in Northern Ireland*, Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, Fiona Stephen, ed., (Manchester University Press, 2000), 40

⁶⁵ Peace Agreements Digital Collection: Northern Ireland, United States Institute of Peace, <http://www.usip.org/library/pa/ni/ni3.html>

At social level, the debate in what regards the level of antagonism is dynamic. In a recent article, in *The New Statesman*, John Kampfner argues that there are two societies in Northern Ireland that have developed independently. The communities “have now separated. There are Catholic Protestant leisure centres, Catholic libraries and Protestant post offices (...) some 80 per cent of people now live in what are called single identity communities”⁶⁷. Donald Horowitz, in an article in 2002, considers on the contrary that Northern Ireland is not anymore a fragmented society: “its antagonisms have softened so significantly that each side’s fear of and antipathy towards the other side has diminished markedly”⁶⁸. Whether Kampfner or Horowitz are correct in their assessments of the situation is a matter of lively debated. The existent political system seems to be more stable than the 1974 one, with a lower level of social antagonism.

The Governments of Great Britain and Ireland, in an attempt to restore the political institutions of Northern Ireland that have been inactive since the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly on the 14th of October 2002, summoned the parties involved to negotiate an Agreement.

The main parties met in Scotland and signed the St Andrews Agreement on the 13th of October 2006, offering “both sides until the end of November to accept new terms of restoring a devolved government and parliament by next March – or face direct rules for a long time to come”⁶⁹. The St Andrews Agreement is similar with the Belfast Agreement in that it is not the result of hard exclusive negotiations between the Northern Ireland actors, but an imposed one. The results seem to be positive this time, having in view that although they

⁶⁶ Donald L. Horowitz, (2002), 195

⁶⁷ John Kampfner, “Divided in peace”, *The New Statesman*, 20th of November 2006, <http://www.newstatesman.com/200611200028>

⁶⁸ Donald L. Horowitz, (2002), 199

⁶⁹ John Kampfner

cannot get along on many issues, the Protestants and Catholics agree that home rule from Westminster is not an option. The Agreement has

...a fixed timetable for the implementation [and will represent a last opportunity for the Northern Ireland parties to lead the reform process] in the event of failure to reach agreement by the 24 November we [Britain and Ireland] proceed on the basis of the new British Irish partnership to implement the Belfast Agreement⁷⁰.

The Assembly, a result of the Belfast Agreement is the typical example of a consociational institution that should provide equal representation in the decision-making process for all representatives of the Northern Ireland community. The beginning of January 2007, after nearly 10 years since the Belfast Agreement, brought unrest among the civil society, in Northern Ireland, Britain and Ireland. In a recent article in the Irish Times, Gerry Moriarty sees Tony Blair's intervention in the Assemblies blockage as an "attempt to prevent collapse of the political process in the North"⁷¹.

The St Andrews Agreement of 2006, provided for a strict time-table that resulted in the positive results of the 7th of March elections for the Stormont regime. What makes the St Andrews Agreement different from all the others is the strict "deadline policy" that Tony Blair, in cooperation with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland Bertie Ahern, opted for. These dead-lines forced the political parties to cooperate and most of all to resolve their internal conflicts as to provide with the necessary positions. The first deadline, set for the 10th of November 2006 stated that "we [United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland] have set out a fixed timetable for the implementation of this agreement (...) and have asked the parties, having consulted their members, to confirm their acceptance by the 10 November"⁷². Although the two main parties, DUP and Sinn Féin, had vague statements, not fully accepting or denying the entire Agreement, their positions were considered acceptable to continue with

⁷⁰ The St Andrew Agreement, <http://www.standrewsagreement.org/>

⁷¹ Gerry Moriarty, "Adams now faces crucial call on policing ardheis", *The Irish Times*, (5th of January 2007), <http://irishtimes.newspaperdirect.com/epaper/viewer.aspx>

⁷² The St Andrew Agreement

the implementation of the Agreement's provisions. This deadline, although seemingly unimportant, represents the first sign of what was to become a fragile, yet stable, cooperation between the parties. Four days after the signing of the Agreement, on the 17th of October, the DUP had strong internal problems in what regards entering government with Sinn Féin – the DUP “has been unwilling to go into government with Sinn Féin [viewing] the party's transformation from political wing of an armed movement - the IRA - to a peaceful, democratic political party as incomplete”⁷³.

The existing consociational system and its sustainability will be analyzed in the following chapter, with an emphasis on present incentives for the internal actors, and the external actors' interests in the stability of the Northern Ireland political system.

⁷³ Paul Owen, “What is the St Andrews agreement?”, *The Guardian*, (17th of October 2006), <http://politics.guardian.co.uk/northernirelandassembly/story/0,,1923847,00.html>

Chapter 4. Political sustainability of consociational governance in Northern Ireland

Political and institutional sustainability of the consociational governance in Northern Ireland, as seen in the previous chapter, has a history of failed attempts. Several causes can be identified: these Agreements were not in fact Agreements, but they were imposed by Great Britain (and Ireland); the lack of political will among the Northern Irish parties; social, economic and contextual causes. Having in view the recent results of the 2007 Northern Irish elections, the Thesis will use a cost-benefit model to analyze the choices that the political parties and external actors have: this kind of analysis should show that the two main parties of the Northern Ireland Assembly (the Democrat Unionist Party and Sinn Féin) will both win if they cooperate. The cost-benefit analysis will also show that the present incentives are obviously bigger than in previous years, and that this should make the entire political system functional.

The chapter is divided into two parts, dealing with the two types of actors that are involved in the political process in the Northern Ireland peace-process and consociational building and consolidation. The first type of actor is the internal one, and because this chapter deals with the political sustainability of the consociational model of governance, societal actors position and actions in this direction will be dealt with in the next chapter. The second type of actor, involved in the Northern Ireland matter, regards the external pressures applied to the internal actors. The influence that these actors had and continue to have is diverse, starting from concrete legal actions from the United Kingdom (and the Republic of Ireland), continuing with strong political pressures from the United States, and finally with the European Union's indirect influence on the matter.

4.1. Northern Ireland Parties. Cost and benefit analysis

Transformed from a majority rule to a PR/power sharing one, the Northern Irish political system has witnessed large scale changes in the parties' positions and importance. The 1998 Belfast Agreement began a long road for the construction of an effective consociational state, which had as an immediate effect a power sharing government formed by the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democrat Liberal Party, the Democrat Unionist Party and Sinn Féin. This government did not last, partially because of tensions between the Unionists and Sinn Féin, partially because of internal conflicts and differences of opinions within government parties, and, not less important, the failure of Sinn Féin (and not only) to put enough pressure on the Irish Republican Army for the re-affirmation of an official ceasefire and decommissioning.

4.1.1. Northern Ireland's "consociational party system"

How does the consociational system affect voting behavior and parties' behavior after 1998? As the last chapter will stress, the model pro-power-sharing that the four representative parties (over 86% of votes) present should lead in given time at a decrease in the level of antagonism, and therefore to the elimination or reduction to low of risks regarding future conflicts.

The Northern Irish party system is characterized by a clear ethnic competition. Being an ethnic dual party system, Northern Ireland presents "fierce party competition (...) within the context of an overall bipolar constitutional cleavage [with] parties that seek only the support of the electorate on 'their side'"⁷⁴. In classical ethnic party systems, within a bloc there are two types of phenomena: either, as Mitchell argued, "fierce" competition among

parties for the highest number of votes within their community; either common position/coalitions in order to prevent the “others” to win a better position. Due to the fact that the Northern Ireland ethnic party system is to be found in a consociational system, some of the theories of ethnic party are not applicable. Within the power-sharing government, competition and political conflict should not be a characteristic: cross-community relations need to be improved, and cooperation and consensus at political level to become a rule.

The Northern Ireland Executive is a coalition cabinet formed by the representatives of the overwhelming majority resulted from the March 2007 elections. Therefore, institutional sustainability is possible if the heads of parties first of all are representative for their parties (unified parties); and second of all, if the four parties’ representatives in the Executive promote a consensus policy. Yet, the Assembly is still divided on a cleavage basis. What should represent a model for the Northern Irish communities, in cross-community relations, is an Assembly in which its members are seated in three distinctive groups: nationalist, unionist and other. As O’Leary argues, “Lijpharts’s injunctions in favor of full self-determination rather than pre-determination were violated”⁷⁵. Also, this raises problems for cross-community parties like the Alliance Party for Northern Ireland or Woman’s Coalition (in 1998 elections).

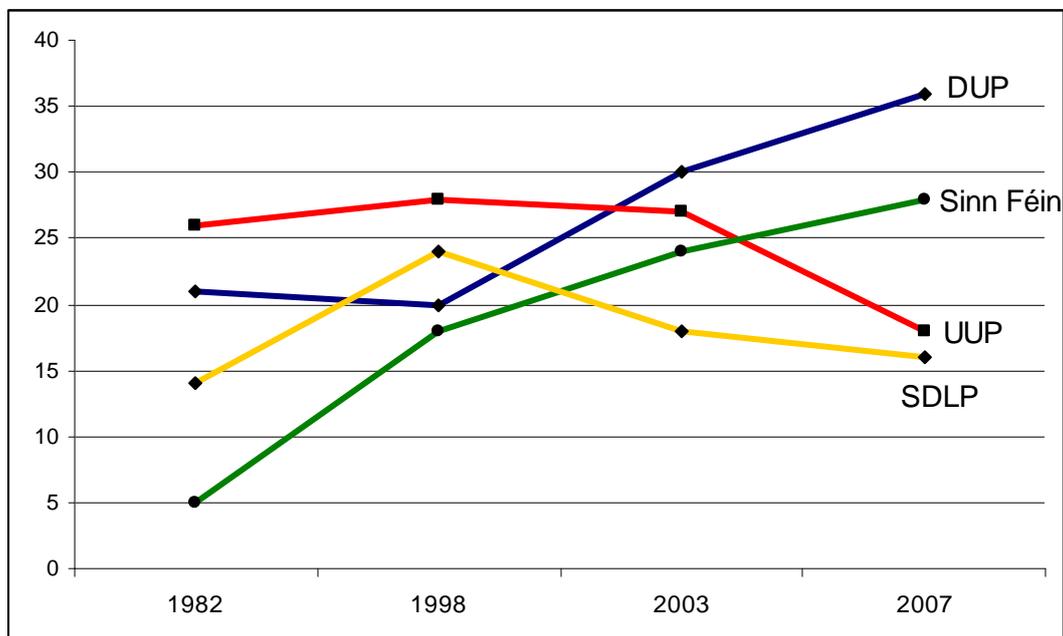
One of the preconditions for consociationalism to be functional is that the constitutive communities are able to talk with one voice. This was not, and is still not the case in Northern Ireland. Also, on a political level, even if representing the same community, the parties are unable to designate a single representative. Therefore, one of the causes of possible political instability comes from complications in the decision-making process that might be hindered by political competition from “the same side”.

⁷⁴ Paul Mitchell, “Transcending an Ethnic Party System? The Impact of Consociational Governance in Electoral Dynamics and the Party System”, in *Aspects of the Belfast Agreement*, Rick Wilford, ed., (Oxford University Press, 2001), 28-29

⁷⁵ Brendan O’Leary, “The Agreement: Results and Prospects”, *Ibid*, 50

The Northern Irish political scene, after a failed government that had as basis two moderate parties – the UUP and the SDLP – was changed in the last years. Why did the electorate change position from voting parties that are more moderate in the previous years to voting for parties that are viewed as extreme? One explanation is to be found in the inability of UUP and SDLP to have a strong and cohesive voice for their communities. Another explanation for the 7th of March results is to be found in the difference between the leaders of the parties: Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams represent strong voices in the Northern Ireland political scene, viewed as reliable by each community. The evolution of the four parties, from the 1982 elections is interesting in what regards the downfall of UUP and SDLP, while their counterparts, the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, have had constant and increase in votes, as Chart 1 shows:

Chart 1. Party seats evolution in the Northern Ireland Assembly (1982-2007)



Source: on the basis of data provided by <http://www.ark.ac.uk/elections>

4.1.2. Northern Irish parties

Cooperation between the main parties (in this case the DUP and Sinn Féin) and recognition of each one's rightful position in the power-sharing government is essential for the implementation of a consociational state, and especially after the government is formed. The political game continued even during Blair's dead-line policy, when DUP said it would not enter government unless circumstances were not proper⁷⁶. The deadline stated that "following endorsement of the St Andrews Agreement by the parties the Assembly will meet to nominate the First and Deputy First Minister on 24 November"⁷⁷. There could be two explanations for the DUP statements: the first one, of internal origin, refers to the DUP internal conflicts – many of the regional leaders did not accept going into governance with Sinn Féin or to accept imposed regulations to the matter. The second one can be that the DUP tried to put pressure on Sinn Féin, and to gain a higher position both in inter-party and intra-party negotiations and in the eyes of the Protestant public opinion.

The two main parties' positions during the entire "deadline period" were similar – cautious. After decades of antagonism, political fights, extreme violence, the representatives (including also UUP and SDLP) of the two communities' level of uncertainty regarding "the other's" position was high. This can be observed in the statements of both parties. Sinn Féin, for example, was ready to take the risk and deny the possibility for the implementation of the Agreement if conditions were not in its favor. On the 28th of January 2007, a special meeting

⁷⁶ At the Assembly meeting on 24 November, Ian Paisley, the DUP leader said that "circumstances have not been reached that there can be a nomination or a designation this day [and] if and when commitments are delivered, the DUP would enter government.", "Paisley will accept nomination", BBC News, Friday, 24 November 2006 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6181370.stm

⁷⁷ St Andrews Agreement,

of Sinn Féin (Ard Fheis) mandated the Ard Chomhairle (National Executive) to implement motion voted that day that accepted the Agreement's provisions :

...only when the power-sharing institutions are established and when the Ard Chomhairle is satisfied that the policing and justice, powers will be transferred. Or if this does not happen within the St Andrews timeframe, only when acceptable new partnership arrangements to implement the Good Friday Agreement are in place.⁷⁸

The game theory analysis is based on the relations between internal and external actors that are involved in the region. For this, I have selected only two parties from Northern Ireland, DUP and Sinn Féin, not only because these are the most important parties (as seen from the 7th of March election results) but also because the external actors considered them as the main representatives of the Catholic and Protestant communities. Another motive for which these two parties were selected in the analysis is because it would have been impractical to construct a game with two actors like the Protestant political representatives and the Catholic ones, because, as argued before, the two sides should be taken into analysis separately. Including UUP and SDLP in the game would have led to the same results, because the incentives are roughly the same. The only difference by replacing DUP with UUP, and Sinn Féin with SDLP, would be in the fact that the two parties were the basis of the previous power-sharing government.

The game theory approach might be considered too rigid in a political system so entrenched in political, cultural and most off all interest characteristics. Yet, in the present consociational system, the main actors, the parties, have a common goal: reduce instability, promote an image of durability and eliminate political and economic uncertainties. In case of non-cooperation all the parties, as representatives of their communities, will lose. Therefore, not questioning the importance of non-material factors, a game theory approach provides positive results for the political sustainability.

⁷⁸Motion passed by the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis (28th January 2007), <http://www.sinnfeinonline.com/policies>

For the parties involved a cost-benefit analysis of the entire “consocialization process” of Northern Ireland, leads to several results, as the table below shows:

Table 1

		DUP	
		Cooperate	Defect
Sinn Féin	Cooperate	+M, +A, +P -Pr _{SF} , -Pr _{DUP}	+Pr _{DUP} -M, -A, -P
	Defect	+Pr _{SF} , -M, -A, -P	+Pr _{SF} , -M, -A, -P

M (Money) = financial package for the Northern Irish Government for ten years worth £50 billion, of which for the next four years the British Government commits to offer £35 billion in funding. This financial package will be granted only if the power sharing system is functional and all deadlines are respected accordingly.⁷⁹

A (Autonomy) = no Direct Rule from Westminster

P (Power) = internal power among the political system, as the most important parties, both as a result of elections, but also due to external recognition.

Pr (Pride) = to not cooperate with the “other side” would mean to preserve decades of antagonism between the two communities. I have coded this as “pride”, because that would be the only thing that the parties could win – the pride that they did not cooperate with the “enemies”. Pr_{SF} = non-feasible terms of agreements. Pr_{DUP} = non-cooperation issues with Sinn Féin (DUP opposed the Belfast Agreement)

The costs and benefit model in Table 1 shows that the two main parties should normally cooperate, having in view the winnings. Yet, these kind of winning strategies were present from 1998 in the Belfast Agreement. What makes this case seem more appropriate to be a success is the fact that all conditions are now fulfilled: in return for providing positive results and a sustainable consociational governance, Northern Ireland will receive a financial package for the next four years of £35 billion. Also, the political parties will consolidate their position within the Northern Ireland political system, and will be regarded as “good actors” by London, Dublin and Washington, as the parties that were able to provide the necessary political environment for the softening of centuries’ of antagonism. The government of 2002 failed because of scandals over Sinn Féin spying activities in the Assembly. Political instability in power-sharing governments is often, and that was what happened in the previous consociational government. Although more stable, and with positive signals of

⁷⁹ Treasury of the United Kingdom, http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/newsroom_and_speeches/press/2006/press_82_06.cfm

cooperation from the constitutive parties, the present power-sharing system is inherently subject to political instability.

Another way to portray the political system (if we take into account only DUP and Sinn Féin), is giving action alternatives a preference top, as follows:

Table 2

		DUP	
		Cooperate	Defect
Sinn Féin	Cooperate	3 or 2, 2	1, 1
	Defect	1, 1	1, 1

DUP

3 (best alternative) = MAP (money, autonomy, power – as described earlier), plus G_{SF}, that would be coded as a government that would not include Sinn Féin;

2 (second best alternative) = MAP, plus Sinn Féin in the government;

1 (negative alternative – defect) = a choice that would be made in view of possible serious political conflict within the power-sharing government.

Sinn Féin

3 = MAP plus a strong position in the Government and in the Assembly;

2 = MAP plus with a relatively important position within the Government and in the Assembly;

1 = a choice that would be made in view of possible serious political conflict within the power-sharing government.

The second table shows, more clearly, that the two parties’ strategies should be directed towards cooperation. The most important aspect of political sustainability in Northern Ireland is the behavior of actors, in view of incentives and pressure applied by outer and internal actors. If an actor chooses to defect, and leave the political system, then the other actor/s will lose, due to the large percentage that these two parties obtained in the March elections.

For Sinn Féin, the best possible and realistic scenario would be that in which a power-sharing coalition exists, and in which the party has enough power to persuade the “opposing-allied” parties to act accordingly to its interests. Ideal for Sinn Féin would be that it represented the entire Catholic community, without having to share representational power with SDLP – this is a pure theoretical model of party competition, officially, Sinn Féin doesn’t have a clear negative position towards SDLP. Therefore, through cooperation Sinn

Féin is able to achieve the first or the second best alternative (3/2). The relatively strong position that the party has in the power-sharing government and in the Assembly— gained by the election results – offers enough negotiating power in future political games with DUP, UUP and even SDLP. Choosing the defect option is classified as a third option, and considered a negative one, having in view the consequences: return to Direct Rule from London, including political and financial control. Also, choosing to withdraw from government (even in the case of extreme events) would represent a downfall in the eyes of the electorate, and probably result in a negative reaction from London.

The Democratic Unionist Party alternatives are more limited than Sinn Féin's. The best alternative for DUP (a party that opposed the Good Friday Agreement and power-sharing system) would be a government (even a power-sharing one) without the participation of Sinn Féin. Such an alternative seems improbable at this point, considering the nature of the consociational system in Northern Ireland, the high support that Sinn Féin enjoys (26,16%) and the external actors' position. Therefore the best alternative, that would include the financial package, Northern Ireland's autonomy from London and political recognition (coded as MAP), is the second one (2): the present consociational system, that includes also the second biggest party in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin.

As presented in Table 2, future choices of the two parties are limited to cooperation, that if one of the parties the decision to defect from the system (case in which all parties lose). Political sustainability of consociational governance is divided into two directions: the internal interactions between actors, and the level of external pressure (direct or indirect) as, the next subchapter presents.

Interaction between the four main parties of Northern Ireland, since the power-sharing government was established, can be characterized by cooperation and focus on local and regional problems. Yet, the question of whether the system will fail or not is present. As

Gareth Gordon argues in a recent article, the answer is no: “The smart money says it won't. Mr. Paisley has rarely looked happier - or more at ease with his public self. And that goes for Mr. McGuinness too”⁸⁰. A recent example of possible political confrontation comes from the first defeat of a Sinn Féin motion supporting a single equality bill to bring together different legislation outlawing discrimination.⁸¹ In a fragile political system like Northern Ireland, political crisis are possible. The problem appears from the fact that it is not a classical political system, but one build on decades of violent conflict and centuries of antagonism.

Recent events show that cooperation initiatives exists, between the parties. On May 29th 2007, Sinn Féin was set to launch a common project, aimed at improving political and social relations between the communities, and between the parties. Sinn Féin Foyle MLA and Head of Unionist Engagement, Martina Anderson argued that

As republicans we have a view of the kind of Ireland that we would like established but there is an appetite out there for debate. I think the charter [Charter for Unionist Engagement] is a tool for engagement and it will add to the worthwhile and meaningful engagement that is already happening across the north. (...) The development of our unionist engagement is about trying to build up a better understanding of people from the different parts of our community and their experiences. It is a two-way street and a slow process but there is significant engagement between ourselves and people right throughout the Protestant, unionist, and loyalist community.⁸²

This kind of initiatives, coming from a party considered extremist by many, can only represent positive signals of a political society that tries to achieve some sense of cooperation, through compromise and mutual understanding. Also, by recognizing different types of communities, Protestants, Unionists or Loyalists, the Sinn Féin press statement stresses, indirectly, the importance of religious, cultural and political diversity in Northern Ireland. This sort of initiatives can have positive effects only if the respondents – in the case the

80 Gareth Gordon, “Not that much happening 'on the hill'”, (18th of May 2007), BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6669577.stm

81 Unionists defeat equality motion, (22nd of May 2007), BBC News, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/6680381.stm

Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities – have common perceptions of what should be done; and if they are often and increasing in the level of cooperation and communication.

4.2. External actors. Influence and involvement

External actors, as stated earlier, represent crucial factors in the development of the modern consociational systems. In the case of Northern Ireland, this can be seen through the entire process of “accommodation”. The importance of external actors comes from the fact that all consociational exercises in Northern Ireland up to this point were not constructed at a “indoor level”, but, as the literature presents (Horowitz, O’Leary, McGarry), forced upon by external actors. Their position and actions constituted crucial building blocks for the consociation political present, and will remain important in the future – political and legal sanctions; and financial pressures.

4.2.1. The United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Different interests, different engagement, common solutions

Regarded as an internal problem of the United Kingdom, the Northern Ireland conflict resolution depended greatly on the extent to which the British Government’s policies on the matter were applied. These policies varied both in effects and in power. As presented in the third chapter, the UK preference for consociational system is to be seen from the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. It “attempted to bring Northern Ireland up to British standards of democracy in the hope that this would result in the resolution of the conflict”⁸². Britain’s lack of political preparation for a consociational system, and a security strategy that proved

⁸² Martina Anderson, Sinn Féin Foyle MLA and Head of Unionist Engagement, quoted in Victoria O’Hara’s “Sinn Féin launches bid to reach out to unionists”, *The Belfast Telegraph*, (29th of May 2007), <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/article2591974.ece>

⁸³ Paul Dixon, 282

inefficient are among the reasons not only for the ending of the power-sharing government, but also for the continuation of the conflict.

The British government, brokering the peace-process as the main actor, had to convince both “sides” of the need for a compromise. While trying to reach an equilibrium between unionists and nationalists political forces, it also had to encourage communication between paramilitary groups and the actors involved.

In order to achieve some kind of balance between nationalist and unionist claims, British Governments reassure nationalists (and even republicans) that they are ‘neutral’, Irish unity can be achieved by consent and that they will be treated fairly in any peace process. At the same time the British Governments must also reassure unionists of their place within the Union by championing their cause and opposing Irish unity without the consent of majority in Northern Ireland.⁸⁴

To satisfy all parties involved, the British Government had to identify middle grounds for reaching consensus. Similar with the fall of the Sunningdale based Government, the 1998 Belfast Agreement based one failed as well, due to some similar causes. In 1974, the British Government imposed Direct Rule, in order to stabilize the region and eliminate conflict and sources of conflict. The much lower violence level at the beginning of 2000s (among other differences), changed the strategy, in that it provided both incentives for the actors involved, but also more threats to their interests, in the case of non-cooperation. Direct Rule from London, from 2007 onwards, would have meant a defeat of Northern Irish parties’ positions. The British and Irish governments’ strategy in this case was common and lead to positive results.

The evolution of conflict resolution was influenced by the relation between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Britain needed Ireland involved for several reasons: regional and international support; local support from the “Irish side” of the matter in Northern Ireland, and also to make a political statement, mainly directed towards the United States, that argued for the matter to be resolved by Britain and Ireland, as capable actors.

Although with a large influence in the peace-process through the International Body formed or official and unofficial political lobby, the United States' recent influence and involvement in the Northern Ireland consociational system was limited. As the next sub-chapter stresses, the US limited its actions to conflict and not post-conflict settlements.

For the Republic of Ireland being part of the conflict resolution and the construction of a sustainable consociational system represented a recognition of its importance in the region, and also a method of promoting its policies and interests in Northern Ireland.

Although having recent common strategies, the British and Irish governments' positions throughout the peace-process were different, not regarding the general framework, but in what regards the form and the manner of negotiating. Like the US government (strongly influenced by the Irish-American lobby), the Irish government "had to publicly fulfil its role in the 'pan-nationalist front' and take the nationalist part in disputes with the British, thereby demonstrating to republicans the effectiveness of the unarmed struggle"⁸⁵.

The result of British and Irish policies in what regards negotiation patters is important. The 1973 based power-sharing government did not have the participation of paramilitaries in negotiations. That is considered as one of the main causes of its failure. Yet, by inviting (and stressing the need for paramilitary's representatives of political representatives – Sinn Féin) them to actively participate in the talks, Britain "has recognized, and to some extent accommodated, the power of street politics and violence [risking] the delegitimization of democratic politics through this process"⁸⁶.

In a interest and influence analysis, one must also present the negative effects of these. Although with a clear intent for a stable region and a settlement of the conflict in sustainable terms, the British (and Irish) government policies have showed their power limits in imposing

⁸⁴ Ibid, 284

⁸⁵ Ibid, 291

⁸⁶

consociationalism. Yet, the new dead-line politics started from the end of 2006, proved that “coercive consociationalism” can provide with positive results, and most of all sustainable.

4.2.2. The United States

Political pressure coming from the United States for the implementation of solutions to the Northern Ireland conflict can be divided in two periods: prior to Clinton and after Clinton: “prior to the Clinton Presidency, American involvement in the conflict was largely reactive”⁸⁷. The US attitude towards the conflict was fundamentally not against the United Kingdom – “Washington shunned involvement in a conflict which was generally viewed as obscure, ancient and probably intractable”⁸⁸, yet sometimes, in indirect forms it stated disapproval towards the British government – “in 1979 the State Department suspended the sale of handguns to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)”⁸⁹ due to scandals of RUC’s interrogation measures.

As the history of US involvement in the conflict shows, the main shifts in position come from the leaders’ changes, in the United States and Britain. The UK’s position to the entire US involvement in the peace-process changed “following Tony Blair’s position (...) in stark contrast to the John Major [and Thatcher] years, it [Clinton] was now actually welcomed by London”⁹⁰. The importance of leaders is clearly viewed in the Clinton period, when the US changed its position from a reactive to a proactive country. Clinton’s activism comes from several reasons: personal interest in the region, “victory” over the State Department for the White House in what regards European politics, the new American internationalism of peace or Clinton’s electoral campaign promises of more involvement in the peace process. Wanting to become involved in the process, the United States’ pressure was directed both towards London and Belfast. As Robert Fisk argues, US interventions in

⁸⁷ Adrian Guelke, “International Dimensions” in Rick Wilford, 254

⁸⁸ John Dumbrell, “Hope and history: the US and peace in Northern Ireland” in Michael Cox, 215

⁸⁹ Rick Wilford, 254-253

the Northern Ireland peace-process were “calculated to produce a winner, a side with whom Washington feels comfortable, an ally upon which can depend”⁹¹.

As argued by David Trimble and John Drumbrell⁹², there is little evidence of a united Irish America. Divided also on sectarian lines⁹³, the Irish Americans represent still an important (even crucial) electorate pull in presidential elections. Also, through numerous organizations, the Irish-American community represented an important influential factor for the United States position towards the region – Irish Northern Aid (NORAID-1970), Irish National Caucus (INC-1974) or Americans for a New Irish Agenda (ANIA-1992).

The US involvement in the peace-process – besides the informal lobby or the Irish-American NGOs assisting victims and in the same time the IRA – is considered to be highly significant. In an era of US hegemony, and US-led democratization and peace development, the Northern Ireland matter proved in the end to have a successful turnout. Leading the International Body (George Mitchell, former Democrat Senator) that had as task to present solutions, the US was directly involved in the peace-process. The Irish-American lobby proved efficient in providing easy ways out for the republican movement, in cases of non-compliance (e.g. the unwillingness of IRA decommission in 1995). Also, the US position towards the IRA was a non-penalty one – “rewards for positive actions by the republican movement have formed a more important element of American engagement in the peace-process than the imposition of penalties for negative ones”⁹⁴.

The 1998 Belfast Agreement, a “pact brokered with U.S. assistance”⁹⁵, represented the culmination of US involvement in the Northern Ireland conflict resolution. Brokering

⁹⁰ John Dumbrell, 218

⁹¹ Robert Fisk, “No Use Relying on Uncle Bill”, *Fortnight*, no. 346, (1996), 19

⁹² John Dumbrell, 219

⁹³ In 1993-1994, House of Representatives Speaker Tom Foley, an important Irish origin American politician opposed the granting of visa for Gerry Adams.

⁹⁴ Adrian Guelke, 255

⁹⁵ Stephen Kaufman, “Convening of Northern Ireland Assembly an Important Moment”, US Embassy in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, (8th of May 2007), <http://london.usembassy.gov/ni218.html>

peace was easier for the US than for the United Kingdom, partially because of the American power status, but also because of the Catholic image regarding the American position, in contrast to the British one.

The Bush administration has a lesser influence in what regards the present political system. There are two possible explanations for this: one would be the growing level of UK-Irish involvement in the consociational process building; the other one comes from the fact that the US' interest in the region was limited to creating an area of peace and stability, officially achieved in 2005, with the IRA decommissioning. Nevertheless, the US position to the matter is active, and important. In a characteristic post-9/11US discourse, Senator Kennedy stated at the 8th of May the American support and consideration for the positive results obtained, emphasizing the role of model that Northern Ireland could play in the world: Northern Ireland is “an extraordinary example (...) that you can disband militias and private armies, and put away the bomb and bullet”⁹⁶.

The examples that the US intervention in the peace-process, offer clear evidence that the modern thesis of consociationalism is a valuable one. Modern consociations are based on external actors' positions to the relative conflict or segregation level, and their actions to eliminate or prevent any sources of conflict. The role that the United States took in the peace-process in Northern Ireland demonstrates not only the highly debated matter of US intervention in international affairs, but also the level that this intervention can have, when discussing about diplomatic interventions. The role of the United States was therefore, dual: it was important because it was viewed by the Catholics as an outside actor that considered their position as important and justified; it was acceptable because the entire peace-process was mastered by outside actors – therefore, not British.

⁹⁶ Senator Edward Kennedy, Ibid

4.2.3. The European Union

The presence of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in the European Union (the European Communities at that time) from 1973 provided with a discussion forum for stabilizing the Northern Ireland region. Informal and formal meetings between the two heads of Governments led in 1985 to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Being a EU region, Northern Ireland's political and social stability became very important for the EU institutions that started developing interest and policy approach towards it. The European Union's direct role in the Northern Ireland conflict is limited. What is important is the development of cross-border mobilisation, projects that made the political actors cooperate, both amongst themselves but also with Ireland. Through its functional competences in agriculture, single market and regional policy, the EU had an indirect role in political cooperation, especially at local level among the two communities.

The Northern Ireland parties' position towards the European Union is diverse: "nationalist opinion is generally supportive of European integration, whereas unionist opinion is more sceptical"⁹⁷, accordingly to British position. Therefore, compromises that involved the European Union were almost impossible to implement: a failed project of SDLP in 1992 proves that. The proposal suggested that the government of Northern Ireland should be comprised by a commission of six persons, "comprising three members directly elected by the people of Northern Ireland, two members appointed by the British and Irish Governments, and the last appointed by the European Commission"⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ Brigid Laffan, *Ireland, Britain, Northern Ireland and the European Dimension*, (Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin, 2003), 7

⁹⁸ Rick Wilford, 258

The European Union's position towards the Northern Ireland conflict is similar in the fact that it is diverse as well: the European Commission and the Council had little or no implication in the conflict, the European Parliament

...became increasingly involved in debating the political dimensions of the conflict (...) commissioning of a report on Northern Ireland by the Political Affairs Committee of the parliament [being] extremely controversial because it raised questions about the blurring of the boundary between what could be considered as the internal affairs of a member state and the competence of the union.⁹⁹

Although not the main factor in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the EU, through the voice of the European Parliament, put pressure on the two countries, and offered a forum of discussion and negotiations. Responding actively to the AIA, the European Union created the Northern Ireland Committee, and as a result of the 1994 cease-fires, the Commission established the Commission Task Force. The importance of this reaction comes from the final result of the EU's involvement in the conflict resolution – the Peace and Reconciliation Fund. As stated earlier, the European Union's direct involvement in the peace process is seen as insignificant. Yet, the indirect involvement created institutions in which cooperation between the Northern Ireland actors was compulsory:

The Peace and Reconciliation Fund (PRF) led to the establishment of new mechanisms of cooperation that enabled people to see the potential for cooperation, creating political space for new developments. It forced politicians and wider civil society groups to take on the responsibility for resource allocation. At local level there were funding mechanisms which push the political parties towards agreement on resource allocation which in turn promotes effective working mechanism.¹⁰⁰

The European Union's influence in the peace process is not insignificant. Internal conflicts within its borders affect the European Union's regional policies, internal market and other policies. Therefore, bearing in mind the sovereignty and the subsidiarity principles, the EU should become an important actor in resolving its internal problems.

⁹⁹ Brigid Laffan, 9

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 11

Chapter 5. Social sustainability of consociational governance in Northern Ireland

The hypothesis continues in the fifth chapter: if the consociational governance provides with positive results, so if the system is politically sustainable, then, the social antagonisms will be softened. The perceived sustainability matter is of the utmost importance, for both politics and society. If political elites cooperate and also the two communities cooperate, then the consociational governance is sustainable. Previous attempts of creating consociational governance in Northern Ireland have failed in the political arena, due to several causes, explained previously. What constitutes the main issue is not only the political cooperation. The conflict that still exists between the communities needs to be addressed properly, by political elites and from within the communities themselves.

The more likely scenario in Northern Ireland seems to be: political elite cooperate (that is what is happening at this moment) and the two communities still have serious problems in cooperation. The literature concerning this topic is divided in two main perceptions of Catholic-Protestant relations: fragmentation and isolation vs. softening antagonisms. The softening antagonisms that Horowitz talks about (in a previous chapter) exist at a higher level, yet at the base level, and especially in several regions around Belfast and in the Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh, Londonderry County Borough, parts of Londonderry and Armagh, these are still present. This counties were the subject of the highest level of local and regional discrimination, “all the accusations of gerrymandering, practically all the complaints about housing and regional policy, and a disproportionate amount of the charges about public and private employment”¹⁰¹ coming from this region of Northern Ireland.

¹⁰¹ John Whyte, in Tom Gallagher

The chapter will focus on describing, on the basis of existing literature and personal observation in Belfast, the nature of social antagonism in Northern Ireland. The second part of the chapter focuses on the internal initiatives for the improvement of cross-community relations, first by analyzing the state of single identity activities, and later on, by analyzing the cross-community projects, and their effects.

5.1. Religious, ethnic, racial, socio-economic or colonial causes of violent conflict?

Causes of the conflict are as numerous as the literature that describes them. Starting from religious based explanations, passing through colonial ones and ending with class explanations, the literature is diverse and contradicting in the Northern Ireland case. Before continuing, one important remark must be made: this chapter does not deal with causes of the conflict, but presents, as stated above, the nature of the segregation level, and the initiatives taken to lower it. Also, when using the term “conflict” in the final chapter, the Thesis is not referring to the violent conflict and its causes, but at the present social conflict, that takes non-violent forms, preserving antagonisms.

In order to properly assess the level of antagonism between the two communities, an analysis of its type is necessary. Present relations between the two communities are hard to evaluate if a prior analysis regarding the nature of conflict is not made. Therefore, one should answer the following questions: what is the nature of the antagonism, how it is manifested, and what are the main differences between Catholics or Protestants? Or is it Brits and Irishmen? Or is it republicans and unionists? These questions, and the misuse of some of these terms, or others like ethnic conflict, segregation or racial conflict, make difficult for young researchers to analyse the conditions of Northern Ireland.

As argued before, the main causes of the violent conflict are to be found in the recent events – Catholic minority discrimination, between 1921-1972. Although it might seem reductionist, this interpretation is based on the immediate interest of actors and their chosen path to satisfy them. Increase in the level of violence can be debated as having other causes – type of British involvement, religious/ identity matters or defensive and revenge type violence. Yet, the socio-economic causes are primary for the beginning of the violent conflict – IRA representatives, as presented in a previous chapter, asked for civil and social rights and the elimination of Catholic minority discrimination. Interests and actions of the actors involved represent the main factor of the violent conflict and of the social antipathy. Revisionist historians, like George Boyce and Alan O’Day (1996) or Brady (1994), stress the importance of explanations like “backwardness, extremism, myths, religion, tribal conflicts, irrationality, atavism, emotional attachment to self-preserving versions of history”¹⁰². Other explanations are based on ethnic issues or colonial ones. Yet, as argued before, the violent conflict has as causes discriminatory policies of the Protestant governments and Protestant majority.

Therefore, as argued in the second chapter, the conflict is not only a religious one. Although one of the most religious societies in Europe in the last decades, Northern Irish citizens perceived in 1991 (so, during violent conflict) that religion and segregation are not the main causes of the conflict. Political and discrimination causes (over 50%) are viewed as main causes of the violent conflict, and not religion (plus segregation, around 25%). Religion *per se* represents a form of identity, of “being on one of the sides”, and has little theological importance.

¹⁰² David Miller, ed., *Rethinking Northern Ireland. Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, (Longman, 1998), 15

Northern Ireland is a society that is characterized by “religious imagery and sectarianism”¹⁰³. The literature considers religion one of the main causes of the conflict, and of the continuous enmity between the two communities. As one of the most ardent supporters of the religious conflict theory, sociologist Steve Bruce argued in 1986 that “the religious division is the cause of the conflict”¹⁰⁴. Evidence of the importance of religion can be found in the high church attendance, the importance of a religious based party (DUP) or the existence of the Orange Order that restricted Catholic membership.

The Northern Ireland conflict and enmity are not based entirely on religious matters. As stated earlier, negative perceptions about “the others” are not linked to religious beliefs or strong theological knowledge. As Richard Rose argues, political attitudes, and therefore, societal attitudes, come not from religious beliefs, but from religion and nationality, non bargainable benefits.¹⁰⁵ Protestants, and Catholics also, use religious reasons as symbols and signs. Religion is used to maintain and develop solidarity between members of communities, as Émile Durkheim argues. Opposing Durkheim, Wallis argues that religion is “a sign of identity in a situation of inter-group conflict”¹⁰⁶. In Northern Ireland, the two approaches can be combined. Religion plays an important role and holds together communities in political, social and violent conflict with other groups. The conflict is not entirely religious because religion is not the cause of it. Religion is used for political purposes, having a more political than spiritual role.

An important aspect must be stressed. Religion and ethnicity, as building-bricks of Northern Ireland identity, are important in the assessment of the present social division. Although not main causes of the violent conflict, these two are very important in the non-

¹⁰³ Aughey quoted in David Miller, 41

¹⁰⁴ Steve Bruce quoted in David Miller, Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Rose, *Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective*, (Beacon Press, 1971), 397-407

¹⁰⁶ Durkheim and Wallis in David Miller, 41

violent relations between Catholics and Protestants. As the next sub-chapter will show, identity in Northern Ireland is a complex construction, sometimes contradicting itself, as well as classical theories of identity. While the conflict is not *per se* religious, religion constitutes an important aspect of any social relations analysis in Northern Ireland.

5.2. British and Irish or Protestants and Catholics?

5.2.1. National identity

The two “sides” are not monolithically constructed. To argue that all Catholics consider themselves Irish and that all Protestants consider themselves British would be a mistake. Data offered by the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT)¹⁰⁷ organization for 2005 offer illustrative images of the Northern Irish society, at ethnic levels: 39% describe themselves as British, 28% as Irish and 27% as Northern Irish. The non-existent monolithical structure of Catholics-Irish vs. Protestants-British comes from the fact that, according to the 2001 Census, Catholics represent 40,25% of Northern Ireland population, while Protestants represent “only” 42%. This contradicts the common perception of Protestant majority. The word “only” is used therefore with two senses: first of all, the data does not refer to community background religion, but to the respondents answers to the question “what is your religion?”. As the next paragraph will stress, data is used differently to present different images, based on the interests of those who present it. Protestantism in Northern Ireland is not as unified as Catholicism. The most important Protestant Churches are the Presbyterian one (20,7%) and the Anglican Church of Ireland (15,3%). To reach the “only” 42%, other

¹⁰⁷ All the statistical data in this sub-chapter is provided by NILT (<http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/>), besides the specified data that comes from the Northern Ireland Census 2001 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, <http://www.nicensus2001.gov.uk/nica/common/home.jsp>)

Protestant branches are added: the Methodist Church (3,5%), the Baptists (1,12%) and other like the Free Presbyterians, the Protestants or the Reformed Presbyterians.

The literature on the subject of Northern Irish identity is vast. What is important in this are not necessarily the statistical data, but the way in which it is used. For example, the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics (ONS) presents as religions blocs in 2001, Protestants as being 53% and Catholics 44%¹⁰⁸ (on the basis of the 2001 Census). Yet, the Northern Ireland 2001 Census presents a percentage of 13,8 of Northern Ireland respondents with no religion (or which have not stated their religion). By using community background religion, ONS offers not a fake image, but one that presents the statistical data in a interest-based approach.

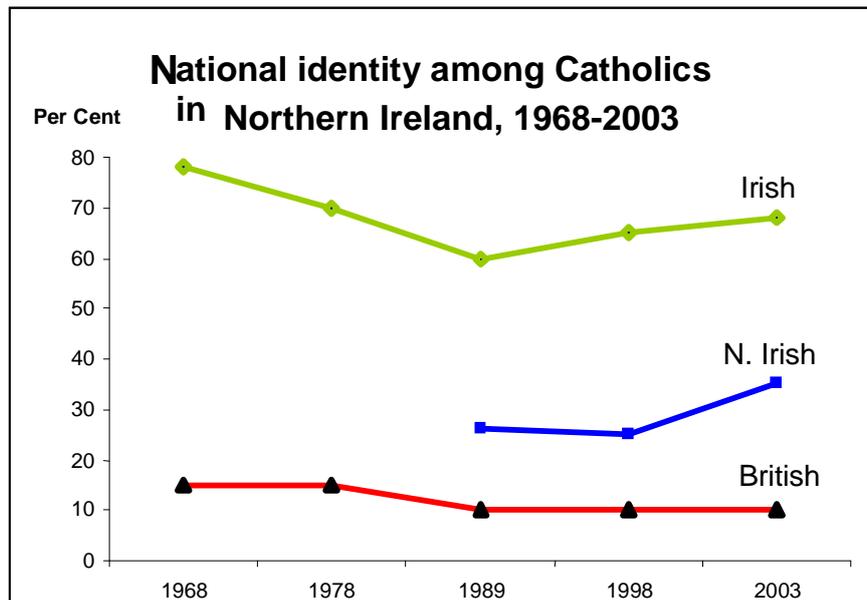
Stressing the fact that a monolithic Catholics-Irish vs. Protestants-British structure does not exist in Northern Ireland, the subchapter will now focus on the level of British/Irish/Northern Irish identities, and their effects on community relations. When asked what their nationality is¹⁰⁹, the majority of Northern Irish respondents (54%) answered that they are British. Persons with Irish nationality are in a percentage of 26%, while Northern Irish, 16%. Irish nationality is a very debated topic in the Island. The rather high number of Irish citizens living in Northern Ireland (so therefore the United Kingdom) is explained by the fact that Northern Irish citizens can apply for Irish citizenship fairly easily (if born before 1998). The differences appear when Northern Irish are asked what best describes them. Identity, in Northern Ireland, is formed by many factors, yet what constitutes an identity mainly is "best personal description" by inhabitants. Therefore, 39% consider themselves British, 28% Irish and 27% Northern Irish.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=980>

¹⁰⁹ Data provided by NILT, <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/>

In an analysis regarding ethnicity based on religious affiliation in 2003¹¹⁰, over 65% of Catholics consider themselves as being Irish, and 30% of being Northern Irish. Only 10% of them see themselves as British. As Chart 1 shows, the trend is in the increase of the Northern Irish affiliation, while Irish and British identities are lower than in 1968.

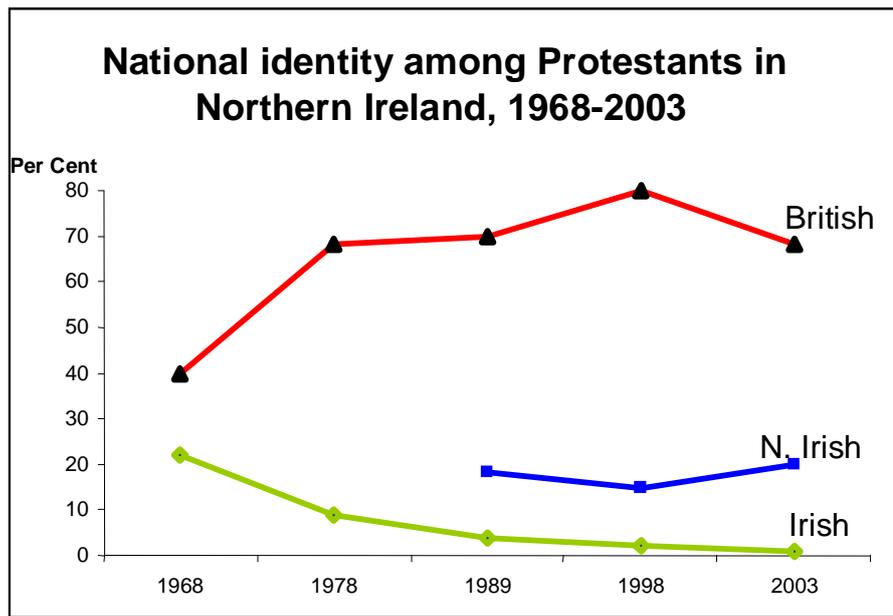
Chart 1



Source: Adapted from Tony Fahey, Bernadette C. Hayes, Richard Sinnott, *Conflict and Consensus. A study of values and attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, (Institute of Public Administration, Ireland, 2005), 62

¹¹⁰ Tony Fahey, Bernadette C. Hayes and Richard Sinnott, *Conflict and Consensus. A study of values and attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, (Institute of Public Administration, Ireland, 2005), 62-63

Chart 2



Source: Adapted from Tony Fahey, Bernadette C. Hayes, Richard Sinnott, *Conflict and Consensus. A study of values and attitudes in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland*, (Institute of Public Administration, Ireland, 2005), 63

The obvious trend, both in the Catholic and Protestant community is the increase in the Northern Irish identity. Differences are to be found in the increasing number of Protestants that consider themselves as being British, while, in absolute terms, Catholics, starting from 1968 are decreasing in identifying themselves as Irish.

Northern Irish citizens' identity can be divided in three main categories: Irish/British, Catholic/Protestant and Nationalist/Unionist. All three identities are mixed and interconnected, influencing one another. Political identity is linked to religious and ethnic. Isolated cases of Catholics being Unionists or Protestants voting for Nationalist parties exist. Yet these are not important. Over 68% of Protestants consider themselves to be Unionists, and over 60% of Catholics, Nationalists. However, in both communities, a similar percentage of 30-35 exists that does not associate religion with politics.

5.2.2. Religious identity

Religious identification is important in Northern Ireland, not necessarily for theological reasons, but for identification and “side-taking”. High church attendance produces, develops and maintains group relations and identity. As Durkheim argues, “ritual and participation help to hold the organization of society together”¹¹¹. Although not powerful enough to influence and lead the communities, churches, especially in Northern Ireland, succeed in preserving some sort of non-twenty-first century type ideological control.

Due to higher church attendance, and higher involvement in education, the Catholic Church exerts more pressure on its community. Churches can become social actors if they fulfill successfully other tasks besides spiritual ones: meeting place, safe-heaven, public service provider or events organizer. Dividing factors between the communities are enhanced by Church practices and rituals, that combine political and social issues with religious ones. For Catholics, “the sense of church is at the core of experience (...) religion is not just a private affair, but it is rooted in experience of a faith community”¹¹². For both Catholics and Protestants religion plays a very important role. As Mitchell argues, religion has

...a multidimensional role in contemporary Northern Ireland. It is socially and politically significant for different people in different ways – namely, marking out communal identities, providing a community-building dynamic, helping constitute ideology and values and offering theological interpretations of social and political relationships.¹¹³

Religion manifests and transforms itself into ideology, taking a political and identity role. This scenario is to be found in many societies and within many periods of time. Religion is manifested as ideology “where understandings of self, other and place are structured into a

¹¹¹ Émile Durkheim quoted in Clain Mitchell, *Is religion in Northern Ireland politically significant?*, (Institute for British-Irish Studies, University College Dublin, 2003), 9

¹¹² Oliver Crilly, “The Catholic Church in Ireland”, in *A tapestry of beliefs: Christian traditions in Northern Ireland*, Norman Richardson, ed, (Blackstaff Press, 1998), 41

system of ideas and concepts, from which identities are formed and social action is conceived”¹¹⁴. In the Northern Ireland case, religion manifests itself as ideology, and as literature shows, the labeling of people into Catholics or Protestants loses from significance the theological aspect.

In a divided and imbalanced society like Northern Ireland in the last century/centuries, religion has also negative effects. By promoting the majority’s religion on the expense on the minority, sectarianism appears. The conflict in Northern Ireland is not to be seen entirely as a religious one. It is characterized by the superior position that one of the groups has over the other, in the image of religious superiority. Protestant governments’ policies, as Chapter 2 points out, lead to stronger discrimination of Catholic minority than the effects of normal economic conditions. Higher Catholic fertility rates and emigration had as result a higher demand for jobs, housing space and schools. Mirror images of preferential vs. discriminatory policies appeared. As population grew, small Catholic minorities in different cities and regions started to become larger, which lead to an increase in the segregation level. This is influenced by two factors: “a large minority group providing for itself the basis for a high degree of social-self sufficiency, and such a large minority being perceived as a significant threat to the local majority”¹¹⁵.

Inter-group relations, as Chapter 2 shows, were negatively influenced by economic inequality. With causes like segregational labor market, or fertility rates and lower education, the economic environment produced unemployment, low wages and therefore to conflict relations between the two communities. The economic and social process that Catholics were subject to might be referred as “social closure” on the basis of Frank Parkin’s description of the term: “social collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to resources

¹¹³ Clain Mitchell, 16

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 11

¹¹⁵ Frederick W. Boal, Neville H. Douglas, ed., *Integration and Division. Geographical Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Problem*, (Academic Press, 1982), 340

and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles (...) Its purpose is always the closure of social and economic opportunities to outsiders”¹¹⁶. The Protestant majority governments succeeded in isolating the Catholics, not only on religion/ethnic motives, but also on economic issues (like scarcity of resources, poor labor market, or war legacies).

Economic differences and class related issues are extremely important in the Northern Ireland violent conflict. In what regards identity, social class has little or no importance. Although sharing similar conditions and problems, the Northern Irish class levels do not constitute a significant unit of analysis. Class-based theories presuppose that “commonalities must inevitably flow from a shared structural position”¹¹⁷. In Northern Ireland there are not enough concrete examples of solidarity among working classes or middle class that would lead to common political interests.

Religious identity is also formed by contrasting to “the others”. The phenomenon of anti-Catholicism is widely spread in Northern Ireland. The basis comes from the the theological debate that begun during the Reformation period, in a critique of the Roman Catholic Church doctrine and practices. As a sociological process, anti-Catholicism produces social stratification and social closure, and can be defined as:

The determination of actions, attitudes and practices by negative beliefs about Catholics or the Catholic Church as an institution, which results in these negative beliefs being invoked as an ethnic boundary marker in group identity.¹¹⁸

Analyzing further, as a sociological process, this one occurs at three levels: “ideas, individual behavior and social structure”¹¹⁹. The first two levels are inevitable, yet when the third level manifests, its effects are negative and violent. Similar in some aspects with anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, anti-Catholicism grew stronger because it offered both

¹¹⁶ Frank Parkin, *Marxism and Class Theory: a Bourgeois Critique*, (Tavistock Publications, 1979), 144

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Tonge, *The New Northern Ireland Politics?*, (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 196

¹¹⁸ John D. Brewer and Gareth I. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600-1998. The Mote and the Beam*, (Macmillan, 1998), 209

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 210

mobilization for unity in the Protestant community, and also it provided legitimization for the privileged and superior position that the Protestants had from 1922. A comprehensive explanation of why anti-Catholicism persisted for such a long time in Northern Ireland and still constitutes part of society's behavior is offered by John D. Brewer:

[Anti-Catholicism] has long historical roots in ethno-national traditions in Northern Ireland, going back to the original conflict between planters and Gaels and forming part of their ethnic myths; it has a legacy of efficacy and effectiveness, providing many lessons of its effectiveness as a resource across time; anti-Catholicism is very consistent with the rendering of the Northern Irish society into the simple zero-sum game between competing groups (...) it fits the self-identities of the groups involved (...) the deployment of anti-Catholicism as a resource in structuring group relations fits the high levels of religiosity in Northern Ireland and the value people place on religious beliefs; and finally, anti-Catholicism comes with its own immutable and in-built legitimation.¹²⁰

As stated above, anti-Catholicism still represents a characteristic of the contemporary Northern Ireland society. It is to be found not only in the Protestant community, but also in the Catholic one. As peculiar as it sounds, anti-Catholicism is incorporated in the Catholics social structure as a cause, as a motive to have negative perceptions about the others, described best by phrases like “if they hate us/don't like us, we hate them as well”. Anti-Catholicism and anti-Protestantism become excuses for both communities both for “attack” and for “defense”. Similar with “race” in Britain (due to colonial past), anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland is closely connected with the cultural mix.

One important remark should be made at the end of this subchapter. Differences among communities, in Northern Ireland, and elsewhere in the world, are not a negative aspect. *United in diversity* is the motto of the European Union. Globalization and international migration bring people from different countries, races, religions, sexual orientations or education together. What constitutes the negative aspect in societies with two or more separate communities are the negative images that transform into aggressive actions

or state policies. As presented earlier, anti-Catholicism as a sociological process is based on ideas, individual behavior and social structure. If communities are separated but still maintain good community relations and cooperation, this should not be seen as a negative issue. Yet, if negative and prejudiced ideas, individual violent or hostile actions or state policies increase, communities' separation and non-cooperation require initiatives to lower levels of antagonism.

5.3. Decrease of antagonism. Intra and inter-community relations

Initiatives to decrease antagonism between the two communities and to facilitate contact have been in practice in Northern Ireland both as a result of internal initiatives but also external ones. In a society characterized in the last 30-35 years by violent conflict and general bitterness, cross-community relations suffer from prejudice, hatred, different views about history and personal/local causes.

Why is it important to help but also to let the communities help themselves in achieving better results in cross-community relations? One might argue that societies are in general divided and to increase communication is a waste of resources. Again, what makes cross-community relations and single identity relations work so important? If the communities have negative images regarding the others this cannot be changed. This approach fails to remember that the conflict began as a social movement. Although not the case nowadays for large social movements of Catholics for civil, political and economic rights, the roots and for that matter the effects of the conflict remain. Even if one thinks of more focused issues, like labour relations, it is easy to understand why cross-community relations need to be improved. Social, civil discrimination cannot be controlled by authorities. Yet, its effects (alienation, isolation and division) have profound effects. Cooperation and

¹²⁰ Ibid, 211

tolerance are important for an effective democratic society. Therefore, Northern Ireland's social dimension is as important as the political one.

The subchapter will focus mainly on two issues, and the debate that surrounds their importance and place. The first one deals with single identity community relations, and the second one with cross-community relations. The order is not accidental. Although there are discussions regarding which one of these should be implemented first, the subchapter, will stress that work within the community as a basis is more effective than work at cross-community level and after that in single identity groups.

Also, the subchapter will stress the importance of effects coming from the consociational governance system in Northern Ireland. As a model of cooperation that the political representatives offer, it represents a third way to improve cross-community relations. As presented earlier, the cross-community relations importance can come under question. Mary Fitzduff presents in a similar manner the “acting or *laissez-faire*” debate. To leave the cross-community relations process solely on the effects of political cooperation is not sufficient to achieve the goals set. One could chose to “ignore these divisions, both communal and personal, and hope that a political solution (...) will in itself be sufficient to ease and develop the bonds between communities [with] communities settling for a benign apartheid”¹²¹. This slow approach is ineffective. Therefore, the overall strategy should focus on these three issues: single identity work, cross-community relations and a good cooperation and tolerance model streaming from an effective consociational model.

5.3.1. Single identity community relations

When referring to single identity relations in Northern Ireland, some remarks must be made. As presented earlier, there exists a debate regarding the single identity or cross-

¹²¹ Mari Fitzduff, *Beyond Violence. Conflict resolution process in Northern Ireland*, (United Nations University Press, 2002), 32

community relations approach. Besides this, the debate focuses also on the use or not of the words “single identity”. Some authors, like Joanne Hughes and Caitlin Donnelly, prefer using the term “intra-community relations work, as an alternative to single identity work [because] the term more accurately describes the nature of the work being undertaken”¹²². Due to the fact that many single identity projects deal with matters that are not focusing on the intra-community approach, the Thesis uses, as the majority of literature, the term *single-identity relations*.

Cross community relations require not only positive inter-group contact but also intra-group relations. Mostly related to cultural identity issues, single identity community relations are not “standardized and can range from projects that attempt to directly address, discuss or potentially challenge conflict issues, to those that focus on ‘softer’ issues and broach difficult conflict related topics only if they naturally arise”¹²³. Single identity community relations are either pre-contact between two communities’ projects or alternative to inter-group discussions. Single identity community relations also approach the matter of expectation states. In this type of groups, “fears and prejudices can be addressed in a safe environment prior to contact”¹²⁴.

The Community Relations Council¹²⁵ guidelines for single identity community relations can be summarized as follows:

- single identity groups should aim to build cross-community networks;
- where cross-community work is being initiated it should be complemented by parallel single identity work which can facilitate confidence building amongst those wary of contact;

¹²² Joanne Hughes and Caitlin Donnelly, *Single Identity Community Relations*, (University of Ulster, 1998), 83

¹²³ Cheyanne Church, Anna Visser, Laurie Johnson, “Single Identity Work: An approach to conflict resolution in Northern Ireland”, *International Conflict Research Working Paper*, (August 2002), 10

¹²⁴ Joanne Hughes, 4

¹²⁵ “The Community Relations Council was formed in January 1990 as an independent company and registered charity. It originated in 1986 as a proposal of a research report commissioned by the NI Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights. The Community Relations Council was set up to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote recognition of cultural diversity. [It focuses on] encouraging other organizations, both voluntary and statutory, to develop a community relations aspect to their policies and practices; working with churches and groups which have a primary community relations focus; encouraging greater acceptance of and respect for cultural diversity.” Community Relations Council, <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/about-the-council/background-info/>

- where specific groups (e.g. ex-prisoners, interface groups) have particular fears single identity work should be offered as a prelude to cross community contact and should be developed that it will help to build confidence and deal with grievances in preparation for cross-community cooperation;
- groups should be offered the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who have progressed from single identity to contact work;
- discussion about religious, political and cultural issues pertinent to other groups can be facilitated at single identity level through the use of different media;
- cultural traditions activity can be extended to include some activities from other traditions;
- work which focuses on issues of common concern (environmental, employment and economic development issues) can be undertaken with neighbouring single identity communities.¹²⁶

Why are single identity community relations important? Besides the matter of preparing the contact between the two groups, they offer the ones that would not approve “more contact with the others” a possibility of expressing their ideas.

Although seen as united communities, the Catholic and Protestant have several differences within them, starting from mentality, education, style of life or even religious practices (especially in the Protestant case). While “discussing the internal differences and difficulties that often emerge in single tradition groups (...) members want to present a united front”¹²⁷ arguing for the inexistence of intra-community differences. Single identity community relations practitioners should promote diversity inside communities, and make cautious people accept differences. This “is a crucial means of helping them to be more receptive towards difference in other groups or traditions”¹²⁸.

The importance of single identity community relations within the community relations activities varies across “mutual understanding and anti sectarian/ intimidation work through cultural tradition and political work to inter-church and conflict resolution community relations”¹²⁹. This approach also promotes cultural traditions and is able to provide social frameworks for the development of communities because it “can provide opportunities for

¹²⁶ Joanne Hughes, 5-6

¹²⁷ Cheyanne Church, 10

issue based worked to be developed at a cooperative level and an ongoing basis between communities (...) it can provide mechanisms for developing confidence in people and communities to engage in the wider political process”¹³⁰. Providing the necessary internal environment, single identity community relations help cross-community relations, not only on identity issues or construction of common groups, but also in institutional and development matters. As Mari Fitzduff argued in 1993,

...it is now increasingly recognised that work focusing on differences, e.g. of a political or theological nature, in some instances is likely to be limited unless work designated to facilitate free discussion *within* communities is carried out productively. If such intra-community work is not done (...) mutual understanding work is more likely to produce defensiveness and be therefore less effective.

As stated earlier, there are two directions that single identity community relations can take: one that is based on internal matters, and the other that deals with single identity community relations as basis for engaging in cross-country relations. In what regards the first category, “own culture validation, this work engages those who would not otherwise have become involved in a community project [and] these projects are commonly concerned with the individual with a focus on building self-esteem”¹³¹. For example,

...the project *An Crann (The Tree)* which is centred in the nationalist community of Derry, has encouraged and supported individuals to tell their story and address personal issues related to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Although classified as a community relations project, it does not broach or attempt to instigate cross-community contact. Other examples of projects in this category would include job skills training, life skills courses or local history groups.¹³²

The second approach, considers single identity community relations as pre-requisites for positive contact between the communities, as the following project shows:

The Belfast Interface Project (BIP), established in 1995, [has as tasks] to identify issues of major concern to communities living in interface areas or

¹²⁸ Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, (The Columbia Press, 2001), 216

¹²⁹ Joanne Hughes, 6

¹³⁰ Mari Fitzduff, *Approaches to Community Relations*, (Community Relations Council, Belfast, 1993), 29-30

¹³¹ Cheyanee Church, 11

¹³² Ibid

areas where there are particular difficulties between Catholic and Protestant communities living in close proximity. One of the three major functions of the project is the development of single identity work, for example the project has been involved in developing a single identity work resource pack for young people/community activists in the interface areas.¹³³

Considering both approaches important for the larger community relations picture, a third type of single identity community relations projects can be constructed. Combining the two also has positive results, if not better, as a education project in a Protestant county shows: while the main focus was Protestant history and politics, the project comprised also of information about “the others”, including visits to the Republic of Ireland.¹³⁴ This latest example shows that intra-community relations can effectively be used in cross-community relations.

Critics of single identity community relations projects like McQuade, Glendinning or Fraser, argue that these should be focused more on a definitive goal of cross-community improvement. Although contested for the “monolithic” positions they construct, single identity community relations are not necessarily seen in a negative way, but improvement and a refocus are asked. The 1997 Community Relations Council director, Will Glendinning said that “there is a danger that you build two skyscrapers but you never build the bridges”¹³⁵, stressing the increase of division, as result of many single identity community relations projects. Single identity community relations projects’ “negative” effects are presented also by Church, Visser and Johnson: “while engaged in an examination of their cultural issues, participants might be inclined to reinforce their negative view of the other (...) the group could (purposely or inadvertently) further entrench the righteous view of their own position (...) the group could simultaneously develop sophisticated arguments about why they should not engage with the other community”¹³⁶.

¹³³ Ibid, 11-12

¹³⁴ Ibid. 13

¹³⁵ Will Glendinning in Joanne Hughes, 8

¹³⁶ Cheyanne Church, 14

Although critiqued, single identity community relations projects have had positive effects, and still have. As the 1996 Community Relations Council Annual Report states, single identity community relations projects “can enable groups and communities to be less defensive about their own history, and enable them to reach out with pride and tolerance to others who are from different culture and political background”¹³⁷.

Before reaching the cross-community “contact point”, groups that have been involved in single identity community relations projects have to pass through a transitional period, “a grey area that (...) contains a ‘black box’ of contextual factors which will inhibit, enable and influence the developmental potential of groups”¹³⁸.

5.3.2. Cross-community relations

Cross-community relations, based in many cases on single identity community relations projects, have at their core contact between members of the two communities. As argued earlier, a definition of the two communities is very hard to offer: if one talks about the Catholic community, or the Irish one, or the Nationalist, it is impossible to identify the same individuals within all three. The same can be said about the Protestant/British/Loyalist community. Yet, the literature on cross-community relations focuses on relations between Catholics and Protestants, based on cultural and political differences approaches.

The Contact Hypothesis, presented first by the social psychologist Gordon Allport in 1954, argues that “prejudice is largely the result of ignorance [and therefore] contact between groups was seen as an advantage means of gaining knowledge about ‘the others’”¹³⁹. Not questioning the importance of Allport’s theory, in the Northern Irish case, knowledge about ‘the others’ is significant but not enough. The contact that Allport talks about needs to be

¹³⁷ Joanne Hughes, 10

¹³⁸ Ibid, 11

¹³⁹ Cheyanne Church, 6

“personal and sustained, involve a cooperative venture, [needs to] be conducted in a framework of official institutional support, and guarantee equal status between the groups”¹⁴⁰.

Different critiques and reformulations of the Contact Hypothesis have been formulated (Rupert Brown, Thomas Pettigrew, Joanne Hughes or Colin Knox)¹⁴¹ but the fact remains that the hypothesis posits a significant argument: lack of knowledge does lead to negative perceptions because it allows the formation of stereotypes where there is no information basis. Group identity is very important in Northern Ireland. Therefore, even the importance of personal and sustained contact, like Church stresses is to be critiqued. The overall stereotype about Catholics/Protestants or Irish/British still exists, although “people form subtypes – they know that ‘good’ or ‘decent’ Catholics or ‘good’ or ‘decent’ Protestants exist”¹⁴². Although personal contact may result into friendship, group stereotypes are still present.

Cross-community relations are an important part of Northern Ireland’s Government policies and the British one alike. Increased group contacts in the last 30 years, coming from institutionally based or NGO projects, have not offered the expected positive results. Positive impact was hindered by several factors, including: superficiality of contact; the fact that in many cross-community projects, the participants are already pro-reconciliation; or as the Community Relations Council presented, “mitigating factors like: the nature of the issue, feelings of insecurity or lack of confidence, political suspicion, fear of restrictions from within communities, and fear of hostility from the other side”¹⁴³.

Although the initiatives in this respect have not provided with expected results, contact is necessary. The contact theory, revised during the last 40 years, provides with

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 7

¹⁴¹ Rupert Brown, *Group Processes: Dynamics within and between groups*, (Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Thomas Pettigrew, “Generalised Intergroup Contact Effects or Prejudice”, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23 (2), 173-185; Joanne Hughes and Colin Knox, “For Better or Worse? Community Relations Initiatives in Northern Ireland”, *Peace and Change*, 22, 330-335

significant positive effects. Due to the nature of tensions and antagonism in Northern Ireland, and also to the conflict and its effects, improvement of cross-community relations has lacked behind. To be significant, such contacts must be qualitative and “undertaken in a context where group identity, and not just individual identity is acknowledged, where differences are articulated rather than avoided, and where superordinate goals (...) are agreed for cooperative work by groups”¹⁴⁴.

Qualitative contact comes also from the way the environment is built. Neutral venues are hard to find in Northern Ireland. In what regards education, considered the prime environment for softening antagonism with long-term effects, government initiatives appear mainly at the end of the 1990s, with the Education Reform Order (1989). Aimed at developing planned integrated schools, the Order stated that a school, under parental voting could choose the integrated status. The Education for Mutual Understanding package, alongside with Cultural Heritage Programme, formed the cross-curricular themes, in order to replace in time the separate history curricula in Catholic and Protestant schools. Assessing these initiatives is yet to be fulfilled. “We do not know, for example, the shape and form that Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage are taking on the classroom, never mind what the consequences are for the attitude and perceptions of school pupils”¹⁴⁵.

Although very important in improving contact between the two communities, and not questioning the growth in integrated education, this increase in integrated schools is both slow and with low quality results. As Gallagher, Smith and Montgomery argue, in a comprehensive study of integrated education in Northern Ireland, the results are not satisfying – “the education system in Northern Ireland remains predominantly denominational in character and most young people will spend their formative years in

¹⁴² Ed Cairns, *A Welling up of Deep Unconscious Forces*, (Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, Coleraine 1994), 17-18

¹⁴³ Cheyanne Church, 9

¹⁴⁴ Mari Fitzduff, 33

classrooms where they are unlikely to meet peers from other community”¹⁴⁶. As Table 3 shows, in 2002, only a small number of pupils (in primary, secondary and grammar schools) were in integrated schools:

Table 3. Number of pupils in primary, secondary and grammar schools, 2001/2002

	Total
Protestant schools	157801 (48%)
Catholic schools	153629 (47%)
Integrated schools	14626 (4,48%)

Source: Appendix 1, Tony Gallagher, Alan Smith, Alison Montgomery, *Integrated Education in Northern Ireland*, UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster at Coleraine, (2003), p. 24

Cross-community relations are affected by the citizens’ perceptions regarding the other community. Relations between Catholics and Protestants, as Chart 3 shows, had an interesting evolution, starting from 1989. Literature from 1994 or 1995 present a very good image of perceptions regarding cross-community relations based on perceptions about the evolution of inter-community relations. Data from the beginning of 2000s shows unfortunately not only the decreasing trend but also the extent of this. Only 21-22% of respondents think that relations between the two communities are better than five years before. Low quality cross-community contact projects, entrenched mentalities about “the others”, poor governmental policy regarding the social settlement of the conflict, sectarian politics and many other causes’ effects are seen in the low improvement of relations between Protestants and Catholics in the last years.

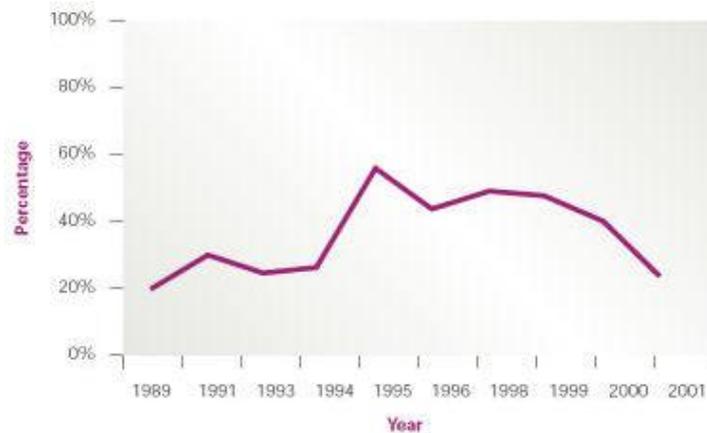
The change in perception can be related to voting behaviour as well: when in 1995 the percent of people believing that community relations are better, the voting pattern started

¹⁴⁵ Seamus Dunn, *Faces of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, (St Martin’s Press, 1995), 38

¹⁴⁶ Tony Gallagher, Alan Smith, Alison Montgomery, *Integrated Education in Northern Ireland*, (UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster at Coleraine, 2003), 17

changing as well. Moderate parties like UUP or SDLP began to loose ground in front of extreme parties like DUP and Sinn Féin.

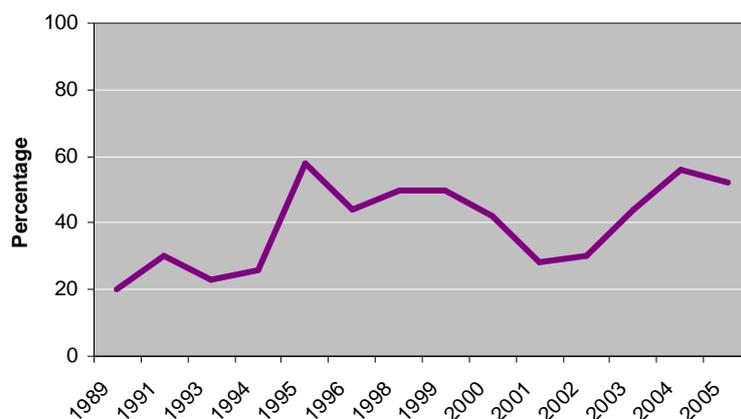
Chart 3. Relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than five years ago (1989-2001)



Source: Northern Ireland: Changing Attitudes? Economic and Research Council¹⁴⁷

The March 2007 election results show that these parties became the strongest in Northern Ireland. Yet, the most important finding that recent surveys have showed is an increasing trend to saying that “relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than five years ago”. Chart 4 shows the increasing trend since 2001/2002 that can be associated with both political change in Northern Ireland but also more cross-community relations. As Chart 4 shows, the increase trend is clear from 2001, with a slight decrease in 2005.

Chart 4. Relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than five years ago (1989-2005)



Source: Module Community Relations, Northern Ireland Life and Times¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/CI/CP/research_publications/seven_sins/pride/northernireland.aspx?ComponentId=10824&SourcePageId=11018

The results in improving cross-community relations in Northern Ireland are still at a lower level than hoped for at the beginning of the most recent consociational process in 1998. Positive signals exist, and as proof, the latest surveys should show that both Catholics and Protestants consider community relations have improved. The solution, to using either single identity relations or cross-community relations projects, or to fully incorporate the first in the larger cross-community system should not be a unitary one. In some regions of Northern Ireland, single identity projects work better than cross-community, while in other regions, or on different social layers, others provide with better results. Ideally, initiatives of this sort should pursue “both single-identity work within specific communities as well well planned and sustained cross-community contact in order to explore and examine their fears, anxieties, and perceptions”¹⁴⁹, projects adjusted on local and regional conditions.

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/comrel.htm>

¹⁴⁹ Cheyanne Church, 17

Conclusions

The Northern Ireland conflict represents a source of intense debate in the academic world. The explanations for the violent conflict, begun at the end of the 1960s, vary from religious, ethnic, colonial, socio-economic or class-based theories. Although important in the development of the Northern Irish matter, the Thesis argued that the main cause of conflict was the discrimination to which the Catholic minority was subject, between the start of the 1920s until the beginning of the 1970s. The IRA fighters had at beginning social and civil rights demands. The events that unfolded after the first violent actions begun are mainly caused by individual behavior of terrorist organizations, “revenge and defense” violent relations or the poor conflict management coming from the British Government.

The first consociation attempt, as presented in the third chapter, is based on the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. The Agreement lacked cooperation between the main representatives of the two communities; it did not involve the main actors of conflict – paramilitaries organizations; the external pressures were insufficient and ambiguous (especially the British policies from 1974); the political environment was too unstable and uncertain for both parties. The chances of reaching a compromise were shattered through the imposing of an Agreement considered ahead of its time, although consociational in essence. With an Assembly based on proportional representation and a power-sharing government¹⁵⁰ in office from 1st of January 1974, the Northern Ireland first consociational political system ended on the 29th of March 1974 once the Northern Ireland Assembly was prorogued. The importance of the Sunningdale Agreement comes from the fact that it is similar to the present

¹⁵⁰ Northern Ireland Executive composed of 11 voting members (6 Unionists, 4 Social Democratic and Labour Party; SDLP, and 1 Alliance Party) and 4 non-voting members (2 SDLP, 1 Unionist, and 1 Alliance Party). Ulster Workers' Council Strike - Chronology of the Strike, Conflict Archive on the Internet, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/uwc/chr.htm>

power-sharing government with several exceptions. The causes of its failure represent important lessons for the present consociational system.

The question that the Thesis asked was whether the consociational model of governance in Northern Ireland is sustainable at political and social level. A simple answer cannot be offered, due to the complexity of the problem.

In what regards political sustainability, first of all, the most important aspect is the behavior of the four parties in the power sharing government. Based on internal conflict, personal interest or strategy, any one of the parties could withdraw from government, and therefore lead to another failed consociational government in Northern Ireland. What sets apart this particular attempt from the others, as argued in the Thesis, are the incentives and the political and social environment present at this point. The financial package that the United Kingdom, in cooperation with the Republic of Ireland, offered represents, as an Irish journalist said, “smart money”. This means, that the parties in the Government, realize the importance of the chance offered to them, and, as rational representatives of their communities will try to maximize the possibilities that are present.

As the Thesis showed, in a game theory model, if the parties do not cooperate, their winnings are low. If they cooperate, the winnings are higher than before, both for the parties *per se*, but also for their communities. Political conflict and instability are inherent to any government or political system, be it consociational or not. In the Northern Ireland case though, political instability constitutes a negative aspect in that it induces negative images to the community.

The social sustainability is directly connected with the political system. If political elites work in an environment that is stable and politically secure, they present a model of cooperation to the communities. Although centuries old mentalities are hard to change, in given time, the level of social antagonism between the two communities should be lowered.

Internal and external initiatives for the decrease and elimination of adversity between Catholics and Protestants have positive results in local areas, and in some age groups. Overall, the effects are not sufficient to change on the short term, mentalities of the two communities. On the long term, these actions should be able to transform and decrease the antagonism between the communities.

The two types of projects presented in the Thesis, single identity community relations projects and cross-community relations projects have had positive effects in decreasing antagonism between the two communities. The problem appears that this effect is not sufficient, and with good results just in some age groups or in some Northern Irish regions. Social sustainability depends also, as argued before, on the political sustainability. The present level of intolerance or hostility between the two communities is evidently lower than in the last decade, yet it is difficult to associate this only to intra or inter-community projects. Elites' cooperation in the last year/years has provided with a clear and stable political scene that results also in increasing positive cross-community relations and most of all in improving perceptions. Cooperation relations between the two communities are hard to assess if one looks at initiatives from outside the core of communities.

From personal observation during a study visit in Belfast¹⁵¹, community relations are still under the effect of the violent conflict and most of all under the effect of segregation. Symbols of Protestantism are to be found at bar entrances or hotels, not only in Protestant neighborhoods but also in the centre of the city. Difference between the two communities, as stated earlier, is not necessarily negative. Irish symbols (flags, colored houses, Celtic language as first before English in public sphere in Catholic neighborhoods) or British (Ulster-Scots Heritage Council festival, British flags, British marked pubs, in Protestant neighborhoods) show the diversity that the Northern Irish society has. What constitutes the

¹⁵¹ 27-29th of April 2007

negative aspect is the transformation of these symbols in social weapons against the others. Difference between the two communities does not automatically equal with division, in a negative sense.

Social and political sustainability of consociational model in Northern Ireland depends therefore on several factors: political behavior of the governing parties, external pressures effects on both political and social level, success of intra and inter-community relations projects and the social effect of governmental policies. What constitutes the essence of consociationalism – cooperation and consensus policies – can only be achieved through compromise, tolerance and communication with “the others”.

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