

# Is external economic assistance hampering the local ownership of peace?

- The dilemma of EU's economic funding of peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland

# Abstract

While the international community spends enormous amounts of money engaging in peacebuilding efforts, scholars are increasingly questioning what effect this actually has on the development of peace. Despite extensive economic contributions to post-conflict societies with the hope of ensuring peace, little development on the ground has been recorded. This raises a question of why provision of economic aid has not generated the expected results on the local level.

According to Jarstad and Sisk's (2008) systemic dilemma, the development of locally rooted peace can be obstructed by the conditions attached to the provision of external economic aid. By adopting the argument of this theory, the following study examines what effect external economic aid has on the opportunity for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland. This is done by conducting a qualitative case study of EU's provision of economic aid to peacebuilding projects in the region through the PEACE III program (2007-2013). The result indicates that the conditions attached to the provision of the economic aid allow local actors to act fairly freely under the guidance of overarching objectives set by EU. The provision of EU's economic aid thereby provides quite a large opportunity for local ownership of peace.

*Key words:* Peacebuilding, local ownership, economic aid, Northern Ireland

*Word count:* 8024

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Problem

External economic aid is not always like water, extinguishing the flames of conflict when sprayed upon them. In some cases it acts as oil, perpetuating the cycle of violence and obstructing the road to peace. Yet, allocation of economic assistance to war-torn post-conflict societies remains one of the main ways the international community engages in peacebuilding<sup>1</sup> efforts (Khan-Byrne 2016: 1014).

Provision of aid as a means to decrease the risk of return to war is not a new development. Since the end of the Second World War there have been advocates for the potential benefits aid holds in regards to ensuring peace. However, since the 1990s there has been a growing realization that successful peacebuilding and durable results require local ownership<sup>2</sup> of peace. Efforts therefore need to be rooted in the local context and the engagement of local actors. As a result, the provision of external economic aid for peacebuilding efforts has come to revolve around the issue of how it can contribute to locally owned peace (Autesserre 2014: 21; Boyce 2002; Duffield 2001: 11, 15; Findley 2018: 2; Jarstad 2008: 27; Ramsbotham et al 2011: 229; Wallensteen 2011: 28-29).

Today an unprecedented amount of external economic aid is being pumped into post-conflict societies with the hope of guaranteeing local development and peace. However, increasing amounts of aid have not resulted in an increasing success rate of generating peaceful development on the ground (Findley 2018: 2; Duffield 2001: 31). Extensive external economic aid for peacebuilding purposes has been allocated to post-conflict societies such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ethiopia, Western Sahara, Sudan, Rwanda, East Timor, Afghanistan, and Northern Ireland without significantly contributing to the local ownership of peace (see Autesserre 2014; Collier-Hoeffler 2010; Duffield 2001; Richmond 2011). This raises the question of

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<sup>1</sup> Peacebuilding refers to a long-term and dynamic process which aims at creating, strengthening and solidifying peace in a post-conflict area. As such, peacebuilding concerns actions addressing the underlying causes of conflict (Autesserre 2014: 21; Wallensteen 2011: 28).

<sup>2</sup> Local ownership refers to the extent local actors control the design, management, and implementation of political processes. In a post-conflict context the term relates to the argument that a peace process will not be sustained unless it is embraced by the actors who have to live with it. It thus suggests that peace cannot be imposed by external actors but instead needs to be nurtured and developed by strategies which calibrate to the domestic political context (Donais 2009: 3-4).

what effect external economic aid has on local peacebuilding efforts and why provision of such aid is not generating the expected results on the local level. The purpose of this paper is therefore *to add to the study of external economic aid's impact on local peacebuilding efforts*.

This paper looks closer at the case of Northern Ireland, where socio-economic inequality and economic deprivation characterized the thirty year long conflict known as the Troubles between the nationalist/republican and unionist/loyalist communities inhabiting the region. The socio-economic status has continued to hinder interaction between the two communities also after the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement, hereafter GFA, in 1998 (Byrne et al 2008: 108-109). A crucial aspect of peacebuilding efforts in the region is therefore to address the causes of conflict through the provision of economic means. Peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland has attracted enormous international attention and investment by donors eager to ensure peace in the region. As a key actor in developing the 1998 GFA, the European Union, hereafter EU, has come to play a crucial role in sustaining local peacebuilding efforts by provision of economic aid. Over the past 25 years the EU has allocated approximately €2.5 billion to peacebuilding projects across the region (SEUPB 2016). Yet, compared to the substantial contribution of economic aid little improvement has been recorded on the ground in terms of local ownership of peace. While the EU's economic aid has contributed positively to the funding of peacebuilding projects, there is still a troubling amount of local actors who do not perceive the aid to have contributed to locally rooted peace (Byrne et al 2008: 115; Khan-Byrne 2016: 1018-1020). The peacebuilding efforts has managed the conflict by limiting the escalation of violence but not reconciling the differences among the population (White et al 2013: 227). The lack of local ownership has arguably been expressed with an increase in peace walls, lack of integration between the two communities and a government that regularly breaks down due to growing political division (Meredith 2015; Taylor 2006: 218; White et al 2013: 227). Then why has the EU's economic contribution to peacebuilding efforts in the region not lead to an increase in local ownership? To add to this understanding, this paper aims to address the question *what opportunity does the EU's economic aid provide for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland?*

## 1.2 Disposition

Next is a short outline of the historical background to the conflict in Northern Ireland and the EU's involvement in the peacebuilding process to contextualize the issue at hand. Following this is a presentation of previous research as well as a description of the theoretical framework of the study. The method chapter details a description of the research design, following a detailed operationalization of local ownership and economic. It also presents the limitations and material used in the study. Thereafter the results are presented before being analyzed in relation to local

ownership. Finally, the result of the analysis is discussed in order to draw conclusions in relation to the study's research question.

### 1.3 The Troubles and EU's Peacebuilding Efforts

For thirty years the region of Northern Ireland was plagued by a violent ethno-national conflict known as the Troubles<sup>3</sup>. Taking place between 1968 and 1998, the conflict revolved around the contested constitutional status of Northern Ireland by the region's two ethnic groups, or communities. The Catholic, largely Irish identifying, nationalist<sup>4</sup> and republican<sup>5</sup> minority population sought to politically reunite Northern Ireland with the rest of the island of Ireland whilst the Protestant, British identifying, unionist<sup>6</sup> and loyalist<sup>7</sup> majority population wished for the region to remain within the United Kingdom. Referring to the mutually exclusive claims of national identity and national belonging, the conflict was expressed as an issue of nationalism with an ethnic dimension (Byrne et al 2009: 630-632; Guelke 2012: 30-32; Ruane-Todd 1996: 28-29).

Beginning in 1968 after a violent loyalist response to a civil rights march held to end discrimination towards Catholics, the conflict came to affect all aspects of social life in the region. For the following thirty years violent encounters took place between fractions of the two communities as well as the British army resulting in the death of 3500 people and a deeply segregated society. Coming to an end with the signing of the GFA in 1998, the conflict had come to have devastating effects on the political, economic and social status of the region (BBC 2018).

In an attempt to encourage peaceful developments in the region the EU created the Special Support Program for Peace and Reconciliation, hereafter PEACE, Fund in 1995. PEACE aimed "to reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation" (SEUPB n.d.: 37) by addressing the social and economic issues underlying and exacerbating the conflict. Since the establishment of PEACE the EU has systematically provided economic aid to local peacebuilding projects in the region through programs, or phases (Buchanan 2008: 393-396; Byrne et al 2009: 635; SEUPB 2016).

PEACE III was the third program funded by EU as part of the European Structural Fund. The program stretched over the period 2007 to 2013 with a total

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<sup>3</sup> The Troubles is a highly complex and polarizing conflict. This account is aimed as an outline of the conflict and its subsequent peace process. It does not attempt to explain or assess the causes or development of the conflict.

<sup>4</sup> Nationalism in a Northern Irish context refers to an ideology which asserts the Irish people as a nation (Ruane-Todd 1996: 87).

<sup>5</sup> Republicanism in the context of Northern Ireland refers to an ideology based on the belief that the whole island of Ireland should be an independent republic for the Irish nation (ibid: 87-88).

<sup>6</sup> Unionism is an ideology which favors a political union between the UK and the island of Ireland (ibid: 88.89).

<sup>7</sup> Loyalism in Northern Ireland is typified as an ideology which strongly endorses a loyal stance to the British rule of the region of Northern Ireland (ibid: 84-85).

budget of €333 million, where €225 million was donated by the European Regional Development Fund and €108 million donated by the regional governments (Khan-Byrne 2016: 1015). Over the duration of the PEACE III program 649 applications for funding were made, out of 218 were accepted and received funding. By the end of the program 215 projects had been completed (Cartmin 2013: 42). Although still aimed at promoting social and economic stability in the region, the PEACE III program had a lesser focus on the economic dimension of the conflict compared to the previous programs, placing more emphasis on local development and reconciliation between the communities. As a result of a substantially reduced budget, PEACE III focused on funding projects strategically targeted at reconciliation. To address concerns of a lack of reconciliation at grass root level raised during previous programs, the PEACE III program aimed to integrate peace dividend into the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of each of the funded projects. As such, the PEACE III program focused on facilitating relationships, encouraging dialogue, and promoting individual change within and between the two communities (SEUPB n.d.: 37-38, 41, 50, 71).

Provision of economic aid through the PEACE III program was managed by the Special European Union Programmes Body, hereafter SEUPB. The SEUPB is the Managing Authority in Northern Ireland for the EU programs. It provides administrative, grant-making, and oversight roles in relation to community initiatives as well as evaluates, provides research on, and monitors progress under the European Structural Fund (SEUPB 2016: 5-6). Accordingly, SEUPB plays an integral part in EU's funding of peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland.



## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Previous Research

#### 2.1.1 Peacebuilding and External Economic Assistance

The academic discussion on external economic aid as a means to build peace in post-conflict contexts derives from a wider debate on external aid and security. Extensive research has been conducted on external aid as assistance in development, humanitarian efforts and now peacebuilding, and its contribution to security. By addressing local issues external aid is argued invaluable to reducing the likelihood of conflict in poor and peripheral states (Duffield 2001: 35-37). However, several researchers have also pointed to the intrinsic danger of careless provision of aid. Under certain conditions external aid may undermine local development efforts and contribute to conditions perpetuating conflict and inequality (for further discussion see Autesserre 2014; Boyce 2002; Byrne et al 2008; Collier 2009; Collier-Hoeffler 2010; Djankov et al 2008; Duffield 2001; Easterly 2007; Easterly 2002; Findley 2018).

Emerging as a novel point of peace research during the 1990s, the literature on peacebuilding has exploded since the end of the Cold War. Since peacebuilding emphasizes the need to address structural and root causes of conflict increasing academic attention has been paid to the issue of socio-economic reconstruction of war-torn societies. Intrinsic to this development has been the merging of external provision of aid and peacebuilding work (Autesserre 2014: 21, 191-192; Donais 2009: 5-6; Duffield 2001: 11, 15; Jarstad 2008: 27). A growing body of peacebuilding literature has come to discuss what implications external aid has on peacebuilding. Building peace is a long and highly resource demanding process. Arguably, external aid may constitute a vital source of assistance in addressing structural inequalities fueling the conflict as well as supporting initiatives aimed at reconciliation and building peace (Autesserre 2014: 21; Byrne et al 2008: 109-110; Byrne-irvin 2002: 56). Yet, provision of external economic aid does not always translate into ensuring peace in a local context (Donais 2009: 3-4). As Autesserre (2014: 103-104, 191-192) states, providing aid which ensures local ownership of peace has come to dominate the peacebuilding agenda but is rarely translated into practice.

### 2.1.2 Economic Aid and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland

Extensive research has been conducted on peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland. The apparent resolution of one of the world's most intractable conflicts has fascinated and intrigued the scientific community, resulting in a plethora of literature on the peacebuilding in the region. Research has mainly been focused on the importance of inclusion of all major conflict parties and the need to engage civil society in the process of building peace (cf Belloni 2008; Bew et al 2009; O'Kane 2010; Powell 2011; Ruane-Todd 1996). As such, the peacebuilding literature has an extensive focus on the local level. Although a prominent feature in peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland, less research has been paid to what effect external actors and their interaction with local actors have on peacebuilding efforts in the region. There is in particular a lack of research on how external economic aid affects local peacebuilding, highlighting the need for further exploration of the relationship between local actors and external economic aid in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland (see Buchanan 2008; Byrne-Ayulo 1998; Khan-Byrne 2016).

Research conducted on the relationship between external economic aid and peacebuilding in the region has mainly focused on the perceived effects of economic aid provided by external actors, such as the EU. Sean Byrne et al (1998; 2008; 2009) has noted a discrepancy between the perceptions of local actors engaged in peacebuilding processes and the donor organs in terms of what effects economic aid has on the development of peace in the region. The perception external actors have on what economic aid is to produce in terms of peace at times differ greatly from what local actors perceive to be the end goal of economic assistance (Byrne-Ayulo 1998: 422-423; Byrne et al 2008: 115-116). To illustrate, while external donors have tended to focus on projects producing tangible results, such as economic change, Byrne et al (2009: 642-643) noted that local actors involved in externally funded peacebuilding projects tend to value individual change which is not necessarily quantifiable. Yet, further research still remains to be conducted in order to understand what opportunities external economic aid provides for local ownership of peace in the region.

## 2.2 The Systemic Dilemma

The choice of theory is generally to be guided by the nature of the question the study seeks to address. A good theory is therefore one which facilitates the investigation and understanding of the relationship between certain factors, narrowing down and specifying the research on the issue of interest (Halperin-Heath 2017: 118-119). For the purpose of this study the systemic dilemma constitutes the theoretical starting point.

The systemic dilemma is identified by Anna Jarstad and Timothy Sisk (2008) as an issue of ownership, of international or local control of the processes of peacebuilding, which arises during the transition from civil war to peace through

the processes of democratization. It specifically revolves around the trade-off between international and local control of peace processes when external actors intervene in peacebuilding efforts. Although international involvement might be a necessary element to end violence and sustain efforts of peace, durable peacebuilding depends on the commitment of local actors and needs to be driven by local actions and motives. The local population needs to feel ownership of the process, and not that it has been imposed from the outside (Jarstad-Sisk 2008: 11). Yet, external actors are not accountable to the local population and the political systems they operate under are rarely translated into the local context. There is thereby a risk of the peace being endorsed by the presence of external actors and not conditional on the engagement of local actors. This risks halting or reversing the peacebuilding process. The theory therefore suggests that the difficulty in ensuring sustainable peace after conflict is due to the trade-off between local ownership and peaceful development when external actors engage in peacebuilding (Jarstad 2008: 17, 24; Jarstad-Sisk 2008: 1, 10-11). The heart of the systemic dilemma thereby lies in the potential drawbacks international involvement, for the sake of strengthening local democratic abilities, has on peacebuilding. However, the physical presence of the external actors is not necessary to enact the systemic dilemma.

The financial relationship developing between local actors and external aid donors run the risk of enacting the systemic dilemma. Withholding local actors the right of local ownership of the peacebuilding processes is difficult today. At the same time, the structures under which external funding is allocated provide little room for local actors to maneuver, limiting their ability to control the peacebuilding processes and thereby reducing their ownership of the peace being built. External assistance often relies upon conditionality, earmarking funding for specific purposes under a limited time frame which not always correspond to local needs, forcing local actors to comply to external demands (Jarstad 2008: 24). To exemplify, after the signing of the GFA in 1998 several peacebuilding efforts sanctioned by the EU were directed towards political reforms such as policing reforms, decommissioning, and the establishment of North/South and East/West bodies. However, these efforts did not address the problems of trust and reconciliation voiced by local actors, continuing to frustrate the post-agreement landscape. From an outside perspective the completion of the peacebuilding tasks might be perceived as improvements but they did not necessarily have resonance in the reality of the people living in the region (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007: 5-6). Because the directives for the usage of aid had been determined by the donors, local actors had little choice but to abide by the peacebuilding efforts despite that it did not address what they perceived as needed for peace.

As a consequence of this dilemma, three issues arise when external actors engage economically in peacebuilding processes. First of all, local actors are likely to undermine local resources and knowledge in order to attract external aid. Secondly, local actors are prone to develop a dependence on the external actor and its resources, often shifting activities in order for continued supply of aid. Finally, external actors tend to direct peacebuilding efforts according to their own

knowledge and abilities instead of engaging the local actors to develop sustainable peace (Belloni 2008: 201-204). Local participation that is based on external donors' involvement is by that limited in its capacity to produce local ownership of the peacebuilding process. When external economic aid is provided the interests of the donor is likely to outweigh those of the local actors, thereby the peace is owned by the external actor rather than the local actors. Accordingly, the theory states that the conditions attached to the provision of external economic aid limits the opportunity of local ownership of peace. The systemic dilemma thereby frames the issue of interest and provides considerations for what implications external economic aid might have for the opportunity of local ownership of peace. As such the theory relates back to the research problem, specifying the area at issue.

## 3 Method

### 3.1 Qualitative Case Study

This study is a qualitative case study of what opportunity EU's economic aid provides for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland. Local ownership is notoriously difficult to measure and its outcome might be affected by several factors. The validity of the study is therefore of outmost importance. Methodological considerations have been guided by the ambition of as closely as possible measure the effects of EU's economic aid on opportunity for local ownership of peace. Thus, a case study has been strategically chosen for this study. Case studies allow for a deep descriptive and contextual understanding of the issue of interest. By allowing the researcher to achieve a high level of validity, identifying and measuring the variables that best represent the theoretical concept of interest (Flyvbjerg 2006: 229; George-Bennett 2004: 19; Halperin-Heath 2017: 217; Yin 2007: 31, 57), a qualitative case study is a suitable design for conducting this study.

### 3.2 Operationalization

In accordance with the systemic dilemma, it is argued that the effects external economic aid has on the opportunity for local actors to obtain local ownership of peace can be analyzed by the conditions ascribed to the provision of aid. In order to analyze this it is, however, necessary to operationalize these theoretical concepts into more context-specific measurements.

#### 3.2.1 Local Ownership

The dependent variable, opportunity of local ownership is often defined rather ambiguously in relation to peacebuilding processes and what is considered local ownership can differ widely between external actors and local actors (Autesserre 2014: 104; Donais 2008: 6-7), intrinsically impeding on the validity and reliability of the study. For the purpose of this study, local ownership of peace is operationalized according to Nathan's (2007) three indicators; to what extent the has peace been *designed*, *managed*, and *implemented* by local actors, defined as

non-external actors. This entails peace developed by the initiation of local actors. As such, local ownership does not refer to local support for peace but rather peace created by local actors. Peace has to be designed according to issues local actors perceive necessary to address and not according to externally imposed ideas of what is needed to build durable peace. Similarly, the processes of building peace have to be managed and implemented in a manner that is determined by local actors, and not conforming to external actors' desired methods (Nathan 2007: 4).

In order to suggest the degree of opportunity for local ownership the EU's economic aid provides, this study has codified local ownership according to specific limits. For this study a high degree of opportunity for local ownership is one where local actors have the ability to design, managed and implement peacebuilding projects completely according to local needs. An intermediate degree of opportunity for local ownership is argued to be where local actors are required to design, manage, and implement the peacebuilding projects in accordance with overarching objectives but are within these free to adapt to local needs. A low degree of opportunity for local ownership is argued to be where local actors have no ability to design, manage or implement according to local needs. In other words, all aspects of the project for building peace are being directed by the conditions for receiving aid.

### 3.2.2 EU Economic Aid

This study operationalizes on the basis of EU economic aid. In accordance with the systemic dilemma it is suggested that the conditions for the provision of aid determines the course of action for building peace, limiting local actors' control of the peacebuilding process, intrinsically impeding on the opportunity for local ownership of peace. To analyze this, EU's economic aid is operationalized into four indicators which correspond to opportunities for local actors to develop peace. These indicators have been developed in combination with empirics and Jarstad and Sisk's (2008) systemic dilemma.

**Degree of earmarked aid** - the extent to which the economic aid has been earmarked to specific purposes set by the donor. This indicator is argued from the point that earmarked funding limits the possible initiatives local actors can take for building peace. Earmarked funding might not correspond to the needs of the local context and impinge on necessary actions if the local situation changes during the funding process (Jarstad-Sisk 2008: 24).

**Criteria for allocation of aid** – the criteria the peacebuilding projects have to satisfy in order to be allocated aid. Specific criteria for receiving funding determined by an external donor will only allow projects which fulfill these to obtain funding. This encourages applicants to adapt or alter their projects to fit the allocation criteria in order to obtain funding. Due to the administrative burden,

extensive and intricate criteria limits the ability of smaller initiatives to gain access to aid (Belloni 2008: 202-203; Byrne et al 2008: 115-116; Jarstad-Sisk 2008: 24).

**Time frame** – the time frame under which the projects are funded to produce the expected result. Since peacebuilding is a long-term process, a limited time frame under which the projects are funded might not provide adequate time for actual progress to be made or recorded. An inadequate time frame can force local actors to speed up the peacebuilding process, skipping necessary steps in order to meet the demands of the donor (Byrne et al 2007: 115; Donais 2009: 9; Jarstad-Sisk 2008: 24).

**Reporting progress** – the extent to which the projects have to report their progress. Reporting on progress takes up valuable time and extensive resources which could be used on building peace at grass root level. Reporting progress can encourage local actors to over- or under-report their progress for strategic purposes such as for continued allocation of aid or to ensure that the criteria set out by the donor is being met (Belloni 2008: 202-203).

### 3.3 Limitations

This study is limited to external economic aid's effect on opportunity of ownership of peace in the region of Northern Ireland. Peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland are funded by different international actors, however, it is beyond the scope of this study to look at the wider spectrum of aid's effect in Northern Ireland. This study is therefore limited to economic aid provided by the EU through the PEACE III program which was operational between 2007 and 2013.

The funding program of PEACE III has been strategically chosen for this study. The PEACE III program had a specific focus on peacebuilding on a local level. In 2005 the EU pledged to ensure local ownership in interventions related to security (European Union 2005). Correspondingly, a new strategic approach which entailed closer cooperation between the SEUPB, local councils, and local communities was developed for the PEACE III program to achieve maximum impact of the funding at the local level (SEUPB n.d.: 26, 30). In addition to this, the PEACE III program specifically aimed to address issues of reconciliation at grassroots level, a need highlighted during the previous programs of PEACE I and PEACE II (SEUPB n.d.: 34-35). Taken together this strong focus on local development and ownership of the peacebuilding process provides an ample opportunity to analyze what opportunity EU's economic aid provides for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland.

The study does not seek to make any inferences to whether there is an actual causal relationship between economic aid and local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland nor to what extent EU economic aid affects the level of local ownership. As George and Bennett (2004: 25-27) argue, case studies are limited in their ability of estimating the effect or causal weight of variables. This study instead aims to

examine what opportunity of local ownership is provided by EU's provision of external economic aid.

### 3.4 Material

Material on economic aid is generally shrouded in bureaucracy and not always made accessible to the public. Although the EU has a policy of transparency, such data is not always easily obtained. The EU's PEACE programs have especially been criticized for their lack of transparency and organization in regards to funding (Byrne et al 2009: 395). There is therefore a limited amount of primary material available for how and with what conditions economic aid is to be allocated to peacebuilding projects. The selection of material has to a certain extent been affected by the availability and accessibility of this information. This affects the overall representativeness and generalizability of the study, however, the aim has always been to ensure that the material represents the overall population of EU's economic aid provided for peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland.

In order to produce an in-depth analysis this study is based on a mixture of primary and secondary material. Case studies generally combine different types and sources of material in order to produce a rich description of the case of interest (Yin 2006: 111-112). The primary material for this study constitutes various official documents concerning the conditions for economic aid for peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland. Primary material concerning the PEACE III projects and the conditions for economic funding will be collected from the Special EU Programme Body (SEUPB) and the European Union. In cases of insufficient material, primary material will be supplemented with critically considered secondary sources.



## 4 Results

### 4.1 Degree of Earmarked Aid

Funding provided for peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Region through the PEACE III program was earmarked to specific projects. All applications for funding to the SEUPB had to be supplemented with a general budget for the project. This budget had to be developed by the applicants themselves and had to correspond to the specific issues and targets the project aimed to address. In order for the project to be allocated funding, the budget had to be approved by the SEUPB. If approved, the budget would guide the management of the project's finances. Funding provided by the SEUPB had to be spent in a manner which ensured that the project would achieve the target criteria stipulated in the project's Letter of Offer<sup>8</sup> (SEUPB n.d.: 86, 89-91). To ensure this financial monitoring took place throughout the life of the project.

In accordance with the European Commission's indicators for monitoring and evaluation, financial input<sup>9</sup> and output<sup>10</sup> was monitored to assess projects' progress (European Commission 2006: 5-6). All financial outputs and claims had to be documented and reported. The use of funding had to be accounted for and related back to the targets of the project (European Union 2008; SEUPB n.d.: 89-91).

### 4.2 Criteria for Allocation of Aid

Allocation of economic aid through the PEACE III program was conditional on the fulfillment of the stipulated criteria. The allocation criteria of economic aid was based on determining how well the projects fit the overall aim of the program set out by the SEUPB. Due to the reduced budget of the PEACE III program, funding

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<sup>8</sup> Letter of Offer is an affirmative document which provides the regulations under which the project is granted to operate. In the Letter of Offer the standard conditions of grant, which describes the project for which the funding is to be applied (SEUPB 2016: 5).

<sup>9</sup> Financial input refers to the allocated budget for a project (European Commission 2006: 6).

<sup>10</sup> Output relates to activity, entailing how much activity has taken place based on the budget (European Commission 2006: 6).

was allocated to strategically chosen projects that could demonstrate how the project would meet strategic outputs under relevant program priorities. Accordingly, the criteria for allocation of funding aimed to determine the relevance of the project in terms of contributing to a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation (SEUPB n.d.: 50-51, 70; Cartmin 2013: 16).

The criteria<sup>11</sup> for allocation of economic aid was divided into two categories according to which the projects were scored. The first category, constituting 60 per cent of the criteria, related to how well the projects met the priority and theme specific objectives of the PEACE III program. Within this category 30 per cent of the criteria referred to the integration of the program specific priorities of reconciling communities and contributing to a shared society in the projects. The remaining 30 per cent depended on the priority given to areas and groups specifically affected by the conflict. The second category, constituting 40 per cent of the criteria, related to the perceived efficiency and effectiveness of the projects. Within the second category 10 per cent of the criteria related to how much value for money the project would produce. An additional 10 per cent related to the perceived need for the project and its potential accomplishments. Due regard was given to what extent the projects involved the five cross-cutting themes of the PEACE III program; cross-border cooperation, equality of opportunity, sustainable development, impact on poverty, and partnership, which made up the final 20 per cent of the criteria (SEUPB n.d.: 50-51; Cartmin 2013: 16-17).

### 4.3 Time Frame

The general time frame for funding of peacebuilding projects in Northern Ireland under the PEACE III program was short-term. The time frame for individual projects was stipulated in the Letter of Offer set by the SEUPB (SEUPB 2016: 4-6). Respondents from an interview study conducted by Skarlato et al (2015) stated that most of the funding during the PEACE III program was provided under a short time-span of 1 to 2 years. The provision of economic aid was described as a necessary contribution for continued peacebuilding in the region. However, the short time frame left few opportunities for tapping into local abilities of developing and sustaining the peacebuilding process. A more suitable time frame was suggested to be longer, between 5 to 7 years (Skarlato et al 2015: 169-171). A review of the PEACE III program conducted by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, NICVA, found the general time frame for funding of projects to be too short to produce viable developments. For improved results long-term funding of separate projects was proposed (NICVA n.d.: 18).

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<sup>11</sup> The criteria was developed through a series of public consultations with program stakeholders, a socio-economic review of the region as well as input from project leaderships (SEUPB n.d.: 31-35).

## 4.4 Reporting Progress

Projects funded through the PEACE III program required continuous reporting on progress throughout the life of the project. Due to the PEACE III program's target oriented nature, continuous reporting, evaluation, and monitoring was adopted in order to reveal and correct significant deviation from goals or proposals initially set out by the projects. Evaluation and monitoring under PEACE III followed the Aid for Peace, hereafter AfP, approach which specifically measures the effectiveness of a project. Under AfP effectiveness is measured according to program-specific indicators and targets as well as project-specific indicators. With the Letter of Offer, specific indicators and targets for achievement was selected for each project. These were used to assess the project's progress throughout its lifetime. Lead Partners<sup>12</sup> were required to provide updates on these indicators every six months but data was to be entered on an on-going basis (Cartmin 2013: 51-52, 64-66, 69-70; Haase 2009: 2; SEUPB n.d.: 50-51). To supplement these indicators, Lead Partners were required to undertake three additional evaluation reports in addition to a post-project evaluation (European Union 2008: 7, 10). Monitoring against the same specific targets and indicators was by some individuals involved in projects funded through the PEACE III program perceived as constraining. Because of their inflexible nature, little room was left for maneuvering in order to accommodate changing local circumstances over the duration of the project (Cartmin 2013: 66-67, 69-70).

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<sup>12</sup> A Lead Partner is a body or organization that has the overall administrative, managerial and financial responsibility for the implementation of the project (SEUPB 2016: 4-5).

# 5 Analysis

## 5.1 Degree of Earmarked Aid

The extent to which the economic aid provided through the PEACE III program was earmarked was high. Funding had to be spent and accounted for in ways which supported the project-specific objectives initially set out in the Letter of Offer. Since this was controlled through the monitoring of the projects' financial in- and output, projects could thereby not deviate from their intended budgets or set targets. However, interesting to note is that although the economic aid was earmarked to specific projects and their intended purposes by the SEUPB, the decision on what and how the funding was to be utilized in order to contribute to the building of peace in Northern Ireland was determined by local actors.

The purposes to which the economic aid was earmarked depended on the budget proposed by the local actors themselves. Local actors held the responsibility of developing a budget which accorded to the intended outcome of their project, providing local actors with the opportunity to formulate the practices for building peace. This suggests to provide local actors with the ability to develop projects without budgetary restrictions from the SEUPB. The earmarking of the economic aid to the project was done with the acceptance of the budget for the project by the SEUPB. By definition this proposes that local actors themselves determined what the funding was to be earmarked to. Considering this, it is implied that because the local actors proposed the budget and the intended use of the funding that they had the opportunity to create projects which resonated with the local context in terms of design, management, and implementation, providing a high degree of opportunity for local ownership of peace.

## 5.2 Criteria for Allocation of Aid

The criteria for allocation of aid through the PEACE III program was highly specified. Allocation of funding through the PEACE III program was conditional on the fulfillment of the criteria set out by the SEUPB to determine the relevance the project had to contributing to promoting reconciliation and a stable society. Projects which did not fulfill the criteria were thereby not provided with economic aid. Notable is that the criteria explicitly targeted certain areas of issues. Due to the

conditional nature of the allocation criteria, it is suggested that projects had to address and include these specifically. Since the criteria, and thereby the specified areas of issues, was not determined by the local actors themselves this arguably impedes on local actors' ability to design projects according to their own account. This suggests a top-down creation of peace based on the perceived areas of issue and priorities set by the SEUPB, and not by the local actors themselves. Interesting to note is, however, that none of the criteria were related to the actual management or implementation of the projects. What methods the project was based on thereby seem to have little relevance in regards to whether or not the project would receive funding. Accordingly, this proposes that the local actors could decide how to carry out the project without having to abide by externally determined methods providing for an intermediary degree of opportunity for local ownership of peace.

### 5.3 Time Frame

The time frame for provision of economic aid was limited. The time frame for funding of each project was determined by the SEUPB and stated in the respective projects' Letter of Offer. The mandate under which the projects were granted to operate was thereby limited to the time frame provided for funding. As such, the extent to which local actors could formulate their project depended on the time frame they had to perform under. The general time frame for funding was short, between 1 and 2 years, which translates into the time frame for which the projects had to be completed within. This implies that most projects had to act on a short-term basis. The issues and methods used to address them had to lend themselves to quick solutions, intrinsically limiting the area of possible conduct. As such, the time frame provided by the SEUPB reduced the options for how to develop peacebuilding projects. However, the time frame also suggests to have affected the possibility of engaging local actors in the process of developing peace. Notable in this regard is the perceived need for longer time frames in order to engage local actors in the peacebuilding projects and tap into their knowledge to produce sustainable results. The statement proposes that the engagement of local actors in the process of developing peacebuilding projects was limited by the time frame imposed by the SEUPB. As such, the short time frame for provision of economic aid did not allow for consulting local actors entailing a limitation in terms of the peace being initiated and based on their suggestions. The extent to which local actors had influence over and could partake in the design, management and implementation was thereby reduced. Taken together, the general short time frame for funding under the PEACE III program provided for a low degree of opportunity for local ownership.

## 5.4 Reporting Progress

Reporting progress was required on an on-going basis. Under the PEACE III program each project had to report progress against two sets of targets and indicators corresponding to the program-wide objectives as well as more project-specific ones stipulated by the SEUPB in the projects' Letter of Offer. These corresponded to ensuring that the intended objectives of promoting reconciliation and a stable society for the PEACE III program as a whole were reached. As such, the targets reflect the ideas of the SEUPB of what type of outcome is necessary to produce peace in the region. The issues and mandate for operation the individual projects were supposed to address was thereby stipulated by the SEUPB.

The purpose of reporting on progress in regards to the targets and indicators was to identify and correct any deviation from the intended result of the projects. Reporting on progress thereby directly translates into ensuring that the projects are managed and implemented in a manner which produces the predetermined end goal. However, in what manner the result was intended to be produced was not stipulated since the indicators and targets were aimed at the issues to address and not the methods of generating it. This suggests that local actors had the ability to themselves determine the manners of managing and implementing the projects for their specific purposes. The overarching objectives for the development of peace was determined by the SEUPB but the local actors were free to decide how they were to adapt the methods themselves. This proposes that the extent to which projects had to report progress under the PEACE III program provided for an intermediate degree of opportunity for local ownership of peace.

## 5.5 Summarizing analysis

The opportunity for local ownership of peace seems to vary between and within the different indicators. Whilst the time frame for funding seems to have provided a low degree of opportunity for local ownership of peace, the degree of earmarked aid seems to have provided for a rather high degree of opportunity. The criteria for allocation of aid and reporting of progress both seem to have provided for intermediate opportunities. However, the indicators also affect each other in regards to the opportunity for local ownership of peace.

Local actors' opportunities to design the peace according to their own perceived issues was to an extent limited. Three of the indicators suggested that local actors were limited in their ability to design the peace. The degree of earmarked aid was the only indicator pertaining local actors with the possibility of controlling the design of the project since the development of the budget allowed local actors to specify what issues to earmark funding to. However, when taken in consideration with the other indicators it still seemed to have an important role. The criteria for allocation of aid determined whether or not a project would receive funding. This

implies that for the local actors to be able to develop a budget they first have to be selected for funding. As such, it is required for the local actors to design the project according to the objectives and issues specified by the SEUPB, thereby impeding on the extent to which the budget could address specific issues. On the other hand, local actors had within these parameters the ability to determine what issues they found important and could thereby propose a budget which specifically targeted these. In addition, if the budget was accepted it would have further implications for the design of the project. The budget would have implications for the reporting of progress since the in- and output was monitored for each project in relation to its budget and targets. This suggests to imply that although local actors were required to design projects for peace in accordance to issues not specified by themselves, they did have the ability to make independent decisions within these regarding the design.

The extent to which local actors had the ability to manage and implement the peace according to their own manners at first glance suggests to have been high. Both the degree of earmarked aid, criteria for allocation of aid, and reporting progress suggested that local actors had the ability to decide the methods for creating peace themselves. Reviewing the indicators it becomes clear that none of the three stipulate any form of restriction in terms of the carrying out the project. Considering this, it proposes a high opportunity for local ownership. However, when taking the time frame into consideration the opportunity became substantially more limited.

The time frame under which funding was provided for the PEACE III program did not stipulate any restrictions in terms of enforcing the peace. On the other hand, the time frame was suggested to have been too short for consulting and engaging local actors in the building of peace. This proposes that valuable inputs and ideas for methods of enforcing peace were lost as well as reduced the local actors' abilities to partake, intrinsically impeding on the extent to which local actors had the ability to initiate the peace. If the time frame limits the ability of local actors to engage in the peacebuilding one might question to what extent local actors actually are a part of the processes of managing and implementing the peace. The opportunity for local ownership in regards to the manners of managing and implementing the peace thereby seems to be conditional on the engagement of local actors.

In closer consideration, it is suggested that it is not necessarily the conditions attached to the provision of aid that per se determine the extent to which local actors have the ability to manage and implement the peace. As stated, the provision of the time frame by the SEUPB did not stipulate any conditions for management or implementation, yet it hampered local actors' abilities to engage in these processes. It is thereby suggested that opportunity for local ownership of peace is not only dependent on the conditions for economic aid but the effects it has on local actors' ability to engage in the process.

## 6 Conclusion

This study has examined what opportunity EU's economic aid provides for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland. This was done by conducting a case study of the EU's provision of economic aid through the PEACE III program. In order to do so, the study was based on the systemic dilemma, suggesting that the conditions attached to the provision of external economic aid limit the opportunity for local ownership of peace. The result indicates that the provision of EU's economic aid to an extent limits the opportunity for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland. Provision of economic aid through the PEACE III program was based on conditionality. The conditionality specifically related to issues and priorities that the EU identified as necessary to address in order to establish peace in the region. Local actors were thereby limited in their ability to determine the general design of the peace. On the other hand, no stipulations were made in regards to the manner in which the peace should be embedded in society. What the result finally suggests is that EU's provision of economic aid provided overarching objectives for local actors to operate according to. However, local actors were free to develop peace according to their own accord within the parameters of these objectives.

Returning to the research question posed at the beginning of this paper of *what opportunity does EU's economic aid provide for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland* it is concluded that it provides for an intermediate opportunity for local ownership of peace.



## 7 Future research

Finally, a few words on the implications external economic aid has on local ownership of peace is in order. This study has indicated that the opportunity for local ownership of peace in Northern Ireland is affected but not confined by the provision of economic aid by the EU. However, the result highlighted a suggestively negative effect provision of external economic aid might have on the engagement of local actors in the processes of building peace. This study acknowledges its limitations in terms of suggesting the effect EU's provision of economic aid had on actual opportunity of local ownership. Local ownership is a complex matter. Whether local ownership of peace exists in a society is conditional on local actors' willingness to take control over peacebuilding processes. Hence, future research should be devoted to examine the effects EU's economic aid has on local actors' perceived opportunity for local ownership of peace. It is suggested that this research would contribute valuable information about the whether the provision of external economic aid affects the willingness of local actors to take ownership of the peace. This study therefore urges and looks forward to future research on this topic.

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