

Universities best to deal with future after conflict

WE ARE going to have a Conflict Transformation Centre at the Maze. Why? We are assured by the DUP that it will not be a shrine to

terrorism and it will not be a museum although, on this last point, they are fuzzy. Sinn Fein says it is an iconic site and the proposed centre will attract international visitors and academics.

It will be, in their description, a contribution to the world in mapping out how we resolved our age old conflict and, at the same time, it will be a boost to the economy.

The usual reactions to this aspect of the development of the Maze site have already been aired.

The same voices have trotted out the same old arguments.

Leaving aside the tedious aspect of these reactions, the real danger is that they obscure a more important debate that we need to have.

The core of the debate is that the concepts that describe a Conflict Transformation Centre are ones that are properly applied to a university.

Lessons, sharing information, academics, education visits: all the things that are the life blood of a university.

All those goals are the precise reasons that universities came into being. And our two universities are already doing all these things. And they are doing them about conflict transformation.

The University of Ulster at Magee has a centre called Incore which describes itself as an International Centre of Excellence for the study of Peace and Conflict.

It was set up in 1993 as a joint project with the United Nations University. It has just completed its third summer school at which 75 academics from all over the world have participated.

Its brochure describes participants from

Denis
BRADLEY



21 countries joining local scholars on an intensive week of reflection on state-of-the-art learning and practice in managing, resolving and transforming conflict.

It also has a facility called Cain (Conflict Archive on the Internet) which contains information on the Troubles from 1968 to the present day.

Incore is situated in the faculty of social science and runs a full academic programme. Queen's University has a smaller but similar course on its curriculum.

So what is going to be different in the Maze?

It can only be more of the same.

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There certainly is a market for peace studies.

There is a local market and there is an international market. But it is a limited market. There are only a limited number of people who want to study it and there are a limited number of academics who give their time to it.

The most the proposals for the Maze can do is dissipate what is already in existence. We are really coming close to an exercise in reinventing the wheel.

On the day of the announcement Reg Empey voiced his distaste that the Maze site should be used for such a purpose and two days later, in his ministerial role for employment and learning, he warned our universities that they are going to have to tighten their belts.

He tells us that there is not going to be the funding that there was during the last five years.

We are clearly in danger of putting ourselves into a situation where we are going to rob Peter to pay Paul.

All of this argument and demand for a Conflict Transformation Centre at the Maze is, of course, a subterfuge.

It is a cover for us not being able to call a spade a spade. It is another example of a society that cannot yet accept an issue on its own merit.

The reality is that the prison buildings in the Maze will make a wonderful museum. It is even acceptable to describe them as an interpretative centre.

They are a sad and potent reminder of what happens when a society fails to establish a political basis for its citizens.

The reality also is that they will make for a good tourist attraction. There is already a market for political tourism. It is happening in the Bogside and on the Shankill and on the Falls.

If properly developed and promoted they will add great value to a tourism industry that is still at a low level in the

north but that can grow over the coming years.

But don't call it or define it as a Conflict Transformation Centre.

Leave that to its proper environment. Leave that to where it already is and should continue to be - leave it to the universities.