

Bridging Ethnic Divisions through Building Social Capital: Structural Challenges and Future Perspectives for Bosnia and Herzegovina

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List of abbreviations:

BiH Bosna i Hercegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

CoE Council of Europe

EU European Union

FBiH Federation of Bosnia and Hertegovina

mreVUK Mreza vijeca ucenika kantona (Student Councils Network from FBiH)

mRESURS Mreza savjeta ucenika Republike Srpske (Student Council Network from RS)

OKC Omladinski komunikativni centar (Youth Communication Centre)

OSCE Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OHR The Office of High Representative

HR High Representative

KM Convertable Mark

PIC Peace Implementation Council

RS Republika Srpska (Serb Republic)

RDC Research and Documentation Center

UN United Nations

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WB The World Bank

The story behind this thesis

In spring 1993, I myself became a refugee of the Bosnian war. I moved with my parent's from the south-east corner of the country, a part of the Herzegovina, to Denmark. I went to Gymnasium there, finished university and started to work. But there was something which still tied me to my home country. I wanted to understand better what happened.

I looked for a programme which would give me this opportunity. I found and applied for EMA, quit my job, moved first to Venice and then to Graz. Here, I decided to write a thesis about social capital and education in Bosnia- Herzegovina. The following thesis is the end result of my research. Without the people I am about to mention, the thesis would have never been what it is. Needless to say, any mistakes are the sole responsibility of the author.

And, thanks to many people.....

My thesis has been a rewarding experience due precisely to the people I met during my research both at the University of Graz as well as during my field trip in BiH. Perhaps it is the topic of social capital that attracts pathological optimist as David Halpern points out. Indeed, there were several instances where optimism was difficult to maintain when confronted with BiH's realities. Nevertheless, I can say that I was fortunate to have known a truly multi-ethnic BiH before the war where tolerance and respect for others were natural features of inter-ethnic relations. This enormous richness has had a positive influence in my life and helped me to find my own place in another country which is my second home, Denmark. Unfortunately, this enormous richness has been almost entirely lost in today's BiH. Young generations have little or no experience at all from living in multi-ethnic society, and in most cases they attend schools under the slogan "separate but equal" rather than "united in ethnic diversity".

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Abstract

The recent history of Bosnia and Herzegovina has had little positive notes. So far the results of the very ambiguous state building project of both USA and the EU have been mixed at best. This thesis highlights an excessive focus of international community on high politics and the accommodation of ethnic political entrepreneurs. Rather than focusing on political elites, local and international policies should look for ways to generate social capital through inter-ethnic collaboration.

This thesis will discuss the concepts of social capital and argue that a long term investment into social capital is the best path to create a sustainable peace and democratic Bosnia-Herzegovina. More specifically, the thesis individuates the education sector as an agency of construction of differences by self-interested political elites. It critically discusses the separation of the education system and warns about negative effects on future generations.

The thesis concludes with a note of hope. Even in deeply divided societies the “pockets” for inter-ethnic collaboration can be exploited if the end goal is to create positive peace. A small scale empirical research conducted by the author about the unification of student councils from both entities shows how young people can break the vicious circle of ethnic exclusion by working on common interests across across the ethnic divide.