

Peer Support and Volunteering: Peace Work Experiences of *Schüler Helfen Leben*

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1. Introduction

The German youth organisation *Schüler Helfen Leben* (SHL) was established in 1992 as a transregional network of high-school students. Its purpose was to help alleviate the psychological and physical damage caused by the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, provide targeted support for young people in dealing with the impacts of war, and assist with social reconstruction. Donations were collected and aid was delivered by German volunteers (teenagers and young adults) to various regions of post-war Bosnia. And finally, SHL actively supported the reconstruction process, focusing mainly on schools but also on kindergartens and childcare facilities, as well as projects which fostered young people's own initiative and helped to overcome ethnic divisions in BiH.

By 2002, through its participation in the *Freiwilliger Sozialer Tag* [Voluntary Social Day of Action]¹ – an annual event involving students, teachers, education authorities and ministries, which has been held in various German federal states since 1998 – SHL had raised so much money in donations that it was able to set up the foundation *Stiftung Schüler Helfen Leben*. It supports projects being run by local voluntary agencies in South East Europe.² (For further information, see Martina Fischer's article on youth work in this book). SHL's methodology is based on a peer-to-peer approach, which means

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¹ On this Day of Action, which has taken place regularly since 1998, pupils work in companies or for family and friends and donate their pay to projects sponsored by SHL. Like almost all the activities carried out by SHL, high-school students and young school-leavers are the key players in organising and running the event.

² This includes setting up a youth centre and a youth cooperative in order to promote the integration of Bosniak returnees in remote rural regions of Eastern Bosnia. SHL also supports other youth projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Romania.

that young people work with others in their own age group. One of the most important aims is to empower young people to exercise some measure of co-determination in schools, thereby fostering a process of change in the education system. Volunteers play a key role here as well.

SHL is not the only organisation to promote the concept of volunteering in BiH. Due to Bosnia-Herzegovina's proximity to Western Europe and the personal contacts between Bosnians and people in other countries, many different initiatives have been set up which depend on the support of international volunteers. In the direct aftermath of the war, the predominant model was short-term deployment of volunteers (or groups of volunteers) who delivered aid or participated in work camps to assist with BiH's physical reconstruction. Today, however, there is more deployment of volunteers over longer periods, especially in transnational initiatives which provide support to Bosnian partners engaged in social reconstruction, trauma work, environmental issues or democratisation. Over recent years, German young people have shown great willingness to commit to volunteering in Bosnia, e.g. as part of the Voluntary Social Year, which is increasingly being accepted as a key element of civil society and an alternative to compulsory military or civilian service. As a result, the number of young people opting to volunteer abroad has risen significantly.³ Some of these volunteers have worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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Ten years after the arrival of the first – generally young – volunteers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it is time to review and appraise the different approaches to voluntary work adopted in BiH and draw some conclusions. This article therefore examines the concepts underlying the work of the various volunteer organisations and assesses their impact. It focuses primarily on SHL's "peer-to-peer" approach and its commitment to transforming the school system, and especially its goal of ensuring that students have a say in decision-making (co-determination).

2. Volunteers' Contribution to Peace- and Democracy-Building and Development Cooperation

After the war ended, Bosnia-Herzegovina became a testing ground for numerous different voluntary and relief organisations from Western Europe, North America and even from various Arab and Asian countries. A new labour market

³ See Enquete Kommission Zukunft des Bürgerschaftlichen Engagements [Study Commission on the Future of Civic Activities] (2002). According to information from the German Federal Ministry for Youth, Family Affairs, Women and Health in 2005, the number of young people undertaking a Voluntary Social Year abroad rose from around 300 in 2003 to approximately 700 a year later.

developed for both Bosnian and international professionals. The international aid organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which received funding from the international community were able to offer a range of extremely well-paid jobs. From the end of the war to 2001 alone, around 5,000 NGOs were set up in BiH with funding from abroad (ICVA 2002:6). These organisations adopted highly diverse approaches to managing transformation processes in post-war Bosnia. As a result, many different models of international volunteering evolved, largely unnoticed. Many people signed up for voluntary service.

Besides *Schüler Helfen Leben*, notable examples include the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the German voluntary organisations Eirene, *Aktion Sühnezeichen-Friedensdienste* [Action Reconciliation – Service for Peace] and *Friedenskreis Halle*, all of which are actively involved in youth work. Each of these organisations has adopted a different model of volunteering, however. Eirene volunteers, for example, are expected to be self-funding, with each volunteer having to develop their own individual “circle of support”.⁴ By contrast, the United Nations volunteers are paid for their work. In advance of the International Year of Volunteers 2001, UNV established three key defining characteristics of volunteering. The activity should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward; the activity should be undertaken voluntarily; and the activity should be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer, or to society at large (UNV 1999:4). These criteria were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.

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At present, there is no universal definition of volunteering, with the result that various models of volunteering exist in the fields of peace and development, based on different principles. The following sections focus in more detail on the various forms of volunteerism in BiH, especially those promoted by the organisations mentioned above; these are then compared with the model pursued by SHL.⁵

2.1. Training for Young Professionals: United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

In line with the concept of volunteerism promoted by the United Nations Volunteers, voluntary service is viewed as a professional activity involving young adults who work in peace or development projects abroad. The experience acquired during this period is intended to benefit the volunteers by opening up future career opportunities in international organisations or major aid agencies.

⁴ Besides funding the volunteers, the task of the “circle of support” is also to involve interested persons directly in the voluntary work. In return, the volunteers send regular bulletins and personal reports in order to ensure that an exchange of experience with the supporters takes place. See www.eirene.org.

⁵ This is an idealised comparison; a clear separation of categories is not always possible in practice.

Their pay is therefore relatively low compared with the salaries customarily paid by the UN agencies.⁶

The opportunity to join the United Nations Volunteers was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1970. UNV is run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and mainly recruits skilled and experienced young professionals who are selected for peace, relief, technical cooperation and development initiatives and for human rights and election monitoring missions, primarily within the UN framework. Missions last several months or years. UNV views itself as a multilateral development service and much of its work therefore involves volunteers from the target countries. The UNV Programme in BiH was established in 1996. From 1997–99, it was among the largest UNV programmes in the world, and from 1996–2002 posted more than 1,000 international and over 500 Bosnian volunteers.⁷

Compared with the salaries paid by other UN agencies, UNV offers fairly low pay which is supposed to reflect local conditions. In reality, however, the pay received by UNV volunteers in BiH is around six times higher than Bosnia's average salary (around €300).⁸ Over the last few years, the volunteers, who are usually well below 30 years of age, have mainly worked in youth development. Through seminars, publicity campaigns and targeted initiatives, they have contributed in many different ways to improving the role of young people. Thanks to its close links with UNDP, and being well-resourced in both financial and personnel terms, UNV has been more successful than other organisations in moving youth issues higher up the political agenda.

However, there is no sign that the programme has been able to establish itself as a model of volunteering “best practice” in the eyes of Bosnian society. As a rule, the Bosnian public do not view the UNV teams as “volunteers” in the sense that they are unpaid. On the contrary, with their remuneration and resources, they tend to be viewed as yet another variant of the (well-paid) experts employed by the international organisations. The UNV Programme is therefore unsuitable as a means of promoting the concept of “volunteering” in Bosnian society. Indeed, the opposite may even be true: the notion that voluntary work may be rewarded

⁶ In principle, the UNV Programme is intended to be a volunteer programme, but it has increasingly become a way of gaining entry to a career in a UN sub-organisation. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and other high-ranking UN officials are always keen to draw attention, in publicity material, to the time they spent as volunteers in UN sub-organisations or the UNV Programme. Kofi Annan, for example, was a volunteer on the Board of Trustees of the United Nations International School. See UN General Assembly (2001).

⁷ See www.unv.ba.

⁸ This means that a UNV volunteer earns substantially more than a Bosnian secondary school teacher, for example:

with extremely high levels of pay – at least by Bosnian standards – awakens false expectations in some cases and undermines the concept of volunteering and unpaid work. Against this background, it is debatable whether the key defining characteristics of volunteering developed by the UN are actually being applied in practice.

2.2. Voluntary Service as “Community Service” and an Opportunity for Individual Learning

In the wake of – and as a response to – the Second World War, voluntary services were set up in Germany and other Western European countries in order to promote international reconciliation and understanding through the voluntary engagement of school-leavers abroad. It was assumed that the individual’s experience of a different way of life and working environment would foster their intercultural skills and enhance their understanding of other cultures. In Germany, voluntary service was also viewed as a way of dealing constructively with the guilt of war: young German volunteers were supposed to atone for the injustices committed by Germany by assuming “responsibility for the consequences of National Socialism”⁹ and helping to strengthen individual peaceability. Since 1994, this traditional model of volunteerism has been pursued by a number of German voluntary organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, notably the Jesuit Volunteer Service (in Tuzla), *Friedenskreis Halle* (in Jajce) and *Aktion Sühnezeichen-Friedensdienste* (in Mostar¹⁰). All these organisations have been involved in youth development. Implicitly or explicitly, these agencies have been guided by a principle which played a key role in the founding of the first international voluntary services in the 1950s, namely trust- and confidence-building through voluntary engagement as a means of promoting reconciliation between nations (or hostile ethnic groups). Some professional experience is desirable, but not a prerequisite, for this type of voluntary work.

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The volunteers who sign up for voluntary service abroad through these agencies only receive pocket money which, ideally, should just cover their living expenses. No formal salary is paid. Their motivation must therefore come from other sources – an interest in gaining experience of life and the belief that their work benefits others. People have a range of motives, but most applicants express a desire to do something worthwhile and help other people. Many are inspired by the notion of Christian service. As a rule, money is not a factor in the decision to undertake this work.

⁹ Guiding Principles of Aktion Sühnezeichen-Friedensdienste, see www.asf-ev.de.

¹⁰ The arrival of volunteers in Mostar coincided with the appointment of Hans Koschnik as the city’s EU Administrator.

Eirene describes its ethos as follows: voluntary service is “an important learning period in the volunteer’s life. It offers the opportunity for intercultural learning and for living engagement on behalf of our neighbours in a foreign country. Peace service broadens the volunteer’s horizons and gives them a better understanding of different and foreign cultures. It empowers them to respect differences and promotes an exchange between faith communities and cultures. Volunteers can also learn another language and take on responsibility in a foreign environment. These are experiences which will be helpful across the board in the workplace in future.”¹¹

Besides the individual benefits for the volunteer, described above, it is also important to mention volunteers’ potential to stimulate learning processes at local level. The volunteers often bring in new ideas which encourage a process of learning. Volunteers can draw on experiences from their own lives and bring them to the local context. In this way, by challenging the local reality, they can initiate a process of reflection among stakeholders which may help to change attitudes towards this reality.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, volunteers are usually deployed in clearly defined project areas and receive clear educational and expert guidance. The usual fields of work are youth centres or childcare work in kindergartens. In practice, however, the demands of this work and the skills needed by the volunteers are often underestimated both by the volunteers themselves and the voluntary organisations. Furthermore, depending on the violence potential or the social conflicts existing in the local community, there may also be few opportunities to deploy volunteers who have no relevant experience; instead, skilled professionals who are trained in social work and have local knowledge may be required. It may not always be possible to bridge this gap. In other words, the “individual learning experience” model sometimes reaches its limits.

On balance, however, after almost ten years of volunteerism in Bosnia, this particular model – which is advocated by *Eirene*, *Friedenskreis Halle* and *Aktion Sühnezeichen-Friedensdienste* as well as various other organisations – is generally positive. Many volunteers report that during their placement, they gained important and sometimes life-changing personal experiences which have had a major impact on their futures, perhaps by influencing their choice of studies. Many of these volunteers have themselves made significant contributions from a peace and development perspective. Through their engagement, especially in the field of youth work, and together with their Bosnian partners, they have done much to put the target group “youth” on the Bosnian agenda, both within

¹¹ Eirene, North Programme, www.eirene.org/programme/nord, 21 May 2005.

the international organisations and in Bosnian politics. Furthermore, their involvement has also helped to bring some measure of stability to the work undertaken by numerous youth and social organisations, which has enabled some of these agencies to expand and develop.

In principle, all the models described in this section have influenced the work of SHL. However, the organisation has taken the work a step further with its adoption of the “peer-to-peer” approach.

2.3. Volunteers as Partners and Models: the “Peer-to-Peer” Approach Adopted by *Schüler Helfen Leben*

The “peer-to-peer” approach adopted by SHL aims to involve young people as “drivers” in project work with their peer group.¹² Young people are seen as role models who, being close in age to the target groups, are more readily accepted as genuine partners than adults are. The young people have various motives for volunteering with SHL: firstly, the willingness to help on an unpaid basis, and secondly, the desire to gain individual learning experiences. The volunteers have equal status to the core (paid) staff and are deployed alongside them in project areas where their prior knowledge – gained in youth organisations, political parties or sports clubs – can be contributed as useful expertise. To some extent, the volunteers are thus able to draw on the same extensive resources as the full-time staff, but they do not receive the same pay. As regards their own self-perception, the volunteers identify and feel a very strong sense of solidarity with the youth target group, and therefore view their volunteering as a learning experience.

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Volunteers are only deployed in those areas where they have already gained experience in their home country. As most of this experience centres on work in schools, the volunteers in BiH are increasingly being deployed to set up youth groups, school newspapers and students’ councils (i.e. pupils’ representative bodies).

Over the last few years, SHL has focused primarily on the education sector, which includes setting up school newspapers and helping to develop models for pupils’ representation. This strategic reorientation was undertaken for several reasons. Firstly, this area of work is seen as the key to social transformation in BiH, for it is here that the course is mapped out for future generations and social norms and values are imparted. Secondly, a reform of the Bosnian school

¹² The term “peer-to-peer” originally meant equality in rank, or membership of the same class or group in society, but it has now been adopted in the field of prevention and extended to age as well. The German Federal Centre for Health Education [Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung] (2002:6), for example, refers to “peers” as “bearers of personal communicative messages”.

system can only take place with the involvement of young people themselves. Thirdly, the education sector offers an opportunity for young school-leavers from Germany to contribute their skills and project experience (e.g. as members of a students' council or a youth media organisation) to reforming the school system in cooperation with their Bosnian partners.

3. The Role of Volunteering in the Transformation of the Bosnian School System

The work profile of *Schüler Helfen Leben* has frequently changed over the 12 or more years since the organisation began operating in BiH, largely in response to local conditions. During the early years to 1997, reconstruction and the equipping of schools and kindergartens featured prominently on the agenda. As the provision of basic schooling started to improve, SHL focused increasingly on the day-to-day problems faced by young people in this post-conflict region. In 1998, SHL opened a youth and seminar centre of its own in Sarajevo and thus created a focal point for its direct engagement with young people in BiH. The centre arranged seminars on youth-specific issues and problems. It fostered the development of an interfaith dialogue on neutral ground. Artistic and cultural events rounded off its range of services. As a result of the experience gained through these events and the volunteers' work, two priorities emerged which SHL has consistently pursued ever since:

- 1) Developing and supporting students' councils and networks, and
- 2) Developing and expanding young people's and students' newspapers.

These issues have been a key focus of SHL's work since 1999. SHL provides support for publications, seminars and training for high-school students. Over recent years, grants have been provided to more than 200 projects run by Bosnian youth organisations and more than 100 newspaper projects. Although education plays an especially important role in stabilising transformation processes (Perry 2003:7), this sector was neglected by the Office of the High Representative (OHR) for a long time. When the international community finally put education reform on the agenda from 2002 onwards, SHL could step up its work in this area, since it had already gained valuable experience in working with German volunteers and Bosnian students on the basis of equality. It was successful in transferring the volunteers' knowledge of the German education system and advise young people on how to articulate students' interests effectively.

To improve our understanding of, and appropriately assess, SHL's work in BiH's education reform, it is essential to start by focusing in more detail on current challenges and the measures adopted by the international community, especially in relation to democracy-building in schools.

3.1. Democracy-Building in Schools: International Initiatives

In 2002, the international community requested the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to assume responsibility for coordinating a comprehensive reform of BiH's education sector. The aim was to establish cohesion in the fragmented system and bring it into line with European standards. An international steering group, known as the Education Issues Set Steering Group (EISSG), was appointed for this purpose. BiH's education sector – like its political system – is organised along ethnopolitical lines and highly decentralised in some respects (*see the article by Astrid Fischer in this book*). The tiers of administration compete with, and often obstruct, each other.¹³ Compared with other European countries, the education system is therefore extremely inefficient and expensive (UNDP 2003:83).

In 2002, BiH's Ministers of Education set themselves the goal of launching a comprehensive education reform, to be coordinated by the OSCE. In a joint message, EISSG and the relevant politicians from all the entities stated in Brussels: "We must start by taking politics out of the classroom, where it has no place. ... There is no place for an education system in our country that divides and segregates children on an ethnic basis" (OSCE 2002:7). However, the commitments to a unified and modern Bosnian education system continue to be empty pledges and have not been backed by practical action, largely due to a lack of political will. Although a Framework Law adopted at federal level now provides for a unified framework curriculum for all schools in BiH and enhanced opportunities for participation by parents, students and teachers,¹⁴ its practical implementation has largely failed due to nationalist politics at local level. For example, there is still massive opposition from Croat organisations, teachers and parents to the OSCE's initiative to re-establish Mostar Old Gymnasium in its original form by merging a Bosniak and a Croat school (Juka 2003; Soldo 2003). The practical implementation of the Framework Law is also being resisted by

¹³ In Republika Srpska (RS), responsibility for education lies with the entity's Ministry of Education. In the FBiH, the ten cantonal Ministers of Education share responsibility for education with the municipalities and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. Brcko district has its own education authority. Including the Federal Ministry of Civil Affairs, this means that a total of 14 ministries are responsible for education in BiH, without any real coordination taking place among these various bodies.

¹⁴ Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003, Article 51. The Law has not yet been ratified by all the parliaments responsible, however.

disgruntled teachers, most of whom underwent professional training in socialist Yugoslavia and find it hard to accept changes to their professional role or adapt to new teaching methods.¹⁵

However, with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in Berlin in September 2003 and the ratification of the Lisbon Convention in January 2004, Bosnia-Herzegovina has pledged to come into line with the standards applicable in the EU Member States. This cannot be achieved unless there is an end to ethnic segregation. Adaptation to these standards also involves the democratisation of the education system, e.g. by adopting models of co-determination (students' participation) in schools and improving students' opportunities to influence decision-making.

The EISSG views democracy-building in schools as an important element of education reform.¹⁶ Against this background, the Framework Law for the school sector provides for the establishment of new education bodies with new powers. Above all, co-determination, which means enabling all relevant stakeholders to participate in educational processes, and greater autonomy for schools will become core elements of school life. The Ministers for all levels of education have affirmed their commitment to the principle of education for participatory needs in a democratic society (EC-TAER 2003:9). The new Framework Law therefore envisages the establishment of students' councils (*vijece učenika*) and parents' councils (*vijece roditelja*), as well as a school board as the school's main management body.

A similar model of management and co-determination existed in the socialist era (*see the article by Astrid Fischer in this book*). As was the case in socialist Yugoslavia, the school board is chosen from school staff, the local community and parents, based on the principles of parity and equal representation. The composition of the school board must reflect the national structure of the students.¹⁷ However, as a result of the reform, school boards are now democratically elected – which was not the case under socialism. The school board is responsible for appointing the director of the school and for determining school policy and the use of resources. The director is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school and deals with pedagogical matters in conjunction with the school board. The school also has an obligation to help parents establish the parents'

¹⁵ On the issue of teaching staff, see Batarilo/Lenhart (2002:53).

¹⁶ See UNDP (2003:81): "As a result of the fragmented and ideologised education system in BiH, some of the principles that have become sine qua non of education in most European countries have been pushed to the background. These include a democratisation of education."

¹⁷ Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2003, Article 51.

council.¹⁸ With the adoption of this model, democratic standards have been introduced. The school board and parents' council have a right to make their voices heard on resource and personnel issues. All adult stakeholders are thus involved in the decision-making process. As in other political fields, there is an obligation to reflect the national structure in appointments to the various school bodies.

Nonetheless, the reform has proved to be half-hearted so far, for the new Framework Law does not provide for any effective participation by students. The manner and procedure for the establishment and work of the students' councils are a matter for the school and are determined by school rules.¹⁹ The students' councils are merely granted the right to inform the school board on its attitudes if the latter so permits. So although students' councils have been set up at local level, the role of the students' representatives will inevitably remain apolitical in the majority of cases (*Schülervertretung* Sarajevo 2001:§7). It would therefore be wrong to assume that there is any genuine student participation in the day-to-day running of schools.

The OSCE is still trying to promote the concept of students' and teachers' councils and is seeking to involve existing groups pro-actively in the debate. Students' councils now attend regular conferences and participate in working groups as a matter of course. However, there is sometimes a tendency for the OSCE to try to exploit this involvement for its own purposes. Since June 2003, for example, it has been working on re-opening Mostar Old Gymnasium as a unified school for Bosnian Muslims and Croats and involving as many stakeholders as possible in this process. This traditional *Gymnasium* (grammar school), which is more than 120 years old, is currently being operated as "two schools under one roof". The integration project has met with massive resistance, mainly in the Croat part of the city (Juka 2003; Soldo 2003). The phased plan for the reunification of the school provides generous financial resources for its expansion, which means that a very well-equipped grammar school will be available for non-segregated education (OSCE 2003). Nonetheless, the nationalist political forces are continuing their blockading tactics. Faced with this situation, the OSCE has sought to identify other mechanisms to drive forward the integration process. To this end, it recruited students on a targeted basis to join a students' council, supposedly to play a key role, in conjunction with the school's management, in modernising the grammar school. The OSCE not only organised the students but also drafted a statute as public proof of the students' support for a unified school.

¹⁸ Ibid., Article 53.

¹⁹ Ibid., Article 54.

Some measure of criticism is justified here: it is apparent that the students have played no part whatsoever in the decision-making process in the school or in its proposed integration. In reality, they have not been actively involved at all. Yet despite this situation, the OSCE's commitment to the students' council at political level is of key importance, and the cooperation between the OSCE and the local initiatives is significant for both sides. In particular, the involvement of various OSCE representatives is often an important form of protection for the new students' councils. As a rule, the students' councils also need a great deal of practical assistance, which they should ideally receive from students themselves. SHL has therefore established a training and development programme for Bosnian students and also maintains contacts both to the international organisations and to students' councils in BiH. SHL, with its young staff and volunteers, is thus able to mediate between young Bosnians and the international organisations. SHL is frequently invited to act as an interlocutor in this context. For example, at an internal training session, SHL had an opportunity to inform the OSCE Education Officer about its work in schools and bring its expertise in establishing students' councils to the debate about framework legislation. SHL representatives have also been invited by the OSCE to chair events about students' councils.²⁰ The OSCE Mission is the key partner in arranging seminars and events in regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina which are still uncharted territory for SHL.

3.2. Supporting the Development of Students' Councils: the Work of SHL

Although international organisations such as the OSCE are promoting students' greater participation in school reform processes (UNDP 2003:81; EC-TAER 2003:9), they are doing so primarily at political level. On a practical level, however, the Bosnian students lack the requisite skills and experience and rarely receive any support. In pre-war Bosnia-Herzegovina, students' councils were almost non-existent. Although there was a type of class representation in some schools, this falls far short of the German model of students' councils or student co-determination, for example. Students, teachers and school directors have therefore turned to models from abroad for guidance and support when establishing their own students' councils. The international volunteers have been able to provide unique and appropriate assistance in this context. These young people have shown that they have far more expertise in setting up students' councils than other international volunteers. As recent school-leavers themselves,

²⁰ For example, the OSCE training in Neum in September 2003 and the OSCE Education Forum in Sarajevo in October 2004.

they can draw on a wealth of up-to-date experience in their own student bodies.

Information seminars in BiH, seminars involving student representatives from various countries and an information brochure on students' representation²¹ are just some of the services typically provided by SHL. The German volunteers are helping their Bosnian colleagues to develop appropriate concepts, e.g. by holding numerous discussions in which they report to teachers, school directors and OSCE representatives about their own experiences as student representatives. The volunteers have immediate and genuine access to the Bosnian students as they are the same age, have no direct or indirect financial interest and are committed to their peer group. They are accepted as role models, friends and partners and can thus work directly with the young people.

Over recent years, SHL volunteers have therefore made a substantial contribution to enhancing knowledge and understanding of students' councils and have helped to assuage some of the teachers' fears about democratisation in schools. Other local NGOs are also active in this field.²² Indeed, as a result of the work, regional structures for student representation have evolved and taken on their own dynamic. This has been the case in Bihac and Sarajevo – cities where SHL has worked very intensively. A Bosnia-wide network has been proposed on various occasions but has not yet come to fruition. Patience and commitment from local actors, as well as high-quality international support, will be required if this process is to take on a broader-based dynamic.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

It is still too early to draw any definite conclusions about the structures for student representation that have been established with SHL's support. The local and regional groups have not existed for very long and their approaches are still very diverse. Nonetheless, the fact that students in BiH are increasingly organising, see themselves as actors in the education system, and are articulating their views and defending their own interests, can be viewed as a success.

²¹ See SHL 2003: *Vijece Ucenika: Sta cekas?* This useful little manual contains practical tips and background information on the issue of students' councils. Multiple copies of the publication have been sent out to middle schools in BiH. A further brochure on the same topic is published by OKC (Omladinski Komunikativni Centar).

²² Since the OSCE began working in the education sector, other organisations have started to provide support in this field; they include a number of local agencies, notably OIA (Omladinski Informativna Agencija) and OKC (Omladinski Komunikativni Centar), which is based in Banja Luka. From 2001–2003, OIA frequently worked with SHL in this area but has now adopted new priorities. OKC is still very active in the field of student representation but focuses its activities primarily on the RS.

Students are becoming more vocal and willing to express their ideas about school, as well as their criticisms and aspirations. They publish their views in school newspapers and lobby to translate these ideas into reality.

The establishment of students' councils – a process in which SHL has played a key role – has not been a resounding success. In rural regions in particular, it has proved extremely difficult to set up appropriate structures and reach out to students. There is also considerable fluctuation in the actors involved in this work. Many of the key actors are lost to the projects as soon as they finish school, leaving gaps in the structures and taking with them their knowledge of how to develop models of student participation. Each successive generation of students then has to work hard to regain this knowledge. Nonetheless, these difficulties are outweighed by the encouraging examples of sustainable and stable structures that are developing; many are accepted as key interlocutors by the international organisations and NGOs, local authorities and, above all, by the schools themselves. The voluntary work carried out within the framework of SHL's "peer-to-peer" approach has made a major contribution to this process.

Ten years have passed since volunteers first began their work in BiH, and during this time, the various voluntary agencies have based their work on a wide range of concepts. The models vary in terms of their themes and methodology, the duration of deployment, and the underlying philosophy. Some volunteers work for pocket money and are primarily interested in gaining intercultural experience which benefits them individually. Others opt for the type of volunteering which pays a salary, in order to gain a foothold on the career ladder. The various concepts set very different priorities. Volunteering may aim to promote personal development, establish a working partnership within the framework of the "peer-to-peer" approach, or provide assistance through the deployment of international experts. Although these objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they are not always readily compatible. Indeed, as the example of UNV shows, some models may actually cause problems if they obviously conflict with the notion of voluntary commitment.

In its many years of work in Bosnia-Herzegovina, SHL's experience has shown that involving teenagers and young adults can give a positive impetus to peace, democracy-building and development cooperation. In youth work and education in particular, young volunteers have been able to establish more direct access to the target group than any other group of workers. German and international volunteers have also jointly initiated a number of projects to rebuild Bosnian society.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that the Bosnians themselves have yet to sign up to the notion of volunteering; volunteering has not yet become a widely

accepted blueprint for social engagement in Bosnia.²³ However, in the core areas of SHL's activities, where young volunteers have worked together with young Bosnians on issues of shared interest in recent years, there have been encouraging examples of Bosnian partners contributing on a voluntary basis, at least to short- and medium-term projects. This applies especially to the development of co-determination models in schools.

The concept of volunteering has thus gained ground, at least to some extent, among young Bosnians over recent years. More and more organisations are being supported by volunteers whose motivation for working in and for the organisation concerned is to improve their employment prospects and gain a foothold on the employment ladder in (inter)national organisations. These young people undoubtedly feel committed to the issues addressed by the projects. For example, some young people undertake regular unpaid work for an anti-drugs campaign in Vitez, Sarajevo and Banja Luka, others are campaigning for a recognised system of civilian service, while in Zenica, young people are promoting environmental issues.²⁴ This voluntary engagement is almost always short-term, however. Due to Bosnia's devastated economy, which has an especially detrimental impact on young people, their primary concern is to secure paid employment.²⁵ Working in a project for several months on a "full-time" but unpaid basis is therefore still very unusual. Various national and international organisations are thus stepping up their efforts to promote the concept of volunteering. For example, OKC, an organisation based in Banja Luka, organises regular conferences and publishes guidelines on volunteering (OKC 2005).²⁶ The deployment of young Bosnian volunteers has only started to gain ground over the last few years. Such deployment may be part of a longer period of residence abroad during which students gain practical work experience,²⁷ or may be an unpaid placement in the volunteer recruitment

²³ On this point, see Florian Bieber: "Most citizens see NGOs either as irrelevant to their lives or as a possible job opportunity." In: Freedom House (2004:155).

²⁴ The organisations in question are Narko Ne, Zasto Ne and Ekopokret.

²⁵ According to a study by UNDP (2005: 29), around 50% of 18-35 year olds have a monthly income of less than €300. Approximately 6% have no regular income or earn less than €50 per month on average. A further 16% of this age group have to manage on €50-150 per month. Many are highly dependent on their parents or on subsidies from relatives in BiH and abroad. However, some young people have an above-average to high income. 1.6% of respondents earn the equivalent of €1000+ per month. Almost all of them are likely to be working for international organisations. The income situation is also highly dependent on local conditions (urban-rural) and on the specific region where the young person lives.

²⁶ The project is supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in conjunction with the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC).

²⁷ In 2003, for example, Eirene offered six education students a six-month practical placement in various organisations in Germany as part of a programme funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation.

organisations themselves.²⁸ However, these forms of voluntary service are primarily viewed as a means of gaining access to paid employment – or as an opportunity to acquire qualifications which will enable the young person to leave the country.²⁹

Although there was substantial interest in undertaking voluntary service in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early days, some of the international volunteer organisations have noticed a decline in interest in volunteering in BiH among Western European recruits over the last few years. This is a great pity, for their services are still needed in a range of fields, especially youth work and education. This has reaffirmed SHL's determination not to turn its back on the Balkans but to maintain its presence.

Voluntary work offers volunteers an individual learning experience, but it also plays an important role in the context of peace and development cooperation. It should therefore continue to receive support and funding. The concept of volunteering should be valued and adopted as a model for civil society engagement, for it demonstrates to the target group that people can work for the benefit of others without expecting any material reward. Only by embedding these principles and fostering the willingness to volunteer on behalf of the community can democratic structures and civil society emerge in Bosnia-Herzegovina and continue to evolve in Western Europe.

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²⁸ For example, Friedenskreis Halle and Aktion Sühnezeichen-Friedensdienste have experience with this form of Bosnian voluntary service.

²⁹ Approximately 92,000 young people left Bosnia-Herzegovina between 1996 and 2001; 62% of those remaining say that they would leave as well, at least temporarily, if they had the opportunity. See UNDP (2002:42) and UN (2003:25).

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