

The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work:

Education, Interethnic Networking
and Income Generation

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1. Introduction

In the post-war period Bosnian society was marked by numerous intersecting lines of conflict. Besides the tensions between Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks (expressed by national identities mostly based on religious affiliations) there were conflicts between refugees or displaced persons (DPs) and the local population, between people returning from abroad and the local communities (or DPs), between the employed and the jobless, between those who have lost their livelihoods and those who have not been so fundamentally affected by the war. Refugee return has been one of the most pressing and serious issues (International Crisis Group 2002). Even if more than a million refugees returned,¹ it is still not guaranteed that this process is irreversible. The continued competition for housing and scarce income-generation opportunities between returnees, local groups and refugees, who will not return to the places from which they were expelled, remains a potential source of tension in many places. The situation is further exacerbated by the exchange of urban and rural populations due to massive migration and re-migration processes. To date, life perspectives in the villages are much worse than in the cities. As a consequence, the conflict between “urban” and “rural” cultures, which was historically significant in the society of former Yugoslavia, has assumed a new dimension.

The parlous state of the Bosnian economy also contributes to increasing the potential for conflict or, at least, for social injustice. Even if modest economic recovery took place – the United Nations Development Programme noted a slight rise in the Human Development Index in recent years from 0.718 in 2000 to 0.781 in 2004 (UNDP 2004:104) and the World Bank has therefore

¹ According to UNHCR documentation, more than one million refugees have returned until late 2004. See UNHCR 2004 and www.unhcr.ch.

reclassified the country from a post-war to a transition country² – GNP still stands at around 40% of its pre-war level. There is a lack of investors, capital and jobs. Unemployment currently stands at more than 40% in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH) and exceeds 50% in Republika Srpska (RS). The “unofficial” unemployment rate is probably even higher.³ According to official data, 42% of the population were unemployed in late 2004 (470,000 persons, 300,000 of whom were registered in the FBiH). 116,587 of them were *younger than 30 years* and seeking employment for the first time in their life. This shows that young people are especially affected by this problem.⁴


Young people offer a strong potential for social innovation and therefore a promising target group for reconciliation work, especially in war-torn societies. Younger age groups (especially those who were born after the war) are generally more open to dialogue and cooperation, compared with the generations that have been directly affected by war and atrocities. But that does not necessarily mean that they will become agents for social change or peace processes. Young people also have a highly destructive potential, which can be sparked by society’s neglect of this group. Young people who have no education or employment opportunities may resort to shadow economies and illegal or – in the worst case – criminal structures. Experience in many post-war societies has shown that if no social integration initiatives are available, male youths in particular form a willing pool of recruits for both mafia-like structures and for political leaders with a vested interest in perpetuating violent conflict. A further outcome is the migration of qualified young people to foreign countries, which they believe will offer them better opportunities; this results in a brain-drain and the loss of the most vital resources for social development. Such a trend has been apparent in Bosnia-Herzegovina for many years.

This article first gives a rough overview of the needs and challenges facing youth work in the Bosnian context (section 2). It secondly presents a multidimensional approach that strives to meet some of these challenges: the project “Young People Build the Future” that has been set up for young

2 See Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Transformation, Success and Remaining Challenges, 10 July 2005, web.worldbank.org.

3 There is a high percentage of hidden unemployment as many people remain on the payrolls (known as waiting lists) of companies which were engaged in production before the war but now only operate with limited capacity. Companies that cannot afford to pay all their staff keep a proportion of them on waiting lists; this is a more cost-effective solution than making the required redundancy payments to the individuals concerned if they are dismissed.

4 The situation is further illustrated by a public opinion poll which was conducted by Prism Research with a sample of 1,500 Bosnian citizens during June 2005. The main findings were: 69.8% of the age group 18-30 were unemployed, and the majority of these (51.6%) were not registered as such by the Employment Bureau; 23.5% of unemployed youth said that they worked in the black labour market, because it was the only way to earn a living. See Prizma Istrazivanja 2005 and see.oneworld.net.



returnees and the local population in Eastern Bosnia by the Tuzla-based NGO Ipak, with support of the German NGO *Schüler Helfen Leben* and the Berlin-based Berghof Research Center. As it combines development strategies and peacebuilding instruments, giving incentives for interethnic cooperation through youth networking, education and income generation, this project can be considered a pilot project. Its goals and strategies are introduced in section 3. Some positive results are highlighted in section 4. The fifth section focuses on difficulties and challenges, and the sixth section presents conclusions and wider perspectives.

2. Youth Promotion as a Key Challenge: The Need for a Joint Peace and Development Approach

In Bosnia-Herzegovina in general, little is being done to integrate young people into the labour market. Moreover, the education system does not meet the requirements of the new market economy. There are very few job opportunities for young people in the formal employment sector, which is still underdeveloped as a result of the war and generally limited to smaller service providers or retail. Most opportunities arise in the informal sector (e.g. in street trading or language teaching). 44% of the young people who responded to the IBHI/UNDP survey and who were in work reported that they were not employed in the occupation for which they were qualified. In light of this situation, it is no surprise that a significant number of young people are resorting to earning a living (or financing their studies) through illegal activities, such as illicit work.⁵

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Faced with the threat of unemployment, many school-leavers are entering higher education⁶, with the result that the universities' capacities are stretched thin (which in turn negatively impacts on the quality of teaching). Furthermore, the large number of university graduates creates intense competition in the labour market, so that a university education in fact does not give most young people the better employment prospects they hope for. There are good career prospects for young people in industries requiring qualifications which older people generally cannot offer (e.g. knowledge of a language or computer skills). Many young people have been attracted by the prospect of working for international

⁵ In the survey (IBHI/UNDP 2000), which was carried out in the Central Bosnian town of Zenica, 12% of the young people interviewed told the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues (IBHI) that they earn most of their income or fund most of their studies through illicit work.

⁶ When asked about their status, 41% of the young adults surveyed for the IBHI/UNDP report (2000) said that they were students.

organisations, which pay very much more than the average salary. Many of those who managed to secure a post in an international organisation tried to use it as a stepping-stone to emigrate.

According to UNDP at least 92,000 young people left Bosnia between January 1996 and March 2001, with tens of thousands still waiting for visas. Faced with these facts, High Representative Paddy Ashdown warned: “This haemorrhage of the young and talented poses perhaps the greatest long-term threat to this country” (Balkan Crisis Report 2003). The exodus is exacerbated by another set of factors: there are still virtually no training opportunities in commerce or technical occupations for young people who have no interest in, or prospect of, a university career. The Bosnian universities do not offer any practical training. Young graduates in Bosnia-Herzegovina have virtually no chance of finding work because they have no practical skills.

Disillusionment and the feeling that they are not needed take hold and lead to a lack of motivation and widespread lethargy. Disenchantment with politics (or politicians) and a general view that there is no point in taking part in elections are further consequences. But some individuals and organisations work against this trend, among them local youth initiatives who face very difficult conditions. A wide range of activities *by* and *for* youths/young adults has been initiated over recent years. They include projects aimed at improving life chances and developing individual initiative or a sense of community among young people (involvement in civil society), and the development of related youth networks. Some offer young people opportunities for transnational or interethnic encounter; others focus on “empowerment” and training to promote individual peace skills. Few projects have set up services to provide practical occupational training, and only very few have incorporated income-generation or job-creation elements into their programmes.⁷

It is important to encourage young people to articulate their ideas and needs. But offering them economic and employment prospects is also an urgent necessity. A particular challenge is to combine approaches that can traditionally be classified as development cooperation with peacebuilding measures. The combination of initiatives that provide training, empowerment, peace education, vocational training and income-generation opportunities in an integrated approach is essential for several reasons: if young people earn their own income, this improves their families’ financial position and also boosts their self-esteem because they thus secure their place in the community and earn some respect. Moreover, training and income-generation measures can offer incentives for

⁷ On this topic, see Fischer/Tumler 2000a and 2000b. See also M. Fischer/A. Fischer 2003:13-26.

people in highly segregated ethnic communities to develop a willingness to *work* together, since it benefits them directly. This may contribute to cooperation and dialogue as essential preconditions of peace. The pilot project “Young People Build the Future”, which was implemented by the NGO Ipak in 2002 in Eastern Bosnia, was motivated by precisely these considerations.

3. “Young People Build the Future” – A Pilot Project

The German-Bosnian organisation Ipak⁸ had acquired many years of experience in youth work in a Tuzla suburb (Simin Han), where it established a youth centre offering leisure activities, education programmes and practical training in carpentry with support from a number of Swiss and German sponsors.⁹ The centre was mainly used by Bosniak refugees who survived or fled from atrocities in the Drina Valley (around Zvornik and Srebrenica) in Eastern Bosnia. When the families had to return to their villages (now in the Republika Srpska), the idea of providing ongoing support for the youngsters after their resettlement and of developing a project for the reintegration of returnees arose. The project idea was conceived by young people who had previously been involved with the youth centre in Simin Han (Tuzla).

At that time the Ipak team was already familiar with the fears and problems associated with the return to this region, including economic uncertainty and physical insecurity. Experience in recent years has shown that many returnees in rural areas face such dire prospects that they soon re-migrate to urban centres. Supporting the return process in Eastern Bosnia therefore appeared to be an urgent necessity.

A more detailed project proposal was developed by the Ipak team and the Berghof Research Center and presented at a competition for funding which was run by the German NGO *Schüler Helfen Leben* (SHL) (*see article by Christian Rickerts and Steffen Emrich in this book*). €500,000 in donations were generated by schoolchildren undertaking voluntary work during the 2001 *Sozialer Tag* [Social Day of Action] in North Germany. Ipak was awarded three years of project funding by SHL. The Berghof Research Center supports the process through financial controlling and regular participatory project evaluations.

⁸ Ipak (which stands for “nevertheless”/“in spite of”) was founded in 1995 in response to a mortar attack that killed 71 teenagers and severely injured more than 265 on 25 May 1995 in Tuzla. Support came from citizens in Mosbach, Germany, for the construction of a youth centre in Simin Han (Tuzla) in order to provide vocational training to young refugees and enable them to shape their own future. A second goal of the project was to create a space for international encounters between German and Bosnian youth.

⁹ Including private donations and funding from GTZ and the German Federal Foreign Office.

3.1. Project Objectives

The project aims to support the integration of young returnees through a combination of community work with income-generation and training measures. To this end, a youth centre, small workshops for craft and training purposes and greenhouses for agricultural production were set up in Krizevici, a village in the Zvornik municipality in the Drina valley. Young people from the region were directly involved in the construction of the centre, which had been a condition of the contract awarded to the building firm.

Through training- and employment-orientated community work, the project intends to improve young people's lives and contribute to local community development. It is also designed to have a conflict-defusing and preventive effect (see Box 1).

Box 1: Project objectives

The key objectives, as outlined by the stakeholders, are:

- to support the social integration of young returnees and local refugees in rural communities in Eastern Bosnia
- to facilitate capacity-building and promote peaceful relations among families from different ethnic groups (Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs) at local level
- to change the widespread attitude in Bosnia which encourages dependency on foreign support and provide an impetus for young people to invest more of their own energy in their country's reconstruction
- to provide incentives that encourage young people returning to their families' pre-war homes to stay, overcome lethargy and take on responsibility for rebuilding economic and social life
- to offer young people economic prospects through income-generation measures
- to overcome the gap between urban and rural areas and to ensure that young people outside the urban centres also have the chance to participate in social (political, cultural and educational) activities
- to offer young people a space where they can develop their creative potential and social skills while providing them with opportunities to deal with the past (trauma work and psychosocial counselling)

The project benefits the returnees from the Bosniak community and young people from the local Bosnian Serb community living in Eastern Bosnia. The aim is to encourage them to participate in shared activities and to involve them in joint community building and reconstruction, as well as in vocational training and production. This includes encounters, international youth exchange programmes

and seminars in civil conflict transformation and democracy-building. Of course, the “fun factor”, with sports activities and cultural events, is also important. A further key priority is to provide psychosocial care, undertake trauma work with young people and teachers, and launch drug prevention measures.

3.2. Strategies

3.2.1. *Networking in the Context of Ethnopolitical Segregation*

A four-member Ipak team – which mainly comprises education specialists from mixed ethnic backgrounds¹⁰ – started to implement the project in 2003. The first project phase concentrated on networking and publicity work. This included the intensive fostering of contacts at the local political level (Zvornik municipality and Krizevici village community) and the appointment of a project advisory council in which persons from the FBiH and RS, i.e. from the Bosnian Serb and Bosniak communities, work together. Before actual construction work started, there was an intensive preparatory stage during which “ownership” of the project concept was embedded in the region and the project firmly rooted in a political and social context. To this end, the Ipak team formed two working groups involving young volunteers from the region.¹¹ Their task was to intensify the contacts with youth groups and raise awareness of the project’s objectives among other NGOs and especially, through regular visits, among the target group in all the outlying villages.

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Connecting the existing, yet somewhat isolated and uncoordinated, youth initiatives in rural areas and small towns of Eastern Bosnia was a central task during the initial project phase. Ipak has been working with more than ten youth groups from the RS and the Federation. A public relations strategy was systematically planned and executed: team members visited 36 villages and presented the project’s objectives even before the foundations were laid for the construction of the centre or the workshops and greenhouses. Meetings were held for four villages at a time. It became obvious that what the young people in the region wanted most was a place where they could meet to organise activities and talk about their experiences. The information meetings were followed by a regional conference, which provided further insight into the needs of the young

¹⁰ The core team currently comprises Lahira Sejfija (project manager), Adnan Harbic (coordinator of the youth centre), Aleksandra Anicic (administrative assistant) and Nermin Memi (technical assistant).

¹¹ The working groups focused on “information” and “organisation” respectively. In addition, there was an “activist core group” which included 15 young people from Krizevici and 15 young people from nearby villages (some of them predominantly Bosnian Serb, some predominantly Bosniak) and the towns of Kalesija and Zvornik. They regularly took part in Ipak’s networking and information activities. Around 90 other young people participated less frequently.

people as well as their educational environment. The conference initiated an information exchange that resulted in the active coordination of some youth initiatives.

Many meetings and workshops were necessary in order to make sure that young people from all ethnic groups would actively participate in Ipak's initiative. Thanks to the initial effort, a few weeks into the project young people from mainly Bosnian Serb villages did join in, even though they had been reluctant at first. The centre opened in December 2003. Around 1,000 people, including 600 young people and many official guests (representatives of UNHCR, OSCE, SFOR, local and regional NGOs and key figures from schools and ministries) attended. The opening ceremony was planned and initiated by the young people as a joint project. The media covered the event comprehensively and positively. Narrowly nationalist or negative assessments were few and far between.

3.2.2. Connecting to the World:

Learning Languages, Mastering the Computer and the Internet

In interviews with pupils and members of the parents' council in and around Krizevici it became apparent what the main expectations concerning the project are: first and foremost, they expect to gain access to the world. That is, they hope for opportunities to learn foreign languages, to get in contact with people from all over the world, and to become computer-literate in using e-mail and the Internet. The first prize in a drawing competition nicely illustrates this: the picture shows the stylised map of Bosnia, which connects to a computer; the computer's mouse is navigated by a toddler. Consequently, Ipak started to offer computer classes and IT seminars at the youth centre in Krizevici in 2004. Bosniak and Bosnian Serb youths from the whole region participate in these courses.

In addition, the centre started to offer English classes in early 2004, taught at two different skill levels. Due to problems in regional transport, these classes are accessible only for youth from the local area, i.e. exclusively for young Bosniak returnees. In the future, Ipak hopes to open half of its IT and language courses to young people (up to the age of 16) from the local area, and the other half to youth (around the age of 16 or 17) from the region (who are also more mobile).

3.2.3. A Space for International Exchange and Inter-cultural Learning

Ipak Bosnia has organised – together with the German NGO Ipak e.V. and several other partners from Switzerland and Germany – a number of international youth encounters. Young people from Germany and Switzerland visited Krizevici; in turn, young people from Krizevici and Tuzla visited the

European cooperation partners. These encounters strengthened social learning within the group as well as cross-cultural learning: For many participants, the trips to Germany and Switzerland were the first opportunity to travel in an ethnically mixed group and to meet people from abroad. The most spectacular encounter to take place *in* Krizevici was a five-day international youth and cultural festival in May 2005. The festival created a space for young people from Bosnia, Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia, Germany and Switzerland to get to know each other. Its main events were a youth camp in Krizevici and a big concert in Tuzla with performers from the West, Bosnia and Serbia-Montenegro.

3.2.4. A Space for Social Learning, Initiative and Self-Help

In order to help young people articulate and communicate their needs, Ipak has created a course that can be called the “Small School of Letters”. The goal of this course is to break through the vicious circle of inner emigration and isolation that many young people feel trapped in due to their refugee experience. Together, they learn to voice their needs and to communicate them in such a way (to other young people, parents, teachers, public institutions, etc.) that they are actually heard and understood. The Ipak team has once more created separate courses for youth up to 16, and for older ones. The younger of the groups comprises only youth from Krizevici and is thus “monoethnic”. The older group recruits youth from all of Zvornik municipality and includes Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks alike. The first group is taught how to communicate in a group, how to take responsibility or how to write letters with reference to examples and through joint learning. With the second group, more emphasis is put on social codes and appropriate behaviour, on ways of approaching public institutions (e.g. to apply for funds) or employers (e.g. to apply for a job) and on increasing cross-cultural skills. E-mail contact with young people from other parts of Bosnia or abroad helps foster such skills. Literature workshops are an additional component of the course programme.

3.2.5. Vocational Training and a Youth Cooperative

Since 2004 Ipak has offered certified training in agricultural production and woodwork (carpentry). Metalwork and welding courses are also planned. Workshops for young entrepreneurs and marketing workshops are also on offer. After two years, 8 teenage boys and 8 teenage girls successfully completed their training in agricultural production (tomato and pepper cultivation). This programme was carried out in cooperation with the agricultural college in neighbouring Sapna. Ipak hopes to add advanced courses soon (as well as the cultivation of strawberries, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, and green beans).

The pressing question, though, is how the young people can use their new qualifications to earn an income. In order to help achieve this goal, a cooperative will be founded that is open to young people and supporters. The idea is that the cooperative can help channel the vocational training into fruitful (self-) employment: it may offer advanced courses for young people who want to start their own agricultural production, as well as general advice and support. The cooperative will also have a role in buying and marketing produce. Furthermore, it will help to link youth with employment opportunities in local and regional firms or in reconstruction projects. In addition, it will give advice on how to start one's own business. So far, 48 persons have joined the cooperative. An application has been submitted to the authorities; registration is pending.

The cooperative idea reaches back to the socialist system, yet the conditions have changed fundamentally. Back then, the main function of youth cooperatives (which were party organisations) was to give youth or students an opportunity to work with their hands during their vacation or in odd jobs. Ipak's cooperative model, on the other hand, is democratically organised: the members define their goals and tasks in joint meetings. The cooperative is envisioned to be a clearinghouse for information and a buyer of products and services from its members.

To create opportunities for training *and* employment is the most important task that the Ipak team has identified. When the centre was built it became apparent how important it was that the young people took part in the construction, and that some of them could even earn some money from it. The principle on which the youth cooperative is based could already be seen in action during this phase. More such opportunities will follow: if, for example, schools are being rebuilt as part of the reconstruction effort, the cooperative will bid competitively for the work in order to put its members into employment. Some of this work will be unskilled labour; other jobs call for qualified craftspeople. The main advantage of the cooperative is that it can offer a wide range of products and services (from agricultural production through carpentry to metal or construction work).

The project fills a gap that is acutely felt by the young people from Krizevici and the surrounding villages. The schools and technical colleges in the area offer no applied courses, nor do they prepare youth for starting their own businesses. Young people graduating from these schools have no relevant practical skills and little chance of learning them elsewhere. Ipak has thus consciously chosen its approach to address this gap. Young people, parents, teachers and political decision-makers of Bosniak and Bosnian Serb background have therefore argued that the project is urgently needed in this structurally very

weak area. The following sections summarise positive results and lessons from the project to date (2002–2005).¹²

4. Positive Results in the First Project Phase

4.1. Empowerment

To get engaged in one's community, voice one's interests and get involved in political decision-making represents uncharted territory for most young people in the region. Political reform has been slow to happen; necessary reforms, for example in the education sector, have been slowed down by power struggles between different administrative bureaucracies and/or by political mobilisation along ethnic lines. Therefore, many young people are disappointed by official politics and regard "the politicians" with utmost distrust. Most of them say they prefer to be "non-political".¹³ There is also a remarkable lack of experience or role modelling of philanthropic community-level engagement. At the same time, there is a general willingness to get involved and take initiative among many young people.

There is no lack of good ideas. Activists from Krizevici and surrounding villages presented the following plans in December 2003:¹⁴ members of the youth council of Djulici (a further returnee community in Republika Srpska) supported the renovation of an old youth centre. A scouts' group from Zvornik had surveyed young people on issues such as violence in the family and drug use, and wanted to become active in awareness-raising in order to help decrease drug-related suicides. Volunteers helped out with an SOS phone line that connected youth with professional psychological counsellors. The group also wanted to become active in awareness-raising concerning the right to conscientious objection, and in ecological projects such as rubbish collection. In Kalesija, a youth centre wanted to start offering IT courses.

The Ipak team helped with advice on how to realise these activities at local level. Ipak's support proved all the more important in an environment where a number of initiatives which were created after the end of the war and

¹² This evaluation is based on participatory observation at workshops and project events, and on interviews with the stakeholders (members of the Ipak team) and members of the target group (schoolchildren and young people from Krizevici and the surrounding villages, including partner youth groups from Zvornik). Moreover, teachers from local schools, representatives of the Krizevici village community, and members of the project advisory council have been interviewed.

¹³ The 2003 elections underline the importance of the project "Young People Build the Future" and of Ipak's efforts to get youth engaged in their communities. The elections were marked by political abstention by large parts of the population (only 51% of those eligible to vote made use of their right). Among youth, the rate of abstention was shocking: only 8% of those who could vote did so.

¹⁴ The presentation was given during a workshop with the Ipak team and the author in Krizevici.

depended on foreign subsidies had faltered once the international organisations withdrew their support. It became obvious that there was a lack of information and that young people needed to be empowered to pursue their interests. A secretariat at the Ministry for Youth and Sport in Republika Srpska, for example, has some funds for youth-related activities.¹⁵ Many young people, though, are inexperienced in applying for such funds. In addition, they need to team up with others in order to present joint youth activities.

In May 2004, a major conference including all cooperation partners was held in Krizevici in order to prepare a comprehensive needs assessment and boost regional information exchange. Youth initiatives were invited to discuss their project ideas, agree on priorities and present them to the representatives of international organisations¹⁶ who were still present in Bosnia. Project ideas ranged from the reconstruction of a cinema to the establishment of a drug counselling office and the improvement of sex education in schools.

Young people from both Bosniak and Bosnian Serb backgrounds participated in networking activities. In this context, the youth centre is a kind of “resource centre” where one can find likeminded people, exchange experiences on dealing with local authorities and get advice. For informal groups in particular, the centre in Krizevici forms an important “base” for consultations, as there is no meeting place with a comparable infrastructure within 50 kilometres.

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Ipak’s goal is, among other things, to impress upon young people the worth of civic engagement and democratic processes. Ipak wants them to learn that the only way to change things is to become active. Hence Ipak’s support for young people in working with established institutions: before the elections in 2004, courses entitled “Small School of Democracy” were offered. It turned out that many young people wanted to engage in youth councils¹⁷ in order to represent their interests in local politics. One successful example is an organisation from Zvornik which has set up a youth council with the support of ten youth groups from different villages. They then elected a representative to send to the local council.

4.2. Close Cooperation with Schools and Teachers

Contacts were also developed with key figures and functionaries working in the fields of youth and education (school directors and teachers). For example,

¹⁵ A budget line of KM 80,000 per year was created in 2003.

¹⁶ Representatives of the German Development Agency (GTZ), the World Bank and the NGO *Schüler Helfen Leben* were present at the conference.

¹⁷ Youth councils exist in many municipalities in the RS and have the right to send a delegate to the local councils. Thus far, this is not the case in the Federation BiH. Krizevici and some neighbouring villages are represented in a youth council.

many local schools were encouraged to participate in an art competition with the theme “Young People Build the Future”, which raised awareness of the project among all the teaching staff and schoolchildren. Parents’ meetings also played a very important role. The competitions did not only produce surprisingly high-quality contributions, they really sparked interest and led to visits and exchanges between Bosniak and Bosnian Serb pupils from different schools.

Many schools in Eastern Bosnia are still in a very poor state. Everything is in short supply – from sanitary amenities to heating fuel, teaching materials and workbooks. Ipak has therefore set up a lending library in Krizevici’s school, which is used intensively. Ipak also helped some schools in the municipality of Zvornik to improve their teaching materials and sanitary amenities.¹⁸ The team’s strategy is to advise teachers on ways of taking action themselves in order to identify remedies, e.g. by initiating a partnership with German schools. Ipak then helps initiate first contacts. The teachers hope to start exchange programmes for pupils and for teachers, as well as to receive fresh pedagogical inputs. Many teachers have not had an opportunity to participate in any training in decades, and perceive this as a severe shortcoming. Until now, the initiation of exchange programmes has proved to be somewhat difficult; one obstacle is a lack of infrastructure that makes it impossible for teachers to call abroad; another obstacle is that sometimes the teachers themselves lack the necessary foreign language skills. Nonetheless, in the case of the school in Oraovac contacts were established with a school in Marburg, Germany, which donated several computers.

In a different vein, Ipak and *Schüler Helfen Leben* provided support for the production of a pupils’ magazine in both Latin and Cyrillic script, which symbolises respect for the different languages that are being used in different schools. The first edition (No. 0) was produced in time for the opening of the youth centre in December 2003. It covered news concerning school and sports activities, reported on NGO youth activities and published an “appeal for peace” by Macedonian and Albanian children who had met during the war in Macedonia. Independent editorial teams from several schools produce the magazine.

Ipak’s cooperation with regional schools has helped create opportunities to meet and get to know each other for teaching staff who support integration and mother-tongue instruction in schools. Teachers from all sides (both with Bosniak and Bosnian Serb background) have been motivated to support the objectives of the project and are actively involved in it.¹⁹ They all consider cooperation with

¹⁸ With the help of UNHCR, for example, portable toilets were put up at the school in Oraovac.

¹⁹ While a school’s teaching staff is often multiethnically composed, this is rare for the school’s pupils. Only Bosniak returnees, for example, attend Krizevici’s school. Oraovac’s school teaches mostly Bosnian Serb children.

Ipak and the youth centre as very inspiring. Ipak also involved the parents in many activities and focused on creating parents' councils.

4.3. Multiethnic Cooperation

The goal defined in the project proposal – to contribute to multiethnic cooperation – was achieved during the first three years of the project to the fullest possible extent: the Krizevici team put together by Ipak is made up of members of both the Bosniak and the Bosnian Serb communities. The same applies for the project advisory council. Ipak also managed to achieve its goal of ensuring that both communities are represented on an equal basis in the cooperation with schools and in contacts with youth organisations.

Ipak has been successful in generating enthusiasm for the project among young people from the Bosniak and Bosnian Serb communities, not only at local level but also in the wider Eastern Bosnian region. Indeed, this was achieved even before the project itself had become a tangible reality. During the planning of leisure activities, music events, and training in PR and democracy-building, successful cooperation was established with youth groups from Zvornik, which have been involved in publicising the project in the predominantly Serb villages around Krizevici. The initiators had hoped for this development but knew that it could not be taken for granted, for in the villages of Eastern Bosnia, most of which are ethnically homogeneous, it still takes a great deal of courage, self-confidence and determination to participate in activities in a village whose population belongs to the other ethnic group.

The extensive networking activities during the first phase of the project helped to ensure that the youth centre can count on the active involvement of individuals and groups from both Bosnian Serb and Bosniak communities in the future. This way, persons working in youth and education, such as teachers, who could function as multipliers in their respective communities, have also been secured as partners. It is already clear that besides the benefits for the target group, i.e. young returnees, the project is also having an impact on the social environment by promoting cooperation among multipliers from the education sector. Here, the Ipak team – together with key partners from the social environment – has at least contributed, through its activities to date, to establishing conditions favourable to the emergence of a “peace constituency” (Lederach 1997). The same applies to networking among youth groups, which also led to manifold initiatives of interethnic cooperation.

This has laid the foundation for interethnic networking at the regional level as well. Initial steps were also taken towards establishing networks for cooperation between government agencies and NGOs.

4.4. Youth in Dialogue with Politicians

The project's objective of motivating young people to articulate their interests and become actively involved in shaping their communities was achieved in several respects. In fact, expectations were exceeded when in the fall of 2004 they actively entered into a dialogue with politics. During the run-up to the first direct election of mayors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ipak supported a series of meetings to which the various candidates were invited. Ipak had not initially planned these events: the idea came from the young people themselves. Such public dialogue between youth and politicians, or administrations, was an absolute novelty in the region. Youth groups from all 36 villages took part in this dialogue (*see also the interview with Lahira Sejjija and Adnan Harbic in this book*).

Seven candidates participated. The young people began by writing down their expectations, which they then presented. They highlighted simple things: a soccer field, a school, repairs of water supplies and roads, better communication infrastructure, and, first and foremost, places where young people could meet. Next, the candidates were asked about their goals in terms of youth policies. They were asked to name concrete projects that they would implement, if they were elected into office, and to sign a statement of intent. The statements were later published on the Internet.

Together, Ipak and the young people tried to make sure that the promises were kept by visiting the elected mayors afterwards. The mayor of Sapna, for example, stood by his word and had a connecting road rebuilt and the water supply repaired. He also granted access to a youth room in a house that young people themselves will rebuild and renovate. This was visible and tangible success. Young people experienced that their involvement could actually bring about change.

A second political dialogue took place when the international community's High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, visited the youth centre in Krizevici in March 2004 and spoke all day with the young people. It was quite shocking when, in answer to the question who would like to leave Bosnia-Herzegovina, 70% of hands went up. Paddy Ashdown stressed that no one should rely on "the international community". It could not solve all problems in the region and young people would need to take action to achieve their interests. Ipak's project staff considered Paddy Ashdown's visit very important for two reasons: 1) It sent a signal to young people that they matter in Bosnia's future; and 2) Media coverage contributed to making Ipak's goals known beyond the region, so it is hoped that more attention will be given to the problems of youth in Bosnia.

In sum, there are several positive results that have been achieved by the project so far, as pointed out in this section. However, that does not mean that the project is operating within a framework of unity and harmony in the region. Of course, the project was and still is also confronted with a number of difficulties and challenges.

5. Difficulties and Challenges


5.1. Cooperation with the Administration: Lack of Reliability and Uncertainty

Tremendous efforts were made to foster contacts with the political level in particular. A great deal of patience and an ability to tolerate frustration were required from the Ipak team before the municipal council could finally be persuaded to vote in favour of the centre's construction in Krizevici. During the subsequent phases of the project as well, contacts with politicians and the administration in Zvornik had to be cultivated continuously. Due to the frequent changes of political majorities, it has been essential to maintain the contacts and, if necessary, repeatedly "socialise" new people by making them aware of the project's objectives and regularly updating them on its progress. Several times the project faced new challenges as a result of political changes, such as the replacement of the Social Democrat mayor by a representative of the radical Bosnian Serb party, the SDS. Even after the municipal council had given its consent to the centre's construction, obstructions within the administration resulted in a systematic delay in issuing the building permit.

Furthermore, the local police initially blocked the team's efforts to ensure that the site and its immediate vicinity were cleared of mines. The team overcame all these difficulties by rigorously pursuing dialogue with the various political levels and drawing on informal networks and contacts (including, in the latter case, support from SFOR).²⁰ At local level, this was quite influential, as it proved to people that despite difficulties and bureaucratic red tape, things can happen if one is creative and persistent in pursuing one's interest.

In general, Ipak's cooperation with local authorities worked well as it was very convincing in presenting its goals as politically independent, impartial

²⁰ The chief of police in charge had declined to signal urgency of mine clearance to UNHCR. Ipak then managed to get in touch with SFOR through US cooperation partners. SFOR checked the area around the centre for mines and gave the all-clear. Tensions with the local authorities followed but were eventually resolved. In the end, everyone met on the soccer field where local police, SFOR soldiers and Krizevici's youth played a match.



and dedicated to youth in general (regardless of ethnic, religious or regional background). But frequent changes in the political majorities and fluctuation of decision-makers at local level have created considerable uncertainty and continue to pose a major challenge. As a consequence, members of the project team constantly have to invest a huge amount of energy in building trust and confidence with the relevant persons.

Relentless networking efforts have made it possible for the project to run smoothly and without major obstructions thus far. Intensive contact with the media also proved useful. Some contacts already existed due to Ipak's media-training programme in Tuzla. The project's presence in the national and international media increased with the opening of the centre in December 2003 and High Representative Paddy Ashdown's visit in March 2004.

5.2. Dealing with Trauma and Peace Education

Many of the returnees in Eastern Bosnia suffer from various traumas. Often they have experienced severe human rights violations, expulsion and the loss of family members. Near the "black pass" (*Crni Vrh*), in a mountain range close by the youth centre, one of the largest mass graves on Bosnian ground was discovered in 2004 – more than 600 bodies were found, civilians who had tried to flee Eastern Bosnia for Tuzla in 1995. Many of the young people with whom Ipak works have lost family members. To return to the places where such atrocities happened, and to be confronted again with the perpetrators, can rekindle or reinforce traumatic experiences (*see the article by Monika Kleck on trauma work in this book*). Even those who have been too young to consciously experience war and violence, or those who were born after the war, show signs of psychological stress. The symptoms are exacerbated by a lack of physical or material security, which the young people and their families often face. Lack of security is created, for one, because several war criminals remain at large in Eastern Bosnia. Also, there have been open and concealed threats, and although they have not been directed against the youth centre in Krizevici, they continue to worry people in the villages.²¹

The Ipak team has therefore started to involve psychologists in the work at local level. A psychotherapist was consulted intensively during the starting phase of the project. She helped the team to identify those young people who were most suited to work as multipliers with their peers. Furthermore, she helped them to understand trauma symptoms and developed counselling for traumatised

²¹ The Ipak team reports that in December 2003 explosives were found tied to a well near the road to Krizevici. The well was used exclusively by a village of Bosniak returnees.

young people. Special courses were designed to strengthen self-confidence and self-esteem through group work, and to break through the lethargy afflicting many youths. Some of the young people were also trained to play a supportive and counselling role for their peers.

Ipak staff soon realised that they lacked the qualification to deal professionally with trauma issues. Since they work in an environment that regularly confronts them with the issue, though, Ipak thinks it important to further train the team – as well as to bring in experts to work with the young target group. The goal is to be able to recognise traumatised persons and to deal with them sensitively.

Another set of activities for the next project phase concerns peace education. Workshops in civil conflict transformation will help enable young people to deal constructively with the past. These activities need to be planned very carefully, tailored to the target group, and carried out by professionals.²² Conflict transformation training for the Ipak team members is also on the agenda.


5.3. School and Education Policy Regulations

One frequently encountered difficulty for the project team is that school and education policy regulations adopted at a higher level are geared towards ethnic segregation, including different curricula which provide no teaching in the mother tongue but prescribe either the Bosnian or the Serbian language, rules on religious education and religious rites, etc. (*see the article by Astrid Fischer in this book*). These make life difficult for returnees and teachers and, in many places, result in the geographical separation of children and young people from different communities.²³

The discussions in the schools revealed that there are teaching staff and colleges in the region who would like to work towards changing this situation and promoting integrated multiethnic education. However, they often feel isolated and helpless and still lack the know-how or contacts necessary to reach these goals effectively. Links between these individuals and bodies must be fostered in order to form an “alliance” or “lobby” so that they can work together to achieve

22 Contacts have been established with trainers who are experienced facilitators of cross-border workshops in former Yugoslavia. Together with the Ipak team they will develop a long-term and gradual training concept.

23 For example, the curricula in the RS stipulate that, in the first year, teaching must take place using the Cyrillic script, with the Latin script only being introduced in the second year, whereas in the FBiH it is the other way round. Fearing that their children will suffer discrimination or fall victim to nationalist indoctrination, many parents are sending their children to schools some distance away where their own ethnic community predominates.



their objectives within a professional context. A further challenge is to devise professional development programmes for teachers, with a view to phasing out the outmoded teaching methods that are still widespread in schools (e.g. teachers lecturing from the front of the class and following an outdated curriculum).

Ipak regards sensitisation of parents as one of the most important challenges for the next steps in project development. Only if parents understand and actively support youth issues and needs is there a chance that the education system as a whole can be changed, that curricula for the teaching of language (especially concerning the mother tongue), religion and history can be synchronised, and that ethnic segregation can be counteracted.

5.4. Meeting the Needs of Different Age Groups and Gender Mainstreaming

One difficulty is to integrate older “youth” (between 18 and 25) in training and education efforts. It turned out that they were often more interested in leisure activities and disco nights – understandably so, since they are trying to make up for the youth they have lost during the war by “just having fun”. Younger teenagers are often more interested in the training courses. To integrate the highly diverse expectations and age groups is a particular challenge. So far, Ipak has tried to meet the needs and interests of all those who consider themselves “youth”, even if some of those who come to the centre are well over 20. This generation of “older youth”, the Ipak team is convinced, needs to be integrated by all means. Still, it remains an open question whether Ipak can really meet everyone’s interests and needs.

A further central challenge is to integrate girls into all of the centre’s activities. So far, participation in project activities is quite evenly distributed: in leisure and training activities, 40% young women and 60% young men participate. In the training for agricultural production, the balance stands at 45:55%. Concerning vocational training, there need to be special incentives for girls and young women.

In the next project phases, according to the Ipak team, greater account will therefore be taken of gender aspects. In order to develop the potential of young people of both sexes to the greatest possible extent, it is essential to be aware of boys’ and girls’ different realities, needs and roles that are typical in this society and region. It is especially important to maintain the freedom and change in roles that girls and young women experienced when they were refugees during and after the war, e.g. in urban centres. When devising programmes for young women, the challenge is therefore not simply to adapt to the customs of the village community, but also to help change these customs. Girls and women

should be offered programmes that appeal to them without overwhelming them or expecting them to enter into open confrontation or opposition to their environment.

Nonetheless, gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding and development projects, especially in rural regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, faces a number of challenges. In traditional Muslim families in particular, it is common for girls to have to spend large parts of the day doing chores in the home and the kitchen while their brothers are involved in activities at the youth centre.

In this milieu, the call for girls to take part in crafts training is likely to go unheeded, which does not mean that they should be excluded. Of course all education services should be open to boys and girl. But consideration should be given to providing training opportunities for girls beyond agriculture – in book-keeping and marketing. The Ipak team also tries to combine woodworking and arts/design activities.

6. Conclusions and Wider Perspectives

In summary, the “Young People Build the Future” project already had a positive impact on the target group during its first period (2002–2005) by educating and empowering young people and providing them with practice-orientated professional skills. The project also had an influence on the social environment, 1) in the sense that young people started to engage in the community and put pressure on the political level to meet the needs of young people, and 2) in the sense that interethnic cooperation takes place at many levels between young people and also between schools and teachers. But the impact on the political and social situation in Eastern Bosnia can certainly not be evaluated comprehensively at this stage. Results will only become apparent once the project has been consolidated over the long term, i.e. after a number of years. The positive results to date owe a great deal to the ability of the Ipak team to build contacts across all social milieus by networking and transparent communication about project goals and stages – from the local level up to the international political arena, including civil society groups. Such contacts at different levels make it easier to overcome difficulties and obstacles, and to find creative, inclusive solutions. The project will continue to depend on time- and energy-consuming communication efforts with the local authorities and Zvornik municipality. The Ipak team has set the goal for the next project phase to remind the political decision-makers more forcefully of their duty in dealing with youth problems.

The following priority goals were identified for the next project phase (2005–2008), in addition to the purposes listed in section 3.1 of this article:

Box 2: Priority Goals for the next Project Phase (2005–2008)²⁴

- 1) Active participation of young people in social processes at the local, regional and national levels. The youth network between the municipalities of Tuzla, Kalesija, Osmaci, Sapna and Zvornik should be further developed. A regional youth parliament should be established at the end of 2008.
- 2) National authorities take responsibility and action concerning the problems of young people.
- 3) Active involvement of youth in reconstruction (through a consolidation of the youth cooperative, including training programmes and initiatives for small businesses and entrepreneurial activities).
- 4) Decreasing discrepancies between rural and urban livelihood opportunities boost social dynamics in the rural areas. There is a reason to stay.
- 5) Strengthened individual peace and cross-cultural communication skills through peace education and international youth exchange programmes.

In addition, the current network-building with young people from the Drina region in the Tuzla-Zvornik-Bijeljina triangle will be expanded. Cooperation with teachers and schools will also be stepped up during the next phases of the project. It is especially important to combine Ipak's activities with strategies aimed at reforming education policy at state (local and regional) level. But it would be presumptuous to assume that the "Young People Build the Future" project can dismantle the conditions and problems that have been created by government authorities or key political forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

NGOs – no matter how successful their project strategy may be – are not in a position, or lack the necessary influence, to transform school and education policy provisions that are geared towards ethnic segregation. However, the examples show that through their networking activities, they can help to establish a social climate which is favourable to peaceful community relations, in which people employed in the education sector are encouraged to work towards changing conditions.

International organisations – in conjunction with NGOs – should therefore intensify their efforts to promote school reform and focus on multiethnic education work. This includes the standardisation of curricula and the introduction of

²⁴ Documentation of the workshop "10 Jahre Ipak: Krizevici 2002–2005 und 2005–2008" in Tuzla, 13 July 2005; the workshop was facilitated by Martina Fischer.

guaranteed mother-tongue teaching in order to safeguard integrated schooling (instead of the current ethnically segregated system).

International organisations charged with implementing the Dayton Peace Agreement in BiH, including the HR and the OSCE, recently introduced important measures to implement educational reform and also placed youth organisations, as a target group, at the heart of their measures to promote civil society (on this topic *see the article by Astrid Fischer in this book* and Perry 2003). However, in order to offer this group prospects in their own country, it is important to work towards the introduction of practical occupational training at schools and universities as well. A major challenge for further work is to create economic and employment prospects for young people in order to stem the tide of out-migration from Bosnia (see Fischer/Tumler 2000a, 2000b; Fischer 2001). Otherwise, the loss of talented young people is likely to pose a major threat to the country's development prospects. The increased out-migration since the war is partly due to the lack of vocational training opportunities in Bosnia. The launch of appropriate training programmes in technical occupations or crafts, commerce and industry could improve young people's prospects in the job market and do much to encourage them to remain in their own country.

Appropriate projects can and must be initiated and supported by international development agencies, which have access to the state level. At the same time, domestic and foreign companies must be encouraged to assist this process. It is important to ensure that these measures are not primarily designed *for* young people; instead, young people must be actively involved in needs analysis, project design and implementation.

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