

Peacebuilding Natives: Experiences from 30 years of peacebuilding projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)

Transcript

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So, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Lamia, and I want to say first that I am very grateful for the many different perspectives offered on this subject here today. The title of my presentation is Peacebuilding Natives, and I'm drawing here on the idea that digital natives, this type of buzzword we hear all the time, is one of the many popular phrases heard in today's era of technological hyper-growth. These technological advancements, together with strong securitization narratives, now seem to survey over the agenda of many different states and many different donors, unfortunately, as well. And they are opposed to what we are here to talk about today, which is peace and positive peace above all. The analogy here would suggest that as digital natives navigate technology better and navigate it more easily, peace-building natives might navigate the topic as being born into it. And by figuring out how it's done, rather than learning steps and phases first from a theoretical perspective. So I'm going to briefly give an overview of where I come from. And this is the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a case study in peace building, essentially. And I'm sure many of them, many of you are familiar with it because it has shaped many academic discussions. And through to this, I'm about to explicate this context thoroughly and will focus on the impossible task of convincing my experience. in peacebuilding. So to start off, I would say that from our recharge, I was a project beneficiary and I was included in peacebuilding under this broad umbrella. These peacebuilding initiatives in times included also very unusual projects, such as Shark Tank simulations or A local recording of some of these drugs with a group of ethnically diverse kids, also pleased that children didn't understand, like playing the role of a bear in promotion of a sopranational European identity that no child essentially understood. But also within this framework of growing up in peacebuilding, I also got to experience a lot of positive initiatives, which have also motivated me. to engage with this topic both in my education and in my later work experience. One of these examples is the opportunity for me to attend the School United World College in Mostar, which is of high school fundamentally based on peace education with an explicit aim to contribute to a reconstruction of a post-conflict society. While I do experience, I value this experience deeply, I'm also a minority who has this opportunity. And to this day, the school's classrooms are on top floor of the building with two national ethnically segregated schools in the same building, which is things in the paradigm of two schools under one

group system that ethnically segregates students. So in reality, this school now exists in the form of three schools within the same building. So my point here is that This system persists beyond a lot of effort and attention placed on Bosnia and Herzegovina as a field of peace-building. And that despite many fragmented missions and project-based initiatives, this rate remains frozen in the framework of parallel institutions. So when I speak about my experience, I speak of Bosnia as a case study, but also Moscow as a case study, within a case study, that is stuck in the form of a negative peace, which is also now put under the question of insustainability with growing conflict in society, polarization, variability in a stage and denialism. So in this context, peacebuilding remains the domain of non-governmental institutions and organizations primarily who are now struggling more and more to find resources. Upon reflecting on all of this, I realized that the most valuable perspective that I could contribute with here is that of a peacebuilding native who grew up fascinated by the process. And I want to focus on essentially what work and to shed a light in these methods that I believe are affecting and should be getting more attention. So one of these experiences is the example of not that summer new program that existed in Bosnia for 10 years now. And I think it's not the specific example that never so much, but what it contributes with its insistence on the importance of durability of one project where volunteers show up year through year and continue to deliver this program of bringing kids together in school while they're unable to study together in the formal systems of ethnic celebration. So this persistent effort of enthusiasts, but also the engagement of past beneficiaries, which is another evidence of how this program is valuable and how in practice contacting focuses is very important among young people in bringing together individuals to produce positive outcomes and creating lasting friendships and important skills for quality engagement with their communities. but also contributing to a higher degree of individual mobility, which can also be a separate point of discussion. So while this program operates as the faculty is doing an initiative that brings together kids, it doesn't explicitly focus on it and doesn't state this in its explicit mission, even though it has clear evidence of it and its processes. Another set of experiences I would draw from is an organisation that I'm working for now, Miget Santosaro, which has been an active local NGO for over 30 years, essentially since the last year or four. And how it offers lessons from long experience, from its focus on media as one of the factors in society that compell us conflict and drive it. Here on the side, I'll put some comments on link them if you want to see more about them later. But essentially, what this means in its approach is that it is important to focus on youth working together on constructive stories in this case, because it's about media, but on constructive activities that have real-life impact on their communities. And in these efforts of reaching these beneficiaries, that it's important to go into communities and find local actors to connect with, such as local associations, organizations and local media. Precisely because the experience has shown that if we take these members who are interested in peacebuilding from the society to the center, we are taking them away from their communities and then putting

them back in the context which has even less peace, so to say, to put it simply. So another dimension I would also highlight is that the idea of discussing dominant narratives that fuel conflict is very important to approach by focusing on underrepresented perspectives. And an example here is, of course, it's usually minorities and women, but it can also be a perspective that hasn't been told within this dominant narrative. And in this case, one case, it was journalists who participated in the process of documenting the war. So Here, I would also highlight that inclusion of women, because it is one of the main topics of the conference, is also very important, but important to be done in a way that doesn't frame them as classed big guys, which has been a frequent experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina. And that these approaches need, at times, new creativity and always intersectionality. So one or two, maybe more lessons I would emphasize is from the perspective of donors and organizations conducting peacebuilding is the importance of internal programming that focuses on systemic conflict analysis as the basis for work and to create an effort to have a common understanding of conflict and marketing that it's publicly available. So specifically, this can mean the importance of differentiating between the post-war and post-conflict conceptions in peacebuilding, as this is a crucial difference we just saw being made in presentation of poverty and conflict by Dr. Altman. I think this is very important. And I would also highlight that Many actors in Bosnia from experience did not establish this common understanding, and that we should always be mindful how we understand the war, the conflict, and to understand that ceasefire does not end conflict in a social sense or in other ways. And we should be cautious of what happens when we consider, assume peace too early, essentially. So I would conclude maybe with my broader personal observations also being that there is valuable initiatives. We have to recognize that valuable initiatives are consistently competing with political entrepreneurship, which instrumentalizes conflict-related grievances. While historical distance is welcome in addressing the past between first generations, this conflict that resides in a collective memory in society and as well as its persistent institutional manifestations, it should not be a reality we have to consider as something that needs to be perpetually negotiated. I believe that peacebuilding must be interested in truth and in restorative justice. So when I was conceding this presentation, I knew I wanted to offer more personal perspective, as peacebuilding processes shaped my reality for as long as I can remember. And this year, the ongoing peacebuilding houses in Bosnia-Herzegovina launched its 30th anniversary, and so did the Selenza genocide. We're looking at it today with genocide defining our devastating present context. So a final reflection for me would be that I want to draw your attention to directly involving peacebuilding leaders and shaping and reimagining the peacebuilding processes without subjecting them to politics of appeal in perpetuity. That is all for me for now. Thank you.

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Thank you.