What Works in Building Tolerance Among Balkan Children and Youth

By Cathryn L. Thorup, Ph.D.

Foreword by Martti Ahtisaari

Balkan
Children & Youth
FOUNDATION

International Youth Foundation®

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International Youth Foundation®

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) was established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources and attention to the many effective local efforts that are transforming young lives across the globe. Currently operating in nearly 50 countries and territories, IYF is dedicated to improving the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. IYF's "What Works in Youth Development" series examines cutting edge issues in the field and aims to provide practitioners, policymakers, donors, and others supporting youth initiatives with insights into effective practices and innovative approaches impacting young people worldwide.

Balkan Children and Youth Foundation

Founded in 2000, the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (BCYF) is dedicated to improving the conditions and prospects for young people throughout the Balkan region. With regional operations headquartered in Skopje, Macedonia, BCYF's goal is to serve as a catalyst in strengthening the youth development sector throughout the region through a range of capacity-building supports, targeted grantmaking, and networking opportunities.
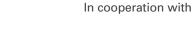
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In times of dramatic change, the story we tell ourselves of the future is even more important than that of the past. While the past may mold who we are, it is a compelling vision of the future that must guide us and propel us forward.

What does the future hold for the Balkan region? After years of brutal and often violent conflict, the people of the Balkans are now rebuilding and renewing their commitment to the goals of peace, progress, and prosperity. While many obstacles—political, social, and economic—remain, one cannot underestimate the power of a shared vision combined with the will to achieve it.

A vital key to peace is cultivating both a recognition of commonalities and greater understanding and respect for differences among the region's diverse ethnic groups, races, religions, and cultures.

A vital key to peace is cultivating both a recognition of commonalities and greater understanding and respect for differences among the region's diverse ethnic groups, religions, nations, and cultures. While this process needs to be a shared responsibility among people throughout the Balkans, it is an especially important goal to nurture among the region's children and youth. With young people under the age of 24 comprising more than a quarter of the population in most Balkan nations, it is they who will soon own the future and are now poised to play an active role in shaping it.

What Works in Building Tolerance Among Balkan Children and Youth explores existing divides in the region, while profiling nine civil society organizations that are working to encourage greater inter-ethnic cooperation and respect for differences among the region's children and youth.

The term tolerance is used in this publication because it is a widely recognized term within the region and within the larger development community. The term is woefully insufficient, however, in describing the level of understanding and cooperation that is needed in the region—and in our world. To merely "tolerate" one another is not enough. We must seek to understand and respect one another—to embrace our similarities and our differences.

Here you will read about a program in Macedonia that uses theatre as a powerful tool to promote greater understanding among young people of diverse national and ethnic backgrounds. Through engaging in an activity that is both meaningful and enjoyable, young people come to understand one another on common ground. Similarly, you will learn about a project in Serbia that trains youth in conflict resolution and nonviolent communication.

As you will see, these are not programs that "preach" tolerant behavior, rather they bring young people of diverse backgrounds together and create a safe, secure environment where they can come to know one another and realize common interests. Not surprisingly, a number of these projects were initiated by—and

continue to be led by youth. Several of the programs profiled here also engage family members and the wider community. Such efforts are vital to preventing future conflicts and nurturing a more peaceful environment over the long-term.

Promoting greater inter-ethnic cooperation and understanding among the region's young people is a key goal of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (BCYF). Established in 2000, BCYF is working to identify and support youth-serving NGOs throughout the region that are meeting young people's needs—for greater civic participation, employment training, nonformal education, access to technology, and health awareness. At the same time, BCYF is mobilizing resources from local and international donors to strengthen and expand such programs. Throughout its work, BCYF is striving to nurture a meaningful dialogue among government, business, and civil society actors—and especially among young people—about what is possible in the region.

We are grateful to Cathryn L. Thorup, Ph.D. for her in-depth analysis of the lessons learned from these nine exciting projects, and for situating them in the broader context of developments in the region as a whole. Gratitude must also be extended to those BCYF staff who provided Dr. Thorup with their first-hand experience and insights into these issues. Lastly, we would like to thank the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its support of this publication and efforts throughout the region to support the positive development of young people.

We hope you will find this material useful and look forward to engaging in a wider dialogue on how best to strengthen and support the types of programs profiled here. Clearly it is efforts such as these that hold the key to securing the peaceful and prosperous future that today's Balkan youth so desire and deserve.

Martti Ahtisaari
Chairman
Balkan Children and Youth Foundation

The quality of life and perceived prospects for the future of the region's 21 million children and youth have been severely affected by the short- and long-term impact of more than a decade of war and threats of war.

The Balkans remain one of the world's most critical hot spots—a place where long-simmering hostilities periodically and unpredictably erupt into acts of violence. Once an example of cooperation across ethnic and religious lines, the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia[1]—one of the most liberal of the former Communist bloc members—is now a mosaic of countries and territories that is home to a wide array of ethnic groups, religious denominations, and political factions. This difficult situation is further aggravated by the pervasive economic distress currently experienced by a significant portion of the region's residents.[2]

The quality of life and perceived prospects for the future of the region's 21 million children and youth have been severely affected by the short- and long-term impact of more than a decade of war and threats of war. As the Director of Association PLIMA in Montenegro has stated, "Our economy suffers as a result of the tensions, relations among our citizens suffer, and there is a constant fear of another war."[3] As a result, many youth are planning to leave the region in order to pursue their studies or to look

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[1] The former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is also referred to as the former Yugoslavia.

[2] Ethnic conflict and war have disrupted economic relations among countries in the region, which in turn has depressed national incomes, increased unemployment and contributed to a deteriorating physical infrastructure.

[3] Jovan Nikolaidis, Director, Association PLIMA, survey data.

for work opportunities abroad. Others devote their time to searching for ways to better their prospects at home and to improve conditions in their communities. None are immune to the problems that plague the region as a whole.

This report examines a number of programs designed to build tolerance among Balkan youth—a critical dimension of numerous local and foreign initiatives to help stabilize the region and improve economic conditions. It is based primarily on information gathered through site visits to six programs in October 2002 (see Appendix), interviews at those sites with staff and participants, and survey data provided by these six programs and three additional programs which were not visited.[4]

The Balkan Children and Youth Foundation (BCYF)[5], a partner of the International Youth Foundation[6], was critical to the realization of this analysis. Based in Skopje, Macedonia, BCYF selected youth programs for this report with which it works or cooperates. Some of these programs are relatively new and the results are still preliminary, while others have been in operation for some time. BCYF provides financial support to six of these nine programs. They are a sub-set of programs for children and youth selected from among a number of excellent local, national, and regional initiatives with similar goals.[7] All nine of these programs provide interesting examples of good practice in building tolerance across a variety of regional divides. For reasons of time, geography, and resources, this study focuses on youth programs in Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are, of course, first-rate programs to be found in other Balkan countries as well. Finally, the difficulties inherent in any effort to review numerous programs in a relatively short period of time are compounded in this case by the sensitivity and complexity of the topic itself.[8]

The programs profiled here contribute directly or indirectly to both conflict prevention and inter-ethnic cooperation. In the context of youth development work in the Balkans, conflict prevention means providing youth with the skills and knowledge necessary to manage conflicts in a non-violent way and to turn conflict into an

opportunity for growth. Inter-ethnic cooperation is based on a respect for ethnic differences and an appreciation for diversity. Both terms are clearly closely connected. Learning to respect differences makes conflict management easier. As staff at Street Stories in Macedonia point out, creating as much inter-ethnic cooperation as possible in as many different aspects of social, economic, political, and cultural life will reduce the possibility of conflict since common goals and interests will be shared by members of different ethnicities.[9]

[9] Street Stories, survey data. Street Stories is a program managed by the Children's Theatre Center (Skopje, Macedonia).

This paper groups these two terms under the general rubric of building tolerance. Tolerance is a more inclusive term than inter-ethnic cooperation, also incorporating religious, national, political, and cultural differences among others. Given the variety of fault lines in the region—ethnic, religious, political, economic—building tolerance was chosen as the term that most accurately describes the work of programs focusing on different aspects of inter-ethnic cooperation, religious tolerance, multi-culturalism, conflict resolution, and conflict prevention. Building tolerance is a term well suited for use as a general framework for examining programs that enable youth to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to function constructively in communities characterized by multiple lines of division.

Working with children and youth to help them to develop strong inter-personal skills, to manage conflict, and to work effectively as a team is challenging under the best of circumstances. To build these skills in a context of deep cleavages requires particular skill, sensitivity, and creativity on the part of all involved. This section explores the fragile environment within which the nine organizations profiled carry out their work and how those circumstances have affected their choice of approach.[10]

The environment in the region is characterized by hundreds of years of suspicion and a recent history of armed conflict. Young people emerged from the conflict with very different reactions. Many felt more polarized and less inclined than ever to take steps to transcend centuries of distrust and work towards reconciliation.[11] Others dedicated themselves to taking steps to change attitudes and behaviors in hopes of avoiding further conflict. Still others felt adrift and hopeless about the future. This is the general context within which efforts to build tolerance are taking place—the situation in each country, of course, will vary significantly depending on local circumstances. Even so, there are certain overarching factors that the majority of these programs must take into account:

Infrastructure and Environment

■ According to BCYF's Executive Director, Agon Demjaha:

"These are not countries in transition, these are countries in stagnation. The fall of Communism produced rising expectations throughout the Balkans, but the standard of living for most has declined. The old social and welfare structures are gone, but the new ones are not yet in place. Since the fall of Communism also coincided with the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the economy declined. Resources are no longer shared and tariff barriers have been erected. The young are affected the most. Their illusions have collapsed. While in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary life is better than it was under Communism, this is not the case in the Balkans. Before, Yugoslavs felt that they were comparatively better off than the citizens of other Communist nations. Individual liberties in the former Yugoslavia were fairly high compared to other Communist countries. There was relatively greater personal freedom and people felt they were well-off. Many now feel that their situation has deteriorated. Their freedom of movement is restricted and their economic situation has worsened. Safety and security were greater before. There is no nostalgia for communism, clearly, but there is nostalgia for the previously higher quality of life. We still don't have democracy. It remains an aspiration. But the economy is the biggest problem. If there is nothing to lose, you fight."[12]

"These are not countries in transition, these are countries in stagnation. The fall of Communism produced rising expectations throughout the Balkans, but the standard of living for most has declined."

—Agon Demjaha, Executive Director, Balkan Children and Youth Foundation

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[10] This section draws heavily on discussions with BCYF consultants and staff working throughout the region, as well as input from staff in the nine organizations profiled.

[11] Risto Karajkov, BCYF Program Officer, October 7, 2002.

[12] Agon Demjaha, Executive Director, BCYF, October 7, 2002.

■ The Balkan region is characterized by the presence of deep cleavages along multiple dividing lines: ethnicity, citizenship, class, religion, culture, and values.[13] Discrimination and the absence of a shared base of knowledge across these different groups makes it difficult to design and implement effective programs for youth and to attract participants.[14] Typically, members of different ethnic groups do not trust each other.[15] If one ethnic group is organizing a mixed group program, members of other ethnic groups will be disinclined to attend. This is one reason why international groups have had a relatively higher level of success[16] in bringing diverse groups together, particularly if the program is run outside the local setting.

■ Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are a still a relatively recent phenomenon in the Balkans. There is a lack of experience with civil society organizations and with voluntary activity in general. In Ulcinj, Montenegro, for example, local government does not fully understand the role of NGOs and views them as a competitor for resources.[17] This makes the mobilization of local resources even more difficult. In Serbia, given the recent role of the international community in supporting local efforts to bring an end to the Milosevic government's policies of ethnic cleansing, NGOs funded by foreign sources are viewed with particular suspicion by the government.[18]

■ There are mixed views throughout the Balkans as to how important it is to foster tolerance in the region. While most youth NGOs consider this to be an important issue,[19] that is not the case with all NGOs. This is one place where the international community has played a key role. In Montenegro, for example, international groups have held workshops and seminars on topics like conflict resolution. Local groups were initially reluctant to tackle this subject. The workshops provided a safe space for people of different ethnicities to meet and talk. Subsequently, local NGOs began to work on these same issues. While most local groups work on issues of inter-ethnic cooperation and conflict prevention out of deeply held

> **There are mixed views throughout the Balkans as to how important it is to foster tolerance in the region.**

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[13] In the Balkans, nationality equates with ethnicity, while citizenship equates with the country in which an individual resides. Thus, an individual may be a citizen of Macedonia, but consider him/herself Albanian for reasons of ethnicity.

[14] Risto Karajkov, op. cit.

[15] As one of BCYF's consultants in Macedonia stated, "We don't know the most basic elements of one another's culture, so we can't just start with a political discussion." There is a combination of a lack of information, misinformation, and disagreement on the validity of the information provided (e.g., historical, statistical). This is an issue in the schools as well, where parents complain that while their children are taught in their native language, the content still reflects the views of the national majority and does not take into account the perspectives of minorities in the country.

[16] This was particularly the case during and immediately after periods of open conflict/heightened tensions when it was especially difficult for local groups to be able to (or in some cases to even want to) convene mixed groups of local actors.

[17] Interview with staff at New Horizon, October 10, 2002. Local NGOs meet monthly in Ulcinj as part of an effort to strengthen the role of civil society in Montenegro.

[18] One of the organizations profiled here—the Belgrade PostPessimists—was very active in the opposition movement to Milosevic and prior to the elections in 2000 carried out a significant portion of its work underground. Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. "Reconciliation Among Young People in the Balkans—An Evaluation of the PostPessimist Network and other Youth Initiatives." Draft Evaluation Report. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 2001, section 3.1.2.

[19] According to BCYF's consultant in Serbia, approximately 80% of youth organizations have at least one program dealing with inter-ethnic cooperation. Aleksandra Vidanovic, BCYF Semi-Annual Consultants' Meeting, October 7, 2002.

conviction, the availability of significant resources from the international community also provides a powerful incentive for non-profits to move in this direction.

■ Language is an enormous barrier to collaboration. This is not only a factor that must be taken into account by programs that bring together youth from different countries in the region, but also programs that combine different ethnic groups from within the same country. In Macedonia, for example, most Albanian youth speak Macedonian, but not vice versa. In Montenegro, there are no universities that teach in Albanian. Local youth who wish to pursue their studies in the Albanian language, must leave their country in order to do so.[20]

■ Another complexity of the local environment is related to the difficulty of travel within and among countries in the region. Transportation is poor, travel is time-consuming, and travel restrictions (both crossing borders and within countries) add additional logistical challenges to programmatic efforts to bring people together. While the physical safety of travelers has improved significantly, ground transportation is still not without risk. Issues of ethnicity continue to play a significant role in determining the safest route to take when traveling through the region.

■ Finally, of course, the very fluidity and fragility of the overall environment in the Balkans—the continuing possibility of additional armed conflict— makes development initiatives seem relatively precarious. As one observer commented, "The programs may work, but the country may not." This places an additional burden on program managers who are looking for long- term development solutions rather than quick fixes. The brain drain, hit- and-run investment, lack of coordination among the domestic and international groups working in the region, and competition between region-wide and country-based programs for resources further complicates the picture.

Building Youth Participation

■ Many youth demonstrate an unwillingness to participate in organized pro- grams to combat hostility and prejudice. Some fear they will be perceived as not being "politically correct" if they express their true feelings. They know what they are expected to say and this may make it difficult to be frank. Moreover, for some the conflict is too recent and too painful.[21] They may come to an activity

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[20] To obtain a job with an international organization, candidates need to speak more than one language, of course. This serves as an incentive for interested young people to expand their language skills.

[21] Wars fought among neighbors—where those involved experience betrayal on a very personal level—are known to "…have special long-lasting pernicious psycho-social effects." UD Evaluation Report, 3.99 cited in Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. op. cit., section 2.1.

but leave soon after because they cannot handle the feelings that arise. They are afraid to care about the situation too much because it is simply too disturbing. As BCYF's consultant in Serbia said, "It's not a simulation game, it's real life."[22]

■ Another problem faced by programs that want to reach out to youth is the brain drain. Organizations may work with youth only to see them leave the country in search of better educational opportunities and jobs.[23] Many of the most talented young people leave and whatever skills for conflict mitigation and tolerance they have learned leave with them.[24] Diell Bakalli, age 17, and currently the President of one of the programs profiled here—the Prishtina PostPessimists—states, "The youth aren't doing anything. Everyone is planning to leave. The future is very depressing. The high schools are poor and so are the universities. On top of it, there is an economic crisis. In my own case, I will leave Kosovo to continue my studies and then come back."[25] Another young participant in Association PLIMA's program says, "Even if you get a university degree, you can't find a job. I'll go to the United States or Germany to work and study."[26]

■ An additional challenge is to ensure that some youth programs reach beyond the "best and the brightest" to include a broader cross-section of the youth population. If only youth "leaders" or "elites" take part in programs to build tolerance, the rest of youth remain on the margin of change. The answer may lie in combining "top down" programs that build "tomorrow's leaders" with more grassroots initiatives that reach larger numbers of young people to build "tomorrow's citizens."

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[22] Aleksandra Vidanovic, op. cit.

[23] Some youth go to work for the same international organizations and foundations that are working on building tolerance in the region—often at much higher salaries than they would receive working in local NGOs.

[24] This is not just limited to youth. It is striking how many professionals in their prime talk about leaving their country or being ready to leave should the situation deteriorate further.

[25] Diell Bakalli, interview, October 8, 2002. Agon Demjaha, Executive Director of BCYF, presents an alternative view saying that while this is an accurate portrayal of the situation throughout most of the Balkans—and particularly in Bosnia and Herzogovina—recent Gallup International polls indicate that Kosovar youth are highly optimistic.

[26] Youth focus group meeting, Association PLIMA, October 10, 2002.

This section examines the activities of nine programs operating in five distinct geographic settings. While each program is unique, all have a similar objective: to build bridges among youth across multiple fault lines. If successful, these programs will have made a small but highly significant contribution to efforts to help construct a more durable, less hazardous, and more hopeful future in the region.

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

"Peace Building Project"—Omladinski Center (The Youth Center) in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, Bosnia and Herzegovina[27]

The Youth Center was established in 1996 as part of a community reconstruction program funded by the United Nations and the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).[28] It was registered as a local NGO in 1997 and, according to staff, is the only multi-ethnic organization in this divided community. The Center is dedicated to providing a safe place for children and youth to gather, and offers a variety of educational, artistic, and creative activities designed to strengthen skills and encourage youth to take leadership roles in peace building in their communities.

The approach of the Youth Center is a holistic one that addresses the psychosocial needs of children and youth[29] through activities aimed at promoting a multi-ethnic dialogue within civil society, tolerance, constructive conflict resolution,[30] leadership, and—ultimately—the reunification of the two communities. Participants take part in creating educational programs designed to connect two communities separated by war. Center staff believe that the program ultimately strengthens the preconditions for democracy and a vibrant civil society, underscoring the critical link between building tolerance and fostering democracy. Center activities include community service programs, English and German classes, drama, dance, and drawing.

The Peace Building Project is based in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, a small town situated on the main road between Central Bosnia and Herzegovina. Between 1992 and 1994, it was the center of intense armed conflict between Bosniacs (Muslims) and Croats (Catholics). Eighty percent of private housing was destroyed and the public infrastructure was completely demolished. Subsequently, the town was divided into two independent ethnic communities (Gornji Vakuf/Bosniacs and Uskoplje/Croats). In 2001, an agreement was reached to join the two municipal administrations, but the town—including all institutions dealing with children and youth—remains divided.

> **Center staff believe that the program ultimately strengthens the preconditions for democracy and a vibrant civil society, underscoring the critical link between building tolerance and fostering democracy.**

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[27] The information in this section is based on survey data completed by Mirjana Gvozdenovic, Assistant Manager.

[28] Past and present donors of the Center include the European Commission, the United Nations Development Program, BCYF, German and Dutch funders, and several faith-based organizations such as Catholic Relief Services.

[29] The Center also works with teachers, parents, and other members of the community.

[30] Center staff work both on conflict prevention (discussing with children and youth the negative consequences of conflict for their community) and on inter-ethnic cooperation—learning to live "with each other, not beside each other." Survey data.

Most residents live below the poverty line and unemployment is a serious problem. Many orphans, disabled veterans, refugees, and displaced persons live in this community. The target population for the Peace Building Project includes refugees, returnees, children with social needs, and orphans, ages 5 to 18. Many of the Bosniac and Croat participants live in rural areas surrounding the town.

Cultural and linguistic differences are a significant source of conflict. Young people are particularly affected and are highly influenced by the views of their parents, teachers, and other adults in the community. There is a lack of basic knowledge across ethnic lines, but Center staff report significant progress in combating these prejudices through their work.

As an indication of project outputs, the Center reports that since 1996 over 3,500 children and youth have taken part in a Center activity and 200 youth have taken part in projects focused on conflict resolution and civic education.[31] Over 80 public and cultural events have been organized in the broader community. Eighty-five percent of participants took part in multi-ethnic dialogues. Finally, more than 1,000 children and youth completed the Center's computer course and more than 1,200 took part in multi-ethnic summer camps.[32]

Center staff have also documented the assessments of outside observers of Center activities regarding project outcomes. Children and youth who attend the program regularly demonstrate greater levels of tolerance. Many have gained strong language and computer skills and interact easily across ethnic lines.[33] Overall, the Center provides children and youth with coping skills and a degree of hope about a more peaceful future through its emphasis on self-expression, creativity, and interactive learning. It offers young people a stable, safe environment in which they can interact with one another and build their self-confidence.

Center staff believe reconciliation will be a long process and that it requires local solutions. One of their toughest challenges is that of being the only multi-ethnic organization, while at the same time pioneering new teaching methods (interactive learning). Parents have accepted the participation of their children in the program, but do not themselves directly support the undertaking by participating in Center activities themselves. Staff report that reactions on the part of school teachers and peers are sometimes negative which, of course, undermines what the children and youth are learning in the program. While the wider community gives rhetorical support, Center staff report that it does not extend to participating in Center activities.

> **The Center provides children and youth with coping skills and a degree of hope about a more peaceful future through its emphasis on self-expression, creativity, and interactive learning.**

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[31] IYF reports 520 children from different ethnic backgrounds took part in Center activities funded by BCYF between 2001 and 2002. Mohanlal, Don. "Strengthening the Capacity of NGOs Serving Children and Youth in the Balkans: Twelve Months of Operation of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation." International Youth Foundation. April 2002, p. 6.

[32] These outputs are representative of a more extensive list of reported results provided by the Center.

[33] The observers note a difference, however, between children and youth. To some degree, the latter seem less hopeful and a few are much quieter and depressed.

Despite these difficulties, the Youth Center believes that through educational activities, seminars, civic initiatives, and networking with other organizations, they can help young people become "the bearers of essential democratic changes, civic awareness and global action."[34]

Kosovo:

"Prishtina PostPessimists"—Prishtina, Kosovo[35]

The Prishtina PostPessimists—like the Belgrade PostPessimists profiled later—form part of a regional network of youth dedicated to improving conditions in the Balkans.[36] The PostPessimist network is a highly regarded and internationally recognized effort to build tolerance among youth across the Balkans. The network grew out of a youth conference that took place in Austria alongside a United Nations conference on human rights in 1993. Participants included youth from throughout the former Yugoslavia. These young people decided to organize another meeting specifically designed to bring together youth from the region. With the assistance of Norwegian People's AID, that meeting took place in Austria in 1994.[37] It led to the formation of a network designed to build friend-

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[34] Youth Center, survey data.

[35] Material on the Prishtina PostPessimists is based on survey data and an interview with Diell Bakalli, President of the Prishtina PostPessimists, October 8, 2002. Information on the PostPessimist network as a whole is based on information provided by the Prishtina PostPessimists, the Belgrade PostPessimists, and an extensive evaluation of the PostPessimist network undertaken by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

[36] One interesting difference between the PostPessimist organization (both the network and the two local operations in Belgrade and Prishtina) and the other organizations profiled here is that the PostPessimists organization was launched by youth and is managed by youth.

[37] At this camp, 14-19 year olds from Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, and Kosovo took part in seminars on topics such as non-violent communication and in creative workshops in drama and art. Arriving with badges and flags proclaiming their affiliations and with a certain degree of fear, they developed strong connections over the course of the week. Subsequently, the PostPessimists have organized similar peace camps for approximately 100 youth from the region each year.

ship and understanding among youth from different ethnic groups. PostPessimists youth groups were formed in a number of major cities of the former Yugoslavia. Annual meetings were held in Norway and Hungary. In 1998, the first major PostPessimist meeting was held in the region in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The PostPessimist network projects focus on inter-ethnic cooperation and non-violent communication.[38] This is considered the most effective way to show young people how to understand, analyze, prevent, or transform conflicts. The Network is constantly looking for new ways for young people to work across national borders in order to share, create, and communicate with other youth. They are encouraged to play an active role in the decision-making processes in their societies.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that these young people were forming a network that would include multiple ethnicities in the middle of a war zone. The focus from 1995 on was on conflict resolution and conflict prevention. Local PostPessimist groups were encouraged to develop their own programming, but to do so in a way that would not endanger their members.[39] Early on, when the war in Bosnia was still raging, it was enough just to bring young people together. While early programming concentrated on more non-political themes, issues of communication, gender, regional cooperation, and human rights were addressed directly in the peace camps from 1998 on. Given the context in the Balkans, however, even those programs that were basically apolitical in nature (drama, music, films) made a political statement simply by including members of diverse ethnic groups. Without losing the focus on fostering tolerance, recent meetings of the Network have expanded to include discussions of issues of broader interest to youth such as globalization, unemployment, and the media.

In 1995, the PostPessimist network had 100 members, now there are approximately 1,000 from across the region. There are 19 active groups with about 4 to 45 members each. The seven member Board and the Steering Committee for the Network is based in Belgrade. While it is clear that the overarching theme of the Network is building tolerance, local groups have full autonomy in determining their programming.[40]

The Prishtina PostPessimists grew out of the PostPessimist network. Funded until 2002 by Norwegian People's AID,[41] the Prishtina PostPessimists are now self-funded. The program is dedicated to helping the youth of Kosovo by tackling

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[38] The PostPessimist network combines "social/political activism, cultural activities, and training." Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. op. cit., section 2.3.

[39] Of course as the head of the Prishtina PostPessimists said, "We have worked under risky circumstances before, during and after the war." Diell Bakalli, op. cit.

[40] A portion of that programming is focused on building tolerance, but local programming includes other issues of interest to youth as well. As the Norwegian Ministry's evaluation report points out, the Network has placed particular emphasis on ensuring that "activities should be rooted in the youth's own ideas and interests, rather than being imposed upon them…" Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. op. cit., section 2.3.

[41] Norwegian People's Aid has played a key role in funding the PostPessimist network as well. Today, the Network is attempting to develop a long-term strategy for financial sustainability.

the social problems faced by youth through social work, political activity, and art. The idea is to help youth break through the barriers that are impeding their progress while at the same time fighting prejudice.

The reminders of war are still quite evident in Kosovo. Kosovo remains a UN protectorate and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) continues to play a critical governance role. While open conflict among the ethnic groups has ended, deep divisions remain,[42] and those few Serbs who have stayed in the country now live in enclaves protected by NATO's international peacekeeping Kosovo Force (KFOR). Youth were directly and indirectly affected, of course, by these conflicts. "There are still traumas in all of us, and there is a bitter past that we all have in ourselves. Everybody does their best to ensure that the situation is not repeated, as it is something that no one should have to live through."[43]

The primary activities of the Prishtina PostPessimists are conferences, seminars, campaigns, and workshops related to youth. The participants in these activities are primarily from Prishtina and range in age from 14 to 40.[44] Prior to the outbreak of war in Kosovo in 1998, the Prishtina PostPessimists included both Serbs and Albanians in a shared office setting. The group disintegrated as a result of the war and today Serb and Albanian members work separately.[45] The size of the group has diminished considerably as a result of the recent conflict.

The idea behind the program is to carry out activities that youth will find interesting, new, and progressive. According to its President, the Prishtina PostPessimists—unlike the PostPessimist network as a whole—do not directly tackle issues related to tolerance and conflict. "What we try to do is to overcome the bitter past by doing other work and thinking about a better future and a better life for everyone… we need to work toward stability in the Balkans so that the conflict we have experienced will not repeat itself."[46]

The activities undertaken by the Prishtina PostPessimists are extremely diverse. They include: a survey and follow-up discussion in 1997 of youth views regarding the public school system; two Kosovar Albanian-Serb dialogues organized with the Belgrade PostPessimists; an art workshop and exhibit in 1998 with children from areas of conflict; a project in 1999 where children in Prishtina worked to clean up the city's

> "What we try to do is overcome the bitter past by doing other work and thinking about a better life for everyone… we need to work toward stability in the Balkans so that the conflict we have experienced will not repeat itself."
>
> — Diell Bakalli, President, Prishtina PostPessimists

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[42] As evidence of this, Diell Bakalli points out that Albanian members of the PostPessimists have been criticized by their teachers for having worked with Serbs. Despite this situation, the Albanian PostPessimists in Kosovo continue to work with their Serbian counterparts in Belgrade.

[43] Diell Bakalli, October 8, 2002. His own experience is illustrative. At the outset of the war in 1998, his Albanian family's Serbian landlord (with whom his family had shared a house for sixteen years) appeared at the door with a rifle and gave the family five minutes in which to vacate their home. His family joined other refugees in Macedonia. The experience has affected his attitudes, he said, but he continues to promote tolerance. Similar traumas were experienced by Serbian youth in Kosovo once the Albanian refugees returned.

[44] Although the participants vary widely in age, the age of the Prishtina PostPessimists themselves is strictly controlled. Members must leave the organization in Kosovo when they reach age 18. Elsewhere, the age range in the PostPessimist network is 14-31, with the majority hovering around ages 21 or 22.

[45] The survey and interview were handled by the Albanian side of the PostPessimists. Activities on the Serb side are extremely limited at this point.

[46] Diell Bakalli, op. cit.

sports center plaza; a project in 2000 entitled "Think Tolerance" which used a variety of communication mechanisms to disseminate the concept of tolerance; a play in 2001 entitled "Libido" with themes related to life in Prishtina (proceeds were donated to a fund for orphans); and, finally, a graffiti workshop designed to spread the idea of peace and tolerance through graffiti art.

Camps where young people can come together away from their home setting are particularly effective, according to staff, in bringing people of different backgrounds and nationalities together. Art and drama workshops, for example, combine education and fun. The challenge of organizing these activities in a tense, highly sensitive setting is significant, however. In this context, simply approaching youth to encourage them to participate can be problematic. The economic and political setting and work with other ethnicities have been difficult.

The Prishtina PostPessimists work in partnership with a number of other local organizations, e.g., The Young Ecologists of Kosovo, Balkan Youth Link Kosovo, Balkan Youth Link Albania, the Kosovo Foundation for an Open Society (KFOS), the Kosovo Initiative for a democratic society (KIDS), the PostPessimists Belgrade, PostPessimists Zagreb, and PostPessimists Sarajevo.

The Prishtina PostPessimists have found that while youth are interested in pursuing new activities, they lack sufficient motivation to initiate the activities themselves. The organization has found that youth in Kosovo are looking for someone to provide this leadership. Secondly, they have learned that prejudices are overcome by bringing young people together to share ideas and thoughts. It is in this way that they recognize the elements that connect them as human beings.

Program staff feel they have undertaken a number of projects that have made a significant contribution to improving the life of the youth of Prishtina.

Macedonia:

"Babylon: Young People Development Center," Youth Center for Balkan Cooperation, Veles, Macedonia[47]

Babylon was launched in 1999 in Veles, Macedonia after the Kosovo crises, as an extension of an ongoing project.[48] Babylon provides social and educational support for children and youth of different backgrounds, while promoting gender equality and urban/rural balance. Outside funding sources for this program of the Youth Center in Veles include BCYF, the local government, and the Agency for Youth and Sport in Macedonia. The program works to ensure young people's participation in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society by developing their skills and abilities and enabling them to engage in community-based activities. Center staff hope in this way to strengthen networks and mechanisms of social cohesion and to build confidence among different communities.

Babylon activities include training sessions and seminars for youth from different ethnic groups that also help to build confidence levels in the community at large. Social and educational activities include workshops on computers, English, social skills, journalism, debate, healthy lifestyles, street law, and creativity. Youth are encouraged to continue their involvement in the Center by serving as volunteers and attracting more young people to the program. Parents in Veles are quite supportive of this initiative. They even attend some of the workshops, thereby extending program impact to a broader audience.

The target population is divided into two age groups: 7-13 and 14-24. Approximately 55% are female and 45% male, and there is a mix of different socio-economic backgrounds. Both rural and urban youth take part in these programs. Seventy-two percent of the participants are Macedonians, 23% are Turks and Romas, 2% are Muslims, 2% are Serbs, and 1% are Vlacks.

In just over two years, about 2,000 children and 1,000 young people from different cultural and ethnic groups have participated directly in the project, while parents and members of local institutions have taken part indirectly. Involvement on the part of parents of minority ethnic groups increased 5% in the last year. Currently, about 280 children and 130 youth are actively participating.

> Babylon activities include training sessions and seminars for youth from different ethnic groups that also help to build confidence levels in the community at large.

[47] The information in this section is based on survey data provided by Marta Strakova, President of the Youth Center for Balkan Cooperation.

[48] There are seven Babylon centers located throughout Macedonia. Initially founded by the Italian cooperation and development organization CESVI and later supported by UNICEF, these centers are currently operated by Macedonia's Agency for Youth and Sport.

A key focus of Babylon's work is civic education and democracy building. In preparation for assuming a more active role in their communities at large, youth play a key role as volunteers in implementing and organizing activities in the Youth Center. The program provides teenagers with a variety of options to occupy their free time and gives them the opportunity to develop both their creativity and a respect for others. Additionally, Babylon provides a safe environment for the discussion of human rights, conflict, and other problems confronting youth. Other life skills that are addressed include the development of inter-personal skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills.

Program managers consider non-formal education to be the best way to get closer to this particular target group and to implement planned activities. Management challenges include space constraints, a lack of equipment such as computers, and a possible lack of financial sustainability. Another significant program constraint is the relatively poor educational level of Roma children and youth. They need special attention in group settings, adding to the challenge of working with mixed groups. Program staff feel they are making significant progress with this issue, but recognize that the process will take time.

Macedonia:
"Street Stories," Children's Theatre Center
Skopje, Macedonia[49]

Street Stories was established in 1999 during the Kosovo crisis as a way to use theatre to reduce ethnic tensions and violence among children of different backgrounds.[50] It began as a pilot project of the Children's Theatre Center and has received funding from the Foundation Open Society Institute-Macedonia (FOSIM), the Swedish Development Agency (Sida), and the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency (SDC).

According to program staff, the ghetto-like environment within which the program operates in Macedonia is ethnically and culturally segregated and economically underdeveloped. Children and youth are profoundly affected by this segregated lifestyle. There is a lack of inter-ethnic communication among young people, professional and educational opportunities are limited, and prejudice and stereotypes are prevalent.

Street Stories uses children's theatre as an educational tool to combat all three of the problems listed above and to: create greater inter-ethnic cooperation among children; educate children about cultural differences and similarities among different ethnic groups; to increase children's understanding of their rights and democracy; to strengthen

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[49] The information in this section is based on survey data provided by CTC's artistic director, Dritero Kasapi, interviews with Refet Abazzi (executive director) and Petrit Nezeri (program coordinator), and a site visit (including a group discussion with youth participants).

[50] It began by carrying out programs for the many children displaced by that conflict.

children's presentation skills; to facilitate the reintegration of children with problematic behaviors into society; and to make theatre and culture more accessible to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The program works with youngsters, ages 7 to 13, from urban areas in Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo, and Debar.[51] Most of the children live in ethnically segregated neighborhoods, which means they do not have the opportunity to build an inter-ethnic social network and get to know children from other cultures.

Program managers work closely with the Ministry of Education, the schools, and parents. Open auditions for the program are announced in the schools and the announcement makes it clear that this is a program that will bring young people together from different ethnic backgrounds. Children are selected based both on their performance skills and on their attitudes about working with children from different backgrounds (Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Roma). According to CTC Executive Director Refet Abazi, "They learn that no one has a monopoly on truth... nobody's truth is absolute."

As a first step, the children are trained for six weeks in communication and team skills (3 times a week for 2.5 hours a day). They also learn basic theatre techniques. The next phase is that of story gathering. CTC staff coordinates site visits for children from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds to different neighborhoods, to various mosques and churches, to art museums, and the theatre. The CTC youth continue to learn to work together as they interview young people from different ethnic backgrounds about their experiences in their neighborhoods, in their schools, and with their friends. The youth then collect and write up their experiences in these "street" encounters. Once back at the Center, the children discuss their stories and turn them into multilingual dramatic pieces. One or two of these pieces are then chosen for production. The final step is for the youth to perform their work—each speaking in his or her own native language—for other children, teachers, and parents and to take part in a public discussion of the issues raised.

In a group interview,[52] the children who take part in Street Stories indicated that the most valuable skill they have learned through the program is to work together. To do that, they said, they needed to develop other skills such as tolerance and trust. The children indicated that they had learned a lot about each other that was new to them. When they discuss the program with their friends at school and explain how they work side by side with young people from other ethnic groups, the CTC children reported that their friends are curious and ask whether they can join the group too.

"They learn that no one has a monopoly on truth... nobody's truth is absolute."

— Refet Abazi, Executive Director, Children's Theatre Center

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[51] Street Stories is a good example of a program that has been scaled up—extended and/or expanded. It began with one program in Skopje and today there are two in Skopje, and one each in Tetovo, Kumanovo, and Debar.

[52] Interview with youth involved in Street Stories at CTC, October 7, 2002.

Based on their experience, program staff believes that the most effective approach to building tolerance is an indirect one.[53] The theatre is viewed as creative work, as fun, and as a game. The design emphasizes inter-cultural learning, communication, group dynamics, trust, teamwork, and language. These elements in turn help to create a group identity. An environment is created where children can learn about one another's cultures, share and solve problems, and create a team product. In essence, the program creates "…a feeling of community within the group which is based on respecting differences and discovering commonalities."[54]

Bi-monthly meetings with parents serve two purposes: to keep parents informed about the group's work and to indirectly introduce some of the values and ideas the children are learning into the lives of their families. Public performances and accompanying discussions are another opportunity to reach a wider audience of children, teachers, and parents. According to program staff, establishing communication among these three groups is both essential to the success of the program and one of its greatest challenges.

Parents are at first skeptical about the program and some have even refused to allow their children to take part. When the children have themselves expressed a strong desire to join the project, however, Children's Theatre Center staff have visited their homes to encourage their parents to allow them to participate. While CTC is not always successful, many parents change their minds. The schools have been supportive from the start, viewing the program as a real opportunity for their students.

Over the past four years, Street Stories has reached about 500 children as direct participants and another 3,500 as audience members. There have been 12 performances for community audiences, 20 discussions between parents and children, and 12 among parents, teachers, and children. The children who directly take part in the production develop a feeling of community with children of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as they work together. The children in the audience, the parents, and the teachers witness this process during the performance and have the opportunity to then apply what they learn to their own lives.

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Over the past four years, Street Stories has reached about 500 children as direct participants and another 3,500 as audience members.

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[53] Although the overall Street Stories approach is an indirect one (e.g.,: youth learn about tolerance as a result of working together on a theatre production), the initial six week training session does include discussions that are directly focused on inter-ethnic cooperation. Discussions deal directly with issues such as tolerance, stereotypes, prejudice, and the need for good communication.

[54] For this reason, John Paul Lederach emphasizes that, "…the relational aspect of reconciliation should be recognized as the central component of peace-building. The frame of reference should be the restoration and rebuilding of relationships." Cited in Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. op. cit., section 3. "Reconciliation must be proactive in seeking to create an encounter where people can focus on their relationship and share their perceptions, feelings, and experiences with one another, with the goal of creating new perceptions and new shared experiences." Lederach, John P. *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press. c1997, p. 30.

According to Refet Abazi, "By the time these young people reach high school they have overcome certain prejudices and stereotypes. They have good friends from other ethnic groups. They have good communication skills. Their parents have learned to talk to one another while attending performances and taking part in other Street Stories activities. One Albanian parent was surprised to discover that her daughter could speak Macedonian as a result of her participation in the program."[55]

Working on this program has taught Street Stories staff a number of valuable lessons. First, it is important not to push issues, but to allow them to come up naturally within the group. Second, it takes time to see results and patience is required. Finally, it is important to be able to make decisions quickly once problems come up—whether from the children themselves, the parents, or from outside sources (e.g., political upheaval or armed turmoil).

According to program managers, youth "…are a force capable of setting new values and standards… that will promote civil society, focusing on civil and individual rights by respecting collective rights regarding language and culture."[56] Street Stories provides a model of how to build a civil society based on mutual respect that serves as an example to a broader audience. Equally important, it empowers the children who participate by providing them with the social knowledge and skills they need to create that society.

"Respecting Cultural Differences" and "Seminars for Parents," Step by Step, Children's Creative Center, Skopje, Macedonia[57]

Based on the success of the Step by Step program in kindergartens and primary schools in Macedonia and parental enthusiasm for the program, the Open Society Institute Macedonia (OSI-Macedonia), in partnership with the Youth Cultural Center, opened the Children's Creative Center (CCC) in 1997. CCC was established to provide a unique informal educational environment for all children in this multi-cultural country. Focused on the intellectual, social, and creative development of children, it is a place where children are valued and encouraged to participate in programs that educate, engage, inspire, and entertain.

CCC is also a family learning resource that offers exhibits and programs that help children appreciate their own unique talents and develop their full potential through visual and performing arts. It encourages family participation,

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[55] Refet Abazi, op. cit.

[56] Dritero Kasapi, op. cit.

[57] This section is based on survey data provided by Suzana Kirandziska, Country Director, an interview with her, and a site visit to CCC.

offering parents and children opportunities for creativity and intellectual development. It is a place where parents can share their experiences in raising their children with one another and make programmatic contributions. CCC works to meet the needs of children from all socio-economic, physical, and emotional levels in this multi-ethnic community and it serves as a creative resource for teachers. Finally, CCC encourages corporations, foundations, and individuals to work in partnership for social change.

Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state that is in a process of transition. Civil war broke out (though of limited size and duration) in 2001, and today multi-ethnic tensions and economic problems linger, producing a sense of political instability. The current population is approximately[58] 66.5% Macedonian, 23% Albanian, 4% Turks, 2% Roma, and 4.5% Serbs, Vlaks, and others. Minorities are educated in their own language which means that children of different ethnic groups are segregated from one another during a substantial portion of the day. Unemployment is high (approximately 40%) and a growing number of families live on social welfare. Children are particularly affected by this situation. They are also

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[58] In Macedonia—as is the case in other parts of the Balkans—there is disagreement over the accuracy of these percentages, with each minority ethnic group insisting they represent a higher proportion of the population than official figures indicate.

influenced by the information they receive from the media and all too often that message is one that promulgates division.[59] As a result, prejudices begin to form early on. It is important therefore to initiate programs designed to combat this prejudice when children are still quite young.

BCYF supports two CCC programs. The first of these is Respecting Cultural Differences. The project is designed to improve the capacity of young people to avoid conflict, to appreciate cultural and national similarities and differences, to establish a spirit of tolerance, and to build a modern democratic society. Children learn how to make choices, how to be prepared for open and honest dialogue and how to use mutual respect to solve every-day disputes in multi-ethnic communities.

CCC believes that building and enhancing individual self-esteem will contribute to problem-solving. Children with low self-esteem handle prob-lems differently than those with enhanced self-esteem. According to CCC staff, children and youth must play an active role in creating a society free of biases and stereotypes. Tolerance will be enhanced to the extent that youth can improve their capacity to avoid conflict and misunderstanding and for building a multi-ethnic world. Conflict prevention and inter-ethnic coopera-tion reinforce one another.

Respecting Cultural Differences provides models and illustrations of dif-ferent dwellings in order to educate children and youth as to the diversity of cultures that exist side-by-side in their country and around the world. Life-size replicas of dwellings characteristic of different ethnic groups in Macedonia (and other parts of the world)[60] can be visited at CCC. Activities and discussions focus on the wide array of communication styles, belief sys-tems, practices, values, customs, rituals, roles, and relationships that exist in the world. The goals for children and their parents are: to increase their knowledge and understanding of cultural differences and the value of diversi-ty; and, to remind them that they are each a unique individual deserving of respect and tolerance from others. Visitors have an opportunity to see objects representative of different cultures, as well as displays and special foods relat-ed to the celebrations and festivals of different communities. The emphasis is on respect for the dignity of each family and its culture, customs, and beliefs.

The children and youth who take part in these programs include boys and girls, ages 4 to 14, from both rural and urban areas. They come from different ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. Families and teachers of these chil-dren also participate in CCC activities—making costumes, for example. As a

> CCC believes that building and enhancing individual self-esteem will contribute to problem-solving. Children with low self-esteem han-dle problems differently than those with enhanced self-esteem.

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[59] "Politicians misuse 'nationalism' to gain widespread popular support. They say we must become more nationalistic in order to counteract the nationalism of 'others'… they say they will protect us from the nationalism of 'others'." Agon Demjaha, op. cit.

[60] The Muslim house was opened at the height of tensions in Macedonia in 2001, underscoring the commitment of groups such as CCC to continue pressing for tolerance even under the most difficult of circumstances.

result, parents make friends with other parents from different ethnic groups. In cooperation with several programs of OSI-Macedonia, refugee children, street children, Roma children, and children with special needs also visit the center. CCC points out that children do not need to speak the same language in order to play with one another. The Center provides a rare opportunity for children and youth to interact with one another across ethnic and religious lines. "Children are separated in school because they learn in their own language and even after school there is little opportunity for mixing."[61]

The goal of the second project—"Seminars for Parents"—is to help families become more involved in their children's lives, to provide them with new information, and to share experiences among families. Many children do not attend any sort of formal educational institution and CCC believes this makes it even more important for parents to be well prepared. They are, after all, the principal educators for their children. CCC encourages parents to view themselves as equal partners with Center staff. Information is provided to parents that enables them to: increase their knowledge of child development; increase their awareness of the importance of the parent-child relationship; observe children at work and play; increase the self-esteem of their children; show respect for children and value their ideas; encourage children to solve problems and respect one another; and, to ask probing questions that encourage children to really think about their answers. The project also provides parents with the opportunity to discuss their beliefs, values, attitudes, and concerns about child-rearing.

The CCC approach emphasizes non-formal education, collective participation, and active learning. Since its formation, over 6,370 children (Macedonian, Albanian, Roma, and Turks) have visited CCC.[62] In many cases, their parents have visited as well. The children were particularly interested in the Muslim dwelling, as many of the objects inside the home were unfamiliar to them. A number of parents donated traditional objects, folk costumes, and recipes to the Muslim display. Other parents introduced children and youth to needlework and embroidery techniques used by different ethnic groups. Differences are presented as an advantage in building a multicultural world.

The seminars for parents help to address the prejudices held by an older generation. CCC has found that parents were intrigued by the possibility of directly participating in the educational process. Utilizing the technique of peer learning, CCC staff encouraged the 100 parents who participated in 2001-2002, to share their experiences in child-rearing with other parents.[63] They also discuss issues such as conflict resolution, building self-esteem, communication, and creativity.

> The Center provides a rare opportunity for children and youth to interact with one another across ethnic and religious lines... differences are presented as an advantage in building a multicultural world.

[61] Suzana Kirandziska, op. cit.

[62] 3,000 youth participated in Center activities in 2001-2002. Mohanlal, Don. op cit. p. 9.

[63] Mohanlal, Don. op. cit. p. 9.

While much has been done, CCC points out that the number of people visiting the Center is still relatively small when compared to the overall size of the population at large. CCC has a number of ideas and techniques for working with children and their parents that they feel could be usefully shared with other programs. CCC activities reinforce child-centered teaching practices that facilitate a child's growth and development. These are combined with parental involvement to ensure optimum support for children's learning needs. Parents are a vital resource within the CCC approach and program evaluations demonstrate that their reactions to the program are generally positive.

CCC would like to expand its work by increasing parental involvement in educating displaced children. Finally, to attract more visitors to the Center, staff plans to increase media coverage of CCC events.

Montenegro:

"Center for Creative Multiculture – Equal and Together," Association PLIMA – Ecology and Multiculture, Ulcinj, Montenegro[64]

Association PLIMA – Ecology and Multiculture was founded in 1995 and was from the outset focused on the promotion of multiculturalism. In April 2001, it launched the Center for Creative Multiculture. The program is funded by BCYF and is designed to bring youth from various cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds together to learn jointly about the variety of cultures present in their community. The learning activities are designed to raise cooperation among youth by increasing understanding and the acceptance of differences. The target population is from Montenegro and includes boys and girls primarily of elementary school age. Participants come from a variety of ethnic groups (Montenegrin, Albanian, and Serb) and include individuals from Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim faiths from all economic levels.

As is the case in other parts of the Balkans, youth in Ulcinj complain of a lack of job and study opportunities. There are also few cultural events. In this context, the Center provides youth with a place to learn and play. According to participants in the program, the Center provides them with an opportunity to talk and to learn more about each other. The youth point out that prior to taking part in Center activities, they knew very little about other ethnic groups and held certain prejudices about them. They have discovered that despite their ethnic or religious differences, young people in the area have very similar tastes in movies and fashion and similar hopes and concerns.[65]

According to its Director, Jovan Nikolaidis, the Center is fortunate in that

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[64] The information in this section is based on survey data, discussions with Center staff, particularly Jovan Nikolaidis, and a site visit to the Center (including a group discussion with youth participants).

[65] Group discussion with youth from the Center for Creative Multiculture, Association PLIMA, October 10, 2002.

Ulcinj has not experienced the same level of ethnic hostility as other parts of the region. The town has a long tradition of multiculturalism and tolerance.[66] Association PLIMA is dedicated to preserving those multicultural values and fostering civil society. In that sense, the program is focused on conflict prevention. The dual focus on ecology and multiculture is reflected in the organization's commitment to preserving both nature and human relations. The approach reflects the Director's experiences living in Bosnia prior to the outbreak of war when all sides co-existed peacefully. He asks parents, "Remember the old days when we used to mix?"[67]

The Center is a place where youth of different backgrounds can learn together. Its approach is to tackle the goal of fostering tolerance indirectly. "Because we are working with children," said Nikolaidis, "it would be inappropriate to take a strictly political approach."[68] In Ulcinj, children of Albanian, Serbian, and Montenegrin ethnic backgrounds go to the same schools, but they are separated once they arrive, spending the day in classes taught in their native language. Albanian children learn in Albanian and Montenegrin and Serbian youth learn in Serbian. The Center is the only place where they can learn together—side by side.

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[66] Montenegro is one of the few places in the Balkans where there has been no open conflict. Inter-marriage has been fairly common. Recent events in the region have, of course, put pressure on this situation. For an assessment of the history of cooperation between Montenegrins and Albanians in Montenegro, see Nikolaidis, Jovan. "Managing Multiethnic Coexistence," in Dimitrijevic, Nenad (ed.), Managing Multiethnic Local Communities in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia. LGI Book. c2000, pp. 447-457.

[67] Jovan Nikolaidis, interview, October 9, 2002. Nikolaidis points out that a lot of progress can be undone if parents—due to their own prejudices—undermine at home what youth are learning at the Center or if the youth turn on the television at home and hear negative messages about other ethnic groups.

[68] Jovan Nikolaidis, op. cit., survey data.

By the end of two or three months, Montenegrin youth who previously spoke no Albanian can write sentences.[69]

The Center is open every day of the week from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Young people from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds gather at the Center to study, learn about each other's cultures and values, use the computers, and undertake creative activities. The Center's programs include audio and video presentations, virtual art and music workshops, creative writing workshops, seminars given by prominent intellectuals from a variety of backgrounds, and workshops in rural areas. Between 2001 and 2002, 60 children attended the Center on a daily basis and approximately 120 more young people participated in the workshops.[70] During that time, there were no conflicts among the young people and communication improved as a result of this interactive work.

One of the biggest challenges to the program is that the children and youth who participate spend such a significant percentage of their lives separated from one another—in school, at home, and in their neighborhoods. Secondly, program managers have had to battle the prejudices of their parents. Once some parents leaned that the program was focused on multi-ethnic tolerance, they prevented their children from returning to the Center. Center staff worked closely with these parents and over time they began to see the benefits of the program and allowed the youth to resume their participation. At the beginning, though, some of the Center staff were accused of being "Albanian spies" or "traitors." According to the program's director, some of the best results have been seen in schools located in the villages. "The behavior and attitude of rural children has been exceptional."[71] A third challenge is that of scale. According to the Director, it is important that this program and others like it be incorporated into the schools where many more youth could be reached.

"Women's Education, Emancipation, and Enhancement of Multicultural Relations," New Horizon, Ulcinj, Montenegro[72]

The Women's Education, Emancipation, and Enhancement of Multicultural Relations project (referred to here as WEEMR) is operated by the New Horizon organization and is funded by the Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation, Mama Cash, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).[73] WEEMR was launched in 1999 when 60,000 refugees from Kosovo arrived in Ulcinj,

> **One of the biggest challenges to the program is that the children and youth who participate spend such a significant percentage of their lives separated from one another—in school, at home, and in their neighborhoods.**

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[69] One of the Montenegrin youth interviewed said he was interested in learning Albanian so that he could communicate with Albanian youth. There is an economic incentive, as well, to being able to speak multiple languages. It makes youth more marketable in terms of jobs.

[70] Mohanlal, Don. op. cit. p. 6.

[71] Jovan Nikolaidis, op. cit. Eight workshops were organized in villages around Ulcinj for youth who could not attend Center activities.

[72] The information in this section is based on survey data, discussions with New Horizon staff and a site visit to New Horizon.

[73] It has been difficult for WEEMR to secure local funding. NGOs are viewed as competitors for much needed resources on the part of the local government.

Montenegro.[74] The goal of the program is to create positive and stable inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in Ulcinj and to expand the participation of women and young girls in public life.

Many different ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic groups live together in Ulcinj.[75] According to program staff, although Ulcinj has not seen the same level of deterioration in relations among ethnic groups as has been the case elsewhere, the overall political situation in the region is still not conducive to cooperation among these groups.[76] Minorities are in a particularly vulnerable position. The economic situation in Ulcinj is precarious with the highest unemployment rates in Montenegro. Additionally, there are fewer women with jobs in Ulcinj (21%) than anywhere else in the country. The downturn in the economy is closely linked to the decline in tourism that has resulted from regional conflict. Many hotels have been closed for years and are now unusable. Finally, the general deterioration in the standard of living has contributed to a mass emigration of young people.

WEEMR staff point out that youth are among the first to suffer the consequences of regional tensions. Due to a lower standard of living, young people are unable to pursue higher education.[77] Young men react to limited options at the local level and the declining economy by leaving Montenegro to go abroad. In addition to marrying early, young women tend to marry significantly older men. They often emigrate at that point as well. WEEMR provides a three-month counseling session for young girls where psychologists and teachers discuss the negative consequences of marrying at such a young age. By directly tackling the phenomenon of early marriages, they indirectly combat youth migration.

The WEEMR program grew out of desire to devote special attention to women in the area. In general, they are undereducated and absent from public life. According to program staff, despite a more open attitude in Ulcinj around issues of ethnicity,[78] attitudes toward the family are still quite traditional. WEEMR activities are designed to bring women out of their homes and into an environment where they can interact with others. There is particular interest in increasing the involvement of women in the political life of their communities. A second objective is to bring Ulcinj women of different nationalities and religions together.[79] Despite regional hostilities, Ulcinj is characterized by high levels of tolerance and cooperation among diverse

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[74] Local residents are very proud of the fact that Ulcinj hosted more refugees than any other city.

[75] The majority population in Ulcinj—unlike the rest of the country—is Albanian.

[76] Program staff point to continuous political tensions between Serbia and Montenegro, the politicization of the economy, frequent elections, and linguistic differences (particularly between the Albanian and Slavic populations) as elements that contribute to turbulence.

[77] Language plays a role here as well. There are no universities in Montenegro that teach in Albanian. Any Albanian-speaking youth who wishes to attend university must travel to Prishtina, Kosovo, or to Albania, and economic considerations make that extremely difficult if not impossible.

[78] This atmosphere of acceptance has had a highly positive impact on tourism in Ulcinj.

[79] WEEMR also brings women of different economic backgrounds together, including those from the city and those from rural areas. Women in the rural areas are primarily Albanian and would otherwise have little opportunity to meet Montenegrin women and/or urban women.

groups. WEEMR is aimed at maintaining this positive environment and ensuring against any possible deterioration of that environment or conflict through an explicit strategy of inter-ethnic dialogue.[80]

WEEMR provides education to women through training programs that include courses in: computers, languages, sewing, journalism, women's health, and economic empowerment. Other activities include seminars, round tables, and radio and TV shows. The seminars include topics such as human rights, women's rights, the building of civil society, and war and its consequences in multi-ethnic areas. These tough issues are addressed after women in the program have gotten to know each other through the various training programs.

WEEMR's programs for women include Albanians (Muslim and Catholic), Montenegrins, Serbs, and Roma, as well as women refugees from Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. Although the women range in age from 16 to 45, the primary focus is on younger women. They are members of families facing social and economic hardships and families of displaced persons and refugees. Most are self-supporting, single mothers. Many women from nearby rural areas also attend WEEMR programs.[81] Due to the difficulty of pursuing higher education, young women tend to marry before they reach their full legal age.[82] WEEMR programs provide them with an opportunity to continue learning. The women meet twice a week for one and a half hours a day. Lessons are held in both Albanian and Serbian[83] and program staff report that there is a good level of interaction among attendees from different societal groups.

No one is forced to sit together in class. Communication is initiated naturally during the joint activities (e.g., sewing, computers). According to program staff, after a time women who had previously exhibited a certain degree of prejudice are now communicating easily across ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines about issues that concern all women.

Program staff note that one of the lessons learned from this program is that in order to expand the knowledge base of their participants and to combat prejudice it is important to have direct communication and to hold frequent workshops. One of the challenges early on was skepticism in the community toward activities focused on women. Program staff say this is the result of a closed society that views a woman's place as in her home regardless of her abilities. Overcoming this prejudice has been difficult. As NGOs are quite new in the area, there were also initial doubts about the group's intentions. Some parents

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[80] Interestingly, even in this relatively more tranquil setting, one staff member characterized the situation in Ulcinj as "…stable, but explosive." Meeting at New Horizon, October 10, 2002.

[81] The country's population is evenly split between rural and urban areas.

[82] WEEMR conducted a survey of 300 girls, ages 15-18, that showed that 40% marry before reaching full legal age.

[83] All teachers must be able to speak both Serb and Albanian.

were particularly reluctant to have their daughters participate. Following staff discussions with community members, however, these reservations decreased.

Looking to the future, WEEMR staff remain concerned about the lack of opportunities for young people due to the economic crisis. The inability to pursue higher education, a low standard of living, and a lack of jobs and opportunities for promotion lead many young people to consider leaving the country. WEEMR staff believes that if the government is unable to address these general infrastructure issues, youth will lose any desire they might have to build their future in Montenegro.

Serbia:

"Democracy Learning – Youth Participation," Group MOST, Belgrade, Serbia[84]

Established in 1993, Group MOST is one of the first Serbian NGOs. The organization's twenty professionals (primarily psychologists) organize training seminars for individuals of all ages from a wide array of national backgrounds on constructive conflict resolution, debate and dialogue, and positive intercultural communication.[85] According to program managers, the explosion of youth NGOs in Belgrade points out the need for programs that help young people to develop the skills that will allow them to be active participants in their society. Democracy Learning-Youth Participation was established in May 2002, and incorporates a program that was implemented from 1999-2000 in seven towns in diverse cultural regions in Serbia.

The Democracy Learning-Youth Participation program is funded by BCYF and is designed to educate youth NGOs by equipping them with basic knowledge, values, and skills in civil society building and working within the NGO sector. The goal is to increase the capacity of youth NGOs to work on civil society promotion themselves, thereby fostering the participation of other young people in democratic change in their society. The idea is to encourage young people to become active participants in their communities and to demonstrate to them that: they are responsible for their future, they can change the society in which they live, and that they can take steps to reshape their daily lives.

According to program managers, violent conflicts in the region and the policies of the Milosevic regime in Serbia over a period of ten years have increased social distance, apathy, aggression, mistrust, and human rights violations. Resistance to violations of democratic freedoms in Serbia was widespread among students, NGOs, the media, and intellectuals who were pressing for a civil, peaceful, and democratic society. Youth participation in this movement has been significant. For this reason, pro-

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[84] This section is based on survey data provided by Marija Gajic, Project Coordinator, a group interview with Marija Gajic and with Director and trainer Dragan Popadic, and a site visit to Group MOST.

[85] Group MOST has no full-time staff. With the exception of a part-time secretary, all staff are volunteers.

gram managers believe it is critical to foster democratic values among young people and to encourage their continued participation. Based on this rationale, Group MOST staff believes that it is important to create mechanisms that mobilize democratically-oriented young people, provide support and requisite skills, and promote the ideas of democracy and a non-violent civil society.

Group MOST program managers point out that young people have been particularly affected by the conflicts that characterized the region from 1990-2001. Their memories are dominated by war and the language of hate toward all other ethnicities—toward anyone who is different—that fills the media. They were too young when the conflict started to have had an opportunity to meet young people from other parts of the former Yugoslavia nor have they had the opportunity to travel abroad. As a result, youth are fairly xenophobic according to program managers and are afraid of differences.

The Democracy Learning-Youth Participation program directly addresses prejudice and the fear of diversity. All kinds of differences are tackled, but there is particular emphasis placed on cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. The program emphasizes those elements that link all human beings to one another and explores issues related to human rights. The idea is to make young people aware of their prejudice, but not afraid of it. The goal is to show them they can choose to react differently to those feelings and to develop feelings of tolerance, curiosity, and respect.[86]

Group MOST managers indicate that it is often difficult to separate ethnicity and religion in the Balkans. They believe that religion is the principal way of defining ethnicity in the region and that each religion has its own cultural patterns. At the same time, they feel there is hope for the future in the fact that there are also significant shared cultural patterns as well (e.g., living in the same region for centuries, similarities in the language) that transcend political conditions. These similarities can be used as a means to connect young people.

The goals of the Democracy Learning-Youth Participation program are: to provide an opportunity for youth to discuss their rights through constructive, non-violent dialogue; to develop skills in intercultural communication based on toler-

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[86] Group MOST trainers also emphasize the need to allow people who have been through a war to have the time and space necessary to deal with feelings of anger, sadness, and hatred. The emphasis is on facing, understanding, and handling conflict constructively rather than on "preventing" or ignoring it. Interview at Group MOST, October 12, 2002.

ance and the respect of mutual differences; to create mechanisms that foster action at the local level that is sensitive to cultural differences; to provide basic skills in conflict resolution and non-violent communication; to increase the capacity of youth to prepare, run and evaluate projects; and to nurture and strengthen networking and cooperation among youth NGOs at the local grassroots level.

The project is comprised of ten training sessions given during three three-day seminars. Ten youth NGOs from Belgrade are taking part in seminars on: conflict resolution and non-violent communication, NGO management and cooperation, and intercultural understanding and local initiatives. Though these ten youth NGOs are of relatively recent formation (within the last two years), all have already carried out significant projects and activities with youth. Once this nucleus of youth NGOs receives training, they can then disseminate their knowledge to other youth NGOs in Belgrade and throughout Serbia. The groups represent a mix of males and females between the ages of 19 and 30. It is an urban population representing a variety of economic levels. While diverse ethnicities are welcome, the participants are primarily Serbian as that is the majority population in Belgrade.

The seminar on intercultural understanding is based on simulation games and discussions where young people can confront their fears and find ways in which to celebrate diversity. In a session called "Three Cultures," the participants are divided into three groups. Each group is assigned a particular culture with specific religious patterns, behaviors, value systems, gender relationships, and language characteristics. They are placed in an imaginary situation where they are supposed to cooperate, but where they must react according to certain pre-defined cultural patterns. According to program managers, these sessions can be very intense and at times disturbing to the participants, but the end result is highly positive. After the session, there is a discussion about the ways in which these simulation exercises relate to their real life experiences and the steps these youth can take to respond to diversity in a more positive way.

According to program managers, thirteen seminars for ten youth NGOs have been held to date. Most have focused on conflict management, but some have been held on NGO management and intercultural understanding. About 160 young NGO activists have directly benefited from the program and have expressed their satisfaction with program content. Program managers comment on the high level of active participation on the part of the participants in terms of asking questions and discussing issues. The young people filled out evaluations at the request of program managers and comments included the following: "I can see things

now from a completely different angle." "This has made me think about something I hadn't even noticed before." "I've learned a lot." While it is still too early to document the impact on the community at large, program managers believe these young people will be developing new projects within their NGOs where they can put these new skills and knowledge to use.

Group MOST trainers believe that experience—not theoretical discussions about differences is the best way to learn and grow. In this sense, simulation exercises (as opposed to lectures) are useful for raising awareness and connecting one's personal experiences with issues of tolerance and mutual respect. One problem with the seminars is their relatively short (3-day) duration. Ideally, the trainers would like to see these sessions followed by a real world exercise where participants would be exposed to people of different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds and have the opportunity to learn more about each other face to face.

Program managers point out that it is particularly difficult to work on conflict resolution in a setting where conflict is a highly sensitive issue. The youth at times believe that understanding can be established in the protected training area, but that people outside the training are unwilling to change. They feel that their numbers are small compared to the task and this breeds feelings of helplessness. A "real world" follow-up session of the sort described above might help to demonstrate that change is possible.

Some of the young people who have completed the course launched activities in 1999-2000 that included an inter-religious party in the public square and posters with messages about respect for differences. Peers seem to be supportive of these activities, but there is no sense yet of the reaction of the community at large.

"Seeding The Future," the Belgrade PostPessimists—covering former Yugoslavia from Belgrade, Serbia[87]

Seeding the Future is one of the many country-level projects to grow out of the PostPessimists Network. Launched in February 2002 by the Belgrade PostPessimists, it is designed to instruct young trainers in seven cities in countries of former Yugoslavia in nonviolent communication, understanding conflicts, team building, group and program management, youth activism, and fundraising. Funded by the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation as part of its work to strengthen youth NGOs in the region, Seeding the Future grows out of the Belgrade PostPessimists commitment to peer learning and non-formal education.

> Group MOST trainers believe that experience— not theoretical discussions about differences—is the best way to learn and grow.

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[87] This section is based on survey data provided by Slobodan Simic (Program Coordinator) and Vladimir Erceg (Program Financial Manager), a group interview with Slobodan Simic, Vladimir Erceg, and Tamara Milanov (Program Coordinator), and a site visit.

The program teaches all the basic skills that the PostPessimist network has identified as critical to its work over the past eight years.

According to program managers, the fall of Communism, unresolved issues from World War II, and hostilities among various ethnic groups led to civil war and the eventual disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Everyone was touched by the wars that took place between 1991-1995 and 1998-1999. Children and youth were particularly affected by these events. In October 2000, the process of democratization in Serbia and the process of normalization of relations with other countries in the region began, but the political situation remains unstable[88] and the results have been mixed.

The program managers point out that internal conflicts in the region today are primarily political in nature and are based in a deteriorated economic situation, years of living under quasi-democratic and non-democratic regimes, and a history of war. Many refugees have still not returned to their homes and their situation is of serious concern. Tensions in Kosovo and Macedonia contribute significantly to regional instability. According to program staff, lack of cooperation with the United National International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia on the part of Serbia and Croatia also presents a problem for international relations.[89] Most conflicts are ethnic in nature, though religion also produces conflict despite pleas on the part of religious leaders for peace.

The economic crisis means that youth in Serbia find themselves unable to travel or meet young people from other countries. There is no opportunity to work with youth from other cultures. Youth have lived their lives in isolation, not even knowing their neighbors. This, of course, is a significant change from the time when all Yugoslavs lived in the same country. Finally, the educational infrastructure—materials, books, and physical conditions—is poor.

Though the standard of living remains low, the Belgrade PostPessimists believe that there is growing room for social activism. Youth have been particularly active in pressing for improved relations with the people of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. It was this political will among youth that led to the formation of the PostPessimist network.

The Seeding the Future project developed from a series of evaluations of local and regional PostPessimist projects and PostPessimist Network Board meetings. This program and the Prishtina PostPessimist program are country-level initiatives undertaken by the local members of this broader network. The

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[88] The assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic in March 2003 underscores this point.

[89] Survey data, op. cit.

Belgrade PostPessimists have organized and implemented the Seeding the Future program for the Network. The program links seven PostPessimist Centers in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Nis, and Subotica), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Mostar), Croatia (Zagreb), and Slovenia (Ljubljana). Initially, the plan was to include more cities in this program, but project managers were unable to secure sufficient funds. The number of cities and potential beneficiaries had to be reduced when additional sources of funding did not materialize.

The youth who take part in this program generally already have some level of experience in NGO work. The goal is to provide them with the skills they need to actively participate in decision-making processes in their own communities and to empower and motivate them to take part in social change. This is accomplished through: a series of training of trainers sessions in youth activism, human rights, conflict resolution, and non-violent communication; sharing needs and ideas with other young people; and by organizing joint actions at the network level.

Seeding the Future focuses on improving communication among youth in the region, encouraging local activism by increasing levels of understanding about conflict and teaching techniques of non-violent communication. While the approach focuses on non-formal education, there is also an effort to influence the education system by working with youth that are in school and college parliaments. As in the case of a number of other projects reviewed here, the approach is indirect. It is based on providing youth with educational materials and improving their skills in non-violent communication. The idea is that youth will then be able to both recognize and understand conflict. With their new skills in group activism, they will be prepared to take steps to address problems in their community in a constructive manner.[90]

Seeding the Future has already held one training seminar and "Trial by Fire" follow-up workshops in seven cities in former Yugoslavia. The PostPessimists Network and Board have held several meetings where this initiative has been discussed, including an evaluation session. Seeding the Future works with youth, ages 18 to 25, from all social and economic levels and all ethnicities. Thirty-four youth took part in the training seminar and learned about non-violent communication, understanding conflict, and youth activism. These youth have also taken the lead in the local workshops in which 800 youth have participated.

From this project and other PostPessimist network projects, program managers have learned that non-formal education is a long-term process. Ad hoc projects have a much weaker impact than educational initiatives that are systematic, well-

Youth have lived their lives in isolation, not even knowing their neighbors.

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[90] As Tamara Milanov of the Belgrade PostPessimists says, "Being engaged in youth activism has completely changed my life. It has led to a career change. I have shifted from civil engineering to social science. I want to go beyond participating in a youth camp." Interview, October 12, 2002.

planned, and long-term. Second, educational plans and strategies must be followed by concrete action. It is not enough just to provide youth with knowledge and skills, it is important to give them the opportunity to put those skills to use. Program managers have found that youth really enjoy taking part in peer learning in an interactive, participatory workshop setting. Finally, program managers are determined to reach out beyond youth involved in the NGO community in order to work with young people in high schools and universities.[91]

A discussion with three participants in the PostPessimist network led to the identification of other lessons learned:

- Do not tell youth what they need to do. It is important to develop a relationship with young people, allowing them to discover the importance of certain values themselves. Rather than telling youth not to judge people on the basis of ethnicity, present them with concrete alternatives.

- Non-formal education should not detract from the time youth need to spend on school. In order to accommodate their after-school schedules, short-term projects may be the best approach.

- Be safe. It is important that youth are in a safe place when they initiate a dialogue. The PostPessimist network has held annual Peace Camps that allow youth to interact safely with one another outside their normal environment.

- NGOs should decide for themselves what programs are needed, rather than allowing donors to determine that for them.

- Build team skills and communication skills. School is characterized by one way communication. It is important that youth be reminded of the value of two-way communication.

- Peer learning is an extremely effective approach. It allows young people to work with other young people in a highly interactive manner.

Parents have been supportive of Seeding the Future even during the time when the political situation in the country was at its most dangerous. Now that the situation is somewhat more stabilized, their support is even greater. While in the past it was difficult for the PostPessimist network to carry out activities in the schools—or even to discuss them—today they are getting a very positive reaction in the schools. Youth are interested in the projects and excited about learning something different. Although participants in the program have informed program managers that reactions by others—peers, etc.—to their involvement in

> It is not enough just to provide youth with knowledge and skills, it is important to give them the opportunity to put those skills to use.

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[91] Program staff believes that they have contributed to an opening of political space in Belgrade. One challenge they face, however, is a lack of cooperation among youth organizations in the area. There is a need for stronger networking at the project level.

PostPessimist activities varies from excitement to suspicion, they say they are proud to have something to share with their school friends.

The Belgrade PostPessimists believe that youth in the region need to take part in the key decision making processes in their societies. Youth who can communicate both with other youth and with adults are a particularly valuable resource. They have a critical role to play in pointing out the problems and needs of youth, actively working on issues that concern young people, and helping adults to build a better society. As they begin to take responsibility for the future, young people need to ask—and be asked—to actively contribute to developing educational, inter-cultural, communication, and, even, political programs for the societies in which they live.

Seeding the Future contributes to this process by: promoting youth engagement in the implementation of activities which contribute to social change; encouraging youth activism at the local, regional, and network level; disseminating knowledge on non-violent communication, non-violent conflict resolution, group management, and youth activism throughout the Balkans; training and providing skills to young activists in order to increase the number of ultimate beneficiaries of the non-formal educational process; and, by reaching young people who are not active in NGOs and providing them the opportunity to obtain knowledge and skills in a non-formal setting that can empower them to take part in concrete social actions.

The Belgrade PostPessimists believe that youth in the region need to take part in the key decision making processes in their societies.

Although each of the programs discussed above has unique characteristics, their ultimate objective is similar: to build tolerance among Balkan children and youth. There are clearly many different approaches to achieving this goal. The experience of these nine programs provides a number of useful lessons learned for organizations pursuing similar objectives.

Choice of Approach

The following overarching components have been identified by the projects profiled here as raising the prospects for success: involving youth in the design and implementation of the programming; providing a safe environment for program activities (in both physical[92] and psychological terms); utilizing peer learning, inter-cultural learning, and simulation exercises; starting at a young age before prejudices are firmly rooted;[93] linking the promotion of democratic values, civil society, and tolerance; involving parents and the community; and combining recreational/social activities with skill building (e.g., making it fun).

Other key factors that will influence program design and implementation include:

■ Flexibility is key when working with youth. "When working with young people, you can't have a pre-formula...," according to Refet Abazi, Executive Director of the Children's Theatre Centre. "You must have the necessary skills, but be ready to adapt them to the circumstances. Rather than prescribing recipes, you want to provoke youth."[94]

■ While some programs will choose to tackle issues such as discrimination, conflict, or distrust directly, others will decide to work indirectly. These latter programs may focus on a seemingly unrelated topic—e.g., the environment, sports or sewing—but break down barriers to collaboration by bringing individuals together over a period of time and allowing them to get to know one another. New Horizon, for example, brings women of different backgrounds together to engage in activities where they learn to work together. Once they feel comfortable with each other, they begin to talk directly about tough social issues related to tolerance. It is this exposure to one another over time that begins to break down barriers.

■ The choice of a direct or indirect approach has to do with factors such as the nature of the program, the age of the youth involved, the degree of hostility and tension present in the community, and the preferences of the organizers.

■ Different venues offer different advantages. Non-formal education (after school programs, for example) avoids some of the bureaucratic constraints involved in introducing

It is this exposure to one another over time that begins to break down barriers.

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[92] In situations where safety is a concern for parents, providing transportation to program activities is a real plus in terms of attracting children to the program. Refet Abazi, Executive Director Children's Theatre Center, October 13, 2002.

[93] Susana Kirandziska, Director, Step by Step, Children's Creative Center, October 8, 2002. This is also the recommendation of the Youth Center in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje.

[94] Refet Abazi, op. cit., October 13, 2002.

new content and new methodologies into highly regulated school curriculums. It also makes a mixing of different ethnicities and religions easier. Another alternative is to take youth away from their normal day-to-day activities in order to take part in a retreat in an attractive setting. As one program organizer said, "Youth may not be interested in going to class after school, but invite them to a nice place and they'll come."

According to BCYF, non-formal education approaches are particularly well suited to a region where children and adolescents have suffered from wars and conflicts. "They tend to attract and create the kind of young people which the region needs: autonomous, responsible, committed, and supportive."[95] Non-formal education is particularly effective in: "fostering civic education, focusing on the needs of the individual, incorporating culture and context in the curriculum, reaching young people who are out of school, and building on peer education."[96] Over time it is important to look for opportunities to scale up these programs, either within a non-formal venue or by introducing them into the school system in order to reach larger numbers of youth.

■ Several programs[97] emphasized that this is just the beginning of a long process and one where their work—far from being supported by the community at large—is frequently at odds with the prevailing social infrastructure. Said Jovan Nikolaidis, Director of Association PLIMA, "This will be a long hard process. Children are willing to incorporate our messages, but everything outside the Center works against us… the school, the family, etc… In the Center they learn together, but in the schools they learn apart from one another. The good thing is that these children now know that things can operate in a different, more tolerant and democratic way."[98] A number of the staff involved in these nine programs emphasized the need for patience and a long-term perspective.

■ Taking youth to visit different religious institutions (as the Children's Theater Center has done) brings many of them to the realization that their basic tenets are not so very different from one another. This insight left a profound impression on youth brought up to believe they held the "only truth."

■ Depending on how deep the cleavages are, it may be important to bring youth together outside their own setting or even their own country. Moving them out of their local setting provides young people with the opportunity to be exposed to new ideas far away from the pressure of peer groups and parents. In severe cases, it may be necessary—as a first step—to work with different groups separately until they reach a level where they can interact with one another.[99]

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[95] "Guidelines for Project Submission to the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation." Balkan Children and Youth Foundation. See www.balkanyouth.org/grants.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Youth Center in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Center for Creative Multiculture, Association PLIMA, Ulcinj, Montenegro.

[98] Jovan Nikolaidis, op. cit., survey.

[99] Agon Demjaha, op. cit.

■ Involving more than one country in a workshop may help to create a more relaxed atmosphere. Groups that might have difficulty interacting with one another in their own country may find a common bond when faced with individuals from other countries.[100]

■ While parental involvement may be useful to programs designed to prepare youth for jobs or to build youth leadership skills, it seems to be an indispensable component of many programs designed to foster tolerance among youth.[101] Parents take part in a number of Children's Creative Center activities, for example. This helps them to learn new attitudes about different ethnic groups that subsequently reinforce what their children are learning in the program. Alternatively, parents can undo what youth are learning in these programs if they continue to express hostility and prejudice toward different ethnic groups, nationalities, and religions.

■ The computer and the Internet are a universal language of interest across all the various cultural divides.[102] Another common interest of many youth in the Balkans is to learn English. While this interest is based on the opportunities it promises in terms of studying abroad and jobs, it also serves as a neutral means of communication across the various dividing lines in the region.

■ The enabling environment for programs such as these could be improved through greater institutional cooperation across borders and within countries, across the various dividing lines. The sharing of lessons learned is still hampered by barriers (both explicit and implicit) to cooperation and the sharing of information. Despite this lingering legacy of suspicion and discomfort, however, there is strong agreement that the future of the region depends upon working to build tolerance among youth. That is a good starting point for collaboration.

■ It is important to take community values and community involvement into account in developing a program that will generate a response on the part of parents, teachers, and others that is supportive of the new attitudes and skills learned by children and youth. Programs that are not already doing so may want to look for ways to involve the broader community in their activities and to tie some of their activities to community service initiatives.

■ There are many differences among these programs: direct versus indirect approaches; choice of venue, design, and tools; working with individual youth or training youth from youth NGOs to work with others; and engaging in dialogue, building capacity, and/or supporting recreational activities. What all these pro-

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[100] Group MOST, October 12, 2002.

[101] Parental influence (their views on ethnicity, for example) on their children is even greater today. Due to the economic crisis, young people live at home until a later age than was previously the case.

[102] Jovan Nikolaidis, op. cit. October 9, 2002.

grams have in common, however, is a focus on the identification of shared cultural patterns—in order to build points of connection among the participants—and a fundamental belief that there is hope for a better future. Convincing youth that there is hope and pairing that belief with real opportunities are essential to the future of the region.

Role of the International Community

■ The international community still plays a key role in programs designed to foster tolerance. First, in some circumstances, organizations from outside the region can serve as an objective convener of meetings, where local actors are viewed as partisan. Second, they bring critical new resources into the region and have played a particularly important role in encouraging and supporting local efforts to address the issue of tolerance. Third, the international community has a major influence on the overarching enabling environment; from Kosovo, where the international community plays a lead governance role, to other countries in the region where international organizations support local NGOs by pressing local governments to provide them with greater political space and access to resources.[103] Finally, the international community provides technical expertise to the nongovernmental community in organizational strengthening and program content in the area of promoting tolerance.

■ Local ownership is critical to the long-term success of these initiatives. The ultimate goal is for local programs to have—as quickly as possible—the necessary resources, skills, and training to initiate and lead these programs themselves.

Where Next?

It is easy to succumb to pessimism when talking about the prospects for peace in regions of the world characterized by centuries of hostility: the Middle East, Ireland, and the Balkans among others. Yet the only alternative is to abandon

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[103] One powerful motivator for local actors (particularly government and business) is the belief that they will be able to strengthen their ties to Europe (e.g., membership at some point in the European Union).

hope and in the process condemn the youth of these regions to a future of enmi-
ty and despair. The programs profiled here serve two purposes: they stand as a
testimony to the determination of local citizens to choose a different future and
they offer concrete examples of good practice.

One advantage in the Balkans is that many can still remember when many differ-
ent ethnic and religious groups lived together as part of one federation. While few in
the region would desire a return to Communist rule, the experience provides a rela-
tively recent, collective experience of peaceful coexistence.[104] Similarly, certain regions
in the area have been characterized by moments of tolerance—Bosnia, for example,
was, for many years, a place where mixed marriages were common. Ulcinj,
Montenegro also has a long tradition of multiculturalism. According to Jovan
Nikolaidis of Association PLIMA, "Ulcinj is a mosaic of cultures—we do not have
assimilation, we have co-existence. Our motto here in PLIMA is, 'Respect the differ-
ences, and nurture the similarities.' That is part of the Ulcinj tradition."[105]

Many in the region want to return to the way things used to be in terms of peace-
ful coexistence and they remember what that was like. As time passes, however, those
with experience with cooperation are replaced by youth who have known only hostili-
ty and armed conflict.[106] Given the fluidity of events, youth are in the process of form-
ing/re-forming their world view. This creates a critical window of opportunity for
programmatic interventions that provide youth with new, more constructive ways of
thinking and acting. If successful, youth may be in a position to begin to build bridges
across the various lines of division within their communities, their countries, and the
region as a whole—serving as a societal "glue" for the Balkans. For this to happen,
changes in attitudes and the development of new skills must be linked to real oppor-
tunities for youth in terms of jobs and education.

Although perspectives vary greatly from country to country (and within countries)
on the issue of reconciliation, many express a general desire to form part of societies
based on mutual respect, where each group retains its own distinct character, but
where there is mutual collaboration. According to BCYF Executive Director Agon
Demjaha, "We don't need to love each other, but we don't need to hate each other."[107]
Jovan Nikolaidis of Association PLIMA has written that for him the goal in
Montenegro is to have a functioning democracy that is "…multinational, multi-
denominational, and multicultural… with a strong civil society. The people who

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[104] It could be argued, of course, that this was less an authentic expression of cultural pluralism than the reflection of an
imposed Communist order that simply paid rhetorical homage to concepts of "brotherhood and unity." Regardless of
the authenticity of the sentiments, however, the collective experience of a period in which different ethnicities and
religions coexisted is a potent reminder to many of an alternative to conflict. For more on this topic see, Nikolaidis,
Jovan. "Managing Multiethnic Coexistence," in Dimitrijevic, Nenad (ed.), Managing Multiethnic Local
Communities in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia. LGI Book. c2000, pp. 447.

[105] Jovan Nikolaidis, op. cit., October 9, 2002.

[106] "We're here to remind youth and their parents of the way things were before in Ulcinj." Jovan Nikolaidis, ibid.

[107] Agon Demjaha, op. cit.

inhabit it belong to different ethnic groups, and all of them should consider this state their homeland."[108] For this to happen, holistic approaches are required, as many structures must change simultaneously in ways that are complementary to one another.

The work of civil society in supporting tolerance and multiculturalism is most effective when supported—in words and with resources—by local and national government and by the business community. That is not the case in many parts of the Balkans, where the business community is of relatively recent formation and political leaders frequently appeal to the most nationalistic elements of society to reach and maintain power. As one NGO staff member said, "The political leaders can undo with one statement what the NGO community has worked ten years to build."[109] In this context, the role of civil society and that of the international community becomes even more critical. Efforts to foster a strong, skilled, and self-confident civil society will in turn bolster efforts to build tolerance in the face of challenges from government.

While civil society continues to grow in strength in the Balkans, it is still a relatively young sector[110] and there is a long way to go before it has the requisite technical capacity, financial resources, and self-confidence to feel equal to the challenge posed by divisive forces in these countries. This is where the international community continues to serve as a critical source of encouragement and financial and technical support. The international community can press national governments to decentralize; to provide an enabling environment conducive to a strong civil society; to demonstrate greater respect for minority rights; and, to invest in youth—who are, after all, tomorrow's voters. Over time, the role of the international community should be supported by capable, financially sustainable organizations operating at the local level.

Significant international resources, of course, did come into the region following the fall of Communism in December 1991 and the beginning of the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite this infusion of capital and technical assistance, most of the next decade was characterized by prolonged periods of armed conflict in a number of areas of the region. This has led some to question the degree to which programs designed to build tolerance can make a difference. But as Agon Demjaha says, "We can only assume that it would have been much worse otherwise. Plus, there is an element of hope. When conflict broke out between Albanians and Macedonians in 2001, the war was very contained. It demonstrated that Albanians and Macedonians did not really

<div style="float:left; width:30%;">

The work of civil society in supporting tolerance and multiculturalism is most effective when supported—in words and with resources—by local and national government and by the business community.

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[108] Nikolaidis, Jovan. "Managing Multiethnic Coexistence." op. cit. p. 449.

[109] Risto Karajkov, op. cit.

[110] There is, of course. a general lack of experience with civil society and voluntary activity in the Balkans. Up until twelve or thirteen years ago, there were no NGOs in the Balkans.

want to fight each other. Perhaps earlier conflicts in the region have shown us the value of peace."[111]

Similarly, when some of the program staff interviewed were asked how they could keep on working in such difficult circumstances—where today's gains can be wiped out unexpectedly by new violence—their response was, "What's the alternative? If we don't do this, what hope is there for young people?" As BCYF's consultant in Romania stated, "You can't resolve this in one generation, but you must start now if you want a resolution in fifty years."[112]

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[111] Agon Demjaha, op. cit.

[112] Mihai Forin Rosca, Romania, October 7, 2002.

Program Surveys

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- "Peace Building Project," Omladinski Center (The Youth Center), Gornji Vakuf-

Uskoplje, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo:

- "Prishtina PostPessimists," Prishtina, Kosovo

Macedonia:

- "Babylon: Young People Development Center," Youth Center for Balkan

Cooperation, Veles, Macedonia

- "Street Stories," Children's Theatre Center, Skopje, Macedonia

- "Respecting Cultural Differences," Step by Step, Children's Creative Center,"

 Skopje, Macedonia

Montenegro:

- "Center for Creative Multiculture," Association PLIMA – Ecology and Multiculture,
Ulcinj, Montenegro

- "Women's Education, Emancipation and Enhancement of Multicultural

Relations," New Horizon, Ulcinj, Montenegro

Serbia:

- "Democracy Learning – Youth Participation," Group MOST, Belgrade, Serbia

- "Seeding The Future," The Belgrade PostPessimists, covering the former

Yugoslavia from Belgrade, Serbia

Program Visits and Interviews

■ "Association PLIMA," Ulcinj, Montenegro, interview with Jovan Nikolaidis, Director. October 9, 2002.

■ "Belgrade PostPessimists," Belgrade, Serbia, group interview with Tamara Milanov (Program Coordinator), Slobodan Simic (Program Coordinator), and Vladimir Erceg (Program Financial Manager). October 12, 2002.

■ "Group MOST," Belgrade Serbia, group interview with Dragan Popadic (Director) and Marija Gajic (Project Coordinator). October 12, 2002.

■ "New Horizon," Ulcinj, Montenegro, group interview with Nazif Veliqi, (Secretary General) Minire Paleviq (Assistant Coordinator), and Sahiba Mavriq (Secretary) October 10, 2002.

■ "Street Stories," Children's Theatre Center, Skopje, Macedonia, interview with Petrit Neziri, Program Coordinator. October 7, 2002.

■ "Step by Step," Children's Creative Center, Skopje, Macedonia, interview with Suzana Kirandziska, Director. October 8, 2002.

Additional Interviews

■ Refet Abazi, Executive Director, Children's Theatre Center, Skopje, Macedonia. October 13, 2002.

■ Diell Bakalli, President, Prishtina PostPessimists, in Skopje, Macedonia. October 8, 2002.

■ Agon Demjaha, Executive Director, Balkan Children and Youth Foundation. October 6-13 (various interviews).

■ Jovan Nikolaidis, Director, Association PLIMA − Ecology and Multiculture, Ulcinj, Montenegro. October 9, 2002.

■ Focus group meeting with BCYF consultants from throughout the Balkans, in Ohrid, Macedonia. October 7, 2002.

Documents[113]

■ Dyregrov, Kari and Softing, Gunn Helen. "Reconciliation Among Young People in the Balkans—An Evaluation of the PostPessimist Network and other Youth Initiatives." Draft Evaluation Report. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. October 2001, pp. 44.

■ Mohanlal, Don. "Strengthening the Capacity of NGOs Serving Children and Youth in the Balkans: Twelve Months of Operation of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation." International Youth Foundation. April 2002, pp. 11.

■ Nikolaidis, Jovan. "Managing Multiethnic Coexistence," in Dimitrijevic, Nenad (ed.), *Managing Multiethnic Local Communities in the Countries of the Former Yugoslavia.* LGI Book. c2000, pp. 447-457.

Websites

■ www.balkanyouth.org

■ www.iyfnet.org

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[113] Additionally, assorted background documents on the region and program documents were reviewed.

Additional titles in the What Works series:

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