Democracy and Youth
Most Mira - Project on Peacebuilding 2017

Summary
Most Mira hosted 14 young participants on 2-8 August 2017 in the village of Kevljani in the north of Bosnia. The project was a mix of local Bosnian, international, and Bosnian diaspora young people (18-30 years old). The theme for this year’s course was “Democracy & Post-Conflict Politics in Bosnia” and included workshops on challenging post-conflict politics, destabilizing identities, refugees, the 2014 floods, art and activism, the politics of NGOs, engaging the diaspora in peacebuilding, and the relationship between democracy and peacebuilding. Participants went on site visits to six memorials in the region, two former concentration camps (Trnopolje and Omarska), and two mass graves, in addition to visiting local NGOs, community centers, and commemoration ceremonies. The project hosted our first Community Party as part of our outreach efforts to bring the local community into discussions with participants—and over 20 community members came out. Participants also collected our second annual community survey in Prijedor, Kozarac, and Kevljani exploring local perceptions of peacebuilding. Participation in the survey increased from 27 in 2015 to 86 respondents this year and the results of the community survey will be presented in the PoP 2017 report.

Project Successes
We provided a unique opportunity for Bosnian young people to re-engage with the history, politics and social issues of the Prijedor region alongside international participants because this year’s project had a better ratio of Bosnians to international participants than previous projects, and included diaspora Bosnians for the first time. We also attended for the first time the commemorations at Trnopolje and Omarska, which were deep emotional and experiential learning moments. We developed new collaborations with Centre for Peacebuilding from Sanski Most, BASOC from Banja Luka, and the EU Studies Center at the City University of New York.

Each participant wrote a blog post reflecting on their experiences from the project, and we were particularly impressed by the depth of their understanding and perceptiveness to the complex nuances of peacebuilding and democracy. In the month of August 2017 alone, the PoP website had 757 views and 466 unique visitors. Over those four weeks, our social media reached 19,905 people with 31,555 impressions; the most popular blog posts garnering more than 3000 impressions and the average posts had 1632.

All participants were interviewed on the last day to evaluate the impact of the project and provide feedback to improve future programs. Three themes that emerged were:

1. Increased understanding of peacebuilding and democracy
   - **Azra, 29, from Kevljani and grew up in Chicago**: Personal connections really helped me understand peacebuilding as a continual process. You can’t just keep the peace, you have to rebuild it for every generation.
   - **Sara, 18, from Zenica**: They only talk about Srebrenica at school. I did not know about the concentration camps here, and I did not know it was worse than Srebrenica. I said- did you know about Omarska Mum? Why did you not tell me about it? My mum does not tell me much. Our country is dying but all they think about is the war. We should forgive. There are a lot of prejudices in our town. Sometimes my parents joke—oh you are going to the Serb part, you cannot go there with all the Serbs and Croats.

2. Developing deep inter-cultural learning, confidence and teamwork
   - **Kate, from UK**: I did not know Stefan [a participant] was a Serb. I spoke to him after Omarska- asking about how his family felt about it. I learnt a lot about boundaries when talking to people about their
experiences. I have learnt how to speak to people about a very difficult subject. I learnt a lot about being in a team and being aware of sensitivities.

- **Sara, 18, from Zenica:** I got over my shyness through talking in the sessions. I like to do projects but I do not like to talk. After I talked I was not shaking, and I realised that I am not shy. I think I am beginning to understand people more. You do not need to love or hate them; you need to understand them and that opened my eyes.

- **Azra, 29, from Kevljani and grew up in Chicago:** Most Mira gave me the opportunity to go places I would never have gone and to interact with people I would never have met. I was born in Prijedor but it was the first time I ever walked the streets of Prijedor. The project gave me a sense of a safe space and people I could relate to. I know the language but I do not know the dynamics and the political movements that are happening. You created the support to have that experience. It made it more meaningful and helped me address my own history.

### 3. Inspiring future peacebuilders

- **Sara, 18, from Zenica:** My aims have changed, now I want to get my friends involved and I want to get more involved in the community doing some active things.

- **Mersiha, 21, from Kozarac:** As a local, I am ashamed that I am not involved more in things here in Ljubija. I use my homecoming for just going out with friends. I should come back more often and engage in social projects. I have gained so much from being pushed forward, there is something that has got in me to be more active. I wanted to go abroad and study and now I am thinking of staying and doing more in the community.

### Challenges and improvements

The project was delivered with more participants, more events, and more facilitators than previously but with the same number of supporting staff. We have concluded that in order to maintain the same number of participants and quality of engagement that we require more support staff, particularly in administration during planning and preparation and driving support.

We have noted improvements based on our own learnings and participant feedback and these include:

- Participants always drop out, often at the last minute. In order to counter this, we must recruit and accept many more than anticipated.

- We will include an additional session on the basic details of Bosnian war because many internationals lacked the most basic understanding of the conflict.

- Supporting participants to manage the emotional impact of visiting commemorations, memorials, and cemeteries. In particular, we will work to better prepare and support diaspora youth who have a personal connection to these sites.

- We will plan better outreach to youth who have returned to Bosnia for the summer holidays in order to include them in the following year’s project.

### What Next?

This year’s project was a clear step up in size, partnerships, and events--making it a true success. We hope to build on this momentum to include diaspora and the local community in new ways. The Most Mira Team created detailed learnings and suggestions for the 2017-18 Project on Peacebuilding based on this year’s experience. This includes clarity on roles before, during and after the project, an improved approach to recruitment targeting young people from Serb backgrounds, ways to improve logistics management and better supporting the participants with clear joining instructions. Maintaining the PoP Alumni network is another new aim for next year. We have set up a facebook group, and have planned quarterly specific newsletters. Maintaining contact has several aims: supporting a network of young peacebuilders, supporting our 2018 recruitment, encouraging fundraising, and a culture of giving back.
The POP 2017 team and participants gather with locals from the community. More than 20 community members joined the POP’s first Community Party.

There was a high focus of participation in all the workshops. In this photo, Sari Wastell is leading a discussion on *Destabilizing Identities*. 
In the workshop, *Art as Memory and Activism*, the participants discussed how art and peacebuilding are linked and how the work together. Jovana, a previous PoP participant and subsequent theatre project facilitator, discusses her experience of working with Most Mira, art, and peacebuilding.

In the workshop, *Diaspora and the NGO-ization of Civil Society*, Nick Micinski challenged the participants to think about the different stakeholders in democracy.
As the sunset, the local kids played soccer while dinner was being prepared for the Community Party.

At the Omarska commemoration, Kemal Pervanic shared his experience of his time in the concentration camp. Several thousand Bosniaks were held in this building.
25 years ago on the 5th of August, Trnopolje was visited (discovered) by foreign journalists. Many from the local community walked from Kozarac to Trnopolje to participate in the event.

One workshop took us on a site visit to Ljubija, a village north of Prijedor, where the devastating consequences of war were apparent. Goran Zoric, founder of KVART, gave a tour of the town and explained its rich cultural and economic history.