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**A BRIEF NOTE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND RECONCILIATION IN  
TRAUMATIZED STATE**

**Prof. dr. Lars Petter Soltvedt\***

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*Summary:*

*With reference to two different approaches to the study of regional integration in political science and peace building sociology, we will conduct a survey to investigate attitudes towards the relationship between social entrepreneurship, human rights and the development of positive and peaceful social relations among students at two different universities in Mostar, Bosnia & Hercegovina. One of these two universities is participating in a project financed by the Norwegian MFA – to establish a common platform among universities in the Western Balkan for the teaching and practice of human rights and interculturalism. (1) The other is not. We will take advantage of this situation to explore variation in student attitudes towards the above, as well as attitudes towards the future, personal and otherwise, at these two universities.*

*Theoretically, our point of departure will be the concept of “spill over” in theories of regional integration, as developed in the 1960s, to explain political integration in Western Europe. We will combine aspects of this theorizing with theories developed by Paul Lederach (1997), to describe, however briefly, the role in society of a peace facilitator. Proceeding then with an empirical analysis at two levels, we will present the results of our investigation. First we will describe our own contribution and efforts in the Western Balkans to establish a common platform for the teaching of human rights and interculturalism. Next we will interview students at these two universities in Mostar – to test our hypotheses on their attitudes both towards the relationships mentioned above, as well as the effect of these perceptions on their sense of in what direction their society is moving.*

*Key words: human rights, reconciliation, social relations, education.*

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\* Associate Professor in Political Science and Human Rights, Buskerud University College.

### **Introduction: Bosnia & Hercegovina as a traumatized state**

Bosnia & Hercegovina has in many ways been a traumatized state since its declaration of independence from Yugoslavia in 1992 and the ensuing outbreak of war that same year. After the Dayton Accord and Peace Agreement in 1995, the war has continued with other means. Rather than enjoying the fruits of an imposed peace, limited economic resources in a divided and traumatized society have led to political stalemate, social unrest, mistrust and lack of empathy for the other; in short very fragile social relations.

Attempts at reconciliation and the improvement of social relations among members of the two main communities in the Federation, have been hampered by politics and the politicization of important educational institutions such as high schools and universities. In the city of Stolac in Hercegovina, Croats and Bosniaks attend the same high school – but at different times of the day. Croats in the morning and Bosniaks in the afternoon. In Mostar, another divided city – they have two universities; the University of Mostar has mostly a Croat student population. Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar enjoys a mostly Bosniak student population. At the University of Mostar, Croat is the official language. At the Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar, Croat, Bosniak and Serbian are all official languages.

It has been said that the wars in the Western Balkans broke out first at the Universities. In the libraries stacked with nationalistic literature. Among the faculty – inspired by, and in their turn, inspiring students with their own prejudiced, nationalistic rhetoric. One is now afraid that the same rhetoric may prevent an emerging generation from wishing and attempting to create again a just and peaceful society – for all in all of Bosnia & Hercegovina.

For some years, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has, with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attempted to bring universities in the Western Balkans together to establish a common platform for the teaching of human rights and interculturalism. During the summer of 2012, Buskerud University College established and arranged for the first time an international summer school in human rights and social entrepreneurship at the Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar (2). The goal of both of these projects has been to bring students and faculty together in exchange of ideas and curriculum – fostering mutual tolerance in respect for the other - and with that attempting to reduce xenophobia and common mistrust. In Mostar, the Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar has participated in these programs since their inception three years ago. The University of Mostar has considered participation, but has until now declined. We will take advantage of this situation to explore variation in student attitudes towards the development of reconciliation and positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## Brief Theoretical Part

Following in the footsteps of David Mitrany (1943; 1966) and inheriting the normative approach of functionalism to political integration, Neo-functionalism is a theory of *regional* integration, building on the work of Karl W. Deutsch (1968), Ernst B. Haas (1958), and Leon Lindberg (1970), among others. The explicit purpose of the neo-functionalists was to utilize the pioneering European experience of integration to generate hypotheses for testing in other regional environments and contexts. Jean Monnet's approach to European integration, which aimed at integrating individual sectors in hopes of achieving spill-over effects to further the process of integration, is said to have followed the basic premises of the neo-functional schools.

Early Neo-functionalist theory assumed a decline in the importance of nationalism in a war-ravaged Europe. It predicted that, gradually, elected officials, interest groups, and large commercial interests within states would see it in their interests to pursue welfare policies or objectives, at a level higher than their own parochial and network interests. Haas (1958) theorized three mechanisms that he thought would drive the integration forward: positive spillover, increased number of transactions, and a transfer in domestic allegiances. Related to our own query and normative concern, we may expect a positive spillover onto society from our efforts at the level of the university, to establish common platforms for the teaching of human rights, social entrepreneurship and interculturalism. Increased number of interactions between faculty and students alike – from universities located in Kosovo, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, may hopefully inspire a transfer in domestic allegiances away from nationalism and ethnocentricity in the political sector. At this point and on the basis of our own efforts alone, time is of course not ripe to see such a transfer. It is nevertheless our hope that at the level of the student population, our efforts may have provided a tentative platform for spill-over to eventually occur.

Missing in most neo-functionalist works on political and regional integration is the role of the individual. In providing for peace and reconciliation, the focus of the individual in his or her relationship to the social, political or economic environment is of course very important. It is our contention that norms and material values somehow have to coincide – together with an appreciation of present life situation and prospects for the future. At the same time, respect and inclusion of the other constitute the most basic premise of peaceful interaction in any democratic society, socially, politically and economically – not the least in former traumatized states suffering from internal disorder and a lack of cohesion.

John Paul Lederach provides a perspective on conflict transformation that may be utilized in this context. Implicitly referring to what we would like to call “peace facilitators” –those that possess open channels of communication both to the “grassroots” as well as to the elites in society, be they elected politicians, religious leaders, the head of the police or the army, he asserts that sustainable

peace and reconciliation in traumatized states rests upon the efforts and communicative skills of such spokesmen and women – most often representatives of civil society, students or faculty at institutions of higher learning. Thus the role of the university in contributing to the making of peace and reconciliation in traumatized states.

### **A Simple Design**

The moving away from a traumatized past is risky business. Research has found that the most war- and conflict prone states are those that are involved in democratization – and of those the ones that are “suffering” the most may be those that have had democracy imposed upon from abroad. Witness not the least the sad example of Iraq and perhaps now also Libya. Sustainable peace, in our view, rests not only on political factors, but as much on norms, values and instruments that include and encompass the weak and the marginalized. Normatively, insight into, and respect for human rights may provide guidance. Instrumentally, social entrepreneurship may provide innovative strategies away from neglect and missed opportunities towards inclusion of all.

In what may very well be considered a pilot study, in our survey we have interviewed 50 students from the mostly Croat University of Mostar and 50 students from the mostly Bosniak Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar. The sample of students was drawn on a non-probability basis, randomly selected from all faculties at both Universities. The questionnaires were distributed personally and via email to students, various student representatives and random students on both campuses. Presentations on various youth meetings were also used to distribute some questionnaires, as well as to alumni of the 2013 International Summer School in Mostar. In spite of these efforts to include a sample of representative opinions from the students in Mostar, the small sample nevertheless indicate that one should be careful to generalize categorically to a larger population of students. We nevertheless hope to demonstrate an indicative effect of our efforts on attitudes among students at the two universities, as far as the role of the university in contributing to the development of positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia & Hercegovina, the relationship between human rights and social entrepreneurship, and views towards future economic and social developments in Bosnia & Hercegovina. We thus formulate the following hypotheses, which we will try to falsify – however indicatively.

H1: There is no difference in attitudes among students at the two universities in Mostar, as far as the perceived relationship between human rights and social entrepreneurship is concerned.

H2: There is no difference in attitudes among students at the two universities in Mostar, in their perception of the role of the university in its contribution to the

development of reconciliation and positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia & Hercegovina.

H3: In general, there is no difference among students at the two universities in Mostar as far as optimism about the future in terms of reconciliation and the development of positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia & Hercegovina.

### **Empirical findings**

H1: In general, we did not find any dramatic difference in the perceptions of students at the two universities, as far as the relationship between human rights and social entrepreneurship is concerned. We did find, however, more students at the University of Mostar that reported no familiarity with the concepts – partly due, as some reported, to “a lack of attention towards these topics among the faculty”.

Among those that were familiar with the topics, they suggest that taken together the teaching of human rights and social entrepreneurship at universities in Bosnia & Hercegovina could provide important stepping stones in the direction of sustainable peace, reconciliation and the improvement of social relations among members of different communities in Bosnia & Hercegovina in general, and in Mostar, the divided city, in particular. Typically, students report that the teaching of these topics are mutually reinforcing in the direction of peace – if only university leadership and faculty members would acknowledge that, and rid themselves of nationalistic tendencies and religious prejudice. “We need to improve from within” and the teaching of both human rights and social entrepreneurship could be conducive to that. “We do not want to inherit the hatred of our parents – the teaching of human rights and social entrepreneurship could provide us with the necessary respect, tolerance and empathy for the other”.

H2: Neither did we find any dramatic difference in attitudes among students at the two universities in Mostar, in their perception of the role of the university in its contribution to the development of reconciliation and positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia & Hercegovina. At both universities the students expressed dissatisfaction with their faculty – complaining about lack of attention in theory as well as in practice, to interreligious dialogue and the teaching of democratic citizenship. Some complain about “economic mismanagement” and the role of politics in higher education. As one student at the University of Mostar put it: “In Bosnia they only promote hate under the influence of politics. They don’t work enough on activities that would lead to positive change and reconciliation.” Another student at the same university express himself this way: “Universities have the task and obligation to be active participants in the reconciliation process and to show by example that true reconciliation is possible!” Others at the Dzemal Bijedic University of Mostar refer to the important task of universities “to create young people’s mindsets that can foster reconciliation between different national/religious communities.

Universities should help the youth to meet, connect and break prejudice.” Referring to the lack of academic freedom, one student at Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar complains that “..universities themselves cannot contribute to peace building, because they have elites above them on which they depend. Young people are trying to destroy these nationalistic barriers.” Many students at both universities conclude that educational institutions do not do enough about reconciliation through a stronger emphasis on the teaching of human rights and interculturalism. With this in mind, some also added that politicians should stay away from the universities, not the least because of their tendency to spread nationalistic propaganda.

H3: Concerning the difference among students at the two universities in Mostar as far as optimism is concerned, about the future in terms of reconciliation and the development of positive social relations between members of different religious communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we did find some interesting differences. Among the students at Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar, only 59.2% reported that they were positive towards the future – compared to 77.6% of the students at the University of Mostar. These different views are also reflected in their responses to questions concerning economic growth and development, future job prospects in Bosnia & Herzegovina, and whether or not one would leave the country if one had the opportunity to do so. Among students at the Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar, 30% say that they are optimistic about future economic growth and development for Bosnia & Herzegovina, compared to 34.7% at the University of Mostar. Only 26.5% of the students at Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar expect to find a job in Bosnia & Herzegovina related to their studies, after they graduate. Among students in the sample from the University of Mostar, nearly 40% report positively on that. Looking at all the students in the sample, more than two-thirds have negative expectations in this respect. Perhaps not surprisingly, more than 80% of the students at both universities indicate that they would like to leave their country, if they had the opportunity to do so. 78% of the students at Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar report that they would, compared to 84% of the student sample at the University of Mostar. All in all, with the exception of the last figure on leaving, we find a more negative student sample at the Dzermal Bijedic University of Mostar than at the University of Mostar.

In spite, perhaps, of the above, most of the students in our sample report that they are content in their lives. Asking “to what degree do you feel happy and content with your life?” 92% of the students at the Dzermal Bijedic University report that they are either “very content” or “somewhat content.” This compares to 97% of the students at the University of Mostar.

As an appropriate conclusion to this empirical section, an overwhelming majority of the students at both universities feel that the educational institutions in Bosnia & Herzegovina do not care enough about educating students in human rights, positive social relations and democracy. We ask this may be noted as our suggestion on how to rectify and correct for some of the negative attitudes

reported above - among students at both universities in Mostar. It seems to us, that the barriers to spill-over are presently greater than the potential strength of an educated and seemingly well informed student population. As such, much is to be expected of future young peace facilitators.

### Concluding remarks

On the basis of this brief survey, it seems to us that such spill-over as that anticipated from our efforts to teach topics related to human rights, interculturalism and social entrepreneurship at the level of the University in Bosnia & Hercegovina, may take some time to materialize. Within the present political climate, it may seem unreal to anticipate the occurrence of real and sustainable change – at least in the short term. In spite of the efforts by some dedicated members of faculty, the overwhelming tendency seems to be towards status quo. At least, that seems to be the view shared by most students in our sample.

However, and referring to Paul Lederach (1997), the role of the peace facilitator in a situation of such strong neglect, cannot be more important. Rather than being discouraged by perhaps inconclusive results as far as our own efforts are concerned, one has to look at alternative explanations as to why students at the Dzemal Bijedic University are somewhat less positive to most if not all of the issues discussed, than students at the University of Mostar.

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**Notes**

1: The International project “Build Bridges – not Walls: the Role of Universities in Peacebuilding” was initiated in the beginning of 2012 by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee with an aim to develop a platform between the universities and NGOs in BiH, Serbia and Kosovo in the fields of human rights, intercultural understanding and peace building. The duration of the project in its first phase is three years, and it is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

2: Buskerud University College arranged in cooperation with Dzamal Bijedic University of Mostar a first time ever International Summers School in Mostar ever. Altogether 43 students from both the universities in Mostar attended one of two classes in International Human Rights and Social Entrepreneurship. Mostar International Summer School will be arranged again in 2014.