

# **THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PEACE-BUILDING PROCESS, A CASE STUDY OF TWO NGOs IN SREBRENICA**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper represents research that studies two NGO's in Srebrenica founded by women who have a peace-building agenda on a local level. Fundamentally, this is the analysis of how women's NGOs contributes to the peace-building and answers a question about grassroots initiatives contribute to stabilization and repair of the social infrastructure in post conflict societies. The chosen town is Srebrenica which had been under United Nations protection as a "safe haven", during the Bosnia and Herzegovina war in the mid nineties and the chosen NGOs are the oldest NGOs founded and ran by women. The method of answering the research question was a case study based on document analysis and interview. Theoretical framework is Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, edited by Thania Paffenholz, more specifically A Comprehensive Analytical Framework for assessing civil society's role in the peace-building. The findings reveal that in the emergence of these organizations, a gendered view on politics and society is cultivated and that the social position of women made them exposed more to non-governmental work. It is also clear that the organizational priorities and dynamics of the NGO changes once they receive international financing. The changes are revealed in how they adjust their agenda adopting the financier's agenda to obtain funds. Finally, the groups contribute to the peace-building process by providing safe space and opportunities for youth who were born after the war to work in multiethnic environment without war burden towards a common vision. The author argues for an increase in a study of women NGOs and their peacemaking efforts in a postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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# 1. Introduction

The study about peace and peace-building itself is a fascinating research field. It is extremely important to investigate the process itself within devastated societies that lack the necessary common vision for a better future such as current Bosnia and Herzegovina - portioned, not just politically, but socially as well. Civil society as a democratic precondition and tool, seem to be heavily involved in repairing societies and rebuilding social capital. Gender subsection of the civil society has also proven to be important and women as founders and beneficiaries of two major NGOs in Srebrenica are certainly important sub dimension of the peace-making process.

This thesis looks at civil society in Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, more particularly in the two nongovernmental organizations. The main research question of this thesis is: How these NGOs and their activities contribute to the peace-building process? Another questions that I will address are: What are the obstacles ? What is gender dimension and why is it relevant?

The study encompasses two different organizations in the town: “SARA” aimed at helping women and the “Youth Center” in Srebrenica. These local organizations are the longest running and were among the very first formal structures dealing with peace-building. Both organizations are founded and ran by women, although now, there are both female and male volunteers. Consequently, this paper is a specific examination of the emergence of particular local<sup>1</sup> civil

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<sup>1</sup> As this paper focuses on local non-governmental groups it is necessary to define what is the reference point for the term “local”. The usage of the term “local” for the purposes of this paper means internal activism and commitment to the cause that is not imposed *from the “above”*, but has appeared *from within* the local community and reflects needs of its inhabitants. The majority of post-conflict countries are often heavily sustained by international aid fostering efforts to come to a sustainable peace. The target of this paper is internal organizations that occurred from within the society, as a self-motivated mechanism. I shall, however, acknowledge that regardless of the fact that the organizations are locally founded and locally run, the majority still rely upon financial support from international funders. Local NGO’s I researched are the driving force, self-motivated bottom-up organizations but with financial incentives provided from the outside.

society groups that concentrate with specific aims on certain target groups within a given time frame in a particular town.

In order to understand the context surrounding the NGOs we need to have more information about Bosnian war. Bosnia has been involved in what has been called the “bloodiest war after World War II”<sup>2</sup>. Fought between 1992 and 1995, it was a consequence of the breakup of Yugoslavia at the beginning of the nineties. It has been “the longest and most violent European war in the second half of the twentieth century”<sup>3</sup> The country continues to live with the aftermath of the conflict which saw over 100,000 killed, over two million displaced or made refugee, as well as the wholesale destruction of its infrastructure, institutions and social capital. <sup>4</sup> Despite this, the country has been attempting, with international assistance, to move forward from the aftermath. With many international initiatives taking place, local efforts to change the current situation of political instability and society’s mistrust began their mission as well.

Theoretical framework of the research is *A Comprehensive Analytical Framework for assessing civil society’s role in the peace-building* and its three main functions (Socialization, Service providers and Rebuilding communities). The method of answering the research question was a case study based on document analysis (project applications, donor evaluation and public polls) and interviews of the staff and volunteers of the NGOs. The main findings in a nutshell are that women in Srebrenica are more exposed to non-governmental work due to its non-hierarchical nature. Another finding revealed that donors’ policies are heavily involved with change in organizational goals, structures and target groups. Lack of transparency and ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia, *Bosnian Civil War*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O46-BosnianCivilWar.html>, 3/30/2011

<sup>3</sup> Jan Palmowski. *Bosnian Civil War*. A Dictionary of Contemporary World History. 2004. *Encyclopedia.com*, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O46-BosnianCivilWar.html>, 29/05/11

<sup>4</sup> Care international, *Peace-building Partnership Support*, Instrument for Stability Crisis preparedness component, youth peace advocates in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, Den Hague, 2004

imbalance are internal obstacles for the organizations. The funding issues and other obstacles are disabling organizations from progressing forward with more substantial work. Finally, the two organizations are to be acknowledged for their successful endeavors in connecting ethnic others as well as providing community space for nurturing cross-ethnic relations.

The emergence of the NGOs founded by women and youth has never been fully investigated in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of this paper is to understand the ways in which two NGOs, Youth Council and “SARA” contribute to peace-building within a traumatized area in the transitional period after the conflict. The approach will extend previous work by using different examples and different contexts. This study makes a contribution to the understanding of how a society can find ways to deal with a traumatic past and re-build social relations. More specifically it provides us with an insight of the origins, activities as well as obstacles, that women led NGOs in Srebrenica, the town known for its horrific past, are facing in their work. By investigating two NGOs in Srebrenica, this thesis contributes to the prospects of sustainable peace and reconciliation in Bosnia.

### ***1.1. Organization of the Thesis***

My thesis is structured as follows: Chapter two reviews some of the current literature on peace and peace-building processes undertaken by civil society. More precisely it reviews the peace-building efforts in some other societies as well as theories about non-successful humanitarian aid. It looks across a few case studies about women NGOs in Bosnia as well as youth projects and their results. The review looks includes various studies about Bosnia its ethno-divide and reconciliation efforts. The chapter provides some contextual information about the Bosnian war and Srebrenica, where the three NGOs work. Finally, in this chapter, I will

provide the conceptual framework. The third chapter is methodology description, specifically, the description of documents and data gatherings. As well as an explanation about interviewee selection and analysis conducted in the framework for assessing civil society's role in the peace-building. In this chapter, I profiled the organizations and in the fourth chapter I described in detail the theoretical framework for the analysis to follow. In the fifth chapter, I focus mainly on the analysis of the activities and projects undertaken by the organizations within the three functions of the framework. Then assesses the gender element and obstacles of their work. Chapter sixth consists of conclusion and further recommendation.



## 2. Literature Review

In the course of this chapter I will briefly outline critiques of major theories involving civil society, humanitarian aid, peace-building, and the definition of the peace. As well as shortly mentioning some of the discussion about women's role in the peace-building and specific case studies. I will also discuss the reasoning behind looking at the gender perspective in the thesis. In this chapter, I will provide context related information about the nature of the Bosnian War and distinctiveness of Srebrenica.

The impact and emergence of a civil society in a post-conflict area has been extensively studied in recent years, however, previous research in the field has been focused on civil society in general and the causes of its appearance, but more as the overall picture. The widest definition of civil society is given by Michael Edwards in "*Civil Society*"<sup>5</sup> in that the civil society is an umbrella term for volunteer interest based groups. Another definition of civil society given by Christoph Spurk is that it is a sphere of voluntary action that is distinct from the state, political, private and economic spheres, keeping in mind that in practice the boundaries between sectors are often complex and blurred. It consists of a large and diverse set of voluntary organizations.<sup>6</sup> Civil society encompasses voluntary civic and social organizations/institutions that are distinguished from the state or market by their purpose and structure. Civil society organizations deal with various programs and projects. NGOs can make important contributions, as they can

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Edwards, *Civil Society*, Polity Press, Malden, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Cristoph Spurk, *Understanding Civil Society*, Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

act as facilitators between communities that have become polarized by conflict. At the grass-roots level, voluntary groups have been able to encourage old enemies to work on joint projects, fostering dialogue and thus helping to resolve disputes at the local level.<sup>7</sup>

There are critiques to civil society such as the “*Empire of Civil Society: Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations*”<sup>8</sup> by Justin Rosenberg to provide an opposing view to the issue. The main argument among many is that there is indeed no answer to the question of what kind of society do distinct institutional spheres of politics and economics. His main argument is that the definition of the civil society cannot be separated clearly, without a blur from political nor economical sphere. However, this theory remains quite vague in regard to this specific research question, how does civil society really impact on the peace-building process?

What is the role of the NGOs in a peace-building process? Thania Paffenholz stated that a look at the practice of peace-building shows that civil society has a role to play and is an accepted player in peace-building initiatives.<sup>9</sup> Paffenholz stated that the majority of civil society studies land on critical overview of donor-NGO relations and recommendation for donors to adopt less-interventionist policies. Along with her colleagues, Paffenholz is one of the rare authors to give a theoretical framework for systematical analysis of the civil society in peace-building. She concluded that national actors had more impact than outsiders and that local NGO even in the modest field of empirical data showed more success. The overall idea and the main point was that only society itself can reclaim peace from within. This is why according to the author, the local initiatives are the most important for reconciliation. The relevancy of Paffenholzs work to this thesis is her study shows that local organizations as “SARA” and Youth

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<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations*, London: Verso, 1994

<sup>9</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 61

Council are to be investigated carefully, considering all external and internal factors to their work.

As external factors, donors and the aid affect the local organizations one way or another, considering the fact that organizations are mostly not self-sustainable and depend on the assistance. How does humanitarian aid and donor's regulations affect the work of local NGOs? Michael Schloms is a scholar who has written about Humanitarian NGOs in the peace-building process. More specifically he looked at how and when aid and peace efforts coincide and conflict. The major point of his work is that the establishment of durable peace in post-conflict situations – the concept of peace-building depends on factors such as the expertise of local actors, structures and access.<sup>10</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina as heavily subsidized country<sup>11</sup> was supposed to start peace-building process, as Schloms said, "As the final phase of a hand-over process that begins with relief aid"<sup>12</sup>. Such practice by humanitarian NGOs should lead to rehabilitation and development efforts, and result in the construction of a sustainable peace.<sup>13</sup> Schloms concludes that aid can hardly play a peace-building role in crisis marked by social disruption, permanent insecurity, and collapsed statehood. What we learned by these studies in sum, is that the process of rebuilding social capital is very difficult if not supported by international aid, but very much obstructed if the aid was a substitute for a dysfunctional state. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina it is evident that the state is not as efficient enough to keep up with rebuilding infrastructure, meeting international community's' and its citizens

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Schloms, *Humanitarian NGOs in Peace Process in Mitigating Conflict. The Role of NGOs*, ed Henry F. Carey and Oliver P. Richmond, 2003, 42

<sup>11</sup> According to International Security Forum : Bosnia has received, since the end of the war, more financial donations from foreign donors for reconstruction than was pumped into 18 Western European countries under the post-World War II, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?Ing=en&id=96684>, (5/2/2011)

<sup>12</sup> Michael Scholms, *Humanitarian NGOs in Peace Process in Mitigating Conflict. The Role of NGOs*, ed Henry F. Carey and Oliver P. Richmond, 2003, 43

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

expectations. Therefore, what the abovementioned studies suggest, is that efficient humanitarian aid needs to be aimed at the priorities of the state, but only if the state has a solid ground and a basic democratic establishment.

If donor “interventionist” policies are extensively elaborated by scholars, one should ask what are the other obstacles facing local NGOs within the peace-building agenda? Jan Egeland reported about NGO-government coordination and communication issues in the common endeavors for peace-building. Perhaps the greatest obstacle lies in the inherent lack of coordination between the various agencies and organizations involved in such undertakings.<sup>14</sup> In such conditions efforts by any party might get lost, as scholar Jan Egeland warns. All in all, the result of such lack of coordination is at best that scarce resources are not used to optimum effect. At worst, the variety of international activities can lead to situations where a number of different, well-meaning agencies and organizations nullify each other’s work.<sup>15</sup> The lack of coordination between the various organizations working in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which all offered different services, has been one of the subject of discussion especially addressed in “*Peace building and Civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina*”<sup>16</sup>. The need for general networking and sharing information is crucial for better tangible results in building peace. Similar discussions have been lead in “*Post Conflict Peace-building*”<sup>17</sup> where all authors discuss the importance of cooperation between local non-governmental organizations and international non-governmental organizations. The authors take up the discussion into the international arena and claim that through their network activities, the organizations can establish a social climate which is

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Egeland, *Peacemaking and the Prevention of Violence: The role of Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations*, International Review of the Red Cross, Vol.81. , No.833, 1999, 77

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> edited by Martina Fischer, *Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ten Years after Dayton, Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ten Years after Dayton, Research center for Constructive Conflict Management*, 2006

<sup>17</sup> edited by Vincent Chetail, *Post-conflict Peacebuilding*, Oxford University Press, 2009

favorable to peaceful community relations and that exchange seminars, workshops and training would enable NGO staff to learn from each other on the basis of peer-to-peer education would allow them to work better in their environments on peace-building. The general conclusion is that transparency and sharing is a core function by civil society actors that is first of all implemented by national and local groups.

It has been reported by extensive studies that in post war countries, many “uncivil actions” take place as a result of a non-existent security structure in the state. In addition, it burdens the civil society efforts facing another issue of a general lack of trust in the fragile society. Forcing the need to differentiate and distinguish themselves from it. Therefore, the question about post-conflict conditions and the ways to deal with “un-civic actions” arises. The social capital, including basic general values and citizen participative will has been devastated and destroyed during the war. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is crucial to prevent “un-civic virtues” such as violence and intolerance from differences prevailing again. One collection of the case studies called *Managing Hatred and Distrust*,<sup>18</sup> offers examples of the post war efforts by the civil society to rebuild trust and gain confidence of the people in the post-conflict countries. The authors gave an example of Croatian municipalities that are successfully implementing a sustainable multiethnic peace, by making sure that no ethnic group can become dominant. Srebrenica is a Serb dominated population within the town, while the Bosniak population dominates the rural area. Therefore, the practice of refusing to allow one ethnic group to be dominant is not possible; however, what is thought by this example is the way organizations figured out the way to keep the beneficiaries ethnically diverse and proportional.

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<sup>18</sup> edited by Nenad Dimitrijevic and Petra Kovacs, *Managing Hatred and Distrust, The Prognosis for Post-Conflict Settlement in Multiethnic Communities in the former Yugoslavia*, Open Society Institute, 2004

Another author, Roberto Belloni, wrote about “uncivil structures” such as mafia-like groups and paramilitary gangs who are taking the opportunity of a weak state and torn down security structures to gain power and illegal funds. In most conflict regions the main threat to stability and obstacle to peace-building and democratization is not the conflict per se, but criminality.<sup>19</sup> Belloni fundamentally questions under what conditions civil society can have an impact on peace negotiations and peace-building, because as previously noted, the country itself has had difficult times in reconstructing from scratch. The international and local efforts to fight criminality, while simultaneously work on rebuilding peace, is crucial to take advantage of the social capital and existing human potential. Investigating the role of international donor organizations Belloni concludes, that central donor practice need to switch into mobilizing effectively existing domestic resources as equal partners to international engagement instead of continuously identifying domestic gaps to be filled with the proper dose of international assistance.<sup>20</sup> His main argument feeds into previously mentioned danger about a dysfunctional state and donor relations, with the need for reliance on the society’s needs and the human capabilities.

Previous research encompassed works on the return of refugees, building civil society in relation to state structures, youth work and activism dealings with the past and Bosnian society on the path of justice, truth and reconciliation. In the latter, subjects facing the past and transitional justice and challenges for sustainable peace-building have been investigated thoroughly and drawn conclusions are that the process is slow and can be fully assessed in many years to come. The main argument is that any step forward in meeting groups from different backgrounds is a huge success. Martina Fischer carried out in-depth case studies; she has done

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<sup>19</sup> Roberto Belloni, *Civil Society in war-to-democracy transitions*, ed Anna K.Jarstad, Timothy D. Sisk, From War to Democracy. Dilemmas of Peace Building, Cambridge University Press, 2008

<sup>20</sup> ibid

research on work with traumatized women and children carried out by institutionalized governmental or international organizations. In her research, she looked at specific projects and efforts to peace-building in the field of youth work and education. She showed that young people offer a strong potential for social innovation and therefore a promising target group for reconciliation work, especially in war torn societies.<sup>21</sup> The author gives an extensive elaboration of the case study of the NGO and the efforts undertaken by the organization to make changes using civil and youth capital. Younger age groups (especially those who were born after the war) are generally more open to dialogue and cooperation, compared with the generations that have been directly affected by war and atrocities.<sup>22</sup> However, she also acknowledged that we cannot call all young people agents of change. She warned that if neglected, young people may not necessarily be an agent of social change on contrary, and just on the contrary, they might resort to shadow economies or illegal structures.

The staff of the pilot project in Bosnia researched by Fischer, combined development strategies and peace-building instruments, giving incentives for interethnic cooperation through youth networking, education, and income generation.<sup>23</sup> Fischer looked across various non-governmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and concluded that they provide opportunities, focusing on “empowerment” and training to promote individual peace skills as well as incentives for people in highly segregated ethnic communities to develop a willingness to work together, since it benefits them directly.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Martina Fischer, *The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work: Education, Interethnic Networking and Income Generation, Ten Years after Dayton, Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ten Years after Dayton, Research center for Constructive Conflict Management*, 2006

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Martina Fischer, *The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work: Education, Interethnic Networking and Income Generation, Ten Years after Dayton, Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ten Years after Dayton, Research center for Constructive Conflict Management*, 2006

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

As mentioned in the introduction, two organizations are founded and run by women, including the majority of their staff. How does gender fit into the story of peace-building NGOs? It is important to emphasize Elissa Helms' observations that women have been among the most active leaders of the burgeoning nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector in postwar Bosnia – Herzegovina.<sup>25</sup> The role of women in building peaceful societies after conflict was elaborated thoroughly in *“Women, Civil Society and the Geopolitics of Democratization”* by Denise M. Horn, who claimed that women and their role in sustaining peace is neglected. She includes several empirical examples where, in her opinion, women's roles were crucial in preventing the war to break out again.<sup>26</sup> This meant that they were involved in various preventative workshops about non-violent conflict resolution and embracing past workshops. They initiated one of the first gathering of “ethnic others” firstly to socialize itself later for the joint projects of empowering women and rebuilding tolerance. The opposing opinion was given by Elissa Helms who has investigated several Bosnian NGOs founded and led by women. In the ethnographic study she undertook, she portrayed an affirmation of gendered social positions enforced through NGOs. She acknowledged the women's role in peace building, but pointed out that NGO work was reinforcing patriarchal Bosnian society's vision about the gender division of labor and “women's place” in the private and public life keeping women in the new private environment-NGO space. This new NGO space was prevented from decision making processes, hence less long term impact in “women gatherings.”

In the existing literature, there has been an underestimation of very specific civil society groups and their effect in post-conflict areas. It is not enough just to acknowledge the existence of the women led NGOs, but rather crucial to analyze the effectiveness of their efforts and

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<sup>25</sup> Elissa Helms, WOMEN AS AGENTS OF ETHNIC RECONCILIATION? WOMEN'S NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN POSTWAR BOSNIA–HERZEGOVINA, *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 16

<sup>26</sup> Denise M. Horn, *Women, civil society and the geopolitics of democratization*, Routledge, New York, 2010.



contribute to the literature in a proper manner. It is also not enough just to note that NGOs are reinforcing gendered social roles, but important to assess why this is so and what are the obstacles for flourishing women's initiatives. Civil society and its successes are increasingly thematized in the literature, but little is known about types of organizations that deal with particular target groups (children, youth and women), and their dynamics in post war areas. Previous research has not provided satisfactory answers to specific questions of their contribution to the peace-building and not enough research has been undertaken to investigate the contribution of NGOs to the peace-building process. Srebrenica is a town with a horrific history and for the scientific arena it is important that the town is researched and investigated from every possible angle and more importantly from the viewpoint of the first peace-building initiatives coming from women.

### ***2.1. Peace, Peace-Building, and Local Women's NGO's***

Immanuel Kant wrote: "Perpetual peace is no empty idea, but a practical thing which, through its gradual solution, is coming always nearer its final realization..."<sup>27</sup> This implies that peace is hard to reach and sustain, but not impossible. Post-conflict repair and reconstruction is a protracted and exhausting process that requires a lot of time, energy and joint efforts. As Scott Hunt said "peace is important today as it has always been."<sup>28</sup> One shall assess the efforts and institution that deal with the process of peace-building and disentangle common struggles and patterns of work.

Organizations for peace-building and peace-keeping have a burden of complex, long and often fragile processes to establish tolerance and peace within conflict-torn regions and countries.

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<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual peace* : a philosophical essay, translated by M. Campbell Smith ; edited, with an introduction by A. Robert Caponigri, New York, Liberal Art Press, 1949

<sup>28</sup> Scott Hunt, *The future of peace: on the front lines with the world's great peacemakers*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002

Peace-making and peace-keeping operations, to be truly successful, must include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people.<sup>29</sup> The reintegration of society and renewal of dialogue has often been the primary agenda of non-profit and non-governmental organizations; however, needless to say, there are many other civil society groups who have different agendas, as well as “uncivil groups” that also appear in war-torn countries.<sup>30</sup>

Peace building is a broad term that encompasses many activities to be undertaken; beginning with re-building infrastructure destroyed in the conflict-divided society and which continues into the social/cultural areas that lead to a sustainable peace. Once peace agreements are signed, it means little if the chapters and clauses of the agreement are not implemented on the ground. Governmental institutions are, in most cases, concerned about building the technical infrastructure and dealing with the transitional justice. While governmental institutions deal with repairing the economy, living standards and roads, which civil society is mostly concerned about include repairing human infrastructure.

Lasting peace requires a sound and equitable economic development, in particular in the domains of housing, public health care, employment, etc. According to Jan Egeland, it also requires social development.<sup>31</sup> After a conflict, all sides, previously in war have to learn to live together again, at high political level, and among ordinary people.<sup>32</sup> People need to be provided with a safe space where they can communicate again and start a dialogue over a common future. The only existing structures that are dealing with the dialogue are often not provided by the state

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<sup>29</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Charles Hill. *The papers of United Nations Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Later in the literature review chapter there are acknowledgements of other civil and uncivil organizations

<sup>31</sup> Jan Egeland, *Peacemaking and the Prevention of Violence: The role of Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations*, International Review of the Red Cross, Vol.81. , No.833, 1999, 77

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

but by the civil society. Hence, NGO's whose main aims are peace-building and tolerant society, play the crucial role of rebuilding society from the scratch and bringing the sides together.

I shall also mention that the definition of 'peace' has been criticized by many feminist theorists<sup>33</sup> and that according to some scholars, the definition is often a "male definition" in which women's roles were elaborated in a context of a patriarchal view that women are the glue responsible for "healing society" since they have a more sophisticated approach and a maternal sensitivity. In this sense, women were assigned specific roles with specific passionate, emotional, and vulnerable characteristics that were often seen as "weak". Hence, this type of definition contributes to the male "rational" approach of solving problems on a "more rational", dispassionate level. One of the feminist critiques is also summed up in the questions: "Does peace means the absence of war?" "What do we exactly mean by war?" Some authors suggest that war is not just a series of military actions, but any other form of violence/conflict (including violence towards women) and that the concept of peace should encompass much more than just the absence of armed organized conflict. For Jude Howell not only the definition of peace is problematic but also the meaning of the civil society. Her main argument is that it is a double-edged sword for feminist in terms of defining civil society as an arena where gendered behaviors, norms and practices are acted out and reproduced.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> i.e. Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King, *Rocking the ship of state: toward a feminist peace politics*, Boulder, Colo. : Westview Press, 1989

<sup>34</sup> Howell Jude and Diane Mulligan, *Gender and civil society: transcending boundaries*, London, Routledge, 2005

## **2.2. Gender and Civil Society in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Having said at the introductions, that the founders and the presidents of the five the most active nongovernmental organizations in Srebrenica are women, amongst them “SARA” and the Youth Council as well, we need to take into account the gender dimension as well. There are two main reasons why should we look at the gender perspective of the civil society in Srebrenica:

1. Culture/ social condition, referring to the status of women in society as a whole. This is linked up to Bosnian society being seen as patriarchal society and amongst the former Yugoslavian countries as one of the first traditional-valued based countries.
2. The specific character of conflict in Bosnia and its consequences which refers to especially gender-specific crimes, hundreds of widows amongst the returnees to Srebrenica, women being a specific sub-group among victims and mass rapes.

### *1. Status of Bosnian woman in the society*

“Women transforming themselves and society” is the name of the first peace conference and was probably one of the first initiatives of women for peace in Bosnia. Over five hundred women gathered in June 1996 in the capital of Bosnia at a conference aiming to reclaim peace.<sup>35</sup> This was the beginning of women’s peace activism and peace-building involvement. Bosnian women’s NGOs have thus been the core participants in networks of organizations, donors, and local and international officials professing to work on reconciliation.<sup>36</sup> Bosnia recently introduced gender quotas, but it remains a patriarchal society with the heritage of the socialist era’s view about

<sup>35</sup> Swanee Hunt, *This was not our war, Bosnian women reclaiming the peace*, Duke University Press, 2004, 137

<sup>36</sup> Ellisa Helms, *The Gender of coffee: Women and reconciliation initiatives in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina*, <http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/home/gould/Dubrovnik/readings/Helms%20WSIF.pdf>, 5/25/2011

women's role in society. In such circumstances one must ask the question: what are the preconditions for the emergence of women's initiatives? And why are women in charge of the majority of civil society organizations in Bosnia? This study will not answer all questions but will acknowledge the two abovementioned organizations in regard to this.

## 2. *The character of conflict in Bosnia and its consequences*

In the context of ethnic ideologies such are the ones prevailing in Bosnia during the war, women have been seen mostly as mothers and tools for "renewing" the nation. Mass rapes were "a psychological message" about one's superiority. Since only women give birth and "renew" a nation, everyone was a threat but women in particular. The massive rape as a tool of revenge means, impregnating them with "their" infants claiming nationalistic rights on the new generation. After the conflict, women have always been seen as the glue to society. The ability of woman to restore dialogue between groups that have ripped apart their connections and lives is distinct. The first initiatives by women in Bosnia adds to the argument. Although women are more often victims rather than perpetrators they often discover the emotional resources to continue not in anger or shame, not in revenge or hatred, but with the will to survive and to seek out humanity amid the violence.<sup>37</sup>

My aim in writing about women's peace initiatives does not imply that there are no men who seek peace and reconciliation and who play equally important roles in the process of post-conflict reconstruction. So, the point is not to minimize the men's role but to acknowledge the women's role and discuss the effectiveness of their efforts as well as obstacles and lack of transparency in their work. Hence, this paper concentrates on women led NGO's working at a

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<sup>37</sup> Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Women building peace, What they do why it matters*, London, 2007, 9

local level whose agenda is peace-building. In patriarchal societies women activists face greater obstacles in mobilizing and expressing universal values of peace than in some other developed countries.

### **2.3. The Bosnian War and Srebrenica**

In order to understand the impact of the NGOs in Srebrenica we should take a look at the nature and the specificity of the Bosnian civil war. The wars of ex-Yugoslavia swept into much more ethnically and culturally diverse Bosnia becoming what is called “conflicts of social belonging and identity.”<sup>38</sup> In the 1998, Attila Agh wrote that “It is too early to talk about the prospects of democratization in a unified Bosnian state.”<sup>39</sup> Seven years after the Dayton Peace Agreement, Sumantra Bose stated that Bosnia is a state by international design and of international design.<sup>40</sup> This had to do with the idea that many development and other aid funds were directed to international civil society groups (international organizations that had their branches, an outreach projects) rather than self-initiated grass roots groups, many of which emerged from within the society itself.

Although Bosnia and Herzegovina is heavily subsidized by the international community, it is not ready to fully engage in the peace-building process. Unfortunately, while many International Aid Funds have tried to instigate and sustain the process, their own agenda-setting rarely includes advice from grass-roots organizations. National divides and low confidence in social institutions means that social trust in the country is virtually non-existent and that social cohesion is extremely

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<sup>38</sup> Elster John, *Coming to terms with the past. A framework for the study of justice in the transition to democracy*, European Journal of Sociology (Arch. europ. sociol.) 1998, 13

<sup>39</sup> Attila Agh, *Emerging democracies in East Central Europe and Balkans*, 1998, 217

<sup>40</sup> Sumantra Bose, *Bosnia after Dayton, Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, 2002, 60

fragile.<sup>41</sup> Sixteen years after the war, country seems not to be able to fully move on. Bosnia's current political situation is far from ideal; more than 80% students want to leave the country, increasing the "brain drain" which leads the country further into apathy and deadlock. While political and economical reforms are constantly delayed with high levels of corruption and more than 45% unemployed rate in both entities along with previously mentioned 60% unemployed youth in Srebrenica, it is clear that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not a prosperous country. Additionally, the rule of law is very weak as a consequence of the high level of political and financial corruption<sup>42</sup> Further politically linked crimes have impaired the development of the country as a whole and because of these things it has progressed little towards securing a sustainable peace, fair welfare provisions and equitable wealth generation.

Srebrenica is located in the Birac region at the Bosnian-Serbian border. It represents the worst aspects of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia – the tragic exodus on both sides. Srebrenica is the most known episode of the war where the ethnic ideologies flourished in its worst destroying the society to the core. The potential impact of the terrible events on next generations of youth is enormous. This is precisely what makes young people the most desired target groups of the continuous work and special attention by NGOs in order for the next generation not to make same mistakes. Women should be addressed because of the fact that the majority of the returnees were widows of the late Bosniaks and the most active NGOs in Srebrenica were ran by Serb women. Fifteen years after the war its consequences are still, in this region, all too visible.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> UNDP/Oxford Research International, *The silent Majority Speaks: Snapshots of today and visions of the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. The report put Bosnia and Herzegovina in the last place for social trust in countries where Oxford Research International has worked, 2007

<sup>42</sup> Transparency International Global Corruption Perception Index, Bosnia and Herzegovina jointly with other countries from region is on the scale from 84<sup>th</sup> -93th the most corrupt country in the world, 2007

<sup>43</sup> Tihomir Knezicek, Care International report, midterm project evaluation, *Youth peace advocates in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina*, , Tuzla, July 2010

This region is one of the most deprived areas of the country and it remains subject to exclusionist identities and hard-line views.<sup>44</sup> Despite the difficult environment, Bosnian civil society has provided important contributions to the peace-building process and the effectiveness of the Srebrenica NGOs will be analyzed in the chapters to follow. Many groups have been engaged in rebuilding relationships and mediating differences between ethnic communities to facilitate the postwar return of refugees and displaced persons.<sup>45</sup> However not many groups have been assessed in order for their impact to be evaluated properly.

## **2.4. Conceptual Framework**

The term *peace-building* was first used by Johan Galtung in a 1975 essay. He defined the term as one of three approaches to peace: peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building<sup>46</sup>. The core difference in essence is that peace-building has preventative and integrative components more emphasized and that it represents positive peace<sup>47</sup> - the absence of both physical and structural violence. The preventative measure is precisely the reason why the peace-building is the most suitable for the region as well as the research. Peace-building achieves positive peace by creating structures and institutions of peace based on justice, equality and cooperation.<sup>48</sup>

Building peace in a war-torn society calls for long term commitment to the cause, building infrastructure across the country in each microcosm of the society while maximizing utility and channeling national and international assistance. Initiatives coming from within the

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

<sup>46</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 45

<sup>47</sup> Johan Galtung distinguishes negative (end of violence) and positive peace (peaceful society at all levels). Peacekeeping aims at negative peace, whereas peacemaking and peacebuilding aim at positive peace.

<sup>48</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 45



society in such extremely hard conditions, destroyed homes and decreasing community values often create feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. The community has very few individuals with any optimistic outlook. They stand out from the rest of the community as completely alien in a society which is recovering from trauma and shock after the devastation of war. Any analysis of civil society's role must consider that armed conflict dramatically changes the lives of all people at all levels, from individual changes in attitudes and behavior (trust and confidence), through economic and social change to dramatic shifts in the relationship of power to all communities in society.<sup>49</sup>

### 3. Methodology

The case study selection was not a random. The aim of the selection process was to come up with the oldest founded organization in Srebrenica that appeared as the first locally initiated organizations. The second criteria of the organization selection were clearly their professed aims and peace-building agenda.

Originally, the study encompassed three organizations including "AMICA", the NGO aimed at protecting women and children's rights. Unfortunately, the organization did not have much evidence of their work and written data that would be enough for the study. After conducted interviews with activists it became apparent that lack of substantial data will result in excluding the organization from the study.

My study consists of two case studies on the basis of interviews, observation and documentary analysis (of monitoring reports, official documents etc of the NGOs): "SARA" aimed to protect women's rights and "Youth Center" aimed to women and youth.

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<sup>49</sup> Cristoph Spurk, *Understanding Civil Society*, Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 18

Generally said the documents are consisted of: Donor's reports, organization's report (narrative and financial), evaluations and official documents. *Sources of data from the Youth Council are:* biography of the organization, grant application documents for the projects: "Silvertown Srebrenica", "Cultural Pump up", "Youth Peace Advocates" and the organizational project reports, Independent Consultant report, Official Statute 2002, Official Statute 2008, progress report for "Youth for peace" project, non-violence workshops and creative workshops reports and finally evaluation polls of the participants for the abovementioned projects. *Sources of data from "SARA" are:* biography of the organization, Official Statute 2000, Official Statute change 2008, Strategic plan of development, Rules of the Procedure of the Board, grant application for the projects: "Multi-religious dialogue as a prevention from conflict" and "Mercy Corps joint project for refugee return relief", Final Narrative reports, evaluation report from Multi-religious Council of B&H, Court decision for registration of the organization and open letter to the organization from the catholic priest Petar Matanovic.

The staff of the both organization opened their archives in order for me to research with no hostile reaction, but rather with sympathy. They introduced me to many documents and only later was I able to choose which one to include in the study. The only documents I could not get a hold of are the documents at the very beginnings of their work. The reasoning behind is that at the very start of their work they were not aware of the importance of keeping the track of the work, the budget was very low and donors of the small grants did not insist on exhaustive financial reports. More ambitious projects required for more professional approach so there was no shortage of clear documentation from 2005 to now days.

From the Youth Council I interviewed the president and the one of the founders, Milena Nikolic. I also interviewed one of the senior staff Aleksandra Jovic as well as project coordinator

Almir Salihovic. One volunteer present and willing to be a subject of interview was Davorin Sekulic. From “SARA” I interviewed Stana Medic and Valentina Gagic, both of the founders and the later one is president. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and my questions came from pre-prepared questionnaire. Each questionnaire was tailored to the position in the organization and the specific activities that each organization was undertaking, yet I ensured to cover general topic. The interview would be roughly divided in two parts. In the part one the questions consisted of general introduction as well as their role in the organization and the part two of the questions aimed to provide answers on their personal experience in the organization’s efforts and the evaluation of their work. They were also asked about some factual information in regard to the specific project they were dealing with. Questions about obstacles they face in their work were not originally planned in the questionnaire but since it spontaneously occurred with each participant answers I understood the need to include it into analysis part.

Needless to say that I have spent majority of my life-time in Srebrenica and have participated in the majority of the abovementioned peace-making efforts in both of the organizations and many others that are not included in the study. This appeared to be advantage as well as a disadvantage. The initial contacting and the ability to freely use the organizations archives and data was easy and clearly a huge assistance to my research. Especially when as a local I am being able to speak the language and not to experience any of the hostile reaction as some foreigners did. However, being organizer and volunteer for many years in Srebrenica resulted with many answers such are literally: “you know it yourself - you volunteered” which clearly are not academically useful answers. Getting mostly answers around this statement, this is the primarily reason why the third organization “AMICA” was excluded from the study.

My own personal involvement in the abovementioned organization is that I have been a volunteer and beneficiaries in the both for years. Ever since the Youth Council and “SARA” opened up their space for children and youth I was there attending workshops and trainings and later being actively involved in organizing activities myself. The multiple years long, peace-building efforts activism has inspired me to further the work and back it up with the academic research and ground it in the academia.

### **3.1. Profiles of the Case Studies**

#### **3.1.1. “Youth Council” - Srebrenica**

The NGO was founded in 2002 firstly as an informal group of young people. The NGO gained its official registration in 2003. According to their first official Statute adopted in 2002, one of their first aims was “bringing young people of Srebrenica together.”<sup>50</sup> The main mission as stated in their biography was youth activism and the improvement of the position of youth in society. The work of the Council is based on youth politics, the politics of peace and nonviolence and citizen participation. This means that the Youth Council staff aims to empower youth of Srebrenica and get them familiar with the democratic participative practices while teaching and professing non-violence and tolerance. The main vision of the organization is to create a tolerant society that respects basic human values and rights and that encourages the active participation of the young people in the society. They have currently four permanently employed staff <sup>51</sup> and around 50 actively engaged volunteers. The ethnic composition is: two Serb women, one

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<sup>50</sup> Official Statute of the Youth Council, adopted in 2002, Srebrenica

<sup>51</sup> Permanently employed staff means the staff that receives salary from a project and their position is due the end of the project unless they get additional funds to keep the vacancy

Bosniak man and one young man who comes from the mixed marriage (having Serb father and Bosniak mother). The number of beneficiaries depends on the scope of the project. It reaches from 20 directly to 10,000 indirectly affected beneficiaries. Volunteers are mainly high school students of roughly 80% Serb population and 20% Bosniak population. The Youth Council is being funded by many international organizations such as UNDP, CARE, OSCE, SHL, and many others amongst them such as the Town Hall that provided them with the free of charge usage of the space. Estimated budget of the organization varies around 100 000 BAM<sup>52</sup> per year. They provide language and computer lessons, non-violent workshops, creative workshops, theatre and music performances, street “guerilla” actions, awareness campaigns etc. The work of the Youth Council evolved from small grant actions to large grand long-term projects. This is especially seen in the current example of the thousands of Euros worth project “Youth Peace Advocates”. The Youth Council is moving its policy towards advocacy, but very sporadically and it is not yet developed, therefore it will remain in the outline of the analysis.

### **3.1.2. “SARA” – Srebrenica**

The organization was founded by three women in 1999 and gained its official registration in 2000. According to the Founding document, “SARA” was established as an organization for women and youth. The purpose of the organization is to engage young women in activities that would create better conditions in the town. By better conditions at the time it meant healthier atmosphere and social climate for dialogue and joint life. It also referred to establishing a space which is “everyday- politics free”, and it meant where the ordinary women count more than overall ethnicized politics.

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<sup>52</sup> BAM-Bosnian currency, stands for KM –convertible mark, roughly 2KM is 1€

The first aim of the organization was to recognize discrimination towards the most vulnerable groups of women and youth and to provide assistance to the victims of segregation and discrimination. The second aim was to protect and promote human rights and to provide services via small grant projects as well as helping the women find fulfillment during their non-working hours. The biggest obstacles they face according to The Strategic Plan of Development is the political instability and donor's agenda as well as increase in migration of Srebrenica citizens. They have currently two permanently employed staff and around 30 actively engaged volunteers. The two employed are Serbs and at their Steering Committee out of five members, two are Bosniaks. Their annual budget for 2008 was 180 000 BAM which is the last known budget but clearly increased in eight years ago when it was around 10 000 BAM. Their donors were many international organizations such are: Open Center: Fond Open Society, CARE, UNDP, CORRIDOR etc. The number of beneficiaries depends on the scope of the project but is decreasing. It varies from 50 to more than 2000 indirect beneficiaries of their projects.

SARA is developing new strategic plans to increase the scope and influence of their work.<sup>53</sup> Their main efforts are towards affecting decision making process on the local level of deciding and transparency of the local policies. Non-discriminatory society remains the basic of their projects.

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<sup>53</sup> The Strategic plan of development 2008- 2011, "SARA Srebrenica", Srebrenica, July 2008

## 4. An Analytical Framework

According to Paffenholz and Spurk,<sup>54</sup> there are seven functions of organizations which enable an in-depth understanding of civil society's detailed role in the political, social and development process. The seven functions are: 1. Protection of citizens, 2. Monitoring for accountability, 3. Advocacy and public communication, 4. Socialization, 5. Building community, 6. Intermediation and facilitation between citizens and state and 7. Service delivery. The three relevant functions for the analysis are Socialization, Building community and Service delivery.<sup>55</sup> Socialization and social cohesion are the key function. By developing peaceful conflict resolution and through the reconciliation process, the social capital is being renewed and re-constructed. Since during the war the majority of the social links are broken – the function of building community is essential. As suggested by the literature it is thus crucial to rebuild these links not only within one group, but across the whole community and society. Intermediation and

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<sup>54</sup> Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk, *A Comprehensive Analytical Framework*, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.67

<sup>55</sup> First function *Protection* refers to the defines provided by the civil sector to the community and protection against the autocracy of the state. Monitoring for accountability is often the core function of civil society as well as advocacy. The NGO's activists often have the time and the expertise to perform research on the ground and to warn if needed or to give recommendations. Therefore they are often consulted by serious political actors. They report on violation of human rights and announce early warnings to decision makers.

facilitation between citizens and state is the function that enables civil society to smoothly develop the progress of dialogue between former armed groups and communities, even in different villages. In the case of peace-building between the parties, even in different villages. The more the structure of the state is damaged, the more the need for the services provided by civil society increases and therefore, consequently, the number of users is increased. Hence the final function of the NGO in this environment is extremely important.

The first four functions have not been effectively performed by these 2 organizations. *Protection of citizens* hasn't been the priority of any of the groups. In the case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Belloni and Hemmer, what it has been discussed many "dealing with the past" activities by NGOs. The reported on some of the cases of protecting victims of trafficking, but in the case of our particular NGOs, "Youth Council" and "SARA", none of the such activity was undertaken. Belloni's conclusion was that the civil sector has not been a strong factor at any point of protection. As they claim: "They are too comfortable in the international security blanket that they currently enjoy."<sup>56</sup> Same refers to *Intermediation and facilitation between citizens and state* the function that these two local NGOs haven't contributed to. Monitoring for accountability and *Advocacy and public communication* are not widely or efficiently performed by Bosnian civil society. Because of the robust international monitoring presence after the war, the function has not been very relevant for local civil society.<sup>57</sup> With the advocacy function there had been some attempts by both of the organizations but none of them were trained to effectively perform it, therefore the advocacy function remained marginalized. The last three functions, *in group socialization, rebuilding community and service delivery* were driving

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<sup>56</sup> Roberto Belloni and Bruce Hemmer, *Bosnia-Herzegovina, Civil Society in a Semioprotectorate, Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 140

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*



agencies for the “Youth Centre” and “SARA” and what follows is a detailed description of at least each function and activities.

Having said in the introductions that while performing interviews, all interviewees spoke about obstacles in their work, one of the subsections of the analysis chapter will be obstacles in the context of their work and the peace-building. Paffenholz claims that the main influential factors that can reduce the space for civil society are: the behavior of the state, the level of violence, the freedom and the role of the media, the diversity within the civil society, the influence of external political factors and the role of donor engagement.<sup>58</sup> In the analysis that follows I will elaborate the role of donor engagement, funding issues as well as hostile reactions of the local people. The last two are not included in the theoretical framework but came as a result of the interviews. The final section of the Analysis chapter will reflect on the gender composition of the organizations and the gender perspective of their work. The reasons for giving the perspective were elaborated in the introduction and are aimed to elaborate the prevailing number of women as founders and activists in Srebrenica.

#### **4.1. Defining the Steps within the Framework:<sup>59</sup>**

1. Understand each function in the context, meaning that I will elaborate the three functions in regard to Srebrenica and the organizations
2. Given the context I will analyze whether the organizations have actually performed the function
3. Identify the activities that the organizations implemented, attributing at least one activity to the function

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<sup>58</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *Enabling and Disabling Factors for Civil Society Peacebuilding*, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. 405

<sup>59</sup> The steps adopted by the Comprehensive Analytical Framework by Paffenholz and Spurk

4. Assess the effectiveness of the organizational activity against the threshold for effectiveness for each activity. Depending of activity it can be results from public opinion polls and evaluation studies, conflict-resolution workshops included or establishing conditions for treating the conflict constructively.
5. Elaborate the obstacles the organizations were facing in order to better understand the effectiveness and the context of their work

## **5. Analysis**

### **5.1. In-Group Socialization Function**

#### **5.1.1. Youth Council**

In 2002 the Youth Council's founding document and initial activities had this function. It enables the organization to offer to the people (in this case young people) a space to socialize, develop tolerance, create mutual trust and the ability to collaborate on low level projects and activities. First “offer” was a space for young people to meet.

One of the first big projects carried out by the council was the music festival “Silvertown Shine”<sup>60</sup> in 2003.<sup>61</sup> It that grew to be the most important music festival in the east of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus of the festival is on social and political applied arts of the young artists from the region of the ex Yugoslav Republics. The aim of the festival is to use art in order to engage young people into increased dialogue and tolerant activity which could bring them to work together on joint projects. The second underlying aim beyond the obvious leisure “fun purpose” is to start sending “positive images” from the town. Milena Nikolic, the President of the Youth Council has clear memories of the initiative almost 10 years ago when their ethnically

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<sup>60</sup> Srebrenica means “silver” hence “Silver-town”

<sup>61</sup> Nedeljko Simic, “Silvertown Shine” Narrative report, Youth Council, July 2003, Srebrenica

mixed group gathered together in order to create something for themselves and for the community

The idea behind the festival was to bring people together. If there was such a huge tragedy in this town, why not use art and culture to provide something for people to help them overcome the past and heal their wounds. And more and more we loved the idea, because we felt like we were in a cage and that we were put in that cage on purpose. For instance, if I am a Serb from Srebrenica I should be ashamed, or that I should be scared of everything...or that we can't socialize with other people... We were looked upon as weird people because we were not expected to be able to socialize and be together as mixed (ethnicities) as we were doing. When the event happened there was not one single incident, proving to us that we were doing the right thing.<sup>62</sup>

“Cultural pump up”<sup>63</sup> was the project to follow. It was a festival of various cultural activities with the emphasis on theatre and documentary films. In order to understand the importance of such initiatives it is important to highlight the fact that the town has been heavily regarded as “the museum town. The journalist working for “Balkan Insight” observed that “*People are poor; it is hard to live. ... and in Srebrenica there are many who only think of the latter town as a grim museum of atrocity.*”<sup>64</sup> There are almost no opportunities for the town or the village youth. In such circumstances the Youth Council worked as the only organized institution aimed to promote and protect the needs of the younger generation. As the volunteer of the Council Davorin Sekulic, recalls: “This was the only place where I felt care-free, my family is burdened, my school is as well, the Council was the only place where I was who I was, a random kid and now a random guy”.<sup>65</sup>

The obstacles facing this event are mostly coming from the Bosniak population and Bosnian politicians who do not see Srebrenica as an appropriate town for celebrations. Many

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Milena Nikolic, the president of the Youth Council, April 2011 Srebrenica

<sup>63</sup> Youth Council Srebrenica Staff, Narrative and Financial report for “Cultural Pump Up, Srebrenica December 2006

<sup>64</sup> Peter Lippman, Hope for change in Srebrenica, Balkan insight, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/hope-for-change-in-srebrenica>, (5/22/11)

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Davorin Sekulic, Youth Council, April 2011, Srebrenica

Town Hall meetings were held in which they attempted to shut down the festival. This was said by those who worked to develop the festival, but they managed every year to fight for its existence. At the same time the local Imam Damir Pestalic during the interview<sup>66</sup> declared that Srebrenica is the only town in which the life returned after the horror. The public opinion poll revealed that the majority of the inhabitants of Srebrenica wanted such event to be held in the town. This was the biggest argument of all to proceed with the festival and turn it into a traditional cultural event for Srebrenica.

### 5.1.2. “SARA”

Many of “SARA's” activities were also related to creating socialization of ethnic, religious and gender groups amongst others. One particular project by ‘SARA’ was in cooperation with the organization Mercy Corps that aimed to provide support for the returnee’s families. Campaigns, public lobbying, and raising awareness were the initial activities of the volunteers in the organization. This meant that the locals had to get ready to meet “the other side” the people that ten years ago were their neighbors and five years before they considered to be their enemies. On the other side, returnees had to go back to where their homes once were and to live again side by side with the people they fought against. Return, as a way to reverse the ethnic separation brought on by ethnic cleansing, was likewise a major goal of foreign intervention agencies and governments and a major –tangible –part of the reconciliation efforts. Having imposed the return, internal distrust and skepticism as well as fear were dominant but not everyone was pessimistic. Valentina Vanja Gagic, the president of the organization recalls the beginnings:

Firstly we didn’t even know what does non-governmental organization mean. Then the three of us applied and got selected for the nursing training where

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Damir Pestalic, documentary “ Candles against the night”, by Robert Golden Pictures, April 2011, Srebrenica

we established some connections and learnt about the civil sector. We were unemployed, without a clear vision of our path and had enough free time and wanted to change the society we lived in. Returnees were coming back and the situation in the town got even more fragile. We wanted to provide them with something better than we already had, we simply wanted a discrimination-free society.<sup>67</sup>

Starting projects were providing women with knowledge and skills that might be useful later on in their lives. The women surveyed asked to develop skills in needlework, creative glass painting, language classes, computer literacy classes and more. Many women were attending the courses or just coming to use the improvised coffee bar and read books from the first improvised library “SARA” staff established in the town. After the war some women established their first interethnic connections in the space of this organization for the first time. Ellisa Helms observed that for women refugees seeking to return to their homes, reconciliation with ethnic others was little more than an NGO buzzword<sup>68</sup>. As the president of the organization said, they were not quite sure what the NGO work was meant to achieve, but they were certain that they were facing life together with returnees and that they needed to find a way of creating the kinds of relationships they had prior to the war. Martina Fischer a scholar who worked on in-depth case studies about non-governmental groups in Bosnia reported on the need for a space and opportunity for intercultural learning via leisure activities in the initial phase of joining people together. The empowerment women by providing them a space and “know how” for making handicrafts which gave them a modest economical independency while socializing with ethnic others were according to Fischer important first steps that seemed simplistic yet were very powerful small steps. This is exactly what “SARA”’s workshops were aiming at: empowering women, taking them away from

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Valentina Vanja Gagic, the president of “SARA Srebrenica”, April 2011 Srebrenica

<sup>68</sup> Ellisa Helms, WOMEN AS AGENTS OF ETHNIC RECONCILIATION? WOMEN’S NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN POSTWAR BOSNIA–HERZEGOVINA, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 16

private domestic housewives-only positions into social environment where they were spending creative time and socialize with “ethnic others”.

## **5.2. Building Community Function**

Building community is also one of the long term goals of both organizations, the Youth Centre’s as well as SARA’s, in according with their founding documents. The definition of this function as described is the engagement and participation in voluntary associations which has the potential to strengthen relationships between citizens and build social capital. Having members of different ethnic and religious backgrounds places both organizations at the heart of the desired consequences of the function. According to Paffenholz and Spurk <sup>69</sup>, in cases where association include members from other ethnic or social groups, it also bridges social divides and contributes to social cohesion. It is important to acknowledge that Paffenholz and Spurk’s model lacks clarifications in regard to the organizations that develop uncivil behavior such as preaching hatred against others and contributing to a greater divide. However, I shall mention that not one document (narrative reports, project application or donor reports) had hate-speech imbedded nor had any of the interviewees mentioned it. Building community can be via dialogue, round tables, preventative measures, culture and art as well as with informal gatherings. Joint projects, responsibilities and tasks can help rebuild community.

### **5.2.1. Youth Centre**

The importance of the Council’s “reach out projects” is understood if we take into consideration the size and the scope of Srebrenica Municipality. The Srebrenica Municipality is

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<sup>69</sup> Thania Paffenholz and Christoph Spurk, *A Comprehensive Analytical Framework*, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.

the largest in B&H with 15,000 square kilometers. A total population estimated at 7,000 with 4,000 in Srebrenica itself. There are 52 villages with the nearest being about 23 kilometers away which makes Srebrenica the widest as well as the most dispersed municipality in the country. The infrastructure of the roads in some parts was completely destroyed during the war, making some villages inaccessible especially during the winter. This means that often people from the villages are excluded from the events in the town. It is important to say that Serbs live mostly in the town while Bosniak population is mostly inhabited in the rural surrounding villages.

The Youth Council in Srebrenica recognized the problem of weakly connected town with surrounding villages, from the start. Its volunteers traveled to some of the villages and included village youth in their events. Sukeska, the village which has a majority of Bosniaks and the largest number of young people has been helped by the Council in Srebrenica and helped to build their own Youth Centre. Financially supported by Italian Donor (Italiana Cooperazione) as well as Council's shared practices, the Youth Centre in Sukeska has become a place for the young people to meet and spend their time in some of the Centre's courses and leisure activities. Speaking about networking in the context of ethno-political segregation, Martina Fischer has said that connecting the existing, yet somewhat isolated and uncoordinated youth initiatives in rural areas became obvious that was what the young people in the region wanted the most, a place where they could meet to organize activities and talk about their experiences<sup>70</sup> This is applicable for the Youth Council in Srebrenica as well as in the Municipality as they helped create this in the surrounding villages. Many informal as well as formal meetings took place in order to establish a trust and a common ground and to ensure that both ethnicities are involved. There is on-going cooperation between the Youth Centers, as well as the inclusion of one of the

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<sup>70</sup> Martina Fischer, *The Need for Multi-Dimensional Youth Work: Education, Interethnic Networking and Income Generation, Ten Years after Dayton, Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ten Years after Dayton*, Research center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2006, 239

activists from the village as a full-time employee in the biggest Peace-building project as a project coordinator in Srebrenica.<sup>71</sup>

I think that the Youth Council contributed a lot to the peace-building process. Having this new project (The Peace Activist), there is a clear long term vision of the Council and its striving for peace. There are many problems we are facing: young people want to leave villages, youth from the town want to leave to other countries and people in general are not aware about peace-building work. It takes time to develop a healthy atmosphere and living conditions and the most important thing is that all relevant factors are involved in the peace-building process.<sup>72</sup>

The work of the Council throughout its 10 year existence has evolved from running sporadic short term projects to the long term projects and active partnerships locally, regionally as well as internationally. The overall objective of the latest and the biggest project (in terms of budget and time) of the Youth Council is called Peace building Partnership Support-Young people strive for Peace. Its purpose is to increase stability and peace and promote a culture of human rights amongst youth and the community in general throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The idea behind is that three regional partner organizations including the above mentioned Youth Council are involved in a “peace network” through volunteer actions, sport and cultural events as well as multiethnic dialogue and non-violent actions. Simultaneously there was a specially designed closed training for 15 peace-activists who will then continue working in their local communities. The Capacity building of three youth organizations: coaching and consultancy for institutional development, and training in rights based approaches, peace building and community development is one of the main activities as well as three year long youth awareness raising campaigns and community mediation and peace building activities.<sup>73</sup> The process of the facilitation is tailored to the needs of each partner as well as assistance in developing an effective regional network of

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<sup>71</sup> Almir Salihovic, project coordinator on the Peace building Partnership Support- Youth for peace, lives in one of the villages and is currently working for the Youth Council in the town

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Almir Salihovic, Youth Council, Srebrenica, April 2011

<sup>73</sup> Summary of the project submitted to the European Commission, September 2008



peace-oriented youth organizations. These are also steps that will improve trust and understanding between the young people who belong to the different ethnic and social groups.

According to the project application the overall objective is to increase stability and promote a culture of human rights amongst youth and community in general throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The specific objective is to stimulate improvements in the socio-economic life and the behavioral attitudes of the youth resulting in increased stability within the society of three municipalities (one of them is Srebrenica). The Mid-term project evaluation (after 18 months) was carried out by independent consultants. The indicators for the achievement of the goals are increased social trust between ethnic, national and religious communities as well as a decrease in violence and anti-social behavior attributable to inter-group conflict. The methodology of the midterm evaluation were individual meetings with the staff, group meetings with partners and beneficiaries and volunteers, telephone interviews and researching the project documentation. The first activity was 6 sport events called “Think Healthy” which aimed to promote healthy way of thinking and the healthier life style in all segments. “Let’s arrange our space” was the activity undertaken with the Youth Centre in Suceška, the village nearby. Total 205 participants were registered in the activities from both ethnic groups. Community development actions are an appropriate method for local community development because they include a large number of volunteers whose actions are fully visible, activities impact on large beneficiary group, while the implementing partners feel more confident in these actions.<sup>74</sup> However it has been marked that the organizations treated their communication campaigns as if these were classical youth actions in the local communities, without a strong enough emphasize on the peace-building, ethnic and social cohesion. The training in non-violent communication

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<sup>74</sup> Tihomir Knezicek, Midterm project evaluation, Youth Peace advocates in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, Stichting CARE Nederland, Tuzla, July 2010.

was evaluated by participants with 4.3 (out of 5); however the ethnic balance was not accomplished. Another activity by the Youth Council was a Regional Youth Peace Conference that was graded positively by participants and channeled youth activities towards the need for more networking. The overall recommendation is that volunteers, together with the staff needs more practice in promoting inter-ethnic tolerance and awareness rising campaigns. The Council also needs to fully develop its capacities with more professional management which needs additional knowledge in management, voluntarism, advocacy and human rights. So according to the overall evaluation which was marked successfully, the organization needs management staff to be more professional and increase the visibility of the project within local community. A later suggestion clashes with the previous observation by Milena who said that people are generally tired of the story about peace-building and NGOs pushing for that kind of rhetoric, so her team tried to “build peace but without necessarily saying that what they are doing is building peace”. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is resistance to any project labeled as a “bridging” project. Initiatives have therefore changed labels and tried to bring people together for reason other than reconciliation and dialogue. According to Paffenholz these initiatives showed better results and people expressed positive experience in working with another group.<sup>75</sup> One should finally acknowledge that this type of partner project where the local organization has been consulted and where the budget is over a million Euros worth and lasts for three years is one of a kind and that the final project evaluation<sup>76</sup> will reveal its impact.

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<sup>75</sup> Thania Paffenholz, *What Civil Society Can Contribute to Peacebuilding*, Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010, 397

<sup>76</sup> The project Youth Peace advocates in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina ends in 2012

### 5.2.2. "SARA"

"SARA Srebrenica" organized the first meeting of the religious leaders in this town of 2000 inhabitants 10 years after the war<sup>77</sup>. Prior to that project neither the Imam, Orthodox and Catholic priest had ever met. This type of projects can be seen fitting into Socialization function, but since the aim was to increase tolerance and dialogue for better community, this project fulfills the Building community function.

Every workshop, lecture and meeting of the citizens of different ethnic background showed the need got the local citizens to learn about each other; to get to understand the different cultures and religions, and then through dialogue, try to combat shared problems and improve the quality of life for all. Seeing the interest of its citizen, the Town Hall officials and the religious institutions offered financial help.<sup>78</sup>

According to the organizational reports<sup>79</sup> about 120 people attended six round tables called at an event called *"Multi-religious dialogue as the prevention of conflict – establishing and sustaining tolerant and joint life through dialogue."* The specificity of the project that lasted for six months was that initially, considering the sensitivity of the nature of the project, only a few people would attend. However, the number of attendees increased due to the increased interest for the round tables and the subject matter. According to the staff of the organization, the topics for each meeting and discussion points were highly relevant, contemporary and carefully selected. The topics were: religion and education, similarities and dissimilarities, religion and contemporary world, using religion as propaganda and the role of the religious leaders in the past Bosnian war. The Catholic priest Matanovic sent a letter of a support to the organization, asking for more of these "lifelong lessons and round tables".

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<sup>77</sup> Stana Medic, *Final narrative report - Multi-religious dialogue as the prevention of conflict – establishing and sustaining tolerant and joint life through dialogue*, "SARA Srebrenica", Srebrenica, January 2006

<sup>78</sup> The Organization "SARA Srebrenica", *Narrative report*, Jun 2006, Srebrenica

<sup>79</sup> Stana Medic, *Final narrative report - Multi-religious dialogue as the prevention of conflict – establishing and sustaining tolerant and joint life through dialogue*, "SARA Srebrenica", Srebrenica, January 2006

We can be certain that the Round tables were something that brought the beginnings of a new and enlightened spirit in this region. After five workshops the community had provided me with more feeling of intimacy and security than before. This experience wasn't only mine. I heard a couple of other people who had been there saying the same. These gatherings were not always pleasant due the topics and sensitivity but it turned out to be overall a wonderful experience. This was a great way of getting to know “the others” and their religious practices. The round tables brought me close to the firm belief and trust of a joint communal life for the community filled with strength and meaning.<sup>80</sup>

### **5.3. Service Delivery Function**

#### **5.3.1 Youth Council**

One of the first “service providers” for the Youth of Srebrenica was the Youth Council and its open space. The Youth Council operates in the Youth Centre. The building is located in the centre of the town. Prior to the war it was the town’s cinema and then became a ruined building, a place where the public threw their rubbish. As journalist Peter Lipman recalls, “In Srebrenica, the young initiated their organization by pulling off a “guerrilla action” when they cleaned up a local building that was in ruins, removing rubble and garbage, and afterwards pressuring the local government to allow them to use the building as a youth center.”<sup>81</sup> A group of young people cleaned the building and applied for the first funds to set up a multifunctional place for the young people to gather and do activities.

There was a group of young people who did not have anything, no quality of life, living in an uneventful environment and we did not care about divisions we had each other and we wanted to create the space in which we could be who we are. We could create something. After restoring the space we made a photographic presentation of what we had done, but looking back I don’t think we realized what we had done in terms of how great our initiative was.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Open letter sent to the organization “SARA”, Catholic priest Petar Matanovic, 2006, Srebrenica, obtained from the organizational staff

<sup>81</sup> Peter Lippman, Hope for change in Srebrenica, Balkan insight, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/blog/hope-for-change-in-srebrenica>, (5/22/11)

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Milena Nikolic, the president of the Youth Council, April 2011 Srebrenica

By now many projects were implemented in the Centre. Many educational and creative workshops, trainings, lessons, performances, concerts and other cultural and art related activities were done there. Recognizing the need for computer literacy and languages The Council has started many courses providing the possibilities for young people to get involved in many different kinds of valuable activity. The overwhelming apathy was one of the major problems that Council staff recognized and they worked not only through visible dialogue related programs but through exchange, intercultural learning, social learning and social engagement projects whose aims were the cooperation of young people.

### 5.3.2. “SARA”

“SARA Srebrenica” also fulfils the Service Function<sup>83</sup>. Back in 2000 in interviews and informal gatherings with the youth of the town, it became apparent to the staff of the organization that young people of Srebrenica felt neglected and left behind compared to their peers in some other towns and globally. Their dissatisfaction was related to opportunities and to the educational system. Bosnia has three separate education systems and a huge bureaucratic apparatus to deal with it consisting of entity and state ministries. According to UNDP surveys there seem to be consensus on the needs of the youngsters for an advanced single educational system. The strong urge for a better coordinated and modernized education system seems to be the top priority for their future prospects according to youngsters. However, the field of education is highly contested and still in some cases dominated by nationalistic forces.<sup>84</sup> Srebrenica is a town under the authority of Republika Srpska, the entity that has a majority Serb population; therefore it falls

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<sup>83</sup> According to the Founding document as well as the Rules of Procedures first offered services were: English language lessons, sewing course, computer lessons as well as creative workshops (playing guitar and painting glass)

<sup>84</sup> Astrid Fischer, *Integration or Segregation? Reforming the Education Sector*, ed Martina Fisher, Peacebuilding and Civil Society in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ten Years after Dayton, Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2006, 298

under the educational system designed by Ministry of Education in government of Republika Srpska. An extremely decentralized system and the lack of coordination between various educational agencies seems to burden the overall system. As a result the young people suffer the most. The post-war segregation of Bosnian society as reflected in the education sector is clear in contrast to the concept of democratic citizenship.<sup>85</sup> The younger people need a more effective, modernized and harmonized educational system. The current system creates conflict and holds back the integrating peace-building process. Extreme poverty and social exclusion as well as the start of the returnees coming back to Srebrenica, has caused anxiety and tensions in the town. The politically destabilized situation is one of the downsides for the young generations who do not have any quality time after school hours because of family obligations. One of the first parallel projects implemented by the organization which was supported by The Open Centre, Fund for Open Society aimed to provide the necessities for young people in terms for educational, cultural and sport trainings. Young people had a chance for a first time to be able to use computers, instruments or other equipment.

#### ***5.4. Disabling Factors for the NGOs Peace-Building***

The theoretical framework requires describing obstacles to the NGOs in order to understand the context in which the organizations operate and play a constructive role in peace building. The reason why we should look at the obstacles is also because according to the evaluation reports, the obstacles were related mostly to donor demands as well as funding issues. The problems constantly reappeared, consequently affected the dynamic of the project and led to either

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid

extinguishing of the project that was previously graded positively, modification of project goals and expectations or to a complete revision of the organization's vision.

The factors that are the stepping stones for civil society in general as defined by Paffenholz and Spurk Understanding *Civil Society, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment* are: the behavior of the state, the level of violence, the freedom and the role of the media, the diversity within civil society, the influence of external political actors and the role of donor engagement. Deriving from the interviews of the organizations staff, all responses were related to the obstacles created by the donor engagement and the behavior of the state/local authorities, consequently I will emphasize three points:

- donor demands
- lack of respect for NGO volunteers
- funding

#### **5.4.1. Donor Demands**

##### **5.4.1.1 Youth Council**

In my interview with her, Milena Nikolic, president of the "Youth Council" said that "One should be really quick-witted to correspond and fulfill donor's regulations and the community needs." In her words, "they often don't match but there are some donors that are giving constant project support, therefore you can always find a way to work with them".<sup>86</sup> According to her, hunting for funds takes much more effort and energy than implementing the activities. Seems that there is little space for consulting or bargaining and that the rigidity of donors' demands diverts the organizational aims away from the local needs in order to satisfy the donor's criteria. This means that donors often create budget and a plan in which the organizations needs to fit in. In

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Milena Nikolic, the president of the Youth Council, April 2011 Srebrenica

Nikolic experience not once was she consulted as an activist or a founder of the organization by donors. Donors would in plain language said, tailor the needs, the budget and the eligible organizations to perform projects. According to the founding documents and project application there are no major compromises with their goals and donor's demands but the activist said that there is always lack of understanding coming from donors and not once have they been consulted when creating budget.

#### **5.4.1.2. "SARA"**

In the 2008, the senior staff of the organization "SARA" passed the reform of the Official Statute of the organization and changed the section of the aims of the Organization, and this new Statute is still valid today. According to new document the first aim of the organization was improvement and protection of the environment. The second aim was rebuilding the community with the active participation of the citizens via dialogue, volunteer actions and participation in the decision making process on the local level. The third and fourth aims were protection and improvement of education, human rights and civil society. The main activities of the Organization foreseen by the document are environmental, educational activities as well as the empowerment and animation of the citizens for more active involvement with the town affairs. The target group nine years ago of the organization according to the first Statute were women and youth and in 2008 Statute refers to the target group as "every member of the community". The donor trend seems to be following EU environment regulations therefore the percentage of the funds for environment issues are increasing and the resources seem to attract NGO that previously had nothing to do with the protection of the environment. Hence, previously peace-builders now identify themselves with environments guardians and create their agenda, aims and activities accordingly.



Vanja, the founding member and the director of the organization does not see any pattern in the change of the agenda nor target group. In 2008 the senior staff of the organization “SARA” passed the reform of the Official Statute and changed the goal to “protection of the environment”.

I don't see any problem with changing the aim of our organization from integration-driven to environment promotion-driven. We are a very well recognized organization in the region and our work has evolved due to the changes in the needs of the citizens. It is normal and it follows the normal development of an organization. We are evolving into an organization that works with something that the local community understands is crucial. Everyone was tired of blabbering about war and peace, people want to live in the current moment. We changed the target group because all our citizens need us.<sup>87</sup>

Another worker from the organization that I interviewed, Stana Medic, when asked if there is a need for more peace-building projects and activities, answered that: “Of course there is a need for peace-building projects. Regardless of the proclaimed and signed Peace Agreement we still need to work on it.”<sup>88</sup> From this it derives that they recognize that still, after 10 years hard work, there is a need to continue working on the reintegration of the community with more cross-cultural dialogue and conflict preventative workshops. Talking about donors, Vanja says that it is “understandable” they make an impact on organizations.

If they (donors) are giving the money, it is understandable they set the rules. They need to have procedures and regulations that everyone should fit in. Now if you ask me if they ever asked those of us on the ground what are our needs, they aren't. I don't know of any case where donors consulted local NGOs. In our ten years of experience we were not once consulted even though we were trained for research and created some studies.<sup>89</sup>

There are plenty of theories which in essence are criticisms of the donors of international aid. Many of the organizations involved in the work of helping B&H evolve into a fair and equal society could take more time to speak to those on the ground as to what the actual need is rather

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Valentina Vanja Gagic, the president of “SARA Srebrenica”, April 2011 Srebrenica

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Stana Medic, worker in “SARA Srebrenica”, April 2011 Srebrenica

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Valentina Vanja Gagic, the president of “SARA Srebrenica”, April 2011 Srebrenica

than that perceived by governments and ministers. Sometimes the imposed initiatives are misguided and are set to satisfy the requirements of the country concerned or the funding source. This happens everywhere in the world but in a country like Bosnia it is particularly damaging since this practice has been going on for the past 15 years. In order to be funded, NGOs function according to the changing preferences of the donors, rather than the communities they are supposed to serve. Organizations also often cannot move quickly enough to keep up with changes in the society they are trying to serve. Funders are often passing judgment on applications from civil society activists that they are not skilled enough to assess or knowledgeable enough to respond to. Documentation and bureaucracy take often far too long which denotes a lack of trust in the system as well as decentralization at all levels. In the documentary shot in Srebrenica “Candles against the night”, Nedeljko Simic, senior advisor in the Town Hall in Srebrenica has said, that not one international funder has pressed any charges nor did they do any proper evaluation on the distribution of funds over the scandal of the missing aid in Srebrenica.<sup>90</sup> This type of practice reinforces corruption in a fragile society such as it Srebrenica. Reconciliation is a long process; it takes generations and many undertakings in order for forgiveness and the healing of trauma to be established. There are civil society groups who are donor-driven, who speak and profess “NGO language and terminology” of which they do not back up with actions, or in constructive thoughts. It is clear that one must acknowledge that international aid allocated directly or indirectly through their grant approval mechanisms change the dimension and agenda of local organizations. Primarily on the basis of long term effects and results.

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<sup>90</sup> Nedeljko Simic interview, *Candles against the night*, documentary by Robert Golden Pictures, UK-Srebrenica 2011

#### 5.4.2. Lack of Respect for NGO Volunteers

There was and still is a scent of resentment and a lack of a high opinion by local citizens directed towards NGO activists. One of the problems that have not been discussed in this framework but it is always being mentioned in interviews, are the problems from the very beginnings of insulting NGO volunteers and calling them names, mainly made up by locals. This is how Vanja recalls the beginnings:

For some, we were betrayers - for Serbs mostly, for Muslims we were spies, for school teachers we were some sort of sect, we were called by every possible name except for that which we stood for. It has been really hard to create new attitudes. This was something that we weren't exposed to prior the war. People were scared, traumatized and they wouldn't face each other or ethnic others.

There is no accurate demographic picture of Srebrenica at the moment but the estimated population after the war was that the vast majority were Serbs. This included Serbs that came back to their homes after Srebrenica according to the Dayton Peace Agreement fall under Republika Srpska (Serb entity) as well as Serb refugees from Sarajevo who were expelled from their homes and found the new one in Srebrenica. Five years after the war many Bosniak returnees were coming back to their homes in Srebrenica and the surrounding villages. The mixture of the old residents, returnees and new inhabitants combined with the unsurpassed fear, increased the level of general mistrust. Majority of the Bosniaks returnees were old women (amongst the majority were widows of the late Bosniaks) who were coming back to the villages in semi-adapted houses. The strong gender and age imbalance created general community imbalance and added to the complexity of the town since the ethnic others were meeting for the first time in a different context. In addition, majority of Bosniak children would, either stay at relatives in Sarajevo and Tuzla (which were the host towns for the expelled women from Srebrenica in 1995), or would travel to another town for schooling.

Only after did they integrate in the educational system in Srebrenica. In such circumstances, gathering of the Serb women who were trying to ease the process of the returning of the Bosniaks to their homes was seen hostile by both groups who were reluctant to make the first steps towards each other. Martina Fischer speaks about different examples but using exactly the same situations where the activist were labeled by both groups and not only were they not supported but often seen either as traitors or spies. Everybody who does not comply with the dominant nationalistic political orders is clearly seen as a traitor. Anybody who voice dissent with the current political situation on “both sides” is clearly labeled. In such constellation, both groups are reluctant to give credits for the work not seen a purpose in the motive.

The State of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been formed by the Dayton Peace Accords agreement in 1995 and consists of three ethnic groups, two entities and one district. Such a political system is highly decentralized and often renders the functioning of the state inoperative through the creation of this huge bureaucratic body. The proof of this at the state level are the delayed reforms required at many levels to enable B&H to become a member of the EU.

Civil society has been affected badly by the impact of the war, having to deal with a traumatized society as well as with the issues of refugees and internal displaced persons. The political leaders are still winning elections with antagonistic rhetoric in their election campaigns which conflict directly with the efforts of civil society to rebuild itself. Most of the activists who were interviewed, mentioned that the memorial days (11<sup>th</sup> of July - the mourning of Bosniak victims and 12<sup>th</sup> of July – mourning of Serb victims) are often the days when the tensions are “visible and tangible”. Often on those occasions, many political and religious leaders take advantage of the situation by demanding apologies and recognition by the ethnic 'others'. Very rare are the cases where they would refer to their own mistakes or attempt to reach some

common ground. This in return has a huge effect on the small step-by-step endeavors of the organizations that need to gain trust again from both groups who are again reminded of their differences and the war atrocities. This is described by one activist a “push and pull situation” where civil society is constantly repairing the communities and the state is working against them and is not moving towards integration or any prospect of it.

### **5.4.3. Funding**

Another major problem is finance and this is closely related to the donor issue. These types of organizations do not charge membership fees because they are aware that their beneficiaries cannot afford it nor would they join the organization in the first place. Misinformed about the nongovernmental work and not accustomed to such endeavors, people from the community would alienate themselves rather than joining in. The project funding is the only source of survival for these organizations and prevents them from having long term plans and any plans for self sustainability. Often the only inputs to the projects are volunteering work and logistic facilities. Many vacancies such as the ones opened up by the project Youth Peace Advocates are temporary and only last to the end of the project. Still, such opportunities are often the only ones in the town that the 67% of the young people who are unemployed in the town, can apply for.<sup>91</sup> Funding remains a huge problem in the NGO world and the inability of continuous work is solely due the fact that there are no funds that the activist can count on in a long run. The section that follows will be the final chapter of the analysis and will aim to elaborate the gender perspective of the NGOs in Srebrenica.

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<sup>91</sup> According the data from the documentary “Candles against the night”, over 50% of young people (above 18) in Srebrenica, hadn’t had a single day at any type of work and 67% are unemployed in total. Such non prosperous atmosphere adds up to the general apathy and the fact that during the working hours one can find many young people sitting in cafes and sports betting shops

## 5.5 Gender Perspective of the NGOs

In the course of the final section of the analysis chapter, I will look across a gender dimension of the NGOs in Srebrenica. As I have written in the introduction, it is important to mention two reasons why we need look at gender erspective of the “Youth Council” and ”SARA”. Firstly, due to the character of conflict in Bosnia and its consequences (especially gender-specific crimes, women being a specific sub-group among victims and specifically women returnees to Srebrenica) and because of the culture/social condition. The interviewee, the founders, activists and local leaders are mostly women. Milena, Aleksandra, Vanja and Stana went through many hardships from the very beginnings of their nongovernmental engagement. When asked about their position in the community and in the country, most of them have a very similar view - nongovernmental worked has enabled them to “have their word heard.” Now, in one paragraph I cannot assess the impact of their word, but it seems to conflict with the general conclusion of Hellms.<sup>92</sup> Hellms main argument was that “dobar komsiluk” (good neighborhood)<sup>93</sup> was in fact reinforcing gendered social roles in Bosnian society. On the contrary, testimonials from the activists in Srebrenica are different.

When we get back home, we are wives and mothers but when we are at work [at the organization] we feel like we are doing something. The society itself has not transformed from patriarchal to very democratic and has not provided women with better positions. However, being engaged in non-governmental work enabled me to effect developments in my society. I count in my family and I do count in the town through the actions of the Council. The status of women is a group matter but also an individual matter. Type of work provides me with a world of new people,

<sup>92</sup> Ellisa Helms, WOMEN AS AGENTS OF ETHNIC RECONCILIATION? WOMEN’S NGOS AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN POSTWAR BOSNIA–HERZEGOVINA, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Vol. 26, No. 1,

<sup>93</sup> Translation for “good neighborhood” the metaphor used for ethnic others living in good terms with each other in Hellms research as well as in Bosnia

communications and results.<sup>94</sup>

Refugees coming back at the end of the 2000 in Srebrenica and surrounding villages were mostly women, widows of the late Bosniak men. Activists from “SARA” were the first to approach this issue of reintegration followed by many other organizations. We cannot conclude that this is because women were in charge of “SARA” at the time, but we must acknowledge that it was the only organization that noticed the need for instant action. They organized the first workshops and meetings of ethnic others. They said that they faced many problems from many corners but they remained persistent. The evaluation of the participants showed that people saw this type of work was successful and is aimed to provide a better community. Evaluation did not reveal any hostile reactions but according to the “SARA” staff, people who were participating had clearly different mindset then the people who did not support their work, or the attitudes changed, but this is not proven. Observing the town of Srebrenica, regardless on the fact that only two organizations were in the center of the research I also recognized that the only local NGO “Prijatelji Srebrenice” that serves as local media reporter for the community and the region, was founded and run by a woman. The organization is completely financially independent from the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same goes for the oldest organization that aims to protect children’s rights, “AMICA”, founded and run by women. The top ranked and most active five NGOs in town are set up by women. This shows that women in Srebrenica are proactively involved in the channels that are available to them in order to make some changes or to fight for a cause. To stray away from so-called beliefs that believe women are assigned superior healing abilities that men do not possess must be clarified. My claim is based on the belief that different

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Aleksanda Jovic, financial assistant on the project Youth Peace Advocates, Youth Council, Srebrenica April 2011

environments and circumstances give rise to different approaches to be used. This occurrence in Bosnia enabled women to stand for a change after such a devastating war and lack-luster economy. The channel which was available in this case was work in civil society and non-governmental arenas, that required no nepotism, nor included any gender based discrimination when hiring. All the interviewed women stressed the fact that women needed a channel that was less hierarchical or less with gender prejudice and assign it to non-governmental work. To clarify, women need not be assigned superior abilities; they were in the same situation as the rest of the society and needed to act on it. No gender is more superior with healing abilities; it's just determined by those who choose to take advantage of any resources available to make a difference. In this case women used the NGO work to fight for the cause they believed in.



## 6. Conclusion

This study has shown that women NGOs significantly contribute to the peace-building process with the first cross-ethnic activities in their society but that they lack sufficient acknowledgment, support and financial stability for them to create ongoing results which would have a long term impact. This study has also revealed that women affiliate to NGO work because of its more relaxed structures and because it offers less hierarchical entry level positions. These discoveries have formed a new question and a recommendation for future research about how women NGO's create cooperation with other local women NGOs who have similar agenda in order to make bigger impact as well as the question about donors' preferences when granting projects?

The limited contribution to the peace building process over the last fifteen years by women NGOs shows how complicated and long-term this issue is. Even with the additional contributions of other NGOs working in the area, the question arises if the efforts are enough to attain a relevant and sustainable peace. The conflicting views of Helm's and Hunt's (op.cit) for example, clearly show that there are different explanations as to what women NGOs have accomplished in regard to peace. Helms calls Hunt's observations "romanticized" and not totally accurate; further, Helms calls the women NGOs efforts a "thin peace". Regardless of these opposing views, this thesis revealed that two of the NGOs studied are contributing to the peace effort by fulfilling three out of seven necessary functions: Socialization, Re-building community and Service providing. Socialization and Re-building community often intertwined as professed and desired aims for the majority of the projects in which the two organizations were involved.

In this paper I presented two cases where the congregation of interest based groups occurred spontaneously. Vanja and Stana from "SARA", were properly trained in nursing courses, learned

how to organize themselves efficiently. The spontaneous was also youth gathering who cleared and cleaned a hazardous building that once was a public disposal. The young in Srebrenica wanted to have a haven where they could organize functions, form activities, and create a positive environment which they could call their own and in which they could socialize and entertain themselves. Accepting other ethnic groups in the place was, as the former volunteer and now president of the Youth Council, Mikica reflected on, something that everyone knew would happen. This was because all of them were “very tired” and “in the same situation”. “Very tired” referred to being burdened with the past although none of them were directly involved with it. The problem with many of youth in Srebrenica is that they have been neglected and remain in the shadow of the horrific events which took place.

It is fact that the first “ethnic others” meeting was made possible by these two organizations in post war Srebrenica. The Youth Council was first to establish long term channels of communication which enabled them to communicate experiences with the Youth Centre in the village of Suceška. The two organizations are predominantly on the one side Serb and on the other Bosniak. The Youth Council staff’s ‘know how’, calling upon practical knowledge, helped create the foundations of the Suceška Centre. The majority of Srebrenica’s youth have been either direct (as organizers) or indirect beneficiaries of cultural projects and music and theatre festivals. Having ethnically diverse project teams as well as an ethnically diverse audience has been a stimulator for years in the rebuilding process of the community via culture and joint efforts.

“SARA” also made sure that the transitional period for returnees has been as smooth as possible within the parameters of their work even while facing hostile reactions from already present locals. They have faced problems from both sides of the ethnic divide. Some locals perceived them as betraying their own group which exposed them to public humiliation.

Religion is an important matter in a secular Bosnia. Being a communist country for many years Bosnian citizens were not able to freely express their religious beliefs. But when the war broke out, the conflict reinforced nationalistic ideas which introduced radical religious views into everyday life. During SARAS' early meetings ostensibly about workshops the staff announced the need for discussions about religious matters. According to later public opinion polls the two criticisms about "SARAS" practice was that the limited number of participants and the insufficient number of available workshops. The participants, the imam and the priests requested to have round table talks as often as possible so the participants could gain greater insights into "religious others". Such actions have profound impacts on people's toleration of different beliefs, allowing broader views and encouraging new perspectives so that people may regain trust and confidence in a fear-free society. Interestingly enough, the majority of the evaluated participants congratulated the organizers for their courage and initiation, and calling for more such events.

Given the level of psychological injury and emotional confusion there is a general reluctance towards optimism. NGO activities expose old and arising issues and obstacles and it is clear that their efforts are still far too small to fight internal and external threats. Some activities were too sporadic and insufficiently promoted. For instance, people involved in sport and young volunteer activities were not well enough informed about the true purpose of the projects; consequently they ended up being random events with insufficient focus. Because of this failure they did not encourage large-scale involvement nor did they obtain an ethnic balance in the projects. It is true to say that the ethnic imbalance within the project staff or beneficiary groups can be seen as a reflection of the ethnic imbalance of the post war population in the village and towns themselves. However, not many activities enabled equal participation, be it because of the logistics (transportation costs) or different priorities within the project goals. Work that lacked a

professional approach (as shown in the midterm evaluation of the Young Peace Activists) was a direct consequence of a shortage of funds for training seminars and advanced guidance for NGO workers themselves. This shortfall frustrated the organizations from taking larger and more ambitious steps. It stopped them from being able to engage in continuous progress as in the case with the religious workshops mentioned above which were begun by “SARA.” Although participants expressed interest in having more workshops it was not possible given “SARAs” resources. By the time funds were found, the organization had reshuffled its agenda towards green projects. It could have been because of the natural dynamic of the organization’s evolution but also because of their donor’s demands.

A government that has ongoing reform and corruption issues over an extended period of time becomes reluctant to support the efforts of the non-government sector. In particular, when the NGO’s are working for a tolerant and peaceful society and the political parties are nurturing intolerant nationalistic views which they believe help to win elections the party leaders may take against the work of the NGOs. In this situation the donor’s priorities, not being aligned with those of the NGOs, forces the NGOs to re-tailor their agendas to fit the politicians priorities. Key to the improvement of civil society’s contribution to peace-building is an increased reliance on local initiatives and interactive consultancies as fostered by the NGOs which often necessitates the development of a more effective partnership between international and domestic partners.<sup>95</sup>

Finally all interviewees expressed the belief that being a women in a small Bosnian town like Srebrenica is disadvantageous. Working in a sector that is not fully understood or appreciated by the majority of Bosnian society, being involved in activities that are often not acceptable to politicians

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<sup>95</sup> Roberto Belloni and Bruce Hemmer, *Bosnia-Herzegovina: Civil Society in a Semioprotectorate*, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.150

and pursuing actions which are often alienating to their own ethnic group add to the burden for female activist. Nevertheless, these women, who were often discouraged either by their families, their ethnic groups or society as a whole, have in some cases continued to work for their organizations for more than 10 years. According to them, they have reached the level in which their “words count” and they enriched their lives by fighting for the causes they strongly believe in. Being a woman activist I can reflect on the hardships of not being taken equally serious as men. I can add to the argument that the work we were doing was taken for granted and obstructed not only because of the gender based prejudice but because it required profound revision and because we demanded fundamental changes in the society as a whole.

Paffenholz wrote that it could be very hard to understand the role of civil society within the different contexts in which we are trying to assess the peace-building process. The concepts of peace and peace-building are deeply embedded in societies with varying cultural practices, which might in turn influence the understanding of those concepts.<sup>96</sup> Bosnian complexity is created out of its diverse cultures, its matrix of religious and historical heritage and by the recent brutal war. Local initiatives are central to the healing process for small communities who struggle with a damaged infrastructure, with a destroyed social capital and a low level of general trust, in addition to their horrifying memories.

The two organizations mentioned above, show positive fulfillment of three important functions within the framework of change and development. The authors do mention that it is not clear whether providing their services can count as a full peace-building function, however, it is

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<sup>96</sup> *Thania Paffenholz, Civil Society and Peacebuilding, in Civil Society and Peacebuilding, Civil Society And Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment, ed by Thania Paffenholz, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010.43*

important to note that this function enables beneficiaries to build trust in the organization and to make their first steps towards the process of peace-building. Socialization and the empowering of community functions were, according to the evaluation of the target groups, deemed to be positive.

Being involved for years in the peacemaking efforts by non-governmental organizations and growing up with the vision of fundamental turn away from the dominant ideologies that harmed so many people and generations I came to conclusion that being privileged to meet with ethnic others over the activities that only the abovementioned NGOs conducted at the time has changed me for better and profoundly impacted many human beings amongst them myself. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that even small, underfunded local initiatives have some significant positive outcomes and that the NGO's endeavors were and certainly are not in vein.

## Appendix

### Documents and list of interviewee:

#### Youth Council:

Knezicek Tihomir for CARE, *Independent Consultant report - progress report for Peace building Partnership Support- Youth for peace submitted to the European Commission*, 2010, Srebrenica

Evaluation polls, *project "Silvertown Shine"*, 2007, Srebrenica

Official Statute of the Youth Council, adopted in 2002, Srebrenica

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Simic, Nedeljko, Youth Council, *"Silvertown Shine" Narrative report*, July 2003, Srebrenica

Youth Council Srebrenica, *Narrative and Financial report for "Cultural Pump Up"*, Srebrenica December 2006

Youth Council, *grant applications, "Silvertown Shine", Youth Peace Advocates and " Cultural Pump Up"*, 2002-2010, Srebrenica

Youth Council, *Summary of the project Peace building Partnership Support- Youth for peace submitted to the European Commission*, September 2008

#### "SARA":

Matanovic, Petar, Catholic priest, *Open letter sent to the organization "SARA"*, 2006, Srebrenica, obtained from the organizational staff

Medic, Stana, *"SARA Srebrenica", Final narrative report, Multi-religious dialogue as the prevention of conflict – establishing and sustaining tolerant and joint life through dialogue*, Srebrenica, January 2006

Multi-religious Council in B&H, *evaluative report*, 2005, Srebrenica-Sarajevo

Official Statute of the "SARA", adopted in 2000, Srebrenica

Official Statute of the "SARA", revised in 2008, Srebrenica

"SARA Srebrenica", *The Strategic plan of development 2008- 2011*, Srebrenica, July 2008

“SARA”, *Mercy Corps joint project for refugee return relief*, evaluation report, 2004, Srebrenica

“SARA Srebrenica”, *Narrative report*, Jun 2006, Srebrenica

“SARA”, *Rules of the Procedure of the Board*, 2008, Srebrenica

“SARA”, grant application for *Project for refugee return relief and Multi-religious dialogue as the prevention of conflict – establishing and sustaining tolerant and joint life through dialogue*, 2002-2006, Srebrenica

**Documentary:**

Golden, Robert, *Candles Against the Night*, Robert Golden Pictures, 2009-2011, Srebrenica

**List of interviewee:**

1. Milena Nikolic, president of the Youth Council
2. Aleksandra Jovic, financial advisor, Youth Council,
3. Almir Salihovic, project co-ordinator, Youth Council
4. Davorin Sekulic, volunteer
5. Valentina Gagic, president of “SARA”
6. Stana Medic, employee in “SARA”



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