

Davis 100 Projects for Peace

Project for Peace in Bosnia

Harvard College

Emina Kobiljar, Houston, TX (born in Bosanski Brod, Bosnia) did not attend a UWC

1. Project Summary

The Project for Peace in Bosnia was designed to help Kolibe, a community in northern Bosnia, to heal the wounds of war through the process of rebuilding their devastated athletic center, and to ultimately create peace through the means of sport. My arrival on June 23rd marked the beginning of the project, which would continue and extend beyond my departure on September 7th.

After the first townhall meeting, I quickly became aware that the project's scope far exceeded construction. The first efforts were focused on obtaining a reconstruction permit, which the villagers had not known about earlier. After almost a month, the permit was obtained and two days later, on July 22nd, the villagers set about the process of reconstruction by symbolically tumbling the walls of the devastated sports center.

In honor of this historic project, the villagers decided to organize a two-day peace tournament. Everyone was involved in the preparations; adults mowed the grass and prepared the turf, while Italian scouts from Torino got the children involved in a project of clearing debris from around the foundation of the old building. The tournament lasted from August 4th to 5th and brought together local Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs and even Roma people.

During the tournament, an architect examined the area where construction was set to start and concluded that it was technically impossible to build a new structure upon the weak foundations of the old sports center- the site had to be dug up and a new foundation put in place. This unexpected news delayed construction and meant that the costs increased by an estimated \$4000. Since the funding would no longer be enough to cover roofing and installations, the villagers decided to erect a larger and more stable building with the funds this summer, and to reach out to former members of their community in order to raise the necessary funds to fully complete the building next summer.

On August 13th, work started on the modified construction project as a large bulldozer dug up the old foundation. Unfortunately, it damaged a large water pipe in the process, cutting off water to all the houses. The next day, heavy rains poured down that delayed construction another week. Adverse weather conditions continued throughout the rest of the month, but despite these unforeseen obstacles villagers could not be stopped from building, and the foundation was laid in the rain on August 22nd. Upon my departure on September 7th, the villagers were still waiting for the concrete to harden enough so they could begin laying the bricks of the building. Construction of the new sports center is expected to last until the end of September, with plans to finish the roofing and installations next summer.

2. Project Results

Although the goal of building a fully functional sports center in one summer was not accomplished, overall, the project was a great success. If the ultimate goal was to unite a community and to rebuild trust among neighbors, then the project fully achieved its purpose. The whole community joined to symbolically bring down the walls of the old sports center. Men, women and children enthusiastically took part in preparing and holding the monumental two-day peace tournament.

The peace tournament brought together teams from the whole area to compete in friendly matches. Since Kolibe did not have its own registered team, villagers played on teams from neighboring towns during the tournament. This increased interaction most notably led to the creation of Sloga, the first multiethnic soccer team in the region. Players from Kolibe and the surrounding Serb and Croat villages formed Sloga at the end of the two days to celebrate and continue the tournament's efforts. A spirit of community and friendship pervaded this summer, without which overcoming the hurdles of construction would not have been possible.

A Croatian architect voluntarily offered his services and determined that the foundations were not suitable to be built upon. As neighbors received word of their situation, they reached out to help. In every stage of construction, the villagers received donations and services. During the tournament, the Italian scouts donated \$750 to the construction of the project. A local firm donated use of their bulldozer to dig up the foundation. Nivex, a Serb construction firm, heard about the project and donated \$300. General Beton, another Serb company, donated \$200 worth of cement to the site. When the water pipe burst, Stanko Danilovic, a Croat plumber, offered his services at no cost to repair the damage. Enthusiasm about the project grew immensely with these gestures of friendship, motivating the villagers to continue construction, even if it meant working in the rain. Now, the villagers can look toward the next year with determination and hope, instead of bitterness and desperation.

3. Implications

During the summer, many villagers approached me to express their deep gratitude for the project. They were deeply touched by the kindness of Mrs. Davis and moved by the unexpected help of their Serb and Croat neighbors. Every activity related to the project – the tournament, the acquisition of construction materials, the issues related to the foundation, and the process of construction – brought the villagers closer to their neighbors and new friends. The multiethnic team formed in this spirit of camaraderie serves as a symbol of the peace that blossomed in Kolibe in the summer of 2007. Present-day Bosnia is filled with unresolved ethnic tension, but the project provides a refreshing example of how so-called enemies can cooperate, and shows that there still exist prospects for a shared peace. This peace spread beyond the borders of Kolibe, as news of the project made headlines in national newspapers, which will hopefully encourage other such efforts. Working on this project has taught me to question disheartening assumptions and to appreciate the unique potential of each community of people. I have learned to regard peace as a verb, not as a noun; peace is sharing, building, cooperating, and respecting each other as members of the same team.



The community unites to bring down the old walls on July 22nd, 2007



Local children help in efforts to build a stable foundation on August 13th, 2007



The members of Sloga pose for a group picture on August 5th, 2007