

Original Project Title: Building Bridges in Mostar

Location: Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Sponsoring College: Harvard College

Students: Dilia Zwart, USA, Harvard College. Freya Nowell, UK, London School of Economics.

Sho Igawa, USA, Tufts University

Website: Mostarsyp.com

Goals:

There are two main goals for this project for peace. First, the project aspires to help bring together youth in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina by having them interact and learn together during a three-week summer institute. Second, the project will develop leadership skills and an entrepreneurial work ethic among these youth by fostering connections between them and local organizations.

Other funds:

Dilia Zwart received Harvard funds from the Davis Center and the Center for European Studies to sponsor her senior thesis field research in Mostar. These expenses covered her travel, lodging, and food. Freya Nowell received funds from the Student Union's Travel Fund at the London School of Economics, which covered all of her travel costs. Sho Igawa received a private donation to cover the costs of a volunteer trip to the city of Dobož for program participants. In line with its goals of promoting volunteerism and community building, the program pursued this additional sub-project in the aftermath of unprecedented floods in northern Bosnia-Herzegovina in May 2014.

Mostar Summer Youth Programme 2014:

The first annual Mostar Summer Youth Programme (MSYP) benefitted over 40 students from a number of high schools and universities in Mostar, Bosnia. The average age of students was 16. While we had hoped to balance the age range of students and initially opened applications to those aged 16-23, we experienced difficulties recruiting university students as the majority were undergoing exams throughout MSYP. We advertised on local radio for three weeks, distributed flyers in all major public spaces in the city, and conducted an interview in order to obtain full-page coverage of MSYP in a popular local newspaper. Ultimately, the majority of the students came from the Gymnasium, which shares its school building with the United World College in Mostar (UWCiM), where we hosted MSYP. The majority of students were also female. As we plan for MSYP 2015, we will attempt to address these issues in order to make MSYP's student body more representative in terms of gender and educational level/background.

MSYP took place with the generous support of the UWCiM, which donated the use of its classrooms. Weekday mornings Monday-Thursday, we used four of these classrooms to host a variety of eighty-minute courses including Debate, Northeast Relations in Practice, Sustainable Tourism and Urban Development, Creative Language and Idioms, TED Talk 101, and Event Planning. We recruited volunteers from around the world as teachers, each of whom had a unique interest in or affiliation with Mostar. Two of our teachers grew up in Mostar, having subsequently emigrated, whilst another two were students currently enrolled at the University of Mostar. Other teachers included an Israeli UWCiM graduate, a peace and conflict media activist from Ireland, a businessman from the UK, three English language teachers from northern Bosnia, and two current UWCiM students.

Thanks to its strong ties to local artists, youth organizations, NGOs and companies, MSYP was also able to put on daily evening events including voluntary work, presentations from local professionals, interactive workshops, arts, sports and cultural activities. These included a games night led by local NGO Youth Power, a poetry workshop led by local poet Mirko Božić, souvenir-making with children cared for by local charity 'Our Kids' Naša Djeca Fundacija, a workshop on social and career development led by Banja Luka-based NGO Perpetuum Mobile and a Japanese culture night supported by the Embassy of Japan in Bosnia. All of MSYP's extra-curricular activities were held at either OKC Abrašević, a local youth cultural center, the Nansen Dialogue Center, or the Egipatsko Selo children's home sports hall. On June 26, students from the course 'Making Your Ideas Grow' visited Intera Technology Park, where they heard stories of

successful local business enterprises and learned about educational and employment opportunities in business and technology for young people in and around Mostar. On June 27 MSYP went on a field trip to visit Hajdučke Vrleti, a ski-resort and restaurant located in Blidinje Nature Park. They toured the stunning nature park and heard about General Manager Marija Vukoja Lastvić's experiences building a successful model of eco-tourism in Bosnia as a young woman who took over her father's business after his death. On July 4 the program culminated in a celebratory closing ceremony, attended by students and their families, which recognized and certified their progress in each individual course over the two weeks. In the evening, students attended a closing party held at OKC Abrašević. The following day, ten MSYP students went on a volunteering trip to the northern city of Doboj in order to contribute to flood-relief efforts by cleaning and repainting a public park, as well as visiting two local NGOs.

MSYP creates a unique and friendly environment in which young people from the Mostar can enjoy integrated educational and social experiences. The program aspires to have a long-term impact by demonstrating a successful, alternative model of education to young Bosnians; one based on multiculturalism, creativity, discussion, debate, and critical thinking. Another distinctive feature of the program is its emphasis on stimulating young people to think about their future careers and personal development through informative and engaging extra-curricular activities. Finally, by bringing students from all social and educational backgrounds together, MSYP hopes to foster new friendships amongst its students. MSYP values sustainability and plans to utilize students and teachers from MSYP 2014 as future ambassadors for the project, that might champion it by helping to advertise and recruit for MSYP 2015. Along with the other program coordinators, I am confident that MSYP will continue to secure funding and run for many years to come and that MSYP 2015 will be comfortably financed by the surplus Davis Projects for Peace funds as well as our ongoing fundraising efforts. We plan to progressively integrate MSYP into the roster of projects delivered by Mostar-based charity 'Our Kids' Naša Djeca Fondacija. We are hopeful that next year's program will attract even higher interest from local students, as well as from volunteers interested in teaching.

Defining Peace:

MSYP defines "peace" as a concept that should be locally visualized and enacted for long-term, sustainable progress. Thus, collaborations with Mostar-based NGOs was imperative throughout the program. While the overarching goals may have been "peace" or "reconciliation," ultimately we succeeded in bridging existing divisions by focusing on practical and common goals, addressing issues including educational development and youth unemployment. In the short term the project provided over 40 of Mostar's young people with an educational summer school, increased their confidence in conversational English, and motivated them to join volunteer projects outside of their classes. The success of this project also depends on long-term developments.

Personal Statements:

Dilia Zwart: Immersing myself in Mostar for several months helped me connect the dots between conversations I had with community youth and how to implement a summer program that incorporated their ideas and goals. Coordinating and managing MSYP was a meaningful experience that solidified my interest in long-term development work and research in the region.

Freya Nowell: Despite having had six years of experience volunteering with young people in Mostar and other parts of the country, coordinating MSYP was a particularly challenging and rewarding experience for me. It has taught me a great deal about the value of civil society networks, particularly for young people, and has cemented my interest in pursuing a career in education development work.

Sho Igawa: Through coordinating MSYP, I learned how to construct and manage community relationships for the benefit of an educational program. It was particularly rewarding to learn about each of our participants as a person with passion and ambition. I am proud that MSYP will strive to deliver a second year to these driven youth.

