K4D | Knowledge, evidence and learning for development

Scalability of transitional justice and reconciliation interventions: moving toward wider socio-political change

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Question

What research and evidence is there on scalability of transitional justice and reconciliation-related interventions and the achievement of wider socio-political effects?
Focus on the Western Balkans.

Contents

1. Summary

Theoretical pathways linking transitional justice and reconciliation interventions to wider processes of social change remain largely implicit (Gready & Robins, 2020; Sokolić, 2020). Empirical studies measuring wider impacts of transitional justice and reconciliation interventions are also limited (Garson, 2020; Jean, 2019; McKone, 2015). A key challenge thus remains how to effectively move individual level transformation to the socio-political level (Sokolić, 2020). Research finds that while projects contribute to 'ripple effects' in society, it can be difficult to scale up successful projects (see Fairey et al., 2020; Fairey & Kerr, 2020). Relationship-building and dialogue, prominent in reconciliation processes and strategies, may resist standardisation, replication and scalability (Fairey et al., 2020).

This rapid literature review looks at research that discusses actual or potential wider effects of transitional justice and reconciliation-related initiatives that extend beyond the individual participants. It focuses on the Western Balkans, with much of the available literature on the region (primarily academic and some grey literature) centred on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Given the limited evidence directly on scalability, this review draws on diverse literature to outline pathways through which micro-level, civil-society based interventions can produce 'ripple effects' in society and scale up to affect larger geographic areas and macro-level socio-political outcomes (see Figure 1 for a snapshot of these linkages). The report also draws upon two prior K4D reports: its companion piece on 'Transitional justice and reconciliation in the Western Balkans'[1]; and 'Addressing societal divisions in post-conflict city settings'[2].

Pathways to wider, 'ripple effects' and socio-political changes

Nationalism and conflict identities: Violent conflict stems from and produces fear, mistrust, dehumanisation and negative stereotypes permeating all levels of society (Garson, 2017). In the aftermath of war, many people remain focused on stereotypes and prejudice; and on the maintenance of a collective memory of victimhood (Garson, 2017; Dudai, 2012). Research on reconciliation initiatives finds that politicians are among the biggest barriers to sustaining reconciliation outcomes, fostering fear of the 'other', distrust and ethno-nationalist divides (Belloni & Ramović, 2019; Jean, 2019). The success of transitional justice and reconciliation interventions in divided societies depends in large part on whether they contribute to redefining antagonistic collective identities and hostile relationships; and undermine support for nationalistic causes (Dudai, 2012).

Transformation of conflict identities through alternative spaces and narratives: Studies of reconciliation interventions outline that exposure to the 'other', such as through shared spaces, inter-group dialogue and collaboration on practical issues, will produce attitudinal and behavioural changes associated with breaking down prejudices and stereotypes. In turn, these changes – and the development of cross-cutting ties – are expected to improve inter-group relationships (Jean, 2019; Garson, 2017; McKone, 2015). At the core of these processes is the insistence on going beyond the ethnicisation of victims toward shared goals and joint activism tackling injustices and inequalities that cut across ethno-national groups (Fridman, 2020;

[1] Haider, H. (2021). *Transitional justice and reconciliation in the Western Balkans: approaches, impact and challenges.* K4D Helpdesk Report 952. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

[2] Haider, H. (2020). *Addressing divisions in post-conflict city settings.* K4D Helpdesk Report 867. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15590

Fridman & Ristić, 2020). These initiatives create alternative platforms for the confrontation of divisive nationalism in post-conflict divided societies (Belloni, 2020; Fridman, 2020).

Interdependence and cross-cutting ties can occur in the realms of arts, culture, economics, sports, and youth-oriented activities, among others (Belloni, 2020; Sokolić, 2020). The Pavarotti Music Centre in BiH, for example, has provided a safe space for like-minded individuals to gather across nationalist divides (Howell, 2018 and 2015). The 'mirëdita, dobar dan!' festival has opened the door to artists from Kosovo performing in theatres and art houses in Serbia, which could gradually pave the way to additional forms of normalisation (Fridman, 2020).

Exposure to the 'other' can also involve discussions of the past to further break down conflict identities and counter macro-level, nationalist trends. Research on inter-group relations and reconciliation emphasises the importance of perspective taking (being able to take the perspective of another person) and facilitating empathy in transforming enemy images and re-humanising the 'other' (Garson, 2017; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). The development of a multi-dimensional image of the 'other' is critical to the reconciliation process (Garson, 2017).

Story-telling can help to increase empathy and mutual acknowledgment of suffering, and consequently contribute to the transformation of conflict identities (Garson, 2017). Recognising another's victimhood, or shared suffering, helps to break down negative stereotypes (Garson, 2017). Stories of rescuers/moral exemplars (individuals who risked their lives to help people from the other group) can be an effective form of story-telling and commemoration that counters prejudice and stereotypes (Bluestein, 2016; Dudai, 2012). Dialogue can also contribute to the development of alternative identities. A study of Nansen Dialogue Centre (NDC) Sarajevo finds that the workshops contributed to the formation of a new, encompassing identity among dialogue participants and in many cases the discovery of shared concerns. This, in turn, fostered civic solidarity and civic action (see below) (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019).

The creation of peace constituencies: The transformation of conflict identities through reconciliation-related activities is theorised as leading to the creation of peace constituencies that support non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and sustainable peace (Garson, 2017). A global study of reconciliation projects finds that participants are seen as the future leaders of social change, with projects designed to give them the skills, capacity, and desire to project their personal transformations to their communities and the wider national society (McKone, 2015). This idea of a 'ripple effect' across society is based on the assumptions that participants will undergo change themselves, that they will want to change others, and that they are capable of creating change (McKone, 2015). The Balkans Diskurs Youth Correspondents Programme (BDYCP) in BiH, for example, seeks to build the capacities and voices of young civil society activists from all ethnic groups to produce narratives that counter divisive public discourse and media, which can reach a larger audience (Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Fairey, 2019).

There is evidence that the attitudinal and behavioural changes stemming from reconciliation-related initiatives has contributed to spin-off activities, which can have a wider impact on society beyond the direct participants. The Alumni Survey BiH finds that 67 percent of the respondents indicated that that they were engaged in further activity aimed at bringing about positive change to the political situation, with 89 percent of this continued activity designed for all communities and an estimated reach of up to several hundred thousand people (Garson 2020, 202; and 2017, 165). In one instance, a prior participant organised a multi-ethnic Association of Former Camp Prisoners (prisoners of war) which grew to include over 3,000 members from Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian communities (Jean, 2019). Given the challenges in directly impacting the political

level, spin-off activities have often focused on empowering young people as the vehicles to eventually bring about social and political change (Garson, 2020 and 2017).

Civic action, citizenship and protest: A key way through which projects and programmes are able to scale up and attain broader reach is to give participants the tools for activism, enabling them to become 'multipliers of peace' within their own communities and societies (Fairey & Kerr, 2020). Structured events and shared spaces can also provide the basic stepping stones for positive inter-group relations and free thinking and expression that can over time lead to action in the public sphere (Belloni, 2020). Dialogue initiatives have fostered shared identities that have in turn contributed to activism. NDC Sarajevo, for example, fostered a strong shared identity among youth in Jajce, who were able to successfully mobilise and protest against mono-ethnic schools, with positive outcomes (Belloni & Ramović, 2019). Research on youth memory activism in Serbia finds that while state officials have labelled returning ICTY convicts as heroes, activists have sought out alternative narratives and demanded that returning war criminals are not allowed to take part in electoral politics or other forms of public life (Fridman, 2018). The homecoming of war criminals represents a shared regional challenge and the potential for shared tactics of engaged citizenship (Fridman, 2018).

The work of cultural and youth centres and other alternative spaces, alongside citizen initiatives, have paved the way for public manifestations of discontent in BiH (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019). The large-scale political protests that erupted beginning from the late 2000s onwards represent non-ethnic mobilisations that had the effect of framing and empowering the 'citizen' (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019). They confirmed that many Bosnians share the same concerns, and that they identified elites as the main immediate cause of their misfortune, rather than the 'other' ethnic group. (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019). Socio-economic protests that took place throughout BiH in 2014 resulted in the resignation of several cantonal governments (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). While anti-government momentum was difficult to maintain, there is evidence that contact established through protesting, meetings and volunteering have helped to establish civic solidarity and activist networks that persist (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020; Milan, 2017).

This has created a virtuous cycle, whereby reconciliation-related initiatives have the potential to contribute to civic activism, which in turn can contribute to more shared spaces and to reconciliation processes. Everyday acts of reconciliation embedded in a civic ethos can be important in preventing the recurrence of violence, reducing inflammatory ethno-nationalist practices, and promoting inter-group reconciliation (Visoka, 2020). At the horizontal dimension, grassroots level, socioeconomic protests build civic solidarity through socialisation and shared aspirations; at the vertical dimension, activists build solidarity because they are pitted against a ruling elite that fails to address their economic concerns (Lai, 2020).

Vertical linkages, sustainability and wider geographic reach

Structure, institutions and electoral changes: A key outcome of the 2014 protests was their quick evolution into plenums (informal, inclusive citizens-led councils) throughout the country (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020; Milan, 2017). Plenums constituted another opportunity for inter-ethnic contact as ordinary citizens; and served as an alternative public sphere in which criticising ethnic elites was possible (Lai, 2020; Puljek-Shank & Fritsch, 2019; Milan, 2017). In order to promote the sustainability of interventions, NDC Sarajevo's dialogue initiative similarly allowed for crucial follow-up in the form of financial support for community actions and the establishment of multi-ethnic coordination bodies and action groups (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019).

Socio-political change in the Western Balkans requires a growing critical mass which sees the merit in progressive and conciliatory ethnic politics and is capable of side-lining divisive ethno-nationalist forces through electoral processes (Visoka, 2020; Garson, 2020). A recent study on the protests in BiH finds evidence of a causal link between the 2014 plenums and voting behaviour – demonstrating the possibility for citizen-led mobilisation to trigger electoral change (Sircar, 2019).

The media: Media activities are particularly geared to reaching a wide audience, across multiple communities and regions, exposing them to themes of tolerance and cooperation (Jean, 2019; McKone, 2015). Documentary film projects, for example, have reported on successful reconciliation processes and portrayed people doing something different and more positive than their negative stereotypes, such as the portrayal of moral exemplars (McKone, 2015). Media attention to positive stories of the relationships forged through reconciliation-related initiatives can also create momentum for sustainable change (Dorokhina et al., 2011). Findings from a Worlds of Journalism (WJS) study suggest that journalists and editors in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia perceive journalism as embodying not only values of objectivity, but also advocacy for social change (Andresen et al., 2017).

New online platforms and forms of social media provide the potential for active citizenship and for a more inclusive society (Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Howell, 2015). The #whitearmbandday social media campaign and online commemoration, initiated by a group of local activists, successfully mobilised a transnational memory network to combat denial of crimes committed in Prijedor in 1992 (Fridman & Ristić, 2020; Paul, 2020). As the online commemoration gained more visibility, traditional media continually reported on the events, which further enhanced the visibility of commemorations (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). Research on #whitearmbandday finds that this form of online transnational commemoration has involved thousands of people across borders, languages, and ethno-nationalities and created the space for alternative memories of war that transcend ethnicisation of victims (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). By adopting the same message and the same hashtag in this and other online and onsite actions, youth memory activists highlight that theirs is not only a national struggle but a regional one (Fridman, 2021). Online memory activism thus has the potential to support broader regional change (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

Involvement of local leaders: In order to achieve genuine, sustainable social or political change, civil society-based activities need to connect with the policies and processes at higher institutional, decision-making and leadership levels (Garson, 2017; McKone, 2015). The theory of change presented here is that if community leaders can come to understand multi-perspective narratives and experiences through reconciliation-related initiatives, they can set a precedent for positive inter-group interaction (Jean, 2019; McKone, 2015).

The involvement of key influencing people and institutions can thus be an important factor in the design and success of initiatives (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). NDC Sarajevo, for example, got buy-in from municipality councillors of all three major ethnic groups, which enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of – and support given to – the organisation and its programming (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). Also, in BiH, the permission-seeking process of *The Rescuers* (an internationally touring exhibition) became a mechanism for forging stronger relationships with local governments, including mayoral offices, (Wahlin & Kahn, 2015).

Figure 1: Pathways to socio-political change produced by transitional justice and reconciliation-related initiatives
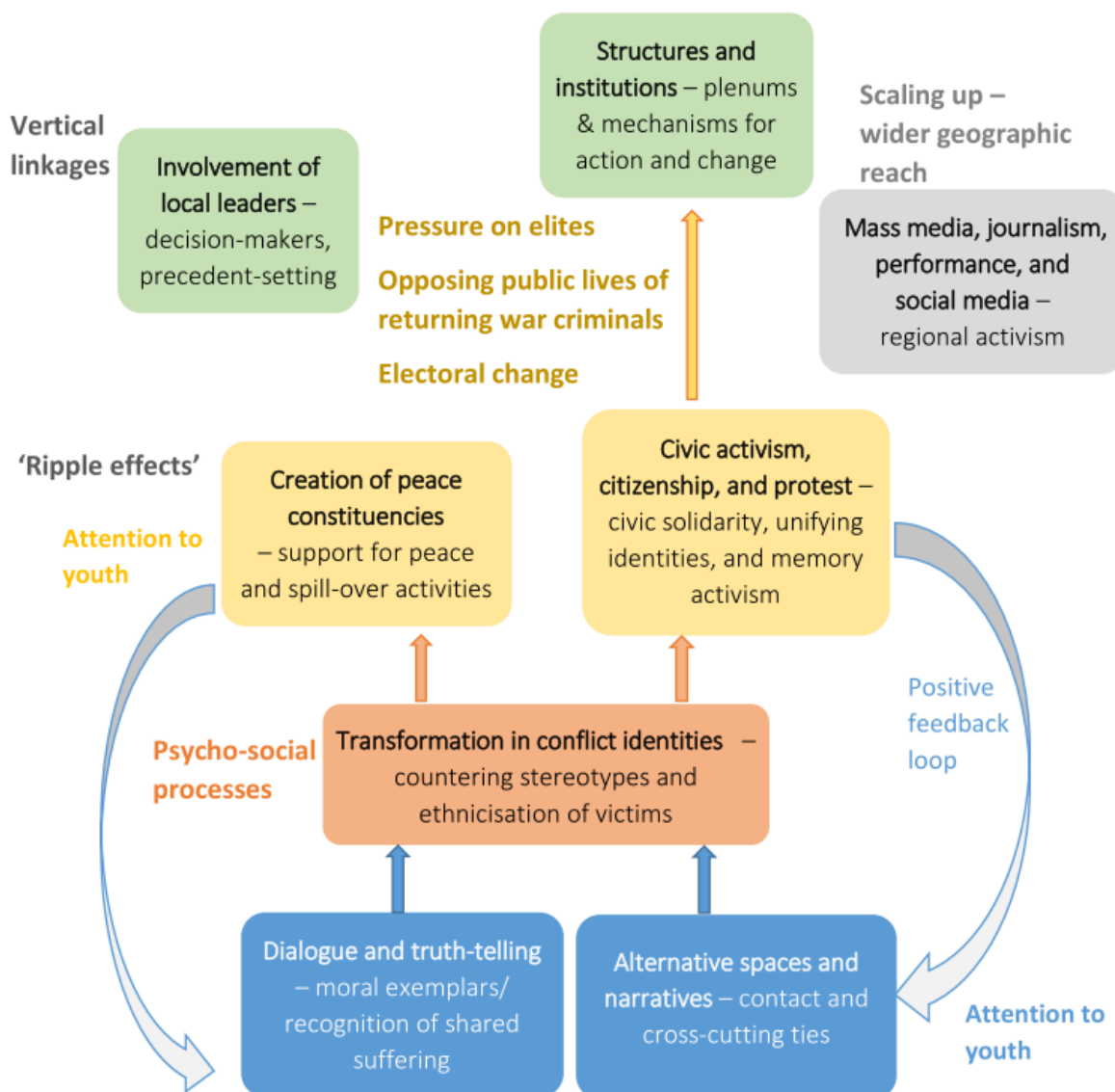
Source: the Author, based in part on Garson, 2017, 55.

2. Background

The evidence

Pathways linking transitional justice and reconciliation interventions to wider processes of social change remain largely implicit (Gready & Robins, 2020; Sokolić, 2020). These linkages and processes remain undertheorised in the literature (Sokolić, 2020). **Theories of change are often normative, with the benefits of interventions presented as self-evident** (Gready & Robins, 2020). While there is evidence of such interventions contributing to transformations in attitudes, perceptions and trust of participating individuals, such personal transformations need to translate into actions at the public, political and institutional level in order to have a sustainable impact on peace (McAuliffe, 2017). A key challenge remains how to effectively move individual level

transformation to the socio-political level (Sokolić, 2020). **Attention to relationship-building and dialogue in reconciliation processes and strategies may resist standardisation, replication and scalability** (Fairey et al., 2020).

Empirical studies measuring wider impacts of transitional justice and reconciliation interventions are limited (Garson, 2020). **Existing evaluations have been criticised for over-reliance on participant testimonies** that claim significant impact, but that are difficult to verify beyond these participant accounts (Fairey et al., 2020). There is also **a tendency to focus on short-term outputs**, rather than longer-term outcomes, and a failure to establish convincing causal links to wider societal and political impacts (Fairey et al., 2020).

A review of 277 reconciliation projects implemented across the globe ('Study A') finds that most intervention strategies focus on early-stage reconciliation, due possibly to limited funding or to assumptions that reconciliation will naturally develop over time (McKone, 2015). A subsequent review of evaluations of reconciliation programmes in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe ('Study B') also reveals a lack of evidence of sustained results over time (Jean, 2019). While **there are many assumptions in project designs and theories of change that wider impacts will happen, there is very little evidence of this reported in evaluations** (Jean, 2019).

Assessments of wider impacts could include measurements of whether participants go on to develop their own initiatives; subsequent ability to resist provocation to violence; and reduction of threat of violence (Garson, 2020). Micro-level interventions, such as arts-based projects, can contribute to such 'ripple effects' or multiplier impacts (Fairey et al., 2020). An effective theory of change for transitional justice and reconciliation must be able to link different levels in societies in ways that extend beyond a vague hope of wider change (Gready & Robins, 2020).

Nationalism and conflict identities

Violent conflict is an inter-societal process with fear, mistrust, dehumanisation, demonisation and negative stereotypes permeating all levels of society (Garson, 2017). These extended processes result in a lack of empathy that makes it easier to mistreat others (Garson, 2017). **In the aftermath of war, many people remain focused on stereotypes and prejudice**, having lost the ability to individualise the 'enemy' (Dudai, 2012). Fear, mistrust, and stereotyping can reignite violence or continue patterns of exclusion (Dudai, 2012).

A focus on victimhood and the **maintenance of a collective memory of victimhood** can also undermine recognition of one's own ethno-national group's wrong-doings and block information about the humanity of the 'enemy' (Bar-Tal, 2013; cited in Garson, 2017). The emotional and political attachment to one's own group is reinforced by political elites who exaggerate the fear of the 'other' and foster distrust in order to maintain power (Belloni & Ramović, 2019). Divisions are also entrenched through education policy and the instrumental use of memorial sites and state symbols in order to support the nationalist cause (Belloni & Ramović, 2019).

Research on reconciliation initiatives finds that politicians are among the biggest barriers to sustaining reconciliation outcomes (Jean, 2019). Academics, practitioners, and participants in reconciliation programmes have noted the extreme difficulty in trying to promote positive inter-group relationships and to create a 'ripple effect' from reconciliation activity when the political dynamic reinforces fear and divisions in the populations (Parent, 2019; Garson, 2017). A study of youth in BiH finds that they often have a one-sided view of the wars, due in large part to lack of knowledge, a biased media and nationalist politicians (Parent, 2019).

The **success of transitional justice and reconciliation interventions in divided societies** – and their ability to achieve wider change – **depends in large part on whether they contribute to redefining these antagonistic collective identities and hostile relationships; and undermine support for nationalistic causes** (see Figure 2) (Garson, 2017; Dudai, 2012). Comprehensive research on joint reconciliation activities in BiH, Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine finds that the effectiveness of such programmes relies in large part on identity change resulting from increased inter-group contact (Garson, 2017). This, in turn, reduces entrenched fear and allows for the development of empathy and rehumanisation of the 'other' (Garson, 2017). A societal climate where the politics of division are not encouraged, and where the dominant sentiment shifts from hostility to solidarity, can provide the space for positive inter-group contacts to occur more freely and spontaneously (from the ground up) (Parent, 2019).

See: Figure 2: The link between reconciliation activities and the development of peace constituencies and stable peace, *Source: Garson, 2017, p. 55,* *https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1575677/1/Garson%20FINAL%20%20printer%2017%20May.pdf*

3. Alternative spaces and informal processes

Bottom-up peace initiatives and 'everyday peace' creates alternative platforms for peace formation and the confrontation of nationalism in post-conflict divided societies (Fridman, 2020). **At the core of these alternative spaces is the insistence on going beyond the ethnicisation of victims towards commonalities and joint activism tackling past injustices and current inequalities that cut across ethno-national groups** (Fridman, 2020; Fridman & Ristić, 2020). Opportunities to work on common interests, including economic challenges, allows for improvement in inter-group relations by fostering greater trust and reducing fear of the 'other' (Parent, 2019). Political discourses countering divisive elites have also emerged in such alternative spaces (Belloni, 2020).

Studies A and B outline a theory of change for reconciliation interventions in relation to exposure to the 'other', drawn from Search for Common Ground's theory of Healthy Relationships and Connections (Jean, 2019; McKone, 2015; Church & Rogers, 2006). The premise is that **exposure to the 'other', through shared spaces, inter-group dialogue, and collaboration on practical issues, among other forms of exposure, will produce the attitudinal and behavioural changes associated with breaking down prejudices and stereotypes**. In turn, **these changes are expected to improve inter-group relationships, which will support the deepening of reconciliation and sustainable peace** (McKone, 2015). Sustaining cross-cutting relationships and networks over time, and at all levels of society, is considered essential for developing support for peace and inter-group reconciliation (Lederach, 1997; cited in Sokolić, 2020; Garson, 2017).

Interdependence and cross-cutting ties can occur in the realms of arts, culture, politics, economics, sports, and youth-oriented activities, among others, that are free of the normative burden of 'reconciliation' (Belloni, 2020; Sokolić, 2020). In the case of arts and culture, for example, the understanding is that if writers, dramatists and filmmakers produce stories and cultural content that humanise the 'other' and support relationship-building across the divide, audience members will seek to emulate these attitudes and behaviours (Jean, 2019). This, in turn, could produce actual transformation in attitudes and behaviour and promote tolerance and positive views of differences on a broader societal scale (Jean, 2019).

There are no expectations associated with how interactions ought to look like in these alternative and informal spaces (Sokolić, 2020). In BiH, these spaces, particularly cultural and youth centres, have provided for key contact with the 'other' and served as microcosms of protest and avenues to counter elite discourses (Belloni, 2020). The Pavarotti Music Centre, for example, planned by War Child, opened in Mostar in 1997, funded through private donations and fundraising, most significantly from Italian opera singer Luciano Pavarotti. The project aimed to bring relief to residents of Mostar and others in BiH through music education and training, music therapy, and recreational and cultural activities (Howell, 2018). The Centre offers a range of in-house learning opportunities for young people in various musical genres (e.g. rock, African drumming).

Interviews with diverse people close to the Centre's projects reveal that the Centre has provided a key contact place – a safe space for like-minded individuals to gather across nationalist divides. It offers an idea of normality – that it is possible to meet youth from other ethno-national backgrounds, who they have been told to fear and hate – and to do things together, to make and create music (Howell, 2018 and 2015). Others from throughout the region have also been curious to go there to see what is on offer, widening the potential impacts of the Centre beyond Mostar (Howell, 2018 and 2015).

Study A finds **that public events, such as arts festivals that can draw large audiences from divided communities, can set a precedent for further interaction that improves tolerance and cooperation necessary to deepen and widen reconciliation** (McKone, 2015). The 'mirëdita, dobar dan!' festival, for example, is a bottom–up, civil society-based initiative aimed at transforming Serbia–Kosovo relations through people-to-people exchanges across conflict groups with the aim of countering negative portrayals of Albanians from Kosovo (Fridman, 2020). The festival brings live music, plays, and documentary and feature films from Kosovo to various locations in Belgrade. There are also roundtable discussions that tackle topics and themes that would often otherwise not be addressed, such as the legacies and the consequences of the 1998–1999 war in Kosovo, including the issue of wartime sexual violence. Albanian and Serbian are both official languages of the festival, with simultaneous translations in both languages (Fridman, 2020).

A recent study focused on perceptions in Serbia of mirëdita, dobar dan! and festival activities in Belgrade finds that such activist forms of everyday peacebuilding diplomacy can challenge and contest the role of ethno-national categories and elite nationalisms (Fridman, 2020). Performances by Kosovar artists at the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra house, for example, had large turnouts – opening the door to artists from Kosovo being invited directly by theatres and art houses in Serbia. This could gradually pave the way to additional forms of normalisation (Fridman, 2020).

A case study of Most Mira's Youth Arts Festival in the northwest region of BiH entailed three days of various forms of art (e.g. theatre, film-making, and dance), involving children from different schools. An evaluation report, which included a survey for teachers and volunteers and small focus group discussions and a collaborative body mapping exercise for youth participants, highlights the success of the festival in building tolerance and friendships; and promoting wide participation (see McKone, 2015).

At the same time, **a key limitation of these events, similar to other initiatives aimed at bridging divides is that the reach may be limited to the 'already converted'** - to those already engaged in anti-nationalist peace activism or those who already hold views supportive of

coexistence (Fridman, 2020). Further, the mirëdita, dobar dan! festival, held annually, has drawnprotests from nationalist actors and led to clashes between ultra-nationalist and anti-nationalist actors (Fridman, 2020). Divisive macro-level environments can constrain the ability of individuals to continue to explore peaceful coexistence beyond the safe shared spaces (Howell, 2015). Still, the mere presence of these alternative options maintains the potential for active, critical citizenship and the potential for a more diverse, inclusive society (Howell, 2015).

Breaking down conflict identities and countering nationalist trends

Antagonistic conflict identities that are bred during the conflict, through stereotypes, mistrust and fear, must be transformed to one in which parties can recognise and celebrate each other's differences and envision a shared future in spite of those differences (Garson, 2017). This is necessary in order to break cycles of intractable conflict and to promote reconciliation and sustainable peace (Garson, 2017; Dudai, 2012). There is a **growing need to deepen our understanding of the ways in which top-down and everyday nationalism can be challenged through micro-level reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives** and through local forms of agency for peace (Fridman, 2020).

Social-psychological literature and empirical research on inter-group relations and reconciliation emphasise the i**mportance of perspective taking and facilitating empathy in transforming enemy images and rehumanising the 'other'** (Garson, 2017; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2016). The development of a new, multi-dimensional image of the other, that goes beyond a stereotype associated with an ethnic label and an appreciation of the differences between individuals is a critical aspect of the reconciliation process (Garson, 2017).

The Alumni Survey BiH demonstrates that participation has facilitated a softening of conflict identities (Garson, 2017). Study B finds that attitudinal changes were reported in 15 out of 36 evaluations, including greater acceptance of members of other ethnic groups (Jean, 2019).

Story-telling can help to increase empathy and mutual acknowledgment of suffering, and consequently contribute to the transformation of conflict identities (Garson, 2017). The Alumni Survey BiH reveals, similar to surveys conducted in Israel-Palestine and Northern Ireland, that respondents felt that the most valuable element of the activities was 'hearing other people's stories/experiences' (81 percent of respondents), in addition to having the opportunity to tell their own story (48 percent), thus seeking the empathy of the other participants (Garson, 2017, 159). Recognising another's victimhood, or shared suffering, humanises the 'other', helping to break the perpetuated negative stereotypes (Garson, 2017).

The use of stories of rescuers/moral exemplars by journalists, truth commissions, archivists, museums, artists and others, to commemorate rescuers and their activities can be an effective form of story-telling and commemoration (Bluestein, 2016). Research finds that commemorating rescuers, and disseminating stories of rescue, can counter prejudice, individualise rather than stereotype the 'other', and rehumanise inter-ethnic perceptions – all of which can facilitate reconciliation (Blustein, 2016; Dudai, 2012). This is the other side of individualising guilt— blaming individuals rather than whole ethnic groups, which is a key goal of prosecutions of war crimes and crimes against humanity (Dudai, 2012). Both processes **seek to counter collective blame and collective attitudes; and to create alternative narratives about past conflict** (Dudai, 2012). Rescuer stories can also help to neutralise criticism of victims who are attacked for seeking reconciliation with former enemies (Dudai, 2012).

Rescuers may, however, be framed as an exception, with their positive actions used only to reinforce prejudice against the majority in their community (Blustein, 2016; Dudai, 2012). As such, it is important to be able to uncover and disseminate a substantial number of such stories to demonstrate that they are not outliers, but rather relatively common behaviour in the out-group (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2020). Stories of help and rescue during the war are still not well known or widespread in BiH and elsewhere in the Western Balkans, however, due in large part to the limited interest public authorities have generally shown in supporting these initiatives or in developing activities themselves (Moll, 2020).

Research on rescuers finds that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia (ICTY) missed an opportunity to uncover and widely disseminate stories of rescuers/moral exemplars, which could have played an effective role in challenging conflict identities on a larger scale (Dudai, 2012). In one instance, it discovered and investigated the story of four young Bosniaks who managed to flee the massacre in Srebrenica and were subsequently helped by two Serbs who came across them. They provided the Bosniaks with shelter, food and directions to a safer region. The survivors were later captured and killed by Serb forces; and their rescuers were also caught by the Serb military police and prosecuted by the wartime Serb authority for 'aiding the enemy' (Dudai, 2012).

This powerful rescue story was discovered only incidentally and then relegated to a footnote in ICTY supporting materials for the prosecution of Drago Nikolić, a Bosnian-Serb army commander involved in the genocide in Srebrenica (Dudai, 2012). Refik Hodzic, an ICTY outreach officer and film-maker, came across the footnote and investigated the story, which resulted in the documentary film, Statement 710399 (Dudai, 2012). If even a small portion of the ICTY's resources had been spent on proactively searching for rescue stories, many more would have been found (Dudai, 2012).

Dialogue also has the potential to contribute not only to personal change but also to the development of alternative identities and broader socio-political changes. This is the approach adopted by NDC Sarajevo, which works in ethnically divided communities in BiH with the aim of rebuilding a functional society (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). A key aspect in the design of NDC Sarajevo's dialogue initiative has been a model of engagement that combines inter-group dialogue with support for local activism (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019).

Through a series of individual and group semi-structured interviews spanning 2012-2017 (with staff, the workshop facilitator, diverse participants and members of local action groups), a recent study of NDC Sarajevo finds that the Centre has created a viable model that contributes to de-ethnicising the everyday problems that local communities experience (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). Workshops examined in this study took place in cities – Zvornik and Jajce and in rural towns - Srebrenica and Bratunac.

The same study finds that **the dialogue workshops contributed to the crucial formation of a new, encompassing identity among dialogue participants and in many cases the discovery of shared concerns**. In the case of Jajce, youth participants started to refer to themselves as the 'Nansen kids', forming an encompassing identity that allowed participation of all ethnic groups (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). These alternative identities are effective in countering the salience placed on ethnicity and can also contribute to participants seeing the 'other' in a different light. It is also in Jajce that students – direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Nansen dialogue processes – successfully initiated protests against the plans of the cantonal government to divide the now-multi-ethnic secondary education along ethnic lines, wanting

instead to be educated together (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). The government ultimately dropped their plans. Similarly, NDC Skopje facilitated dialogue seminars among Albanian and Macedonian communities that led to the identification of a shared concern for better education, regardless of ethnicity (Kelleher and Ryan, 2012).

4. Peace constituencies

The **transformation of conflict identities through reconciliation-related activities is theorised as leading to the creation of cross-cutting networks and peace constituencies** that support more peaceful approaches to conflict resolution and sustainable peace (Garson, 2017). The Individual Change Theory, articulated by Search for Common Ground, specifies that **peace comes through transformative change of a critical mass of individuals** – their attitudes, behaviours and skills, for example through investment in individual change through training and dialogue workshops (Church & Rogers, 2006).

Research, based on process tracing, finds that **participation in reconciliation activities has a role in transforming antagonistic attitudes and identities into those that support peaceful conflict resolution** (Garson, 2017). In the case of BiH, although individuals and organisations have had limited impact in being able to effect change on the political level, there is the potential that encouraging attitude change and reconciliation could aid in the formation of peace constituencies. In turn, given the right circumstances, peace constituencies could eventually challenge divisive elite-driven politics (Garson, 2017). At the same time, however, **the potential of peace constituencies is significantly hampered by lack of institutional support** (Garson, 2020).

Study A finds that reconciliation projects, such as dialogue initiatives, connected grassroots work to shifts in attitudes and behaviours at the community and national levels (McKone, 2015). Projects often conceived of participants as the future leaders of social change, with the aim of giving them the skills, capacity, and desire to project their personal transformations to their communities and the wider national society (McKone, 2015). This **idea of a 'ripple effect' across society is based on the assumptions that participants will undergo change themselves, that they will want to change others, and that they are capable of creating change** (McKone, 2015). The theory of change behind this outcome is that if participants in reconciliation activities are able to trust and empathise with people from across group divides, they will become leaders who will promote positive inter-group relations in their communities and broader society, which in turn will produce a more peaceful, inclusive, and tolerant society (McKone, 2015). Study B finds that beyond attitudinal change, there were examples of personal commitment and behaviour change on behalf of project participants, including the willingness to listen to others and engage in perspective taking, to respect and value differences, and to cooperate and collaborate across divides (Jean, 2019).

Peace constituencies that advocate support for peaceful resolution of the conflict remains a key element in establishing the effectiveness of reconciliation programmes and the direct impact of its alumni (Garson, 2017). The Alumni Survey in BiH reveals that 89 percent of the participants would recommend participation in a joint reconciliation programme to others, with 94 percent of

the respondents indicating that they stayed in touch with participants from the programme[3] (Garson, 2020, 202).

Research on the BDYCP, which runs annually with new participants, finds that it has successfully amplified and extended the profiles and networks of its active participants as cultural actors, media professionals and young peacebuilders (Fairey & Kerr, 2020). Led by the peacebuilding NGO Post Conflict Research Centre (PCRC), it seeks to catalyse new forms of participatory youth-produced visual and digital media in order to build an inclusive civil society. It seeks to build the capacities and voices of young civil society activists from all ethnic groups to challenge the ways in which they have been taught to think, to enter into dialogue with others, and to produce narratives that counter divisive public discourse and media (Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Fairey, 2019).

While not framed as a peacebuilding or reconciliation project, the programme strengthened participants' levels of trust in other ethnic groups; positive attitudes toward inter-ethnic collaboration and reconciliation; and resolve and ability to engage in civil society and work towards durable peace (Fairey & Kerr, 2020). As such, the programme can be seen as expanding their capacities as 'active citizens' to influence and become 'multipliers of peace' from within their own societies and peer groups (Fairey & Kerr, 2020).

The PCRC's Ordinary Heroes programme, from which the BDYCP evolved, utilises international stories of rescuer behaviour and moral courage to promote reconciliation and inter-ethnic cooperation among Bosnian-Herzegovinian youth in particular. After a viewing of one of the Ordinary Heroes documentaries during the workshops, the programme participants' discussion demonstrated an active engagement and nuanced understanding of the concept of moral courage and the important role it plays in building peace and coexistence. Seven participants went on to enter stories (11 articles in total) in the Srđan Aleksić Youth Competition that focuses on stories of moral courage, celebrating individuals, networks and organisations that challenge divisive politics and narratives. These stories were recently published on the Balkan Diskurs website, thus spreading their messages of peace (Fairey, 2019).

Spin-off activities

The **attitudinal and behavioural changes stemming from reconciliation-related initiatives can contribute to spin-off activities, which can have a wider impact on society beyond the impact on direct participants**. Study B finds, for example, that one participant, after accepting the possibility of living and working with the 'other', organised a multi-ethnic Association of Former Camp Prisoners which grew to include over 3,000 members from Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian communities (Jean, 2019).

The Alumni Survey BiH finds that 67 percent of the respondents indicated that that they were engaged in further activity aimed at bringing about positive change to the political situation, with 89 percent of this continued activity designed for all communities and an estimated reach of up to several hundred thousand people (Garson 2020, 202; and 2017, 165). These spin-off programmes cover a range of initiatives related to reconciliation and transitional justice, including

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[3] Seventy-five percent of the respondents remained in touch with former participants from both their own and other groups.

work with victims and camp survivors, sports clubs and joint activist networks (Garson 2020, and 2017).

Only 17 percent of these spin-off activities were aimed at politicians and government officials, however, with documented frustration at not being able to impact the elite level sufficiently (Garson, 2020, 202; and 2017, 165). Given the challenges in directly impacting the political level, a number of respondents identified that their spin-off activities focused on empowering youth as the vehicles to eventually bring about social and political change (Garson, 2020 and 2017).

The interactions, friendships and social networks fostered at the Pavarotti Music Centre among young people have had a 'snowball effect', increasing the scale of impact on cultural life in Mostar and on countering divisions (Howell, 2015). Some groups began to generate new artistic projects together, becoming cultural producers and building opportunities for others, often younger generations to become involved in urban culture. One group of friends went on to establish a much-loved bar and arts venue (the Alternative Institute) in the centre of town. This venue has sought to explore an alternative culture away from the rigid confines of politically-imposed cultural identities (Howell, 2015). Members of the Alternative Institute then went on to found the Abrašević Youth Cultural Centre, which continues to engage in important work, breaking down and providing alternative narratives to life in Mostar. **While it is challenging for such cultural and arts-based projects to effectively counter the pervasive political nationalist rhetoric in the city and country, the presence of such alternative spaces, options and narratives enables individuals to collaboratively imagine alternative lives** (Howell, 2015). This can create the potential for active, critical citizenship that enriches the cultural life of other citizens and highlights the possibility of a more plural, diverse society to other segments of the population (Howell, 2015).

Participants in the BDYCP also continued their activism beyond the direct project activities through PCRC led and self-generated opportunities. For example, one participant successfully produced a photography exhibit on stereotypes and discriminatory practices against BiH's Roma population. It received funding from other sources and was able to tour across BiH (Fairey, 2019). Further, the networks fostered by the programme among participants amplified their own self-directed civil society activities and work as media producers. It also exposed them to new opportunities and ideas, creating a 'ripple effect' beyond the programme's direct impact (Fairey, 2019).

5. Civic action and citizenship

Structured events and shared spaces can provide the basic stepping stones for positive inter-group relations and free thinking and expression that is largely absent in the political realm in the Western Balkans (Belloni, 2020). A key way through which projects and programmes are able to scale up and attain broader reach is to give participants the tools for activism, enabling them to become **'multipliers of peace' within their own communities** and societies (Fairey & Kerr, 2020). These foundations, activities and tools can eventually infiltrate into the public sphere in the form civic activism (Belloni, 2020).

Cultural and youth centres, for example, have brought together and mobilised young people beyond the nationalist discourses, fostering cooperation along common interests –e.g. debate, cinema, music, among other activities (Belloni, 2020). Inter-ethnic interactions can be considered positive when they result in civic solidarity, involving 'a forward-looking

commitment to fighting for social justice and against the privileges of political elites' (Lai, 2020, 180). As part of efforts to foster dialogue, tolerance, and reconciliation, many youth-focused peacebuilding efforts emphasise leadership, addressing local problems relevant to youth, and working on achieving solutions (Hammett and Marshall, 2017). Such initiatives that motivate youth to actively involve themselves in civil society are considered to play an important role in creating peaceful, tolerant and productive citizens, building an inclusive society, and enhancing trust between individuals and government bodies (Fairy, 2019; Hammett and Marshall, 2017).

The BDYCP project, beyond amplifying the capacities, networks and skills of participants to work as peacebuilders, also served to solidify their identities as youth activists and to re-affirm the value of their efforts (Fairey, 2019). By the end of the project, all the participants felt strongly about the crucial role that young people had to play in building a better future for BiH, while at the same time being cognisant about the challenges they face to affect meaningful social change (Fairey, 2019).

Youth activists, members of the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR)[4], have been involved in activism related to contested memories in Serbia of the wars of the 1990s (Fridman, 2018). Memory activism has emerged as a continuation of the anti-war activism of the 1990s and post-2000 peace activism. Research on memory activism in Serbia finds that while state officials have labelled returning ICTY convicts as heroes, youth activists have sought out alternative production of knowledge and demanded that returning war criminals should not be taking part in public life (Fridman, 2018). They approach the knowledge produced in the ICTY trials as facts that cannot be denied but rather confronted and debated (Fridman, 2018). Their acts of memory activism can be interpreted as political, constituting forms of engaged citizenship (Fridman, 2018).

The activists opted for confrontational tactics when some of the released convicts began appearing at public events and election campaigns in public spaces, promoting their memoirs, sharing their experiences, and openly negating crimes for which they were convicted (Fridman, 2018). In 2016, for example, activists obstructed a roundtable event in Dom Omladine (Belgrade Youth Centre) in downtown Belgrade, which sought to promote a book by Momčilo Krajišnik, the former Bosnian Serb parliament speaker, who was convicted by the ICTY for the persecution and deportation of Bosniak and Croat civilians from 10 Bosnian municipalities[5] (Fridman, 2018). In 2017, activists attempted to obstruct a public debate in Vojvodina featuring Veselin Šljivančanin, a former officer in the Yugoslav People's Army, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for his role in the 1991 war in Croatia in the Ovčara farm massacre (near Vukovar)[6] (Fridman, 2018). In both cases, the events continued as planned once the activists were removed from the spaces. The actions of the youth memory activists received broad public exposure, becoming a topic of debate in the media and social networks for days after and receiving support and criticism (Fridman, 2018).

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[4] This regional NGO was first formed in Belgrade (Serbia) in 2004 and now has offices in Prishtina (Kosovo), Zagreb (Croatia), Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Podgorica (Montenegro).

[5] Krajišnik was released in September 2013 after serving two thirds of his 20-year sentence. Activists entered the public event that day, and as soon as Krajišnik was given the stage to speak, they began blowing their whistles, preventing him from talking. Outside the building, another group of activists stood with banners stating, 'Home of the Criminals of Belgrade'.

[6] Šljivančanin was released early by the ICTY July 2011. The activists entered the hall as audience members, and as soon as Šljivančanin was about to begin his speech, they began blowing their whistles.

Similar to the first generation of memory activists, **contemporary youth memory activists emphasise the importance of preserving and building regional connections in order to effectively fight against denial and distortion of the violent legacies of the 1990s** (Fridman, 2018). This cause is centred on truth-seeking and justice and downplays ethnic categorisation of victims and perpetrators (Fridman, 2018). The homecoming of war criminals represents a shared challenge and the potential for shared tactics of engaged citizenship (Fridman, 2018).

Dialogue initiatives have also fostered shared identities that have in turn contributed to activism. NDC Sarajevo, for example, fostered a strong shared identity among youth in Jajce (the 'Nansen kids'), who were able to successfully mobilise and protest repeatedly against mono-ethnic schools in the city in 2016-2017 (Belloni & Ramović, 2019). Their protests resulted in the decision of the Ministry of Education of Central Bosnia Canton to suspend the establishment of a new, exclusively Bosniak school (Belloni & Ramović, 2019).

Large scale political protests

Viewing protests as a site of reconciliation activity is informed by an awareness of the importance of informal activities for the sustainability of reconciliation (Lai, 2020). Protests can be more visible and accessible to the public than organised events (Lai, 2020). Despite their potential for drawing people together in fighting for a shared cause across societal divisions, **the contribution of protests to reconciliation remains underexplored in the literature on informal activities in divided societies** (see Lai, 2020).

Protests facilitate the emergence not only of new forms of activism, but also of new kinds of citizenship (Lai, 2020). Protests can build civic solidarity though the combination of (1.) symbolic and physical mixing that occurs during demonstrations for socioeconomic grievances, where people of different groups get together in the same space, or adopt slogans and symbols that cut across social divisions, and; (2.) resistance against the divisive identity frameworks that would normally keep these diverse groups apart (Lai, 2020). The interaction of these elements gives rise to a situation in which protesters constitute themselves as citizens through protest activity, bridging identity-related divisions and producing a new identity of the citizen activist (Lai, 2020). The combination of shared aspirations, opportunities for influencing policy-making, and resistance against the failures of political elites to address shared concerns, allows for civic solidarity to be put into practice (Lai, 2020). **Everyday acts of reconciliation embedded in a civic ethos can be important in preventing the recurrence of violence, reducing inflammatory ethno-nationalist practices, and promoting inter-group reconciliation** (Visoka, 2020).

Larger political protests have taken place throughout BiH, beginning from the late 2000s onwards. Dosta! ('Enough!') emerged as a citizen movement, aimed at encouraging citizens to become involved in social and political life. This mobilisation, initially organised by NGOs Dosta! and Grozd ('Grape'), adopted values of solidarity and social justice and aimed at re-politicising the public sphere. The work of cultural and youth centres, alongside citizen initiatives such as Dosta!, culminated in public manifestations of discontent with protests erupting in Sarajevo in early 2008 (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019). At this time, Sarajevo experienced a wave of juvenile crimes which ultimately resulted in the murder of a 17-year-old boy. Several thousands of Sarajevans took to the streets and demanded the improvement of the security situation. The protestors co-ordinated through a 'loose collective' called Građani Sarajeva ('Citizens of Sarajevo'), which later became Akcija Građana ('Citizens' Action'). This was the first notable non-ethnic mobilisation in post-war BiH and had the effect of framing and empowering the 'citizen',

with the rediscovery of agency (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019). **The protestors' complaints rapidly evolved to include shared dissatisfaction with ruling elites in addressing the socio-economic situation, identifying elites as the immediate cause of their misfortune, rather than the 'other' ethnic group**. The mobilisation called for the resignation of the cantonal government (Belloni, 2020; Sircar, 2019).

In June 2013, an important wave of protests took place throughout BiH, motivated by widely held frustrations over political deadlock and bureaucratic red tape that delayed newborns from receiving their personal identification numbers in a timely manner (Belloni, 2020; Milan, 2017). This cause garnered immense public support for the protesters, who numbered in the thousands, representing again the existence of non-ethnic solidarity at a massive scale (Belloni, 2020). In an effort **to keep the protests independent from interference by political parties and other formal organisations, movement organisers framed their actions with a civic meaning, focusing on the right to citizenship**[7] (Belloni, 2020; Milan, 2017). Politicians eventually adopted a new version of the law which enabled the issuance of ID numbers (Belloni, 2020).

In February 2014, protests began in Tuzla, BiH, led by laid-off factory workers – amidst high levels of unemployment in the country, particularly among young people (Belloni, 2020; Milan, 2017). These socio-economic protests quickly spread to other major urban centres, including Sarajevo, Mostar, Bihać, Bugojno, Travnik and Goražde, becoming the biggest popular mobilisation since the beginning of the 1992-1995 war (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). The protests in the Bosniak-Croat Federation involved people of different backgrounds, including Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, and people who do not affiliate with the three 'constituent peoples' (Lai, 2020). The protests also involved different generations – the young with few job prospects and older workers (Lai, 2020). They did not target any particular political party or politician but expressed the deeper grievances and frustrations against the entire political class (Belloni, 2020). Three days into the protests, Governments of Zenica-Doboj Canton, Tuzla Canton, and Sarajevo Canton resigned, followed by the resignation of the Una-Sana Canton Government a few days later (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). Although the Republika Srpska (RS) remained largely protest-free, opinion polls conducted shortly after the first wave of violence indicated high levels of support in both entities (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020).

Ultimately, anti-government momentum was difficult to maintain due to a combination of media and police pressure and diversion of attention to the devastating floods in May of that year (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). There is, however, **evidence that contact established through protesting, meetings and volunteering have helped to forge civic solidarity and establish activist networks that persist** (Lai, 2020). This network of activist groups could constitute the basis for the next wave of mobilisation (Lai, 2020).

Similar to the prior protests, the participation of protestors as private citizens contributed to the 'civic' character of the protests (Lai, 2020). Research on protests in Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zenica reveal that protestors identified social justice as the primary aim of the protests, which resonated with the population and fostered shared aspirations and solidarity across the ethno-national divide (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020; Milan, 2017). This signalled the emergence of alternative forms of political practices (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). Activists voiced an independent, third vision of the

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[7] The primacy of citizenship over ethnonationality as a unifying identity was evident on a placard carried throughout Sarajevo, which read: 'Neither Serbs, Croats nor Bosniaks. Citizens above all' (Milan, 2017).

state as serving socio-economic needs and guaranteeing the social rights of all its constituents, independent of ethnicity (Puljek-Shank & Fritsch, 2019).

There are thus both horizontal and vertical dimensions at play. **In the horizontal dimension, grassroots level, socioeconomic protests build civic solidarity through socialisation and shared aspirations; in the vertical dimension, activists build solidarity because they are pitted against a ruling elite that refuses to address their economic concerns** (Lai, 2020). At the same time, however, elites try to prevent opposition. Combined with an institutional system that encourages ethnicity-based electoral politics, **elite discourses pose a great challenge to the process of building civic solidarity, and thus to reconciliation more broadly** (Lai, 2020). Political elites tried to defuse momentum during the 2014 protests by dividing citizens along ethnic lines, while the media reported on the events in a way that supported the elite agenda (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020).

Structures and institutions

A key outcome of the 2014 protests was their quick evolution into plenums, established first in Tuzla than spreading throughout the country (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020; Milan, 2017). People participated in the plenums as ordinary citizens, articulating demands and grievances toward the government in a coherent way and engaging in decision-making democratically (Puljek-Shank & Fritsch, 2019; Milan, 2017). They constituted another opportunity for inter-ethnic contact, through physical presence at the meetings and through the formulation of plenum demands that transcended ethnic divisions and focused on citizens as a whole (Lai, 2020). Activists also got together to write and distribute flyers, posters and other promotional material about the protests, and to create groups and pages on social media (Lai, 2020). These features encouraged citizens to see the **plenums as a truly civic space where the ethnic divisions enforced by the institutional system were suspended** (Lai, 2020). They served as an alternative public sphere in which criticising ethnic elites became possible (Puljek-Shank & Fritsch, 2019).

While plenums could involve confrontation and disagreement, they were not attributed to inter-ethnic tensions (Belloni, 2020; Lai, 2020). When discussions about controversial issues emerged at meetings in Zenica, for example, such as the war crimes accusations against Naser Orić (a former commander of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Srebrenica region), the ensuing disagreements, while not being resolved or overcome, remained mostly amicable (Lai, 2020).

In order to support the plenums and other outlets for civic action, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights – in partnership with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs – provided funding to eight informal civic groups throughout BiH[8] (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, 2016). Most of the civic groups were able to establish a permanent office, which provides the necessary space for events, discussions, and activism. The Plenum of the Citizens in Zenica, for example, established its new office in the heart of Zenica, visible and available to all citizens, with the hope that more citizens particularly youth will become more active in society. Importantly, th**e space offers much needed space to share ideas without fear of recrimination** (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, 2016). The Banja Luka Social Centre is also an open space for the free exchange of ideas, which is very restricted in the city – offering

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[8] They are: the Plenum of the citizens in Zenica, Plenum Bosanska Krupa, the Informal Group Srebrenik is ours, the Workers' Union Sindikat Solidarnosti, the Citizens' Movement Gračanica, Banja Luka Social Centre, the Informal Group for Social Justice in Prijedor and the Network 5f7.

freedom and space for various activities involving awareness raising, activism, and new discourses that deconstruct nationalistic paradigms (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, 2016).

Such institutional arrangements can contribute to longer-term impacts. In order to promote the sustainability of interventions, NDC Sarajevo's dialogue initiative similarly allowed for crucial follow-up in the form of financial support for community actions and the establishment of multi-ethnic coordination bodies and action groups (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). Members of Nansen Coordination Bodies (NCBs) from various areas of public life (e.g. groups of young people, teachers and parents) and all ethnic groups were responsible for the identification of local needs and ideas for small-scale local projects (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). There have been concerns, however, that members of the NCBs did not have a common vision for the long-term impact of their activities on a socio-political level (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019).

Electoral changes

Socio-political change in the Western Balkans requires a growing critical mass which sees the merit in progressive and conciliatory ethnic politics and is capable of side-lining divisive ethno-nationalist forces through peaceful and electoral processes (Visoka, 2020; Garson, 2020).

A recent study on the protests in BiH finds evidence of a causal link between the 2014 plenums and voting behaviour (Sircar, 2019). Specifically, it finds that th**e plenums have had a persistent negative electoral effect on certain parties in the Federation of BiH** (Sircar, 2019). This demonstrates that even under the most difficult circumstances, such as the post-authoritarian and post-conflict setting of BiH, where elites wield substantial formal and informal power and citizens rarely protest, it is still possible for citizen-led mobilisation to trigger electoral change (Sircar, 2019).

Analysis of post-protest municipal elections found that the vote share for the *Stranka demokratske akcije* (SDA) (Party of Democratic Action) – a Bosniak nationalist, conservative party – was reduced in places where plenums were established, and increased for Naša Stranka (Our Party) – a small, multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan party (Sircar 2019). The study also surprisingly finds decreased support for the Social Democratic Party (SDP) – a multi-ethnic, social democratic party (Sircar, 2019). One possible explanation for the SDP result is that on average, citizens sought justice not by specifically punishing ethno-national political parties, but rather parties with the highest support in the previous pre-plenum election (Sircar, 2019).

6. Activism through media

Study A finds that **media and performance activities are particularly geared to reaching a wide audience, exposing them to themes of inter-group tolerance and cooperation** (McKone, 2015). Study B also suggests that the use of media and communications technologies can serve as broad-based approaches that engage participants across multiple communities and regions, as well as nation-wide (Jean, 2019). Various projects surveyed in Study A worked solely through media to broadcast information on specific themes to sensitise people to new ideas and to multiple perspectives on contentious issues (McKone, 2015).

Radio shows disseminated information about past atrocities, for example, and highlighted potential areas and reasons for inter-group cooperation (McKone, 2015). Documentary film projects reported on successful reconciliation processes and portrayed people from each side of

the divide doing something different and more positive than the stereotypes of the 'other' (McKone, 2015). This included portrayal of moral exemplars, offering footage and testimonials of people from different ethnic groups helping each other during the conflict (McKone, 2015). Another film documented inter-group encounters and dialogue sessions so that the audience could see what such exchanges are like (McKone, 2015). **If media throughout the Balkans were to give attention to positive stories such as the relationships forged through reconciliation-related initiatives, there could be an echo effect of more projects that could raise awareness and create momentum for sustainable change** (Dorokhina et al., 2011).

One film project surveyed also created a magazine and journal to reach a wider audience (McKone, 2015). Live performances, such as theatre productions, concerts, and other cultural events, were also used to expose a larger audience to new ideas about the 'other' (McKone, 2015).

Journalism and activism

The media and journalists in the Western Balkans have been a tool of advancing political goals before, during and after the wars (Andresen et al., 2017). Findings from a WJS study suggest, however, that journalists and editors in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia perceive journalism as embodying values of objectivity, detachment and independence (Andresen et al., 2017). In addition, they **endorse journalistic roles that advocate for education and social change, coming closer to an activist role** (Andresen et al., 2017). Strategies that can be employed by journalists include fostering resistance to pressure from outside and practicing independent journalism inside traditional structures of newsrooms (Andresen et al., 2017).

A study of journalists in Kosovo, based on 2012-2016 WJS data, finds that Kosovar Albanian and Kosovar Serb journalists feel pressure not only from editors but also the general public when reporting on 'heroes' of the conflict (Sweeney et al., 2020). For example, one Serb journalist noted that although they wanted to include in their work discussion of conflict victims from all ethnic communities, they would be considered a 'hero' by the Serb community if they only reported on Serbian victims and a 'traitor' if they reported on Albanian victims (Sweeney et al., 2020).

Kosovar journalists also noted that the media can make bigger contributions to truth-telling, such as facilitating discussion on truth commissions (Sweeney et al., 2020). There have been successful instances of individual journalists researching and reporting on conflict-related sexual violence, contributing to greater acknowledgment of these crimes (Sweeney et al., 2020). In addition, a Kosovar Albanian documentary filmmaker finds that media has been instrumental in investigating and acknowledging the misdeeds even of figures considered as 'heroes' of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) (Sweeney et al., 2020).

Activism through social media

The mere presence of alternative options provided by various spaces and initiatives – including new online platforms and forms of social media – maintains the potential for active citizenship and for a more diverse, inclusive society (Fairey & Kerr, 2020; Howell, 2015). **The use of hashtags, for example, has gained prominence in the growing phenomena of online commemoration and online memory activism** (Fridman, 2021). In Serbia, research finds evidence of an increase in the use of hashtags on social media platforms by local memory activists addressing the contested pasts in the region, as well as the appearance of online

commemorations. They serve as a supplement rather than replacement for onsite activism and onsite commemorations (Fridman, 2021).

White armband day

In May 2012, Emir Hodžić, a Prijedor-born survivor and activist, stood on the main square on his own with a white armband to protest the local authorities' denial of non-Serbs' right to remember through a ban on commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the events of 1992.[9] The photo of this act of civil disobedience went viral on social media and was integrated into the global social media campaign 'Stop Genocide Denial' (Fridman & Ristić, 2020; Paul, 2020). This online commemoration emerged from the work of a core group of local memory activists who used social media to mobilise a trans-national memory network to combat denial of crimes committed in Prijedor in 1992 (Fridman & Ristić, 2020; Paul, 2020). Adopting the use of the hashtag #whitearmbandday, pre-existing transitional justice networks consisting of local, regional, and international NGOs, legal and educational institutions, and human rights activists mobilised people world-wide to show their solidarity by wearing a white armband on 31 May and sending a message against genocide denial (Fridman & Ristić, 2020; Paul, 2020). Alongside posting their own photos, some participants shared personal stories, family narratives, and memories related to Prijedor (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). **As this online commemoration gained more visibility over time, traditional media continually reported on the events, which further enhanced the visibility of commemorations far beyond the core group of initial organisers** (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

Research on #whitearmbandday finds that this form of online trans-national commemoration has great significance for memory politics beyond the local and national levels, involving thousands of people across borders, languages, and ethno-nationalities (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). **It has also enabled and created the space for new alternative memories of war that transcend ethnicisation of victims to emerge and gain visibility** (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). By choosing to remember the killed children from the 'other' ethnic group, for example, the organisers of 'White Armband Day' created a platform for shared remembrance and inclusion, rather than politicisation of victims' ethnicity (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). Respondents noted the contrast between annual commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide in Potočari and the online and onsite commemorations in Prijedor, the latter of which they considered less politicised and more reflective of the concept of citizenship (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). Not all victims support such trans-ethnic commemorations, however. There were an increasing number of Bosniak diaspora Facebook pages after 2015, for example, dedicated to the exclusive commemoration of Bosniak victims (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). For further discussion on 'White Armband Day', see the section on 'Memorialisation' in the companion piece on *Transitional justice and reconciliation in the Western Balkans*.[10]

The importance of social media extends beyond a platform for activism and serves also as a source of knowledge and information about the wars of the 1990s (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). Further, online commemoration has over time enabled once-banned onsite

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[9] The white armband is reminiscent of the order given in 1992 to non-Serbian communities in the town of Prijedor in Bosnia to mark their houses with white strips and put a white band on their left arms. On 23 May 2012, twenty years following the initial decree about white armbands, the local government denied activist Emir Hodžić a permit to organise an art installation commemorating female victims from Prijedor (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

[10] Haider, H. (2021). *Transitional justice and reconciliation in the Western Balkans: approaches, impact and challenges.* K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

commemorations to take place, demonstrating the interconnectivity between online transnational commemorations and onsite local ones (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).[11]

Online memory activism is significant not only in BiH, but has the potential to support broader regional change through the creation of a post-Yugoslav region of memory that places victims at the centre of commemorative events and practices, irrespective of ethno-nationality (Fridman & Ristić, 2020). This can **counter everyday nationalism in the region and bring together alternative regional memories that are closely intertwined** (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

Young memory activists throughout the former Yugoslavia have protested the return to the region of ICTY convicts who had completed their sentences and reclaimed roles in public life (see section above on 'civic action and citizenship'). In addition to in-person obstruction, resistance has also taken the form of a regional social media hashtag campaign – #NisuNašiHeroji (#NotOurHeroes) – adopted by members of the regional YIHR. Their online memory activism emphasises that although they are too young to remember the wars, these ICTY convicts are *not* the heroes of *their* generation (Fridman, 2021). In 2017, when the ICTY was closing, the group posted a composition of five pictures of their activists standing in well-known public locations in the capitals of five Western Balkan states, holding banners with their hashtag #NisuNašiHeroji (in Kosovo translating the hashtag into Albanian) (Fridman, 2021). By adopting the same message and the same hashtag in their online and onsite actions, these youth activists highlight that theirs is not only a national struggle but a regional one (Fridman, 2021).

7. Involvement of local leaders

Individuals, communities, and local organisations are affected by the positive and negative consequences of government policies and programmes (McKone, 2015). In order to achieve genuine, sustainable social or political change, civil society-based activities need to connect with the policies and processes at higher institutional, decision-making and leadership levels (Garson, 2017; McKone, 2015). **Strategies and efforts for involving local authorities and political leaders in reconciliation-related initiatives have the potential to expand the impact of a project beyond the direct community participants** and to create safe political space for such activities (Haider, 2011).

Study A, for instance, finds that dialogue among local leaders was commonly discussed as a prerequisite to broader community dialogue. This is considered to be the case because leaders may have the respect and authority needed to introduce and generate support from community members; and because some leaders set a precedent for the community (McKone, 2015). The theory of change presented here is that if community leaders can come to understand multi-perspective narratives and experiences through dialogue, they can set a precedent for positive inter-group interaction – publicly demonstrating that it is possible and generating views of tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution and coexistence (Jean, 2019; McKone, 2015). This, in turn, can help to prepare community members for participation in reconciliation-related activities. The assumptions behind this theory include that leaders will have the motivation and space to come together and the ability to find common ground. In addition, they must have adequate influence to promote an alternative narrative and be able to reach a critical mass of people (McKone, 2015).

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[11] In the transition from the global to the local, the development of the annual onsite commemorations has to some extent demobilized the original online activities (Fridman & Ristić, 2020).

The involvement of key people and institutions, who are respected and play an important role in the everyday life of communities and participants is thus an important factor in the design and success of initiatives (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). They can also pave the way for cooperation across multiple levels. NDC Sarajevo, for example, got buy-in from municipality councillors of all three major ethnic groups, health and education workers, which enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of – and support given to – the organisation and its programming (Šerá Komlossyová, 2019). One of the project leaders for 'Imagine Coexistence' in Prijedor, which involved a series of activities designed to achieve exposure to the 'other', was a member of the municipal assembly. He spoke positively about the benefits of the project to his peers and sought to win the backing of the city (Haider, 2011). Open Fun Football Schools in Kosovo, which brings together children across the divide, also reached out to municipalities, trainers and parents and other stakeholders, actively involving them in the project (Krasniqi and Krasniqi, 2019). In order to ensure that boys and girls have access to and are able to take part in sporting initiatives equally, it was considered essential to identify and bring on board female role models as well as key 'gatekeepers' who have the potential to constrain female participation (Dorokhina et al., 2011).

Another example of working with municipalities is the case of The *Rescuers* – an internationally touring exhibition, profiling the stories of those who cross the divide to help the 'other'. Since 2011, it has travelled to 13 cities across the Balkan region, including Sarajevo, Mostar, Bijeljina, Brćko, Bratunac and Srebrenica, each time being displayed in public spaces (Wahlin & Kahn, 2015). It contains the first-hand testimonies and photographic portraits of rescuers from Rwanda (four rescuers), Cambodia (four rescuers), Holocaust Europe (four rescuers) and BIH (ten rescuers). This combined local and global context allows for wider discussion of rescuer behaviour in BiH within a more positive representative framework (Wahlin & Kahn, 2015). The exhibit garnered much publicity from the media, allowing for wider impact. Further, during the permission-seeking process, the exhibition became a mechanism for forging stronger relationships with local governments, including mayoral offices, and community organisations (Wahlin & Kahn, 2015).

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