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ИЗЛАЗ





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Introduction

Perspectives Southeastern Europe is about young adults in the Balkans. It is about young people with a specific kind of transition to adulthood. The comparative analysis of some Eastern and Western European countries shows that the age-status transition was strongly standardized under communist modernization, and that the main events of transition to adulthood took place in more predictable ways compared to Western Europe. The standard “socialist” trajectory: completing education – employment – marriage – leaving parents’ household – childbirth: this was a feature of the socialist period in all Balkan countries, too. This trajectory is under constant change. Key life events such as marriage or parenthood are being increasingly postponed. Longer periods of education and internships keep the young people from the labor market, rendering them dependent either on their families or state support. However, the standard life course of young people in the Balkans remains different from life-transitions in Western Europe where the biography of young people is much more individualized and less traditional and thus less predictable. One of the main consequences of detraditionalization processes is the fact that structural factors such as class, gender and ethnicity cease to be determinants for individuals in pursuit of “living life of one’s own” – the imperative of modernity. Consequently, life becomes a project; a choice biography replaces the standard one.

Life of young people in the Balkans is more traditional. However, due to extraordinary high youth unemployment rates they are stuck in a prolonged adolescence, as well. Living with their parents, very often up to the age of 35, many of these young people seem to feel comfortable with this tradition. However, a lot of young adults do not. They perceive it as the tradition of patriarchy which they struggle to overcome and get rid of. As opposed to their parents who, willingly or not, had been involved in political structures and networks, many seem to have withdrawn from formal patterns of politics. But the question remains whether this is political capitulation, confusion or resistance in the sense that the young are inventing different, more personal and informal means of pursuing their political interests, e.g. ecological activism, or projects reclaiming the right to the city in an environment of brutal and predatory privatization of public spaces. Or, as a means of taking care of each other, they form smaller communities of LGBT people.

The process of the Balkan countries’ EU accession will alter the life course of this region’s young adults. All those who want change, who want to overcome the tradition of patriarchy and discrimination of LGBT people and who are striving for a more democratic culture with a sense of citizenship and a responsible civil society, who want to get ahead in line with their individual merits rather than their parents’ connections or their party membership, who wish for better choice in a stronger labor market – they can expect support for these endeavors from the transformative power of the EU negotiation and accession process. ■■■

Post-Yugoslav Youth Policies: Reasons for Concern

SFRY¹ President for life Josip Broz Tito said during the 1968 student demonstrations: “A country with youth like this doesn’t need to worry about its future”. In a turn of events, some of the noted students of that time later became destroyers of the country whose future seemed so carefree. So, as it turned out, Tito was wrong. At the same time, it was confirmed that he had been right. That depends on how you interpret his words, because the statement regarding a country which “doesn’t need to worry about its future” could have meant that there would be no future to speak of. You do not worry about something that does not exist, do you? Regardless of whether Tito was right, the truth is that the future of a county depends on its youth.

What kind of youth should there be so that a state (country) need not worry? In other words, why does a country worry about its youth (or ought to do so)? Not least due to the fact that a county cares about its own tomorrow – if it cares about its future at all – by looking after its youth. Serbia and Croatia, once constituent parts of the same country, are now facing more or less the same challenges regarding youth policies. Generally, Serbian and Croatian youth policies both meet European principles: cross-sectorality, participation of various actors, evidence-based approach and topics they cover (participation, youth culture, youth mobility, volunteering). Due to insufficient capacity and political will to include youth on the political agenda, as well as massive policy implementation problems, the aforementioned problems are still present in both countries. ■■■

Serbia: Good Framework, Poor Implementation

by Jovana Tripunović

When addressing the public, the recent decision-makers usually say something along the lines of: “The youth isn’t our future, it is our present”. This populist and overused statement is not entirely meaningless. The young, of course, are the future but they should be taken care of in the present. Meanwhile, in the present, the youth (aged between 15 and 24) unemployment rate in Serbia amounts to 50%². That means that more than half of attendees of a teenage party do not earn the money they spend on buying their drinks. Incidentally, beverages consumed are usually alcoholic as about 80% of young people consume alcohol be-

fore the age of 17.³ In such conditions youth policy acts as a fire-extinguisher and in Serbia’s case the metaphor of fire is interesting twofold. Namely, the advocacy activities for the establishment of the Ministry of Youth included a youth campaign in which young activists made phone calls to government institutions asking for the number or, rather, the address of the Ministry of Youth. This nice example of civic activism usually resulted in a confused reply that there was no such ministry and it may have had but a slight influence in facilitating the eventual establishment of the Ministry in 2007. The founding of the Ministry was the product of

Jovana Tripunović holds an MA in Public Administration and Local Self-Government from the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade, as well as an MA in Journalism and Communications from the same faculty. She has 6 years of working experience gained within the Belgrade Open School, one of the most prominent civil society organizations in Serbia.

an active four-year advocacy by young people within the framework of the Youth Coalition of Serbia⁴, civic organizations and the youth organizations affiliated to political parties. Still, in the course of this civic action, telephone calls were made as if there was a fire emergency of sorts.

The Ministry was thus formed “by popular demand”, its assignments dedicated to the interest of the youth. That way the Republic of Serbia took the lead in the region in terms of an institutional framework for youth policy. Since it was created in an open process, the Ministry in charge of implementing youth policy has chosen participation and visibility as its core principles, and is applying them with dedication when dealing with all youth policy stakeholders. The National Youth Strategy was adopted the very next year in an open process, along with the action plan of its implementation the year after that. At a similar pace and in accordance with an already accepted framework, local youth offices were created, the Law on Youth was adopted, as well as local youth action plans.

In a relatively short time, the Republic of Serbia has developed a rather good youth policy framework. The National Youth Strategy defined 11 areas of priority for the young generation: active participation, decision-making, information, equal opportunity, achievements, leisure time, education, employment, security, health and sustainability.⁵ Regardless of the relatively critical tone of the previous part of this text, it is important to highlight that the youth policy framework in Serbia – although adopted faster than was expected and although, it seems, not enough time was dedicated to it – is one of the best, if taken formally.

A wide range of interested parties have taken part in the development of those documents, including around 16,000 youths. In order to harmonize the activities concerning the development, realization and implementation of youth policy, the Youth Council was formed. As an advisory body, based on the Law on Youth, it oversees the implementation and provides measures for the advancement of youth policy. Despite all that, as was earlier mentioned, Serbia has the features of a very unfavorable youth reality.

Unlike the ministry in charge, the rest of the government – in all legislatures so far – has been completely indifferent towards

youth issues and continues to uphold such an approach. Political stakeholders use youth topics in pursuit of populist ends during endlessly repetitive election campaigns. Young people are sporadically offered opportunities for employment, more favorable loans for purchasing and furnishing residential property, as well as conditions for entrepreneurship, but it never goes beyond promises. Generations that grow up on unfulfilled promises will continue to give unrealistic promises because that will be the only behavior model they know. This kind of attitude by the state (with honorable exceptions) leaves unsuspected consequences because, in the end, one of the ultimate youth policy goals ought to be the creation of responsible citizens in the future. It is difficult to objectively estimate the youth’s attitude about the state’s relation towards them but it can be sensed through their own attitude towards the media. The regional survey “Youth and Media”⁶ or rather, its part pertaining to Serbia, has indicated that young people have almost no trust in the media, especially when it comes to political topics. In addition to this, even though there are over 800 youth organizations and associations in Serbia, as well as 133 active local youth offices⁷ (thanks to a favorable youth policy), the survey indicates that the average young person is not familiar with the opportunities he/she has. Should these two trends continue – ignoring the youth on the one hand and the latter’s lack of information, on the other – there will soon be nobody left to defend the Ministry of Youth, nor will the need for its existence be recognized. The same survey shows that young people believe that the media portray them as lethargic, apolitical, delinquent and negative, or report about rare outstanding achievements by young people. One day, perhaps, the example of youth policy in Serbia will be used as a lesson explaining why such a good youth policy does not necessarily produce good results. Moreover, future research on youth policy history in Serbia might be very confusing if the situation is judged on the basis of written documents.

The first youth strategy covered a five-year period which is now coming to an end. Even though the preparations for drafting the future strategy commenced on time, they encountered various obstacles including changes in the government structure and its reshuffling. During one of the

interregnums, there were rumors that the Ministry would be abolished or, rather, attached to the Ministry of Education. Youth organizations strongly criticized the very emergence of those rumors, as well as the media's attitude toward the issue, which was reflected in the use of the denomination "Ministry of Sports". In the end, the process of drafting a new strategy for the 2015-2025 period was recently initiated (August 2014) and announced to be finished by the end of 2014. The Ministry of Youth and Sports has announced a public contest for the participation in a task force for the creation of a new youth strategy. That way, just over a third of the group's members are elected professionals, experts in youth policy and in similar fields. Almost ironically, the task force has barely over one third of a year left to draft a good youth policy for the next ten years. As if there's another fire somewhere else... ■■■

- ¹ Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
- ² <http://www.britserbcham.eu/2014-country-synopsis-serbia/>
- ³ Conclusions based on two recent studies. The first one was conducted in 2013 by Ipsos Strategic Marketing <http://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/downloads/2014/jul2014/Jul2014IzvestajPreliminarni.pdf> and the other one is a research by the Institute for Public Health of Serbia "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut" http://www.batut.org.rs/download/publikacije/zdravlje_mladih.pdf
- ⁴ More about the Youth Coalition of Serbia and its advocacy activities for the establishment of the Ministry of Youth: <http://www.koms.rs/o-nama/nasi-poceci/>
- ⁵ As stated in the National Youth Strategy available at: <http://www.mos.gov.rs/dokumenta/omladina/strategije/>
- ⁶ Results are available at: http://www.bos.rs/cepit/arhiva-vesti/97/2014/05/29/rezultati_-istrzivanje-o-mladima-i-medijima.html
- ⁷ According to the official Ministry of Youth and Sports website www.mos.gov.rs

Croatia: Contours of a European Youth Policy, but Much Remains to be Done

by Marko Kovačić

Despite negative demographic trends, surveys show that the young constitute approximately 20% of the overall Croatian population (Ilisin et al, 2013). Those young people are, as the argument goes, heterogeneous in terms of social and political values, professional and educational aspirations, as well as social opportunities. The same findings suggest that unemployment, increasing poverty and job insecurity are the biggest problems of today's young generation. Furthermore, police, judiciary and civil society organizations enjoy the highest share of the young generation's trust in institutions, while at the same time there is least trust in government and political parties. Additionally, another survey (Bagić, 2011) has revealed that young people in Croatia possess negligibly low political competence and do not comprehend some of the essentials of the democratic political system (for instance, only 31% of respondents were familiar with the meaning of political legitimacy and only 44% of them knew how ministers were elected). If we add to this the fact that Croatia's youth unemployment rate is the third-highest in the EU (in June 2014 it was 48.6%, according to *Eurostat*), a very logical question arises: are

there institutions responsible for young people and if the answer is yes – what are they doing?

Every strategy concept holds two aspects important for acquiring an overview of a public policy – normative acts and stakeholders. Key normative acts in the realm of youth in Croatia are as follows: *Act on Youth Advisory Boards* (regulates the obligation of each local and regional government unit to have a youth advisory board as a youth voice to participate in the decision-making process on the regional and local levels); *Act on Volunteering* (prescribes rights and responsibilities of actors involved in volunteering); *Government decision on the establishment of the National Council for Youth*¹ (inter-ministerial advisory body attached to the Croatian government with the task of participating in the development of youth policies). Apart from those normative acts, there are documents such as the *Act on Associations*, *Act on Primary and Secondary Education* or *Act on Student Councils* – however, they do not focus solely on young people as such. When it comes to institutional stakeholders, the *Ministry of Social Policy and Youth (MSPY)* is the most important and overarching body in imple-

Marko Kovačić is a youth researcher with a background in political science and public policy seated at the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, and a PhD candidate in youth policy at the University of Ljubljana.

menting youth policies; other than these bodies, there are other ministries which tackle specific dimensions of youth policy (*Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Ministry of Labor and Pension System, Ministry of Public Administration*). Other governmental offices and agencies can be identified within the youth policy framework, along with the *Parliamentary Committee on Family, Youth and Sports*. Finally, there are the aforementioned youth advisory boards at the level of municipality, town and county, respectively, as well as the *National Council for Youth*.

As previously seen, there are many actors and a sufficient amount of normative acts; however, their impact is questionable. Currently, the Croatian youth sector is undergoing numerous changes. After the 2011 parliamentary elections, Croatia for the first time got a ministry containing the term “youth” in its name, as a sign that young people were going to be taken as a serious stakeholder in the society. The *Kukuriku* coalition, winner of the elections, in their pre-election manifesto *Plan 21*, stipulated the importance of youth policy, emphasizing the triangle – education, employment, housing, as the backbone of their vision of youth policy together with a strong involvement by young people in society as one of the vital national interests. One would expect for youth problems to come to the agenda but that to a large extent does not correspond to reality. Overlapping jurisdictions, problems with guideline implementation, lack of educated and informed professionals in relevant offices, and the deficit of actual political will – these are the reasons why Croatian youth policy remains underdeveloped.

To point out just a few examples: the MSPY currently employs two persons in its Youth

Department, one of whom has been very recently transferred from another department. Shortage of staff influences the inability to cope with the complex matter of youth policy. Hence, Croatia is currently in the process of drafting a Youth Act – a process abundant with controversy and difficulties: ranging from the lack of consensus by relevant stakeholders (civil society actors and the research community who do not deem it essential to pass such a law), to the nonexistence of a plausible argument for bringing the aforementioned Act from the Government’s point of view. For the sake of brevity, we shall just mention other problems, such as sluggish implementation of *Youth Guarantee*, some problems surrounding state grant allocation for CSOs, or the delay in passing the *National Program for Youth 2014-2017*.

To conclude: on the one hand, youth policy in Croatia has contours of a European youth policy given the topics it covers and principles it represents; still, much remains to be done. Due to a lack of coherence in the actual public policy, the absence of coordination between stakeholders and indifference of the political elites towards the necessity to resolve problems young people in Croatia are facing, their full potential cannot be used. Therefore, only the setting of youth priorities on top of the political agenda – meaning the need to earmark more resources for youth topics and issues, and learning from countries more developed in terms of youth policy (such as Lithuania or Norway) – can ensure positive youth (and social) development. ■■■

¹ Differs from the National Youth Council which is a civil society organization.

Youth Activism: Political Sphere as a Channel to Ensure Sustenance rather than Theater for Debate

When it comes to their political and civic engagement, the youth of the Balkan region have certain features that are common for the European political space and some that are a characteristic of the South Eastern European region (SEE), but also certain mutual differences. As in other European countries, the traditional political channels of articulation of interests (such as political parties, trade union organizations) lose their importance, while new forms of civic activism are slowly established with limited effects. Given that the whole region went through a traumatic experience of war and that the delayed transformation was soon caught up by the economic crisis, the young people, due to underdeveloped infrastructure, fail to clearly articulate their own interests, their strategies for dealing with problems thus remaining mainly atomized. However, depending on the specific national circumstances in which young people live, they articulate messages in the public sphere ranging from social demands for improvement of their status, questioning of the education system to nationalist outcries.

Serbia: Adapting to the Existing “Rules of the Game”

by Dragan Stanojević

Dragan Stanojević is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, where he is also a full time teaching assistant. His main focus is the area of cultural and social participation of youth in the context of post-socialist transformation in Serbia. He is also interested in political sociology in post-socialist countries. He has participated in several research projects on the issue of youth in Serbia: Youth – Actor of Social Change (RRPP, Serbia 2011-2012), Social Participation of Youth in Serbia (UNDP Serbia 2008); Student Population Survey (ISR 2009); Family in Serbia (ISR 2008), and research on the issue of politics: Integrated and United - INTUNE (Framework 5, Serbia 2010).

Given the fact that sociologists in the region tend to regard one as “young” until the age of 35¹ (whereas the surveys carried out in Western Europe set this age limit at around 25²), this shows that the attributes of adulthood³ in this part of Europe are attained somewhat later and with more difficulty. Long-term dependency on parents in terms of financial support and accommodation, caused by underdeveloped economy and inflexible labour market, causes young people in SEE to develop strategies which result in focusing on everyday life and provision of basic livelihood.

Young people share the majority of problems with any other age cohort. The key difference with regard to the older generation is the high *transitory quality* of this group, marked by the acquiring of compe-

tences, and/or knowledge and skills (via education, socialisation) required to enter the adult world⁴. There are significant differences among youth in this process (as is the case among the rest of the population). These differences, such as their domicile, level of education, gender, family background, ethnicity, etc. influence their chances to become successfully included in the adult world. For example, young people in Serbia whose parents have only completed elementary education are three hundred times less likely to graduate from university than the children whose parents are university graduates⁵. In view of the fact that the process of education is a very important generator of social activism⁶, the capacity of young people whose parents are not university graduates to recog-

nise and articulate their interests is significantly lower.

Political activism can be observed both generally and more specifically. In the general sense, political activism relates to the broad spectrum of ways in which citizens are included in the public sphere through civic organisations (ranging from initiatives for the protection of civil rights and the environment, to the improvement of the local community, culture, entertainment, etc). In a more specific sense, political activism implies traditional channels and manners of inclusion in the political field (such as political parties). Many studies⁷ recognise a decrease among traditional forms of political organisation and the growing trend in the new political engagement (in a general sense), this being civic activism which is much more present in the countries of Western Europe where young people are far less prone to join political parties and are more likely to take part in current social problems, thus articulating their political engagement. In countries with young democracies such as the SEE countries, these trends are still not noticeable to the same extent⁸.

The first form of political activism, according to a survey done by the Institute of Sociology and Social Research in Belgrade⁹, is at a very low level. As much as 70% of young people (age 19-35) in Serbia are not members of any organisation in the field of civil society, culture, entertainment, etc. Participation in the civic sector and support to various initiatives is at a very low level. Only 5% of young people are members of an NGO. Around 8% of them are members of cultural and entertainment organisations, and 10% of students are members of a student organisation. The young are mostly members of sports organisations (around 12%). As we can see, the largest percentage of youth initiative is dedicated to entertainment, culture and leisure, whereas the interest in social topics is at a significantly lower level. Organisations mostly supported by the youth are those not exclusively dealing with political problems, such as environmental organisations which are supported by 25% of the youth. Contrary to the general impression of high support for right wing organisations and initiatives, such organisations enjoy the support of less than 5% of the youth. Considering the significantly lower degree of confidence in state institutions and civil society organisations in compar-

ison with their peers in EU countries, young people in Serbia do not expect formal channels and procedures to implement and protect their own interests. Consequently, most of the youth apply individualised and fragmented strategies of “getting by” through relying on their own strengths and informal support channels.

We could argue that young people are to a high extent (self-) excluded from the part of the public sphere that opens the possibility to articulate different interests in the most flexible way. On the one hand, reasons for that lie in the underdeveloped infrastructure, low level of support to grassroots initiatives by the state and the private sector, insufficient funds, clientelism in the allocation of funds and the professionalization of NGOs which often become closed for the inclusion of new activists who would then have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills.

Participation of youth (as well as of the general population) in political life through political parties is very specific. Youth membership in political parties in Serbia is among the highest in Europe (around 12%), and is definitely the highest among post-socialist countries. Such information indicates that the young prefer traditional forms of political life. Is that really so? Interestingly, at the same time the widest gap between active and inactive membership groups in political parties was measured in Serbia and it amounts to 3.5:1, this being the highest discrepancy in Europe. Therefore, young people do join political parties but are not very active. Why is that so? Answers to the previous questions may be obtained if we analyse how the youth feel about the way in which things function in the country they live in. They believe that informal channels such as personal acquaintances and relatively closed support networks are far more important for social advancement at the periphery of Europe¹⁰. Almost two thirds of youth believe that it is necessary to know the right people. More than one half perceive political suitability (and partisan connections) as preconditions for employment and advancement, whereas only one third believe that education plays an important role. Even though they believe that this is true to reality, this situation does not comply with their idea of a just society (because they have ranked education and hard work as the most important factors

for social advancement). Young people usually join the political life for utilitarian reasons and stay there until fulfilling their goal. The latter claim is also indicated by the high level of fluctuation of party membership depending on which political party is currently in power. In view of the fact that the unemployment rate among youth aged between 15 and 35 amounts to around 35% and that the state – through public administration, public enterprises, education and health protection – is a very significant employer (around 47% of the population receive their salaries directly from the state¹¹), the political field is primarily defined by clientelism. This means that young people often join political parties in order to seek employment and in return represent *sure voters* in the elections. The youth are active in political parties only as much as it is necessary – mostly during election campaigns and immediately after elections. After the music stops playing, for those who remain standing the only thing left is to wait for the next round while the others are comfortably sitting in their chairs. Since the political sphere is perceived as a channel to ensure one's sustenance rather than a place to debate matters of public interest, a segment of the population that is just now becoming part

of the adult world sees adapting to the existing “rules of the game” as their only option. ■■■

- ¹ Tomanović, S. et al. (2012) *Young People are Present*, Belgrade, Institute for Sociological Research.
- ² Galland, O. (2003) “Adolescence, Post-Adolescence, Youth: Revised interpretations”, *Revue française de sociologie*, 44, 5, 163 – 188.
- ³ Under the characteristics of adulthood, sociologists usually imply completed education, financial autonomy, independent households and the founding of one's own family (Tomanović, et al. 2012).
- ⁴ Goodwin, J., O'Connor, H. (2009): “Youth and Generation: In the Midst of an Adult World”, in: Furlong, A. (ed.) *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood. New Perspectives and Agendas*, London, New York: Routledge: 22 - 30.
- ⁵ Stanojević, D. (2012) “Social Status of the Young People” in Tomanović, S. et al. (2012): *Young People are Present*, Belgrade, Institute for Sociological Research, 53-80.
- ⁶ Jarić, I., Živadinović, I., (2012) “The political activity of young people” in Tomanović, S. et al. (2012) *Young People are Present*, Belgrade, Institute for Sociological Research, 183-198.
- ⁷ Norris, P. (2003) *Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?* Harvard University Press.
- ⁸ Vukelić, J., Stanojević, D. (2012) “Environmental Activism as a new Form of Political Participation of the Youth in Serbia” *Sociologija*, Vol. LIV (2012), No. 2.
- ⁹ Youth actor of social change (2012) Database
- ¹⁰ Mojić, D (2012) “Young People's Educational Resources, Orientations and Agency” in *Young People are Present*, Belgrade, Institute for Sociological Research: 95-110.
- ¹¹ Labour Force Survey – LFS (2013) Belgrade, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

Croatia: Strong Political Cynicism

by Marko Boko

Nowadays, when speaking about youth in Croatia, the primary topic of discussion is the war/post-war traumatized generation¹ that has been encapsulated by weak and perspectiveless socio-economic developments. On the other hand, the world at large has been shaken by crisis during the last few years, especially affecting the young generation in Southern Europe, with a strong focus on the Balkans. Combining those two factors which lead to total socio-economic disaster, the youth unemployment rate of those neither in education, training or internship in Croatia exceeds almost 50%² and the first generation after World War II has emerged that lives in conditions worse than their parents³. Young people in Croatia are mostly not very interested in political life and this interest declines as a topic loses its local dimension. On the other hand, political cynicism

among young people is quite strong so there is either none at all or minimal trust in the traditional political structures such as political parties or government institutions. However, according to recent surveys⁴ 11% of high school graduates are members of political parties, guided by various motives, of course. Quite interestingly, elements of authoritarianism, political cynicism and pure nationalism are more visible among young members of political parties than among other political youth activists. This might be explained by the fact that 3/4 of graduates who are members of a political party are affiliated with one of the few (extreme) right wing parties, leading to the conclusion that being a young political party member is an indicator of conservative political engagement.⁵ Besides partisan engagement, youth activism takes place through civil society orga-

Marko Boko is 24 and currently lives in Zagreb, Croatia, where he is working on his MA in political theory. He is President of the Croatian Youth Network (Croatian National Youth Council), while also active in several other youth organisations.

nizations, as well, and although there is no relevant data on the number of youth CSO activists in Croatia, some 30% of high school graduates are members⁶ of one or more CSOs. Those young people have lower scores on the political cynicism and authoritarianism scale, and higher ones on the democratic activism scale, which is the opposite of young political party members. On the other hand, around 40% of graduates have a negative opinion about CSOs and citizens' influence on public institutions and society, which is mostly the result of the aforementioned political cynicism and inadequate political education, such as civic education⁷.

The stated facts and relation between the socioeconomic position of young people and their "formal" and "non-formal" political activism and knowledge have recently become a hot topic in Croatia due to intensive changes in the process of introduction of civic education into the education curricula.

In order to have active and aware young citizens who are properly introduced to basic socioeconomic and political terms and concepts where they fully understand their rights and duties, the society must begin to invest in their development in a timely manner, through initiatives such as the introduction of civic education into the education system⁸. Civic education is one of the most important elements needed to empower active and responsible (young) citizens who will not allow to be asked for their opinion and legitimacy only once every four years, but become what they are supposed to be according to the liberal democracy postulates – the most important stakeholder and a key player in the decision-making processes.

The Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports has recently decided not to introduce civic education as an individual subject into Croatian schools, but rather to leave it in curricular implementation, which does not meet the needs and youth rights in the field. Such negative trends do not offer a solution for the identified problems related to youth activism and political knowledge in Croatia, which is not only deflating, but also dangerous due to conditions that are stimulating for nationalist and exclusivist ideas and initiatives.

In order to expect an increased impact and involvement by young people in Croatia or in the rest of the Balkans, we have to invest more in their formal and non-formal education and support and value the existing youth structures and their services aimed at youth empowerment which provide a great deal of work and devotion – mostly on a voluntary basis. ■■■

¹ Mladi u vremenu krize (Youth in the Time of Crisis); First Survey by the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation on the Youth); Ilišin, Bouillet, Gvozdanović, Potočnik, Zagreb, 2013. http://www.idi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/mladi_uvk.pdf

² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics

³ See footnote 1

⁴ Odgaja li škola dobre građane? Studija o političkoj socijalizaciji hrvatskih srednjoškolaca (Does School Raise Good Citizens? Study on Political Socialisation of Croatian High School Students); GONG, Zagreb. 2011. http://www.ss-industrijska-strojarska-zg.skole.hr/upload/ss-industrijska-strojarska-zg/images/static3/970/attachment/Odgaja_li_skola_dobre_gradjane.pdf

⁵ See footnote 4

⁶ See footnote 4

⁷ See footnote 4

⁸ Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Source/Charter/Charter_brochure_EN.pdf

Fear and Anger in Bosnia and Herzegovina

By Nedim Jahić

On October 12th citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina voted in the general election for members of Presidency and Parliament, respectively. The election was specific in many ways but perhaps mostly for the fact that it marked the first time the generation born after the Dayton Peace Agreement had gained the right to vote. The youth unemployment rate amounts to 57.9%¹, the higher education reform has failed in various elements, and the massive brain drain is expected to reach its

peak during the next four years. This is based not only on the fact that a mass exodus is expected – and already shows its results in terms of Bosnians-Herzegovians holding Croatian citizenship² and now being able to compete in EU job markets – but also through mobilization of educated youth with substantial qualifications in the form of needed workforce in fields such as the IT sector³.

The generation in transition has faced a different set of challenges in 2014 and saw

Nedim Jahić - YIHR BH Rule of Law Coordinator, involved in various citizens' initiatives, political campaigning and networking.

the election as the final step in gaining democratic maturity by the entire Bosnian society. However, the score was quite different compared to predictions and ideas (wishes) made by analysts and activists during the last year. So, let us go back for a moment.

It is winter time. February 7th on the streets of Sarajevo, Mostar, Tuzla, Zenica and Bihać. A day of anger, as smoke arises and government buildings are torched following years of frustrations. Bosnia is once again making headlines, as the widespread violence may take various unimaginable turns. The youth are on the frontlines and the dozens of opinions and articles emerging from the fire have brought the idea of a much-needed radical change in society.

Protests later transformed into plenums, non-formal citizens' gatherings which managed to articulate a part of the local problems and provide a space for citizens. A major contribution was made by the young, many of whom grew up with the protests of the "Dosta" ("Enough") movement which had been the main non-formal street movement of Bosnia from 2006 until 2010. As months went by, the first 'revolutionary' hit faded away.

The rainfall in May brought floods, landslides and the largest natural disaster in this country in the past twenty years. Citizens quickly organized through social networks and commenced mass actions to collect humanitarian aid and offer assistance in clean-up actions for flood-affected communities. For youth who were born in the late eighties and early nineties and thus do not remember the mass work actions once organized by the communists, this marked the first time they took part in large-scale socially aware actions.

After the floods and riots, Bosnia yet again made headlines for its commemoration of the Sarajevo assassination that had triggered World War I. In June, a heated debate about the context and local perspective of the role of Gavrilo Princip and the "Young Bosnia" movement in 1914 gave Bosnians a strange sense of our global historical importance. One hundred years ago, a nineteen-year old changed the course of the world. Bearing in mind the overwhelming experience of average youth from urban areas in the last six months, all the news should bring the wind of change in the expectation of October elections.

Elections once again highlighted the great importance of youth, both as voters and political campaign activists. All major political parties have their youth branches, and the machinery of under-30 activists and volunteers was a key driving force for actions in the field, street events and door-to-door campaigning. However, most political parties still avoid youth involvement in the decision-making system. Very few young people managed to get elected, given their low starting positions on electoral lists. While youth in local municipal councils have often displayed much more initiative as opposed to their older colleagues, the higher levels of government policy remain focused on 'trusted' party 'old-timers'.

Voters younger than 30 who are not affiliated with political parties have little confidence in their peers who are politically active, the latter commonly being referred to as "clones of their party leaders"⁴. True, the level of democratization in most political parties remains low. However, it is not only a matter of youth but of the entire structure of political actors in the country. Through the election campaign, candidates have tried various approaches in order to change positions of those who have called for boycott and 'invalid ballots' activists.

Regardless of the fact that political parties are working hard on defining the focus groups, it is hard to narrow down the youth to one specific profile or pattern in a society as divided as the Bosnian. October was election time. Bosnia now faces the challenge of new government. The youth expressed their anger in the protests, as well as their solidarity during the floods. Many fear that more frustration and years of blockade would be a very hard pill to swallow for a rebellious generation. There is not much space for optimism as the country faces a budget deficit, a new round of obstructions on its path towards European integrations, and final breakdown of many public companies. ■■■

¹ <http://www.radiosarajevo.ba/novosti/116112/bih-prednjaci-u-regiji-po-nezaposlenosti-mladih>

² <http://www.oslobodjenje.ba/vijesti/bih/od-ulaska-hrvatske-u-eu-iz-bih-se-iselilo-vise-hiljada-hrvata-egzodus-koji-se-nikog-ne-tice>

³ <http://swot.ba/wordpress/strucnjaci-iz-bih-odlaze-unjemacku/>

⁴ <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/mladi-politicki-kadrovi-osudjeni-na-slijepo-slusanje-lidera/25155847.html>

The Kosovo Youth has yet to be Roused by the Struggle

By Una Hajdari

Political activism amongst the youth in Kosovo is at best minimally manifested and poorly coordinated, with an unexpectedly successful protest or campaign emerging here or there. It would be incorrect to assume the youth is entirely apathetic or apolitical – if we were to measure it by unscientific indicators such as the presence of such topics in social media, the number of politically-themed advocacy organizations and the participation of youth leaders and advocates in political debates even at the top level, then the opposite could be concluded.

However, if we were to strictly measure it by the level of collective organization amongst the youth and their influence on policy-making or social change then this proves dismal, especially for a country considered to have the youngest population in Europe – the median age clocking in at 27.8¹. One could assume this is symptomatic of a country with low living standards – a whopping 55.9% of those between the ages of 15 and 24 are unemployed, with 30 percent of the population living below the poverty line² – as existential problems swamp the initiative of the youth for fighting social injustices. This is not to say that the two are mutually exclusive.

Before going into further analysis, it needs to be said that in Kosovo's modern history, there isn't a single example of an initiative being started that has featured representatives of the country's two main ethnic groups – the Albanians and the Serbs, which together form 96% of the population³. Although Albanians, following the conflict in the region, form an overwhelming majority at 92 percent⁴ (previously being at 77.4 percent and the Serbian population at 13.2 percent⁵), due to the nature of the political problems that are grappling the country – such as the unresolved status issue following the 2008 unilateral declaration of independence by the Prishtina-based government – it remains puzzling that a country where policymaking should involve both of the groups, would not have a movement without a national or ethnic basis, or that the youth would not find it necessary to rally around the same social causes.

Perhaps one should analyze the movements and issues that have in fact taken root and roused the youth. The strongest example is undeniably “Levizja VETEVEDOSJE!”⁶ or the Self-Determination Movement, headed by former student leader and political prisoner Albin Kurti. The movement formed a unified front in 2004 and has since been the only movement to openly oppose the post-war UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) administration and the other supranational organizations with administrative powers that followed.

The Self-Determination Movement has been very vocal in voicing their opposition, and has collected a considerable membership throughout Kosovo. Politically, they oppose the treatment of Kosovo as an international protectorate, and therefore oppose almost all the political parties in Kosovo, which they say have fallen in the line of “international whim.” Their initial claim to fame were their public actions, such as the spraying of an “F” and a “D” on the UN cars “privileged internationals” drove around in Kosovo – spelling out “FUND” or “End” in English. Their motto, “Jo Negociata, Vetevendosje” (No negotiations, self-determination) is repeated by their young followers, and also found on the sides of buildings and in public spaces all over the country.

For a long time, they exercised a monopoly on public protests – even though their real, measurable impact remained low apart from giving a voice to the unsatisfied youth. Internal disagreements and a clash between the membership took place in 2007 following an attempt by the movement to storm the parliament, where two members of the movement were killed by international riot police – an event mythicized by the movement ever since.

Self-Determination hardliners say that the fact that the protests stopped after the incident was a sign of Kurti giving up on the cause, which was not made better by the party running for elections in 2010 and rounding up a “big name” membership of people who are accused of war crimes and corruption.

Amongst the splinter movements, the most significant is the one created by a

Una Hajdari works as a journalist and editor for English-language publications based in Prishtina, mainly covering politics and society.

group of intellectual elites based in Prishtina. Dissatisfied by the often populist and nationalist platform of Self-Determination, they started by forming a “Putsch” movement, which was largely meant to mock the simplistic rhetoric of Prime Minister Thaci and would satirize the idea of overthrowing the government – witty slogans and clever one-liners were the name of the game.

They also organized one of the most significant protests in post-independence Kosovo, against the price hikes of KEK, the electricity distributor – marking the first strong movement other than Self-Determination that rallied a large group of people and protested a specific government policy rather than base it on a strictly nationalist basis. This group, although present in public debates in the capital, lacked the wider appeal of the Self-Determination rhetoric.

This changed slightly when a core group of them announced they were forming a satirical party, “Partia e Forte” or the Strong Party in 2013, which took cultural stereotypes and the politics of other main parties in Kosovo and exaggerated them, such as playing around with the folkloric element of “strength” as a much-valued virtue amongst the Albanian community, and awarding medals to corrupt politicians “for stubbornly not rising up in the face of wide criticism.”

Although they were the media darlings of the November 2013 local elections, they received a single seat in the local assembly and have since all but disintegrated, reduced to their previous role as representatives of the intellectual elite in the capital but with little of a role in social change. Although many have criticized the move-

ment’s so-called “hijacking” of any sort of protest in the country, few have been able to present a viable alternative that has been able to attract the similar support and set aside the romantic-nationalist rhetoric.

In conclusion, one can only summarize that Kosovo is sorely lacking a strong alternative to the Self-Determination monopoly on youth activism. Being witnesses to key processes in state-formation should excite and energize the youth demographic rather than have them sit back and watch. Unlike most of the youth in the world, the changes that they will push through could genuinely shape the way the country will develop and who it will serve. Kosovo has yet to survive its first decade as an independent country, and the youth could – and most importantly, should – serve as the architects of its future. ■■■

¹ CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html>

² Poverty levels and employment statistics are according to the Statistics Agency of Kosovo.

³ Kosovo’s Census Atlas, based on the Population, Housing and Households Census held in 2011. It should be noted that Serb-majority northern Kosovo was largely excluded, as the Serbs and Roma boycotted the census. A large part of the Serbian population in Kosovo is represented by the Belgrade-based government, who are considered to be “parallel” and “illegal” by the Prishtina government. The local politicians at the time called for the Serb boycott of the Kosovo census. However, international organizations choose to still cite and support this census.

⁴ See previous footnote

⁵ According to the last census in the former Yugoslavia (Kosovo Albanian political leaders called for the boycott of the 1991 census).

⁶ They insist on this exact spelling of the name, which makes it sound more like a rallying cry. They have maintained that their name continue being spelled like this even after entering politics, with references being made to them as a movement rather than a party.

Youth in Serbia Between Patriarchy and Post-Socialist Transition

By Ivan Đorđević

If socialist Yugoslavia had the credo “The youth are the most precious treasure we possess”, an alternative version in contemporary Serbia would probably read along the lines of “Young people are our best export product”. Although Serbia has made a long journey from the “Balkan bully” of the 1990s to an EU candidate country in recent years, future prospects for Serbian youth are not too bright. Data from the National Employment Service show that over 50 percent of the population aged between 15 and 30 that are neither in education, training or internship are unemployed.¹ Since the economy shows no signs of recovery, these figures are expected to become even higher.

Recent surveys among young people in Serbia indicate that unemployment and fear of uncertain future are the key societal problems from their perspective. On the other hand, over 60 percent of them have no idea what should be done in order to change these quite desperate life prospects.²

The high unemployment rate among youth and the loss of life prospects are not an issue only in Serbia. Since the beginning of the 2008 Eurozone crisis, many EU members have faced the same problem. These figures are on the rise in most EU states, while in some of them – Greece or Spain, for instance – the rate even exceeds the 50 percent mark.³ Even if young people manage to get employment, most of it is short-termed and uncertain due to austerity and other repressive economic measures. This unstable condition has also caused for certain changes in the family structure. Instead of gaining independence, many youngsters are forced to live “prolonged youth”, remaining dependent on their parents.

In Serbia, this phenomenon is even more widespread. Almost 60 percent of young people aged up to 35 still live with their parents.⁴ Even if they work or have their own families, they often opt to stay with their primary families. In fact, this occurrence could be interpreted as a revitalization of the so-called “extended family” which implies different generations living under the same roof. This family model was the prevailing one in traditional patriarchal societies in the Balkans until World War II. During the years preceding the war, the existence of this type of family organization was motivated by economic factors – remaining in one’s expanded family along with the traditional labor division was the main survival strategy in a poor agricultural society such as Serbia. However, a major industrialization project promoted by the new socialist regime in SFRY⁵ has caused huge changes in the traditional family structure. An increasing number of young people were leaving the countryside in favor of living in cities, seeking jobs and housing. The status of women changed to a great extent, too. Instead of playing the role of subordinate housewives in the traditional patriarchal family, many women suddenly had an opportunity to acquire better education and, eventually, find jobs in cities. The socialist policy of affordable housing for everyone also contributed to massive migrations from villages to big towns and new industrial zones. Changes in the traditional family structure certainly did not uproot patriarchy from society altogether. In this sense, women’s emancipation in socialist Yugoslavia was partially compromised with the so-called double burden of working in and outside of home. Still, women’s

Ivan Đorđević holds a PhD in Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. He is currently an associate researcher at the Institute of Ethnography, SASA in Belgrade.

economic empowerment has had a major effect on their improved status in the family and society as a whole.

The dissolution of former Yugoslavia led to the “nationalisation” of the entire political and private space. Wars and economic devastation introduced a deep social crisis in which ethnic nationalism practically became the sole ideology. The rise of the idea of nation as the supreme political ideal was accompanied by a comprehensive process of returning to tradition. “Traditional values” actually implied the return to religion and conservative ideals whereby the family became the pillar of society with the exclusive purpose to “produce sons of Serbia”. In this process of re-strengthening of the patriarchal system, women have gradually lost the status they had in SFRY. Instead of the socialist ideal of “working woman and mother”, women’s main purpose now was giving birth to new members of the nation and taking care of the household. Or, as Dubravka Ugrešić summed up in the early 1990s: “If women miss the opportunity to participate in political decision-making and defend their rights, the gender of democracy here will be male and, even worse, it will wear military boots”.

The economic catastrophe and consequential complete abandonment of socialist production had a major role in this anachronistic process. The old system was replaced by rampant privatizations, massive job losses, hyperinflation and plundering of state property. In this context, family became the only model of survival, while the patriarchal ideal as a product of the excessively ethnicised political space became the only mode of existence for such family. Moreover, as a consequence of war and economic disaster, the process of gaining independence from parents and hence their striving for emancipation became practically impossible for the majority of the youth. The old model of “extended family” was once again, if not dominant, than at least very much present in Serbia. The patriarchal model reinforced during the 1990s as a result of the economic catastrophe and promotion of nationalist ideology remained intact even after the fall of the Milošević regime and the political changes in 2000. Children and youths who grew up during this period actually accepted the model of re-traditionalized gender roles. However, the post-2000 economic transformation failed to live up to the great expectations of the new “democratic” era. Poverty

was still widespread and, as a practical consequence, even the patriarchal model in which the man is perceived as provider for the family, could not function efficiently due to the simple fact that the level of income was insufficient to support the whole family. Moreover, research conducted in post-communist countries in the late 1990s and the early 2000s shows that women in transitional societies apparently have a more dominant role in providing for a family.⁶ However, the simplest economic solution was to remain within the framework of the extended family as a model of survival. This, so to say, anxiety among many men in Serbia, accompanied by a strong patriarchal worldview, brought about another major problem of contemporary Serbian society – domestic violence, to a great extent targeted against women and children. Although violence against women had always been present in Serbia, various war- or poverty-induced traumas, often including alcoholism, turned them into easy victims, at times even with fatal results.

Growing up in such an environment, many young people actually followed the model they were forced to witness and live in. On the other hand, even though most of them had the desire to leave the primary family upon completing school education, this was rarely possible. The ones fortunate to find a decent job did not have sufficient economic power to rent or buy their own flat. The abandonment of the socialist policy of inexpensive housing, followed by the neoliberal agenda which was promoted by every government since 2000, rendered the aspiration towards living independently rather unrealistic.

This problem escalated after the 2008 economic crisis when the already subpar living conditions in Serbia became even worse. The constrained impossibility of gaining independence from parents only exacerbated the already acute problem of the “prolonged youth” experienced by many young people. Such living conditions actually led to increased political and social passivation of the youth. Recent surveys show that barely 10 percent of this population group perceive political or social engagement as a matter of relevance for them or the society⁷. A vast majority actually have no trust in state institutions, relying only on family or informal networks. There is practically no mobility whatsoever. In fact, the discussion about mobility in present-day Serbia only implies the migrations of highly

educated young people to wealthy Western countries. In comparison to the socialist period when affordable housing and secure factory jobs had attracted a lot of people to migrate⁸, in transitional Serbia such opportunity rarely exists.

Surveys have also shown that the Serbian youth today share a deeply conservative worldview. Almost 60 per cent of high school students in Serbia are to a high extent homophobic. Such tendency is particularly strong among male students. These results correspond with their response on the position of women in Serbia. For example, 70 percent of male youngsters believe that the man should have more power within the family than the woman.⁹

Serbia today finds herself between the hammer of post-socialist transition and the anvil of patriarchy. Young people who grew up following the patriarchal ideal of “Nation and God” are now faced with uncertainties of painful economic transformation, often finding answers in conservative ideologies. Although an overwhelming majority of political parties in contemporary Serbia advocate EU membership as the main goal, the political elite seems reluctant to promote other European values, – apart from those conducting the neoliberal economic agenda – such as protecting the rights of sexual minorities. Homophobic and misogynist attitudes, often escalating into violence, in a way, represent acceptable social behavior in contemporary Serbian society.

The state mostly considers these issues irrelevant. On the other hand, young people who are disappointed over the results of the so-called “transition” and live in terrible economic conditions without any life prospects, in a country on the periphery of Europe, often seek internal ‘usual suspects’ responsible for their harsh living conditions. In the absence of any kind of serious debate on important political or economic issues, the easiest way of finding the culprit is to accuse “fags”, women or any other vulnerable group. ■■■

¹ <http://www.seebiz.eu/u-srbiji-cak-770000-nezaposlenih-najvise-mladih/ar-92544/>

² Tomanović S. et. al., “Mladi – naša sadašnjost. Istraživanje socijalnih biografija mladih u Srbiji” (“Young people are present. The study on social biographies of young people in Serbia”), Čigoja štampa and Institute of Sociology and Social Research, Belgrade 2012.

³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics#Youth_unemployment_trends

⁴ Tomanović et. al., *ibid.*

⁵ Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

⁶ Nikolić-Ristanović V., “Social Change, Gender and Violence: Post-communist and war-affected societies”, Kluwer, Dordrecht, Boston, London 2002.

⁷ Tomanović et. al., *ibid.*

⁸ Although many Yugoslavs used the liberalization of immigration policy since the 1960s to immigrate to Western Europe, the dominant migration stream in former Yugoslavia was from rural to urban areas of the country.

⁹ Radoman, M., “Stavovi i vrednosne orijentacije srednjoškola u Srbiji” (“Attitudes and Value Orientations of Secondary School Pupils in Serbia”, *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia*, Vol. 31, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Belgrade 2011.

Being Young and Gay in Serbia: In Search of a Space of Freedom in a Homophobic Society

by Olga Dimitrijević

“We don’t have that here”, “it came from the West”, “it’s a disease” – these are but a few of the statements in the private or public sphere upon the mention of a LGBT person. All previous surveys on violence and level of homophobia pointed out their difficult living conditions in Serbia (the surveys carried out by GSA and CESID in 2008 and 2010, respectively, can be singled out as the most significant ones).

Homophobia in Serbia is not only a feature of the political right wing, even though this political orientation is the most articulate in its homophobic attitudes and demands, varying from direct incitements to lynching to more moderate statements in the vein of “we have nothing against it, but...” where the “but” entails more or less anything – from the right to free movement to emotional fulfillment. At the same time, surveys show a high level of prejudice and lack of information concerning this subject.

In such a situation, it is difficult for LGBT activism, as well, and one must admit that the activists in their work since 2000 have managed to push toward a series of significant issues: ranging from the inclusion of this subject on the agenda, the anti-discriminatory law and the general, as it seems, relaxation of the moderate public opinion. The aforementioned surveys from 2008 and 2010, respectively, have thus shown gradual improvement: while, on the one hand, the percentage of citizens of Serbia who believed that homosexuality is a disease was around 70%, the number of those who recognize LGBT persons’ right of “being people like everyone else” totaled around 58 %. Currently, we can only guess the extent of the public opinion shift in the meantime, i.e. since 2010, particularly since the very issue of homosexuality be-

came even more present in the public sphere and the events which have initiated public discussion and media attention have occurred in rapid succession.

A frequently neglected question is how the lives of LGBT persons revolve in the midst of all this, especially the youth who are this text’s main topic. What is the difference between their experiences and how much, when it comes to personal experiences, is often omitted from official narratives?

What do we know about the lives of LGBT youth in small communities? Lazar Pavlović of the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) says that, based on his activist experience and the organization’s work, the visibility of violence and stigmatization differs. In larger communities, the visibility of violence is greater, whereas in smaller ones, stigmatization and rejection are more visible. By that fact alone, the violence LGBT persons are exposed to in smaller communities remains invisible for the most part, as persons who suffer attacks rarely decide to report them, due to condemnation by the surroundings. “In smaller communities there are no official gathering centers and the LGBT youth mostly meet at private parties. Due to pronounced stigmatization, there are almost no possibilities of using public spaces as venues for gay events. On the other hand – and I speak from personal experience – such situation causes people in smaller communities to form tighter groups, take more care of each other, and stick together. They are forced to develop stronger solidarity mechanisms more often than it would perhaps be the case in a big city.”

Certainly, the most significant LGBT event is the Pride Parade which also serves as a vehicle of spreading the mediated knowl-

edge and awareness about the existence of LGBT persons beyond the city centers. Debates on whether the Pride Parade causes more benefit or damage for the LGBT community, whether it decreases or increases the level of homophobia, are ongoing within the community itself but we must not forget that the information concerning the Parade is often the only one that reaches the public outside of larger cities. In smaller communities, this is mostly when LGBT issues arrive to the agenda, to restaurants, people's conversations and family gatherings (other than sporadic press interviews in which public personas state their opinion on whether gay is OK). For many young persons we have talked to, information about the Pride Parade was the first to provide them with a feeling of not being alone and lead them to further research and networking via the internet. It has opened up possibilities for today's youth which the previous generation did not have. Dragan, who has moved from a town in Šumadija to Belgrade three years ago, agrees:

"In my town this story was never on the agenda, other than everyone knowing about Pera the hairdresser or Žika the tailor and mockingly whispering about it. I could never identify with this and I felt as if I were alone in the world. And then, somehow, there was more talk about it and I began researching, gradually contacting others, mostly through the internet. That is what led me to work hard and enroll at university because I was aware of the fact that my life, in that sense, could begin only after I leave my community."

LGBT activists agree on that. Predrag Azdejković, Director of the Gay Lesbian Info Centre (GLIC) describes the situation as follows:

"As someone who is gay and who grew up in the so-called province, I can say that the situation is worse than in Belgrade, as it is worse when compared with Belgrade on any other basis. All LGBT events are reserved for Belgrade – parties, activism, festivals – whereas in other cities absolutely nothing happens. Of course, that is the responsibility of LGBT persons living in those cities, because the initiative for something to happen must begin with them, and that initiative is mostly non-existent.

As the majority of LGBT persons living in Belgrade fantasize about running away from Serbia, so do most LGBT persons liv-

ing in the province fantasize about coming to Belgrade which is absolutely understandable as their lives in the province are mostly sentenced to solitude. That is why many of them occasionally come to Belgrade in order to visit a gay club and be able to meet other LGBT persons."

Just as leaving for a big city occupies a key place in the narratives on the LGBT life in the Anglo-American world, we encounter the same tendency here. The lives of young LGBT persons in Belgrade or Novi Sad differ drastically compared with other places. This fact frequently remains out of the developed urban LGBT scenes' focus – the life outside, in smaller cities and villages without defined gathering places, where the very presumption of someone being gay is still a great embarrassment. Or, as Azdejković phrased it: "Belgrade is a big city where if you're out, you can hide, whereas if you're out in a small town, you have nowhere to hide and the homophobia you personally experience is much greater."

Among the LGBT youth living in Belgrade there is already a significant number of those who do not conceal their identity in the public space. Although faced with verbal harassment and exposed to possible violence, LGBT youth are moving in the streets with increasing freedom. Again, as agreed with by our interlocutors, such situation is almost unthinkable outside of Belgrade or Novi Sad. Even in the centers, it is limited to a small number of people who were fortunate, skillful and courageous enough to build such communities for themselves. Most LGBT persons are facing multiple pressures. It is not only a matter of fearing for one's safety, but also of what comes next: starting a family, finding employment, solitude in one's old age. We often encounter LGBT persons who are eager to state that they have no problem living their lives as they wish and expressing their identities; that they had come out without bearing any consequences, etc. However, one should keep in mind that these stories make up for a smaller part of the community – we could even say a luckier one. At the current rate, it is possible to maintain a contemporary LGBT identity only in a larger community. LGBT youth in smaller communities more frequently face rejection by their surroundings, getting thrown out or domestic violence. During the past three years, the Gay Straight Alliance was approached by eight persons



Srdan Veljović, International Pride day, Belgrade, June 27, 2014

who at that time were thrown out in the street with no alternative whatsoever. Lazar Pavlović states that the number of evictees is in fact much higher and that most of the people manage to find refuge at a friend's or acquaintance's house, before or after reporting the incident to GSA. There are dozens of them. The falling out which occurs in those situations, expectedly, reflects upon entire families, deepening the conflicts within.

On the other hand, there are other examples, too – those indicating a certain level of acceptance, as long as the actors accept the unspoken rules of the game, as testified by a young woman from Užice who wished to remain anonymous:

“My family knows, but we have never talked about it. I don't have the need to, either, as we live in a small town and I know that it would cause problems for them if it were said out loud. I have had a few 'best friends' who were treated as daughters-in-law. It seemed to me that the fact I couldn't find a job was a bigger problem for them than my girlfriends.”

Matters are additionally complicated once intercrossing other factors, such as economic position. We still have no official study dealing with the overview of, say, class and sexuality, and how these intersections determine the lives of LGBT youth, but most of them highlight this as an important part of their problems. Sim-

ply put, in order to live in a community it is necessary to have money which student budgets and mostly subpar paychecks simply cannot afford. When it comes to LGBT persons' migrations, Novi Sad is increasingly popular as of late, due to lower living expenses and the existence of a relatively large LGBT community.

We must not forget that violence, pressures, lies and hiding constitute the everyday life for most of the LGBT youth. Still, when it comes to interaction and emotional relations with family, friends and acquaintances, LGBT persons go through them in different ways, more or less overcoming the imposed limitations and pressures. Not everyone lives his/her sexuality as identity, although in Serbia the potential of political struggle was articulated only through identity policies. There is still a great deal of difference in the nuances and life experiences between outed and non-outed LGBT persons. Some have accepted their identities and are prepared to join the struggle for LGBT rights. Some will say that they have no problem with their sexuality but that they are not interested in rallying for LGBT rights. Some will consider their sexuality an embarrassment and secret. So, whether the LGBT minority's position improves – that will depend on the policies that we pursue and whether or not they prove to be overall emancipatory. ■■

We have spoken to several persons who responded to general questions: how's life, how's work and how's your love life? We have singled out these three very different experiences.

There is this café which is somewhat cooler, where normal people gather. God forbid I kiss someone there but everyone knows about a few of us and they are not causing any problems.

No one knows, except for my sister. I meet men over the internet, mostly just for sex. It is difficult to find a real relationship here. Maybe when I move to Belgrade, definitely then, but it is impossible for now. A few of us who are younger know each other but I am not interested in any of them. Sexual partners are only that, as most of them have families and no one would even assume. So far, I have been with a baker and a private company owner.

I don't like it how everyone is saying that there is no life in a small town and that one should come to Belgrade. I love my family and the place I grew up in and I wish I could be emotionally fulfilled here. It's just that I don't see the possibility for that right now. Maybe in twenty, thirty years, when things change, but not now."

(Nikola, 18 years old)

"I have lived with my girlfriend in my parents' house for two years. It's not that I don't want to live independently with her, but there are no conditions for us to do so. My father is very ill and receives a disability pension and my mother hasn't worked for years. Everything the two of us make goes into our household budget, mostly for medicine and food. My folks have accepted her in time, although they objected in the beginning. But what could they have said in a situation where I support the family. My father told me eventually: 'I've always known that you are more of a son to me than daughter', and that was that.

We are struggling and I know that if something were to happen to me, she would continue to take care of my parents. But I am afraid what will happen with the hospital, with the property issues - we can have none of that and it scares me sometimes, what will happen when we grow old."

(Milica, 24 years old)

"I am from Rakovica, our community is very poor. So that is how we socialize, too. There are a few of us - girlfriends who get together, exchange clothes which we borrow from my sister, doing impressions of singers and having fun. I do sex work - that is the only honest job I can do. No one will hire me, but you have to make a living somehow. I have a boyfriend, too, we keep on fighting and reconciling like normal couples do - it is a normal relationship, so to speak.

I quickly got to know older transies and they showed me the ways of life, how to have a family and all. And what can I say - it's hard, you get beaten up, the police hunt us down a lot, but I can make a living, I can even indulge myself sometimes. It's not much but I get by somehow. I don't think about the future much. Whatever the turn of events may be."

(Viki, 23 years old)

Keyword: Solidarity

The question of solidarity returned to the forefront following the major floods which have affected the region in May and August of 2014. Many were astounded by the citizens' response in providing help. Such behavior was striking as it diverges from the customary situation which, as consequence of the crisis visible through the increase of racism and nationalism, included cases of torching beds the immigrants were supposed to sleep in¹ instead of helping them, entire communities protesting as they do not want Roma children in the same school with theirs² or homeless persons being thrown out of the local public transport³. But apart from major disasters, such as floods, there are groups of people on the margins who are trying to help their fellow citizens on an everyday basis. Through various civic initiatives, young people in Serbia and Croatia help the society's most vulnerable groups.

From “Solidarity Meal” to “Bike Kitchen” or How Can One Help the Neediest in One’s Surroundings

By Bojan Cvejić

When Serbia was hit by the heavy floods which submerged towns such as Obrenovac in May, thousands of youth responded to calls for help and assisted in raising sand ramparts across Serbia. There was a shortage of busses to take them there but the persistent ones managed to organize the transport themselves. There were insufficient shovels and sacks, but the determined youths did not leave for their homes, instead finding a way to help at the scene. During this period, the citizens' solidarity also came through while collecting food, clothes and baby accessories for evacuees from the flooded areas. The Red Cross could hardly assign all volunteers at the evacuation centers.

This image of solidarity among citizens, especially the youth, was a pleasant surprise for the Serbian public. However, there is

an increasing number of actions and initiatives by the youth helping the needy, poor, hungry and sick, all over Serbia. Devoid of any interest or benefit, they are joining together, organizing, helping — however, this is not a frequent topic of public discussion.

Nina Miloš and her two friends have launched the “Solidarity Meal” action in Serbia and it began spreading in Belgrade, Niš, Subotica, but also in Macedonia, at an unexpected pace. They urge bakers to join the action and allow all good-willed people to buy pastry for those who cannot afford it. So, all shop owners can join the action by visibly displaying a “Solidarity Meal” poster at their establishment's entrance.

“The idea was to motivate people towards helping each other more. The action spread quickly and the list of bakers who joined can be found on our Facebook

page. We call upon bakers to join in and enable good-willed people to purchase pastry for those who cannot afford it. We have also joined forces with the people from the Belgrade Giveaway action and we are trying to do a good thing“, Nina Miloš points out.

Belgrade Giveaway gathers an increasing number of youths who wish to help. “We wanted to do something nice and inspire others, as well, to do good deeds. It started when we noticed a person sitting on the sidewalk on a cold night. We brought him something to eat and drink. We took it from there. Our action is spreading and now it also includes collecting old clothes. It feels good to do something good“, they stated.

They also collect items for the neediest and then visit various shelters and streets, distributing the aid unconditionally. This humanitarian work is joined by an increasing number of participants. “Our youth is featured by ample solidarity and desire to accomplish something great. The only problems are pessimism and the issue of motivation. We dared to take that step and by doing so we are trying to send a positive message. The reaction was incredible. We were joined by hundreds of people and solidarity was a huge topic during the entire winter season“, Matija Rodić of Belgrade Giveaway, explains. “Solidarity is a major remedy for pessimism which has been the ruling disposition in Serbia for years“, Rodić says, emphasizing that “it did not disappear – it just isn’t talked about“.

Street Face

Another concept of solidarity that has been well-known all over the world for a long time has been present in Serbia, too, for the past four years. It implies that all street newspapers are being sold by the needy and marginalized; 50 % of the profit from each sold copy goes directly to them, while the rest is spent on printing new ones and additional empowerment programs meant for this population group. In addition to this, all such papers deal with important societal issues that are not covered by other media. That is how the story of Street Face began in Serbia.

“A few years ago, a friend of ours was in Slovakia on business and he accidentally discovered a street newspaper. He talked to the homeless persons who sold them, found out that in over 40 countries of the

world there were over 120 similar newspapers which socially and economically empower the neediest. Given the fact that there had been nothing similar in Serbia, he wanted to use this model in his city and help those who need it most“, Nikoleta Kosovac explains.

One by one, people were joining the initiative – a person who has been working with young homeless people, another who wanted to begin doing something they believe in, or the third who wanted to give new meaning to their profession as journalist... “I know of many positive and inspiring examples, particularly from small communities. Either we have indeed relearned something about the basic principles of functioning, or perhaps I move around a small social circle, but it seems to me that solidarity is once again gaining its true meaning, especially with young people. When we embarked on the adventure that is Street Face, the majority of people were saying that we stand no chance of succeeding but here we are, four years later, and it turns out we were right and everything made sense“, Kosovac underlined.

Cyclists for Cyclists, But for Others, Too

While some people help the neediest population, there are others who advocate and rally for a change of culture and improvement of city life, such as the citizens’ association “Streets for Cyclists“. “We are proud of being an example of grassroots activism in Belgrade. Our activities take place locally, based on the community’s level of interest and engagement“, association representative Zoran Bukvić points out.

The idea came from Austrian student and volunteer Maximilian Sagmüller who in March 2011 launched a monthly bicycle ride entitled Critical Mass with the aim of promoting bicycles as means of transportation in Belgrade. In late September, more than 400 cyclists rode through the city center and, for the first time since the inception of Critical Mass, crossed the Pančevo Bridge. Youths are becoming involved as volunteers which, according to Bukvić’s estimate, is important for the community, too, viewed from several aspects such as the promotion of healthy and sustainable means of transportation, decrease of youth vandalism, socializing and getting to know each other.

As of late, Belgrade also got its bike kitchen. The Belgrade Bike Kitchen is situated in 22 Dragoslava Popovića St, gathering bicycle enthusiasts who volunteer and provide help for Belgrade cyclists in repairing their two-wheelers.

Enthusiasm – The Basic Tool

In recent years, youth initiatives are increasingly necessary in societies such as the Serbian. However, the main problem is the fact that their engagement does not meet the adequate response, social worker Minja Mandrapa argues. “Initiatives by the youth, and not only by the youth, are extremely significant in poor societies unable to resolve the numerous problems they are facing. They can largely contribute to resolving a multitude of different problems which, all together, can improve the state of society they live in”, our interlocutor stated, speaking for “Perspectives”.

She goes on to say that the youth, who are naturally enthusiastic and always prepared to face the greatest of problems, can be a decisive resource of every society. The biggest problem they encounter is the inadequate and often non-existent response to their attempts and activism. On the other hand, she goes on to say that there is a highly common case of misusing the

young people’s trust through the use of their effort for scoring personal political points in the short-term by certain governing structures’ members.

“Those kinds of moves often ruin the enthusiasm and ideals of the youth, facing them with the harsh reality, rendering them unable for any form of further engagement. This is not a matter of the society not changing due to a lack of youth initiatives, but of the fact that the former – or, rather, its ruling pseudo-elites – does not want to do so”, Mandrapa states.

The youth bear the least responsibility for the negative aspects of the time they live in. Mandrapa believes that this is the very reason youth initiatives are significant, as it is a matter of the future – a time that is coming, especially for them – so it would make sense for them to have the most influence in its shaping. ■■■

¹ <http://kontrapress.com/clanak.php?rub=Dru%C5%A1tvo&url=Zapaljena-baraka-gde-su-trebali-biti-azlinati>

² Locals in Međimurje Prevented Roma Pupils’ Enrollment in School Despite Verdict by the European Court of Human Rights.

<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/hrvatska-romskoj-djeci-zabranjena-skola>

³ <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Beograd/510491/POGLEDAJTE-Brojac-putnika-sutirao-starca-Direkcija-Otkaz-i-krivica-prijava>

Solidarity-Based Economy is Returning to Croatia

by Marina Kelava

It is a Thursday afternoon and Green Action’s spacious courtyard is once again full of bicycles. One of the bicycles belongs to A., who was recently granted asylum in Croatia. He has been coming to *Biciklopopravljiona*¹, a volunteering service for bicycle repairs in Zagreb, for over a year. Previously he was living in Hotel Porin, an asylum center in the far-away suburbs of Zagreb and, like all asylum-seekers, received only 15 euros per month for living expenses. As an asylum-seeker he could not afford to pay for public transportation. That is why his bicycle has been an important tool for him to get to know Zagreb’s society and only one example of why *Biciklopopravljiona*, a service that recently celebrated its fifth anniversary, became such a lively place of encounter. These kinds of workshops are a well-known concept all

over the world, usually called Bike Kitchen, but even Eugen Vuković, coordinator of the Information Centre within the Green Action NGO, who initiated Bike Kitchen in Zagreb, did not initially believe that this project would be as successful: today it accounts for almost 4,000 repairs in its book of repairs.

“Everybody can come here with their bicycles, use our tools or the volunteers’ help with repairs, but the main idea is for the users to participate in the process and learn the skill of bicycle maintenance. That way, a new generation of volunteers is created, as people often enjoy using newly acquired skills”, Vuković explains.

It seems as though bicycles have succeeded where other civil society initiatives often fail – pulling people out of their usual social borders. Here you will see students

and pensioners, children from the neighborhood and working people, asylum-seekers and foreigners who briefly visit Zagreb, hipsters and punkers, people who collect returnable bottles for a living and use bicycles as survival vehicles, as well as university professors.

Biciklopopravljajona is open on Thursdays from 5 to 8 pm, but this day of the week is very busy in Green Action's courtyard not only because of cyclists. On the same day vegetables and fruits are delivered here for one of Zagreb's GSRs – Groups for Solidarity Exchange (in English known as CSAs – Community Supported Agriculture) – a concept which has spread across Croatia with the idea to directly connect producers, mostly small local organic farmers, with the customers. Today this movement which has been initiated by ZMAG – Green Network of Activist Groups, an association already known regionally for its Recycled Estate, an eco village located in Vukomerić – gathers around 15 groups in Croatia, each with 50 to 100 members.

However, when people begin thinking about where the food they eat comes from, what kind of food it is and how the farmer producing it is being treated by the system, they want more. It was GSR from Pula that initiated a weekly organic farmers' market which motivated GSR groups in Osijek and recently in Rijeka to launch similar markets in their respective cities.

In addition to this, GSR groups across the country have united to raise funds and buy a herd of sheep for a family in Gunja, a village hit hard by the recent floods in Croatia. *Biciklopopravljajona* also visited Gunja and repaired bicycles, for many people there the only means of transportation, as part of a volunteering camp organized by the Cooperative for Ethical Finance, instigator of the first ethical bank in Croatia, whose mission will also include financing solidarity-based economic projects.

ZMAG has published a collection of texts² presenting existing examples of economy they described as “good” in Croatia, namely economy which supports quality of life in the entire community, uses resources in a just way, accepts responsibility, embraces solidarity and respects the sustainability of the ecosystem. *Biciklopopravljajona* and GSRs found their place here, as well as some great examples of social entrepreneurship. Tired of the vulture economy which is killing both the society and the planet's capacity to sustain people on it, Croatia seems to be willing to re-embrace the importance of solidarity³. ■■■

¹ <http://biciklopopravljajona.zelena-akcija.hr/>

² http://www.zmag.hr/admin/public/javascript/fckeditor/editor/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Dobra_ekonomija_2014.pdf

³ <http://h-alter.org/vijesti/ekologija/za-odgovornu-ekonomiju-umjesto-megalomanije>

Citizens of the Earth vs. Land Conquerors – Citizens’ Environmental Movement as a Reaction to the Crisis of Environmental Law and Policy

In the last few decades, Western Balkan countries have been facing serious environmental degradation due to conflicts, political instability, and unsustainable development that has negatively influenced both the state of the environment, as well as the enjoyment and protection of human rights. Throughout history, environmental movements – and particularly youth activists¹ – have been the driving force for addressing environmental issues.

Environmental Movements and Crisis of Environmental Law and Policy in Serbia

by Mirko Popović and Ivana Savić

Youth movements, particularly students’ organisations, played a significant role in democratic transformation of Serbia during the 1990s and in the beginning of the 2000s. Otpor (Resistance)² was a strong youth action movement that considerably contributed to the fall of the Slobodan Milošević regime. One would think that after the democratic changes the youth movement would continue to be strong and address some of the most urgent issues in society. However, the youth movement has been in a state of decay in the post-2000 period. This is particularly evident within the environmental movement where young people, despite their success in environmental campaigning, have been underrepresented and unable to have their say.

Environmental movements, including the youth environmental branch, do not have a long history in Serbia. This is the result of the narrow national frame of reference in which the struggle to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development took place. One of the movements’ key characteristics is the fact that they are youth-initiated³, community-based, goal-oriented, and advocate participatory democracy, as well as environ-

mental and social justice. Unfortunately, they have not been part of international (youth) environmental movements.

The youth environmental movement in Serbia could be described as a movement in its infancy. It is characterised by insufficient capacity to mobilise a large number of citizens (except those who are active only on social networks), sporadic activities, lack of outspokenness and a very low level of networking and engagement with regional and international environmental movements.⁴ This is predominantly due to the country’s unsustainable development which is reflected through the political, economic and social situation, as well as the state’s lack of environmental awareness. It often seems that the environment is the least of our worries until there is a natural or environmental disaster we need to address.⁵ Nonetheless, the youth environmental movement has the potential to contribute to the advancement of the state of the environment and with “a little bit of luck” it could also boost governance-related and societal changes at large.

In spite of the current state of the environmental movement, there have been few

Mirko Popović, civil society activist, Coordinator of the Centre for European Integration of the Belgrade Open School, a civil society organisation from Serbia. Lives and works in Belgrade.

Ivana Savić is the Executive Director of the Centre for Human Rights and Development Studies (CHRDS). She holds an LLM degree in the rights of the child and is doing her PhD studies in human rights and the environment. Ivana is an internationally recognized expert in the fields of human rights, youth, sustainable development, environmental law and civic engagement. She has been involved in different initiatives across the world. Ivana is also a member of the UNDP Civil Society Advisory Committee and CIVICUS Youth Advisory Group.

youth environmental movements established in intergenerational solidarity and partnership that brought about changes and demonstrated the strength of youth civic activism. This article will focus on two youth environmental movements in Serbia – one that has achieved change, and the other which is in its beginning stage with the potential to bring transformational change. The first one is an environmental movement in the strict sense – dedicated to the protection of the Lim River basin – whereas the second one is a movement against the *Belgrade on Water* project with a strong environmental perspective highlighting the importance of the youth environmental movement's collaboration and cooperation with other social movements.

Investments–economic–development–new jobs: this has been the mantra of development and prosperity for years. Brodarevo, a forgotten settlement on the Serbian-Montenegrin border, became the playground for an open display of maladministration when the investor *Renewable Energy Ventures* (REV) began the realisation of two hydropower plant projects in 2008. The project encountered undivided support by the Serbian decision-makers, but faced strong resistance from the citizens. A small local CSO “Friends of Brodarevo”, well-known for its activities on youth policy and community development, together with a group of citizens of different national and religious backgrounds, launched a campaign resulting with the revocation of the investor's energy permit and termination of the project in 2013. The tipping point occurred in 2012 when several environmental activists were brutally beaten up during public consultations. This event provoked a nationwide reaction and the outcome was the mobilisation of environmental CSOs. “Friends of Brodarevo” initiated a regional cooperation and established a coordination team for the protection of the Lim River basin. The team consisted of representatives of Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The *citizens of the earth vs. land conquerors* battle was fought on two fronts. While being proactive at the grassroots level with a strong activist approach, the movement simultaneously launched legal proceedings in order to protect the Lim River. Several cases that were brought before the Administrative Court gave rise to the cancellation of REV's energy permit. Environmental and youth activists have been charged with incitement to ethnic and racial hatred and some of the

cases are still pending. Civic activism supported by proficient legal knowledge has proven to be a winning combination. Several years of a downright fight for civil rights and environmental protection have been followed by police repression and violations of human rights.

In the spring of 2014, the Government of Serbia and the City of Belgrade have introduced the “Belgrade on Water” project, presenting it as a matter of national interest. However, it has been surrounded by controversy in terms of due process and in reference to urban planning and environmental degradation. The project has sparked harsh reactions – both from professionals and the academia, and citizens' groups, predominately youth, who rallied against the project as it is currently being presented. Although the movement is at its early stage, it has demonstrated the potential to become relevant in the future city development, and even beyond that. So far it has also succeeded in joining together different movements, such as the ones focusing on socially equitable urban planning issues, sustainable and healthy environment and civic space as a common good, which is of great importance as none of those issues could previously be dealt with in an isolated manner. Furthermore, the movement is relevant since it has shown that the density of urban life has a strong environmental impact, as it influences the natural habitats, biodiversity, contributes to environmental degradation which further exposes citizens to health and security risks, and is closely related to good urban planning, developmental and environmental governance, or a lack thereof. It is now up to the movement to withstand the test of time and remain persistent in its requests and advocacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The regional youth environmental movement is weak and requires serious strengthening through advancement of the legal and policy framework of the (youth) civic space and environmental awareness-raising. It is also of the utmost importance to facilitate collaboration and cooperation between different movements as well as to ensure a strong environmental perspective. Furthermore, the environmental movement should invest more in building partnerships with different stakeholders, particularly with the me-

dia and human rights organizations. Last but not least, the youth environmental movement ought to be strongly linked to the state of the environment since the question of a healthy environment is ultimately a question of our survival. ■■■

- ¹ Both youth organisations and informal youth groups.
- ² An informal youth political movement established at the Belgrade University.
- ³ Although not always led by youth activists.
- ⁴ For example, Serbian youth organisations working on the climate change issue have not been strongly involved with YOUNGO, or the International Youth Climate Movement.
- ⁵ Such as the floods in the region in May 2014.

Spatial Struggles in Croatia

by Marina Kelava

“Although spatial struggles in the region have until recently been mainly conducted by experienced activists and intellectuals who were questioning the dominant capitalist perception of space with new concepts of public good and commons, lately we see more young people as leaders of those movements“, Vice President of *Croatian Youth Network* and activists' coordinator in *Green Action* Sven Janovski claims.

As examples of increased youth participation in spatial struggles he cites the *Slobodni Filozofski*¹ initiative in Zagreb which saw students taking over the faculty building while campaigning for education for all, and cycling initiatives in Zagreb and Belgrade, *Sindikata biciklista*² and *Ulice za bicikliste*³, respectively, that promote public transportation equality and raise the issue of transportation as a public good. “These initiatives were mostly or completely led by young people, often without much previous experience and with only one basic goal – to defend what they consider common good“, Janovski concludes.

Youth involvement in spatial struggles becomes a necessity if the common good narrative is to prevail as a greater number of battlegrounds are being opened in view of Croatia's deeper spiraling into crisis and continued privatization pressures.

With a population of only 4.4 million, Croatian spatial plans stipulate building areas large enough to house 16 million additional people. These largely exaggerated plans threaten to create ghost towns along the Croatian coast, following the example of Spain's over-constructed environment. However, the movement for spatial justice in Croatia was not sparked by the coastal area endangerment, but by the issue of public spaces in the capital. What is space, what is public space, who owns the rights to use which space? These kinds of questions have entered the public sphere with the *Pravo na grad / Right to the City* move-

ment in Zagreb which has for years rallied against the construction of a private underground garage on a pedestrian street in the historic centre of the Croatian capital. Despite numerous protests, weeks of citizens' camping in the pedestrian area, massive arrests, law suits and all other means of peaceful opposition, this garage has been built and the people were robbed of a piece of the pedestrian zone. Still, the initiative has inspired many other spatial movements across Croatia but also region-wide, such as the movement *Park je naš / Park is ours* in Banjaluka, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Following *Pravo na grad*, the initiative *Srd je naš / Srdj is Ours* in Dubrovnik has incited a local referendum last year, the first referendum called by citizens in Croatia, on the issue of the urban development plan which granted permission for the construction of two golf courses and hundreds of apartments and villas on the Srd hill above UNESCO's World Heritage site, the Old Town of Dubrovnik. Although more than 80 percent of citizens voted against this project, due to the very undemocratic Croatian Law on Referendum their decision is not obligatory for the authorities since fewer than the mandatory 50 percent-plus-one voters turned out.

This referendum inspired a handful of other local ones, all pertaining to the issue of spatial planning. A campaign in Fužine, in the Gorski Kotar area, has called a referendum on the construction of a wind power plant in the midst of a protected forest. The situation from Dubrovnik repeated: the turnout was under 50 percent but the referendum can still be considered a success since in its aftermath the environmental impact study has not been accepted by the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection. Such turn of events hardly ever happens in Croatia and in this case it was interpreted as a consequence of public pressure.

The mistrust concerning the Croatian Ministry's decisions in environmental impact assessments has been confirmed by the June ruling of the High Administrative Court which annulled the environmental permit for the golf project Brkač in the protected landscape of Motovun, Istria. The court confirmed what NGOs *Zelena Istra / Green Istria* and *Zelena akcija / Green Action* have claimed for years: the environmental assessment procedure had been inadequate. During the same week, this court annulled one of the spatial plans for the city of Split's historic core, accepting claims by *Društvo prijatelja kulturne baštine / Society of Friends of Heritage Split* and other civil society organizations that this plan was not in accordance with the law. These rulings confirm what was claimed by many civil society organizations – but also expert organizations consisting of architects or art historians – namely that spatial planning in Croatia is often flawed, corrupt and excludes citizens. However, the problem with the administrative court ruling is the fact that, like in the case of Split, it was given seven

years after the plan had been implemented and much damage to cultural, natural heritage or the city budget had already been done.

A step forward in spatial struggles in Croatia is certainly contained in the fact that citizens have realized that they have to react during the phase of spatial planning procedures rather than wait until heavy machinery comes down the road. This approach led to successes – such as the one in Pazin – which also encourage new initiatives to fight the dominating policy stipulating that beaches can be subject to concessions for leasing chairs and umbrellas, pavements can be turned into commercial parking lots, rivers can be a matter of concession contracts for hydropower plants, forests can become golf courses or wind power plants, before people even realize why they need public space, forests or rivers, in the first place. ■■■

¹ Free Faculty of Philosophy

² Cyclists' Union

³ Streets to the Cyclists

⁴ <http://h-alter.org/vijesti/ekologija/potok-a-ne-bob-staza>

Battle for Sutjeska River in Bosnia and Herzegovina

By Nataša Crnković

Even after ten years of being an environmental activist in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is still a lot of complexity in summing up and defining this movement's status in the country.

As I am working at the Center for Environment, an environmental civil society organization dedicated to the protection and improvement of the environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it goes without saying that I believe in change and the necessity to react to omnipresent problems. That is the path I have chosen, both personally and professionally.

Many questions remain open. Is Bosnia and Herzegovina ready for a shift in opinion regarding the usage of natural resources? Do civil society organizations in our country have a bad image for a reason? Can we, as an environmental movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, justify our existence when new problems are arising almost on a daily basis and with no end in sight? Half of the population is unemployed and living on the verge of subsis-

tence level, so could they be our allies? Should we rely only on the youth, the great hope of many similar countries around the globe? A young generation who are leaving the country in great numbers, with no desire of returning?

This country's predispositions could easily direct the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina towards becoming hardened activists who fight injustice and inequality, political farce, degradation of the educational system and destruction of nature. However, reality is far from that.

My impression is that youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina are generally not that (pro) active, barring worthy exceptions. The existing civil society organizations are sometimes misguided or, more often, misunderstood, making it difficult to define the general opinion about them. More than 10,000 organizations are registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina but it is estimated that only between 500 and 1,500 of them are active and even less are working on a professional level¹. As civil society organi-

Nataša Crnković has been an environmentalist and advocacy campaigner at the Center for Environment for more than ten years. She is working on nature conservation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, questioning projects that are planned in protected and potentially protected areas. Nataša is currently leading the Battle of Sutjeska campaign, aimed against the construction of small hydropower plants in the Sutjeska National Park.

zations are not the only way to express opposition to the problems our country is facing, an encouraging number of individuals is showing that gathering in small citizens' initiatives can also bring results. One of the very positive examples is a struggle to retain a children's playground in the center of Banja Luka where a parking lot was planned. After several months of protesting by citizens and youths, and advocating with municipal authorities, the playground remained intact.²

During the previous years, a few similar initiatives and campaigns emerged across Bosnia and Herzegovina, showing that there are many individuals who are aware of the situation in the country and willing to change it. Another example from Banja Luka is a three-month occupation of a green area under the slogan "Park is ours", when protestants succeeded to rally up to two thousand people on their side. The park is being destroyed after all but the action did manage to create a significant change in the public opinion when it comes to public spaces, but also non-violent actions. Another example is the peaceful defense of Željeznica River, near Fojnica, where locals blocked the road preventing the passing of trucks which were used for construction of a hydropower plant. They stayed there in an improvised cottage long enough for investors to pull back. The case is currently in court procedure but it has already displayed amazing strength by the local people who rallied to defend the river they depend on. *Battle for Sutjeska* is an example of a campaign gathering activists from the entire county, biologists, speleologists, lawyers, mountaineers, economists and "plain" nature lovers – unified in defending the wilderness from destruction. Four small hydropower plants are scheduled to be built in the Sutjeska National Park, an area whose natural value exceeds Bosnia and Herzegovina. For more than two years I have been running this campaign, symbolically entitled *Battle for Sutjeska*, named after a historic battle that took place in the canyon of the Sutjeska River during World War II, which became a heroic symbol of sacrifice, courage and the partisans' moral strength. So far we succeeded to withdraw the controversial Spatial Plan for the Sutjeska National Park from voting procedure by the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska. This was a great victory but many more struggles are ahead of us.

It is encouraging that many young people are aware of the value of this area and the absurdity of planning the construction of hydropower plants in a pristine environment; they have been involved in the campaign from the very outset. Biology students from Sarajevo have organized their annual summer research camp this year at the Sutjeska National Park, focusing their research on the areas that would be jeopardized by the construction of hydropower plants. The research gave exceptional results – several new animal and plant species were discovered and classified for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Film and television direction students were filming for the campaign; young independent media journalists are following our work; economics and law students are offering their analysis... In the winter of 2014 we will organize a petition in some 20 locations in the Republic of Srpska, when mostly young people will collect signatures against the hydropower plants in the Sutjeska National Park, on a voluntary basis. Due to the administrative setup of the country, a petition cannot be organized at the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina level. Still, our partner organizations from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina are fully supportive of our campaign and are involved in its different aspects apart from the petition, thus creating a positive image of the environmental movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This campaign could and hopefully will serve as an example for the defense of other rivers. We are now trying to direct our human resources to other causes and burning issues. Local initiatives are still in undeniable need of support and advising. It is a matter of time when the needs of local communities are recognized and accepted by the decision-makers. That is what matters the most in the long run – sustainment and peaceful future for people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, life in co-existence with nature, whose resources we only benefit from if sustainably managed. Environment and rivers in particular are some of the key natural treasures of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it is up to us, as a country, to urgently decide whether we will sustain them or slowly destroy them for good. ■■■

¹ <http://europa.ba/Default.aspx?id=33&lang=BS>

² <http://www.6yka.com/novost/13838/gradevina-misija-kompletirana>

The Right to Culture

by Žarka Radoja and Peđa Popović

“The cinema is open again! The cinema is open again!” a young man shouted in his phone, running towards what once was the “Zvezda” cinema in downtown Belgrade. Only one hour earlier, on this November 21st, a group of activists gathered in the “Occupy the Movie Theater Movement”³ had occupied “Zvezda” and opened it for the public after seven years. “We want to take part in the research, creation of and contribution to a different Belgrade. We want to have reasons to keep on living in Belgrade. We are here and the cinema is ours”, they stated in a manifesto distributed to visitors that night and read in the dark of the movie theater. It was pasted, along with the manifesto of the New Zvezda Cinema, in front of the entrance where once movie projections had been announced. Now a struggle for cultural spaces is being announced at this very location.

“Zvezda”, along with the other 13 cinemas of the state-owned enterprise “Beograd Film”, was privatized, despite protests by the workers. Although the owner was obligated to continue with their basic purpose for a while, the cinemas were soon shut down and a few years later he was arrested and convicted for mismanagement⁴.

The state that “Zvezda” was found in was somewhat expected, but still defeating. The smell of mold, dust and scattered documents came as no surprise for the activists. However, the state of the building – being a cultural monument under the protection of the Belgrade Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments – shat-

tered the illusion that institutions were taking care of it following the privatization. In fact, the torn water pipes, demolished pieces of ceiling and raised parquet floors testified to the contrary.

This did not prevent the audience from taking the dust-covered cinema seats, everyone with their own plastic bag so as not to get smudged, and seeing the premiere of the symbolically entitled film – “The Disobedient” by Mina Đukić. Less than 48 hours later, the premises were cleaned for the most part, in an effort by hardworking volunteers; groups standing watch overnight were organized in the cinema, and three films a day were being shown.

“We must not accept the current situation – the non-existence of the museum and cinema, a lack of any kind of initiative to render the cinematic program more creative, deeper and wider. We are condemned to market conditions and as creators and authors, we must pander to such criteria. One should not comply with this. We need an alternative institution in order to be able to uphold the level of our creation”, one of the members of the “Occupy the Movie Theater Movement”⁵ told.

The action had strong public resonance. It was covered by the majority of the media and two of the most significant Belgrade festivals – the Auteur Film Festival and the Free Zone Film Festival – backed the occupation of “Zvezda” cinema as did many actors, directors and other filmmakers⁶. Support also came from former workers of “Beograd Film” who had spent years struggling against this company’s privatization.

Žarka Radoja is a journalist and web editor of Radio Free Europe in Belgrade. She is the owner and editor-in-chief of kontrapress.com, a regional online media outlet.

Peđa Popović is a journalist and editor from Belgrade.

From Petnica to the Street Gallery

This way, Belgrade was included in the list of cities⁷ of the world in which citizens occupied cinemas. Still, it is not the first space in Serbia a group of young people is trying to transform into an alternative cultural space. For several years, there have been the examples of INEX Film⁸ and Street Gallery in Belgrade, the Novi Sad Social Centre, Petnica of Culture in Valjevo etc. The group which is involved in the majority of these actions is gathered as the Ministry of Space collective.

“We wanted to provoke the system so that it begins to work and find solutions, but also to test the extent to which citizens are able to function on their own when the system is not working”, the Ministry’s Dobrica Veselinović clarifies the initial idea of occupying the INEX Film building. INEX Film has shown that citizens can function when the system is not working. However, this move did not provoke the authorities to alter their cultural policy, nor to give support to young artists. As testified by the young members of the Šabac-based Kombinart, an organization attempting to implement art into the public space, they had to do everything on their own. “The truth of the matter is that we have received support but only after coming up with the entire concept. Unfortunately, it is not a matter of strategic cooperation but of relinquishing space during the action or obtaining free permits”.

A similar situation was experienced by activists who gave Belgrade its first street gallery, a space which was once a run-down, dark, foul-smelling alley between two blocks at the very center of the city. Today it is a youth gathering spot, a space where street art and other forms of visual art intertwine.

“We have shown that it was possible to use abandoned state property which is owned by all of us, turning it into a place where exhibitions are organized every three weeks on average”, Street Gallery member Radomir Lazović said.

Importance of Spatial Intervention

The existence of alternative cultural spaces is important for a community’s plurality, Director of the New Media Center kuda.org Zoran Pantelić stated.

“Their importance can be interpreted on several levels and we would like to highlight the two basic ones: such organizations ought to practice – mainly internally, within their own structure and division of work – different forms of organizing as opposed to those in institutions, and through those forms of questioning one’s own practices, to project possible alternative models onto the broader community. The second level is the focus of interest and struggle for public spaces, i.e. the focus on the need to analyze the state of public spaces and their purpose in the context of the current privatization process – for the youth, for art and culture, etc, but also as a vehicle of awakening self-criticism towards culture as an elite category in relation to the needs of the society as a whole”, Pantelić stated.

He went on to add that every form of different organization and solution can be interpreted as resistance, but believes that resistance in and of itself is not enough – rather, it is important in which direction it shall develop.

“There is a lack of true insight in the proportions of existence and performance of alternative cultural spaces, but this state is unwilling to change and each step carries with itself a far greater extent of repressive measures, so therefore every form of intervention in such an atmosphere is significant.”

Kuda.org has spent several years dealing with cultural spaces, one of the focus areas being military property⁹ which in Serbia and other countries created after the breakup of SFRY was mostly closed down and left to decay. Metelkova¹⁰ in Ljubljana, “Karl Rojc” in Pula and “Stjepan Radić” in Zadar¹¹ – these are the examples of successful repurposing of military facilities as cultural spaces. However, their overall number remains low due to a rigid system. That is one of the reasons why conquering space is considered a legitimate political act among young artists.

Ideas by kuda.org were realized by the Social Centre from Novi Sad – in late 2011 they squatted the vacant “Dr. Arčibald Rajs” barracks in downtown Novi Sad. They spent weeks cleaning it, organizing various workshops and programs, but the state organs denied them access, after all. Since then they have occupied abandoned spaces on four occasions. The last attempt took place in the Novi Sad Chinatown. However, as had been the case before, it ended in closing down and sealing of the premises.

The Disobedient

Why is it important for young people to organize and try to create spaces for cultural activities for themselves?

“We can only sense that it is an important, almost necessary formative process for them – to realize the fact that one can organize and act outside of the official state and institutional norms. This form of deviation simultaneously helps question the forms of freedom of thought, as well as other solutions that can be initiated in the context of the social and economic dominant model”, Zoran Pantelić stated.

This matter was also addressed in the proclamation by the Auteur Film Festival’s Council¹² in support of the activists’ occupation of “Zvezda”. The filmmakers who signed the announcement stated, *inter alia*, the importance of this act in the context of the struggle for the right to the city, “which, at the same time, represents the struggle for life in that very city”.

And so we return to the beginning of the story – occupation of the “Zvezda” cinema. In a situation where young people decide to occupy abandoned structures, mostly former state enterprises ruined by bad privatization, the public raises the question whether such act is necessary in the present moment, particularly when taking into account the inhibition of culture in Serbia¹³.

“This represents proof that young people refuse to accept the disgusting reality they live in. I believe that this is not only a desperate gesture of a generation deprived of

a chance to have a normal life, but also an act of culture, reminding people that we must maintain certain values or otherwise we are doomed”, award-winning director Goran Marković said minutes after “Zvezda” cinema was occupied. Despite being well into his sixties, he took his plastic bag, covered the old upholstered seat with it and went on to watch “The Disobedient”. ■■■

¹ Frequently quoted sentence from the cult movie “The Marathon Family”.

² “Star”, translator’s note.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/okupacijabioskopa?fref=photo>

⁴ Đivanović Struck a Deal with the Prosecution: Another 16 months in Prison and a €3.1 Million Fine <http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Hronika/363784/Djivanovic-se-dogovorio-s-Tuzilastvom-Jos-16-meseci-zatvora-globa-31-miliona-evra/komentari/6848871/komentar-odgovor>

⁵ During the first couple of days, members of the Movement insisted on anonymity.

⁶ Auteur Film Festival on the occupation of “Zvezda”: Defense of the Right to the City Equals Defense of Life in That Very City <http://kontrapress.com/clanak.php?rub=ARTivizam&url=FAF-o-okupaciji-Zvezde-Odbrana-prava-na-grad-odbrana-je-zivota-u-tom-gradu>

⁷ <https://americaoccupato.org/>

⁸ The former cinematography enterprise which went under in the transition period.

⁹ Film “Open Barracks” <http://www.kuda.org/otvorene-kasarne-tv-emisija-kudaorg-0>

¹⁰ Occupy the Barracks: Squatters in Abandoned Military Facilities in the Balkans <http://www.mic.org.rs/2012/11/12/okupirajte-kasarne-skvoteri-u-napustenim-vojnim-objektima-na-balkanu/>

¹¹ Who Owns the Former Military Facilities (and Lets them Go to Waste)? <http://www.kontrapress.com/clanak.php?rub=GRADovanje&url=Kome-pri-o-padaju-bivsi-vojni-objekti>

¹² See footnote 5

¹³ October Salon Board Resigns <http://www.politika.rs/rubrike/kultura-i-zabava/Odbor-Oktobarskog-salona-podneo-ostavku.lt.html>

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Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
8 Mišarska St, 11000 Belgrade
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