

Hybrid Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Participatory Arts and Youth Activism as Vehicles of Social Change

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Abstract

This article provides an analytical case study of a participatory youth-led filmmaking project in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Using the conceptual framework of hybridity, it critically considers whether and to what extent youth centred, participatory arts projects can facilitate the emergence of a positive hybrid peace. It reflects on three themes—solidarity; creativity as politics; and participation as norm—that speak to the opportunities and challenges encountered during the project. The analysis demonstrates that while participatory arts have the potential to induce a more emancipatory vision of peace, that, and mirroring the warnings from development studies, their effects are not a given and challenges and blockages persist.

Keywords

participatory arts, hybridity, youth, peacebuilding, Bosnia and Herzegovina, film, activism, participatory action research

Introduction

This article explores the potential of participatory arts and youth-led peacebuilding to create a space of positive hybrid peace. Hybridity is used as a conceptual tool that facilitates a move beyond centre-to-periphery modes of analysis and examines the multiple sources of agency at play in (hybrid) peacebuilding. This, we argue, provides greater insight into the ways in which peacebuilding

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actors interact to produce what might be termed a positive hybrid peace (MacGinty & Richmond, 2016).

In exploring these themes, the article focuses on a hybrid youth-led participatory arts project in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), IZAZOV (the *Challenge*).¹ The project, drawing on a participatory action research approach (PAR), resulted from a collaboration between, the authors (UK and BiH researchers), Opera Circus and Humanity in Action (UK and BiH NGOs respectively) and BiH and European youth activists. The project drew on the arts, and specifically filmmaking, as the main focus of activity and tool of engagement to support the mobilization and networking of youth activists. As a result of a series of workshops and mentoring exchanges, IZAZOV participants created short films about their lives, capturing stories they identified as relevant and important. In analysing these outputs and the process of developing and delivering a youth-led participatory arts project, we explore the emancipatory potential for this mode of peacebuilding.

The article proceeds in four parts. First, we explore the literature on hybrid, youth-led and arts-based peacebuilding, arguing that research has neglected synergies between these approaches to peacebuilding. Second, we introduce BiH as the site of the project. Third, we introduce IZAZOV and our methodology. Fourth, we analyse IZAZOV to examine its potential to offer transformative experiences that support youth-led hybrid peacebuilding and activism, identifying three themes—solidarity; creativity as politics; and youth participation as norm.

Hybridity in Peacebuilding and Development

Hybridity has become a central concept in peacebuilding (MacGinty, 2010, 2011; MacGinty & Richmond, 2016; Richmond & Mitchell, 2012). Moving beyond the image of the all-powerful international and powerless local, hybridity describes post-conflict societies as sites of contestation; where ideas and norms circulating throughout the international domain are made real, and given effect in local contexts, fundamentally altering the ideas and norms in the process (McLeod, 2015; Tholen & Groß, 2015). Hybridity is a fundamental, and unavoidable, aspect of contemporary peacebuilding (Belloni, 2012; Millar, 2014); as McLeod (2015:63) argues, “local and international power matters” in understanding how peacebuilding projects are conceived of and put into effect.

If hybrid peace is simply the reality of contemporary approaches to peacebuilding, positive hybrid peace presents as a more emancipatory vision of peace, overcoming some of liberal peace’s perceived deficits, particularly as a coercive form of international governance (Belloni, 2012; MacGinty & Richmond, 2016:222; MacGinty & Sanghera, 2012:5). Here, hybridity, while maintaining a role for international actors, institutions and norms, provides local communities with greater space and voice to shape the terms on which peace is imagined, and actors that are normally side-lined, such as youth, are brought into the fold (MacGinty & Richmond, 2016:228–235). This potentially strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of these interventions, and produces a more emancipatory form of peace that transforms societies in more radical and grounded ways. This looks to disrupt hierarchical, coercive and violent forms social orderings by centering a diverse range of (often ignored) perspectives (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; MacGinty & Richmond, 2016: 230).² In this way, positive hybrid peace is part of the research agenda that looks beyond liberal peace to rethink the processes and power-relations that make up peacebuilding.

However, despite this aspiration, positive hybrid peace as a transformative mode of peacebuilding has by and large failed to materialise. As Kappler and Richmond (2011) show, under the guise of hybridity there is often a very limited notion of which actors are seen as legitimate peace agents, and what activities are seen as conducive to peace. In reference to BiH, Kappler and Richmond (2011) demonstrate

how despite claims to hybridity, international donors side-lined important religious, creative and arts-based organizations that sat uncomfortably with the secular, economically driven and socially conservative image of liberal peace (Kappler & Richmond, 2011; Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015). As MacGinty and Richmond (2016) have argued, hybridity *itself* has become co-opted and de-radicalised by liberal peacebuilding (Kappler, 2012).

Several other issues have affected the hybrid peace research agenda itself, including an overemphasis of the international origins of norms and practices, to the detriment of locating local agency (Björkdahl & Gusic, 2015; Tholen & Groß, 2015), and, a failure to listen to the voices of those directly affected by these interventions, such as project participants, focusing instead on local elites or gatekeepers (Sabaratnam, 2013). This results in both an incomplete picture of how local actors shape transition and contributes to the uncritical celebration of “the local” as the champion against the much-maligned liberal peace agenda (Nadarajah & Rampton, 2015).

Consequently, MacGinty and Richmond (2016:232) ask:

- (1) how might the obstacles that prevent external intervention from engaging with local peace formation be lifted;
- (2) how might the contextual blockages that produce a negative hybrid peace be dealt with; and
- (3) how might the peace formation potential that leads to a positive hybrid form emerging be enabled?

This article responds to these questions by turning to a youth-led participatory arts project, exploring the extent to which this might offer up a more positive form of hybrid peace. This brings both subjects (youth) and methods (the arts) that are often side-lined by liberal peacebuilding to the fore of research and practice, and by looking to empower these subjects contribute towards the disruption of power-relations which, in the case of BiH (discussed below), sustain what can be considered as a negative hybrid peace.

First, despite UN Resolution 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security, youth remain structurally side-lined from peace processes generally and specifically in BiH (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015:115; Drummond-Mundal & Cave, 2007; Simpson, 2018). Caught within a discursive framework that presents them as either disrupters or passive victims, youth are frequently understood as lacking the rationality and agency required to be peacebuilding actors (Agbiboa, 2015; McEvoy-Levy, 2013). Consequently, when youth are considered in peacebuilding work, they are integrated within the dominant peacebuilding frame, often through an emphasis on “peace education,” rather than being treated as a “tactical agents” (Agbiboa, 2015) with specific ideas and agendas that need to be pursued (McEvoy-Levy, 2013:298).

Turning to youth both further explores an often-ignored peacebuilding actor, and also addresses positive hybrid peace’s emancipatory call to re-think whose voice dominates peacebuilding discourse and practice.

lised from mainstream peacebuilding (Kappler, 2012; Kappler & Richmond, 2011). Participatory arts,

The arts generally, and participatory arts specifically, reinforce many of the principles associated with an emancipatory vision of peace.

which draws heavily from participatory development approaches (Chambers, 1997), emphasises the importance of the devolution of responsibility; prioritises local epistemologies whilst maintaining a role for external actors; seeks to understand and disrupt exclusionary power-relations within society; and stresses the need for an approach which constantly evolves and is responsive to needs of the affected community (Cooke & Soria-Donlan, 2020; Sertić, 2018). As a methodological

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approach, then, it is well positioned to achieve the disruptive and emancipatory vision of peace associated with positive hybrid peace (Baily, 2019; Fairey, 2018).

However, despite the growing application of strategic arts-based peacebuilding (Seidl-Fox & Sridhar, 2014; Zelizer, 2003; Shank & Schirch, 2008) there is a recognized lack of critical research and evidence as to the outcomes and impact of such projects (Hunter & Page, 2014). There has been a tendency to, like with hybridity, romanticise or exaggerate the emancipatory potential of the arts generally and participatory arts specifically, to achieve social change and amplify voices (Matarasso, 2019). Moreover, participatory methods have, like hybrid peace, been critiqued for being de-radicalised as it is absorbed into the development “tool kit” (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Claims to participation can help produce a sense of a legitimacy without properly addressing the power imbalances in development work (Tandon, 1995). Yet, as Cornwall (2003) has argued, this is not to say that participatory approaches, *per se*, are at fault, but rather that too often they fail to understand who might be excluded from a participatory approach and suffer from short-term engagement.

Consequently, this article explores the potential synergy between youth-led participatory arts with positive hybrid peacebuilding, while being alert to the challenges that turning to these subjects and sites brings. Indeed, one of the aims of the article is to learn from these challenges to contribute towards a more rigorous and critical debate on the role of arts and youth in peacebuilding contexts.

Peacebuilding and Development in BiH

This section introduces some of the main shortcomings of liberal peacebuilding in BiH, which constitutes an example of negative hybrid peace (MacGinty & Richmond, 2016). It highlights the issues that most significantly affected IZAZOV, namely liberal peacebuilding’s lack of meaningful impact or legitimacy and exclusion of youth.³

Despite billions of dollars spent, against most metrics, the international led peacebuilding effort in BiH has failed to achieve a sustainable, positive, peace. BiH remains divided along ethnonationalist lines and fraught with economic issues,⁴ and the peacebuilding agenda is now almost entirely devoid of legitimacy within BiH society.

Problems exist at each level of the peacebuilding process. At the international level, the issues go back to failed interventions during the conflict and the internationally orchestrated Dayton peace agreement (1995), which contributed to the ethnonationalist divisions in BiH polity and society in the aftermath of the war (Aitken, 2007). The role of the international community was further delegitimised through its heavy handed control of transition (Hasić, 2016; Richmond & Franks, 2009). Even where local “ownership” appears in international policy discourse, in practice there has not been a fundamental rethinking of the meaning and location of power (Lemay-Hébert & Kappler, 2016). International peacebuilding actors promoted a narrow version of “civil society,” excluding actors that are not traditionally thought of as “civil” actors in the public realm, such as those from religious organizations (Kappler, 2012). Domestically, political parties and leaders misuse the complex institutional set up to maintain their power and institutionalise ethnic division (Hasić, 2020). Attempts at more radical change often face hostile local politics that seek to limit or close down these activities (Lee, 2019). Consequently, for many Bosnians a deep malaise exists around the very idea of peacebuilding and transition, and those associated with these processes (Belloni, 2019; Kappler, 2012).

The second issue is the status of youth in BiH. BiH has extraordinarily high rates of youth unemployment, amounting to 40.2% in 2020.⁵ This has exacerbated the issue of “brain drain,” as those with the means to leave BiH to pursue education and employment (Okicic et al., 2020). There was a strong

sentiment among IZAZOV participants, also reflected in national youth surveys (Soldo et al., 2021; Ziga et al., 2015), that while youth would rather live and work in BiH the lack of equitable education conditions and employment prospects leaves young people with few choices. BiH schools rank low in international education comparisons and receive insufficient investment (Pašalić-Kreso, 2008; Sabic-El-Rayess, 2009). Moreover, the current education system reproduces ethnonationalism as the core organizing principle of society (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2009); children are segregated by ethnicity and/or religion, and there are three different sets of national curricula, which, at its most extreme has produced the “Two Schools One Roof” policy.⁶ One IZAZOV participant explained,

We have three presidents and three constituent peoples in BiH. Wherever we are we limited and suppressed by the ideology of nationalism, we are taught not to and pushed not to pursue our dreams because of other people’s wants. We are not supported by our local community because we do not have a definable local community—what is your local community when you have three different sides that are pulling each other from each other? (Participant B 2019).

There is, furthermore, low levels of youth participation in decision making (Okicic et al., 2020) with a sense that Bosnian youth have lost faith in their politicians to tackle the issues that are shaping their lives (Ziga et al., 2015). A youth worker, interviewed for this research, argued that apathy, along with the difficulties that youth activists face in connecting and collaborating with each other, are major obstacles to change (Fairey, 2019). This sense of widespread disenfranchisement needs to be understood within the context of, as discussed, a peacebuilding agenda that has systematically failed to include youth voices in developing and implementing peacebuilding.

A number of programmes have attempted to target Bosnian youth⁷, and it’s important to state that much activity goes on outside of traditional peacebuilding projects.⁸ Moreover, arts-based projects⁹ have been shown to help maintain friendships across ethno-religious boundaries (Kollontai, 2010). There are also some examples of Bosnian youth initiatives, like *Jer me se tiče* (Because it concerns me), that highlight inclusionary attempts to commemorate the past and develop a common narrative (Marijan, 2017). Yet, as is common with youth related peacebuilding more generally, whilst often these types of projects look to *engage* youth (Gillard, 2001; McEvoy-Levy, 2013:297), there is rarely the same emphasis on youth-led peacebuilding work, which defined IZAZOV. Often where youth engagement happens it is premised on the idea that youth need “training” in peace (Berents & McEvoy-Levy, 2015:120), rather than being seen as agents of peace in their own right. It was for this reason that IZAZOV adopted a participatory arts approach.

IZAZOV Process and Methods

IZAZOV drew on PAR to create a space for young Bosnians to explore the role that arts could play in their personal lives, as a mode of political engagement and a means to tackle a number of development challenges, such as “brain drain.” PAR, a long standing method in development work, aligns with the participatory ethos discussed above (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020; McIntyre, 2007). Importantly, from a methodological perspective, PAR’s emphasis is for research to make a positive contribution to the communities that it works with by engaging in activist research and community driven change. As such, this approach is concerned with producing more emancipatory forms of research and practice. This means that the research and practice are designed *together* with researchers involved in the curation, delivery and analysis of the project. In this respect, IZAZOV as a peacebuilding and development project was inseparable from it as a research project.

The seeds for IZAZOV grew out of conversations between the researchers and Bosnian youth activists in BiH between 2017–9,¹⁰ and the long term experience of Opera Circus and Humanity and Action in working with Bosnian youth. These dialogues reaffirmed the sense of young Bosnian’s strong cynicism and malaise regarding international peacebuilding (particularly projects focused on questions of “reconciliation”) and a difficulty in politically mobilising youth due to what remains a conservative and coercive political environment (Faurey, 2018, 2019; Faurey & Kerr, 2020). In research interviews, youth activists highlighted that their difficulty in forming national networks was exacerbated by a lack of available resources to travel and meet each other, and specifically identified that film and social media would be useful in helping overcome these problems.

Consequently, the authors, with Opera Circus and Humanity in Action, designed a youth-led filmmaking project.¹¹ This was explicitly not a peacebuilding project in traditional terms, concerned with topics like reconciliation, but rather looked to engage Bosnian youth in creative critical self-

IZAZOV was built around a non-prescriptive approach that prioritised the creative process to develop critical thinking and nurture self-determination.

reflection and to train and mentor them in producing short films that could be used for engagement and activism. This became IZAZOV. It created a space for young people to define their own stories and take a lead in developing their own activities, networks and outcomes. Through a recruitment process, six Bosnian participants were selected, who were joined by three international youth activists (from Italy, Britain and Romania) and a young Bosnian communications practitioner, who were part of The Complete Freedom of Truth (TCFT), a youth-led network supported by Opera Circus. TCFT uses creative art projects and residencies to encourage critical reflection and build international youth networks of solidarity and activism (TCFT N/d).

The project harnessed hybridity and centred a participatory ethos by distributing power, roles and responsibilities across youth and adult team members, local and international actors, academics, practitioners, artists and activists.

This created a non-hierarchical project structure and meaningful opportunities for participants to shape and influence the project’s direction and outcomes. Everyone, including the researchers, took part in the creative exercises. The TCFT participants acted in a hybrid role of participants and project facilitators, with designated project management responsibilities—one running IZAZOV’s communications, another doing the website design and another co-facilitating workshop discussions. The project employed a young Bosnian project manager and a young Bosnian filmmaker worked with Opera Circus’ lead filmmaking educator (a British/ US citizen) to support the workshops and production of the films. Additional technical training was provided by Sarajevo Film Academy. As the Bosnian project manager stated: “I kind of forgot of my role in the project. And I felt more like a participant because I think all of us, in a way also were” (Participant C 2019).

The project consisted of several workshops and events, with at distance mentoring taking place throughout. The first week long workshop took place in Sarajevo in June 2019 and combined technical and filmmaking tuition with creative story development and networking with both international and local youth activists. The purpose of the workshop was to leave the participants with sufficient technical knowledge to begin working on their films, while supporting them to define their films’ content, future direction and audiences. Part of the devolution of responsibility was symbolically represented by the participants changing the project’s name from the working title, “Youth Speaks,” to “IZAZOV”.

By the end of the first workshop each filmmaker had a rough idea about the film they wanted to make. At this point the filmmakers worked on their films independently over two months with remote support

from the filmmaking tutor. In a second workshop in Sarajevo in September participants finalised their film content. This was followed in November with a weeklong creative arts residency in Bridport, UK, and a workshop and film screening at King's College London, where four participant films were shown. One focused on the personal impact of "brain drain," another offered a critical and satirical overview of a young person's perspective of Bosnian politics. Another focused on the resilience of their hometown, Tuzla, in the face of ethno-nationalist politics and the final one offered a poetic exploration of the anxieties of youth.¹²

IZAZOV produced a diverse array of data, including ethnographic observations, email correspondence, workshop presentations and the films. A total of 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project participants and other project stakeholders. In analysing this data, we took an interpretative approach (Tickner, 2005) which looked for themes to show the potential and limits of youth-led participatory arts-based peacebuilding. It was through analysing this heterogeneous assemblage of data that the themes of solidarity, creativity as politics and participation as norm emerged. Following the participatory ethos, prior to completing the article a draft was shared with the participants and partners and small changes were made.

Some may argue that the project's findings are limited by its size and this interpretive approach. Yet, following the growth of post-positivist methods in critical IR (Aradau & Huysmans, 2014) we contend that the close engagement with participants, the grounded knowledge this produces and the reflexive and evolving relationship between the researchers and project meant that the depth and richness of the data justifies this approach. More generally our methodology rejects the straitjackets of positivist approaches to explore "new possibilities for pairing methodologies and methods in ways that expand, rather than constrain, our research possibilities," to produce "contextually rich, complex accounts of the social world, while attributing an emancipatory function to the production of knowledge" (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020:106; Lai & Roccu, 2019:68–9).

While the project remains ongoing, with continued engagement, dissemination events and research planned, activities have inevitably been delayed by COVID-19. At this point, however, it is possible to identify several opportunities and challenges that this form of research and practice offer in relation to positive hybrid peace. These include solidarity; creativity as politics; and participation as norm.

Solidarity

From the outset the project team were concerned that its international dimension would reproduce the top down peacebuilding hierarchies we hoped to contest. It was for this reason that Bosnians and youth at all project levels played key roles and that a central project principle was devolved responsibility. This consciously hybrid model produced some interesting responses from the participants during interviews, particularly around IZAZOV's international element. From these statements and based on our observations it became clear that a sense of (transnational) solidarity was produced between the participants. Solidarity here is taken to mean a bond between subjects based on both a shared moral and ethical commitment to the Other, and the sense of developing a counter-hegemonic culture through these relationships (Weber, 2007). One participant noted of the international dimension:

I suppose it makes me happy and sad. Happy because someone wants to hear the stories, someone wants to get us more involved, to believe or to make things seen and sad because why don't people from here, from Bosnia, from the Balkans, want to do such wonderful such projects (Participant A 2019).

Later on in the project, Participant A (2021) noted that through the project they felt: “[...] heard and [...] understood.” These responses capture both a positive feeling about a sense of solidarity between the international and local while also an ambivalence to the fact that an international presence remained necessary.

The project’s dialogic nature meant that the participants’ different trajectories could come together and produce a space through which meaningful exchange could take place.

Importantly, it was clear that there was not a hierarchical relationship between international and local. This was not about international actors educating the local in a paternalistic fashion, but, in some respects the opposite. Participant C (2019) noted:

I try to be as involved as I can, especially when it comes to international projects, just to help people to learn about the country, about what’s happening ... I see people were really interested about it, but there was just no one to tell them these things before.

Participant B (2019) noted that it was a positive that people came from different backgrounds with “different ways of doing things.” This exchange instilled a sense of solidarity and support, which Participant F (2019a, b) noted was a distinctive aspect of Opera Circus’ approach more generally. He noted how Opera Circus started their work by listening and then created enduring and long-term relationships with participants (Fairey, 2018). This type of solidarity and a sustained ethics of care was important for IZAZOV, and the presence of longstanding TCFT participants, and their hybrid role as project leaders and participants, showed that support and engagement from Opera Circus and the rest of team would be enduring if desired.

There was also a sense amongst participants that the project demonstrated the possibility of a more hopeful future. One noted.

I had always thought that [Bosnian] youth [were] apathetic and so disinterested in taking action. “All we ever do is complain and do nothing” - prior to Izazov!, this was my perception of the Bosnian society. However, seeing all those young people work so hard, discuss, develop and share ideas really changed my perspective on things. At the same time, I no longer think that our prospects for a brighter future are so bleak (Participant C 2021).

This sense of solidarity and community was an explicit part of how the lead film tutor, imagined the workshops:

I am aware that I wish to engage the workshop members as deeply as I can, to draw out of them their caring for others, to associate this with their concerns for their country or family or humanity, and to work towards creating the finest, most lyrical work they can to warmly embrace an audience (Golden, 2019).

Despite this success, it’s important to note a limitation of this emergent sense of transnational solidarity. To a great extent, IZAZOV participants constitute what Micinski (2016:103) terms “NGO frequent fliers”—individuals that regularly participate in international projects. This further signaled an issue of diversity amongst the participants, as each came from urban educated backgrounds. To some extent, then, there was a predetermined openness to working transnationally, and one of the reasons for the lack of diversity was that the project potentially only attracted those *willing* to participate in an international project (Lee, 2019).¹³ Yet, this does not detract from IZAZOV’s ability to produce new connections and further strengthen an emergent sense of transnational solidarity.

De Coning (2016) emphasises that too much international interference can undermine the self-organizing processes necessary to generate and sustain peace. While, then, remaining cautious about the role of international actors in driving development and peacebuilding (Millar, 2014), IZAZOV suggested that when approached in a non-hierarchical way, and rooted in a sustained ethics of care, hybridity can open up a space where (a transnational) solidarity can emerge.

By opening up a creative space, IZAZOV facilitated political engagement both by contesting the traditional definition of “peacebuilding” and developing a critical sense of self.

Creativity as Politics

For most participants IZAZOV was their first engagement with an arts-based project, which was seen as something that was not normally accessible in BiH. With the high levels of youth unemployment in BiH, participants noted the pressure they felt to pursue conventional career paths. Three of the filmmakers were economics students, despite each expressing they wished to pursue a more creative career. Participant A noted, “I always wanted to do something related to [the arts], but life kind of just created a different direction” (Participant A, 2019). This needs to be understood within the context of a conservative educational curriculum and a liberal peacebuilding agenda that looks to create efficient, “valuable,” neo-liberal subjects (Kappler & Richmond, 2011). Here, then, the project created a (albeit small) space for people to engage and explore the role that the arts might play in their lives going forwards.

In contrast to other peacebuilding projects which frame engagement around a specific theme (like reconciliation), IZAZOV gave participants space to tell a story on their terms, and initial ideas emerged around themes of drug use, immigration, corruption and leaving BiH. What was noticeable in the development of the films was that each participant’s ideas became more reflective and personal as the project developed. Even those films that stayed within the broader boundaries of what was conventionally understood as the problem in BiH were reinterpreted to focus on the personal and affective implications of these issues. The film about corruption in Tuzla, then, became a powerful exploration of what “home” is, and what values of home need to be defended. The film about brain drain became a story about personal loss and the erosion of home.

This affirmed that the arts can act as a process to prompt critical reflection and development (Matarasso, 2019; Redwood & Wedderburn, 2019). Participant A (2021) spoke of how the process became a way of reengaging with a sense of self:

I’ve re-discovered myself through this process. This is something that I wanted to do but my society never allowed me to. That is the number one problem of Bosnian society—that it does not support its young people, we are not encouraged to try to do things’.

Another noted:

With Izazov I learned to be more creative, more persistent and to believe in impossible. Why do I say impossible? It is because your head is sometimes like a Pandora’s box. You have so many ideas that saying them or making film about them are scaring you from the beginning. That is all okay, you are allowed to make mistakes, to make false or right assumptions, we are here to learn what we didn’t know about film, history, facts, technical tools and all sort of knowledge. That is the greatest value that I have learned, to carry on, to ask and accept different opinions, to make new mistakes but to understand it all as learning and training to be better (Participant B 2021).

This positive outcome was the result of two key interlinked, but underdiscussed, elements of participatory arts: the importance of time, to allow a meaningful creative process to evolve and the importance of high quality creative mentoring that simultaneously pushes participants to critically and creatively explore their ideas and hold back from imposing fixed notions of what constitutes creative excellence (Matarasso, 2019). This is time intensive work for the project facilitators and co-ordinators who throughout IZAZOV invested significant amounts of time on a voluntary basis as there was, as is often the case, a woeful lack of funding to sufficiently resource project activities (Lee, 2019).

Participation as Norm

In other, unforeseen ways, the project's hybridity and participatory ethos proved an obstacle. This was particularly after the first workshop over the summer when the participants, despite the project leads' efforts (Golden, 2019, 2021; Lee, 2021), largely disengaged with the project. Here, the idea of empowerment and ownership floundered, and a sense of participant malaise emerged. The cause of this was twofold. First, each participant became overwhelmed by the idea of producing a film (Participant E 2019). Despite constant reassurance that there was no such thing as failure, participants **whereas the open-ended participatory approach was intended as a vehicle through which to deliver an arts-based project, participation, inadvertently, also became a norm the project transferred.**

felt that producing a film was unachievable, which led to temporary—and in one case complete - withdrawal from the project.¹⁴ Second, it became clear that the notion of taking control was itself an unnerving process.

In this respect, it was notable that the participants reengaged with the project in September during another series of more structured workshops and with the UK and BiH project leads providing more direction and guidance. These projects come with natural ebbs and flows, and engagement is affected by numerous factors, not least the day-to-day realities and challenges of participants. But more generally, Participant G (2019b) noted: "Yeah, I think that was the disconnect between the philosophy of giving people freedom and people needing more guidance and instruction." For the participants, who were accustomed to working in what remains a conservative environment, it was not easy to take control and ownership. Participant B (2019) described how in BiH youth were: "not actually taught to think critically, to evaluate things. We have this tradition of just learning things by heart. This is what happens, we are not encouraged to think."

Participatory projects should not assume the salience of their approach, but, rather, the nature of participation should be discussed, contested and adapted through dialogue with participants.

Part of why this environment has been created comes back to the international peacebuilding agenda, which has stamped out creative engagement and local control, functioning as a disciplinary form of governmentality (Jabri, 2013). One participant noted that this was the first time they

had been given a sense ownership in a project like this (Participant F 2019b). To this end, it became necessary as a result of the disengagement, and because of this context, to create a more structured means through which the participants could work and engage with the project (Lai & Rocca, 2019:79). The hybrid participatory model caused other problems too, principally around the participants' mixed roles. The project didn't sufficiently capitalise on the local filmmaker's skills as a mentor, and she was ignored by the other participants over the summer. One of the reasons for this was because of the fluid nature of assigned project roles, which meant that the local filmmaker's skills and project role was not as clearly communicated as it could have been (Participant G, 2019b). Moreover, the open and fluid nature of the project relied on participants feeling comfortable contributing to workshop sessions. What became clear, however, was that some participants, including

the local filmmaker, found this approach alienating (Participant G 2019b). Cornwall (2003) notes how a failure to identify the politics of voice in these projects can reproduce problematic social orderings, particularly around gender. This is something we fell afoul of, by not considering the needs of different project members, such as the local filmmaker. This reinforces the need for more explicit discussions with the participants around the participatory process itself, and how participants wanted responsibility, authority and control to be built into the project.

Conclusion

This article has examined the potential of participatory youth-led arts to offer positive forms of hybrid peace. Positive hybrid peace is taken to mean an emancipatory form of peacebuilding that opens up a space for new voices to be heard, and new understandings and experiences of peace to be explored (MacGinty & Richmond, 2016). This has perhaps first and foremost reaffirmed that hybridity, whether with positive or negative outcomes, always produces unknown affects (Kappler, 2012; MacGinty & Sanghera, 2012). Despite this unpredictability, and while not claiming that these findings are generalisable, we believe that this research offers some important findings about the potential and limits of hybrid participatory youth-led peacebuilding to realise a positive hybrid peace.

First, the project produced a sense of solidarity. We argue that the non-prescriptive nature of the project, driven by a participatory arts ethos, meant that the project largely avoided instilling a strict hierarchy amongst participants, and rather created a space of dialogic exchange and mutual learning and solidarity, which is so often absent in peacebuilding work. In this respect, the sense of agency that was opened up between the participants (with Bosnian and European youth controlling much of the project) was important in sustaining this sense of solidarity and creating the sense of the possibility of contesting the status quo. This was, however, only possible due to everyone's long term investment in the project. This is time and resource intensive work, and it should be noted that a considerable amount of free labour was required to run this project (Fairey & Kerr, 2020). Adequate financing and time is crucial to making these projects effective and sustainable.

Second, the project has reaffirmed the ability of the arts to open up spaces which facilitates self-reflexive learning. Here, an enhanced sense of participant agency and political engagement was seen in practicing the arts in a context where such engagements had been curtailed and discovering a sense of self linked to commitments to social change. Each participant became more critically aware, while simultaneously producing highly reflexive and emotionally powerful outputs. This, as such, exhibits important elements of a positive hybrid peace. Yet this further underscores the importance of providing sufficient time and resources for these projects—something frequently lacking.

The shortcomings of the project can also be taken as an opportunity to learn for future practice. The issue of participant diversity is important, and one possible means to address this is to diversify networks away from those already engaged in peacebuilding work, and second, to move these projects out from metropolises, such as Sarajevo. The issue of participation as norm additionally suggests that considerable attention is required to co-curate a project ensuring that different types of participants have space to contribute. To this end, while at points the project asserted a more structured format, this does necessarily signify a return to a heavy handed top down approach. Rather, a lesson learnt was that the participatory approach needs to be made an overt part of the exchange and collaboration with the participants to collectively and iteratively adapt the project processes and format to meet participants' needs.

While the findings here suggest that there is nothing inevitably emancipatory about the use of participatory arts, or engaging with youth, as a means to pursue a positive hybrid peace, there is, nonetheless

significant potential in both approaches. Indeed, although several limitations have been highlighted, it is the hope that drawing attention to these might facilitate a more critical, reflexive and inclusive approach to hybrid and participatory forms of peacebuilding and development. This might also open up a space for a more honest reflection about the potential and limitations of arts in post-conflict contexts more generally. If the practice is to continue to grow in strength, and overcome its marginalisation, then more critical and empirically grounded studies, such as this, are of vital importance.


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Notes

1. <https://izazov.org/>, accessed 21 June 2021.
2. See Fox (2001) for similar debates within development studies.
3. For good overviews of peacebuilding in BiH see Belloni (2019), Kappler and Richmond (2011).
4. BiH current GDP per capita is only \$6000, and continues to experience negative GDP growth https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=BA&most_recent_value_desc=false, accessed 21 June 2021.
5. According to the World Bank this is one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. See: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true, accessed 21 June 2021.
6. This is where a school building is physically divided in half with different ethnonationalist children attending each part. See: OSCE (2018) Report on “Two Schools Under One Roof”.
7. See for example projects see Post Conflict Research Centre, <https://p-crc.org/>, and Humanity in Action, <https://www.humanityinaction.org/country/bosnia-herzegovina/>, accessed 3 September 2021
8. See the successful contestation of Two Schools One Roof policy in Jajce. <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/20/pupils-from-bosnia-win-max-van-der-stoel-award-07-19-2018/> , accessed 25 August 2021.
9. See for example Most Mira, <https://www.mostmiraproject.org/> and The Mostar Rock School, <https://mostarrockschool.org/>, accessed 3 September 2021.
10. IZAZOV grew out of the research undertaken as part of the interdisciplinary research project, Art & Reconciliation. See <https://artreconciliation.org/> ; accessed 6 September 2021.
11. The project was funded as part of Changing the Story, which is a GCRF Network Plus (UK Arts and Humanities Research Council initiative) research project supporting the building of inclusive societies for young people in 12 post conflict countries. See <https://changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk/> for more details, accessed 6 September 2021.
12. All the films can be viewed at <https://izazov.org/>.
13. Lee also notes how the grant and project time scale did not allow for a recruitment process that sufficiently engaged regional organisations that may have helped diversify the type of participant (Lee2019)
14. A potential issue here was that participants came without much (if any) photography or filmmaking experience, as originally envisaged by the lead film-maker.

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