

A peace building and health promotion project for youth from Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina
Intercultural Creative Weeks – Interkulturelle Sommerwochen – Interkulturalne kreativne sedmice/tjedni IKS



The IKS-Project (Intercultural Creative Weeks) is a project developed by The Association for Prevention of Addiction NARKO-NE, with its head office situated in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina have established their state in the heart of Europe, and have therefore become and remained a people situated on a junction where great European and world cultures have superseded one another, which is clearly evident from the multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-national structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Because of its position – being on the crossroads of Euro-Asian cultures – Bosnia and Herzegovina has great cultural and historical treasures, coupled with a beautiful and untainted nature.



Bosnia and Herzegovina is one of the smaller European countries. It has an area of 51 212 km² and about 3,517 million inhabitants. What makes it specific is the fact that its people do not belong to a single ethnic group, but to three – as well as to some minorities - which are also three constituent nations – Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs, who practice two great monotheistic religions: Islam and Christianity (Catholics and Orthodox). In the period between 1992 and 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina was engulfed in a war of aggression/civil war which followed its separation from the Yugoslav federation of countries. The peace accords, signed in 1995 in the American city of Dayton, divided B&H into two entities (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska) and another region (Brčko Distrikt) which necessarily resulted in a complicated administrative structure of this country.



The IKS-Project has been constantly in development since 2002. Its inception began in the municipality of Vitez, one of the municipalities where the differences in the ways of living of the two peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina are clearly visible. The project as such had the goal of connecting high school students through mutual activities, so that they, as well as the rest of the youth of Vitez, Vareš, and Novi Travnik, could build a town and a future in which multiculturalism is the only acceptable order of things. Each year, and throughout all of its sixteen instances, the project period begins with introductory seminars and workshops, so that our volunteers are able to become acquainted with the details of the project, the HEE rules (healthy, ecological, economical), the code of behaviour that applies while working with children, as well as the prevention of drug addiction.



The beginning is a matter of choice, decision-making, courage, and will. Each one has its own time and place. Almost every year, our activities begin in Visoko, where all the volunteers from Vareš and Novi Travnik, the members of the leaders team, as well as the students from Switzerland, begin a whole new IKS story. The IKS-Project gathers a relatively large number of high school volunteers each year (approximately 40-45). Together with the leading teams in both towns, the students from Switzerland do a great amount of hard and devoted work with the volunteers. On every single day, they all work with approximately one hundred children and teenagers in both towns. By sharing this story and being a part of it, we are building a healthy future for the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Workshops that involve children are always challenging. Each year we try to organize different workshops which are mostly thematic, so that children – but also high-school students who implement them – would learn daily, grow to become better people and in that manner ensure a bright future for themselves and others, nowhere else but in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Designing workshops so that they have a pedagogical effect as well is not a task that everyone can undertake. It is for this purpose that we have students from Switzerland working on the project, and they unconditionally share their experiences with the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



The volunteer workshops are immensely important for high-school students from both towns. Apart from this project, they do not have the opportunity to gain such experiences anywhere else. The educational system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is quite poorly conceived, and as such does not educate young people in terms of teamwork, pedagogy, personality development and self-confidence building, and quite often lacks creativity, communication skills, etc. And this is precisely what the project offers, all the informal aspects of education that can be invaluable to a high-school student in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Our volunteers learn how to acquire good work habits, which can be an additional benefit for future employment.



Apart from building relationships through workshops, the volunteers also do this by engaging in mutual activities during big collective excursions, or through smaller-scale local gatherings. Through a whole day of fun, something that all young people around the world enjoy, we make an effort to build intercultural bridges, bridges that do not separate two coasts but unite them and become pathways between hearts. Such an idea that involves making intercultural connections is especially significant for post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, not only in terms of improving current living conditions but also for the purposes of preventing possible future conflicts that everyone, and especially young people, want to avoid.



The IKS-Project begins and ends with big collective events. The first one involves camping that all project participants are supposed to engage in. The location is usually one of the mountains in Bosnia and Herzegovina. That being the case, young people are far removed from all sources of addiction for four days and spend all of their time with friends, enjoying the lovely nature. Apart from the prevention of addiction, the purpose of this event is to connect groups of volunteers from both towns, and those from local groups as well. In that manner, we are building a strong group of young people who subsequently carry all the weight of the project on their backs. But when you share this burden it becomes a part of you, and is no longer a burden at all. The four-day camp involves numerous activities including sports, creative work, pedagogy, and everything else that the volunteers might encounter on a daily basis through the subsequent project cycle.



The second big event, which has in a way become a “leitmotif” of the entire project, is the KIDS FESTIVAL that, in a single night and in each town, gathers more than 300 people of all ages, 150 of which are children whom this event is in fact intended for. It is a festival of joy and entertainment for all children. The volunteers organize the KIDS FESTIVAL together with the students, and the preparations can last for several days. And each year it becomes more different, more innovative, more exciting. The KIDS FESTIVAL has become a tradition in Vareš and Novi Travnik, and children look forward to it throughout the year, as well as to the project in general. The KIDS FESTIVAL is in fact the grand finale, the jewel in the crown of this project, and we can measure the project's success by that of the festival itself.



Each year, the project cycle ends with the project evaluation that involves volunteers, including the evaluation of team leaders together with the students and the project coordinator Sister Magdalena Schildknecht. We are always interested in making improvements, so the evaluation serves as a commendation of the project's positive sides, but it is also an opportunity to come up with more good practices. The evaluation is especially supported by the students from Switzerland, since they want to contribute to the future improvement of the IKS-Project as much as possible.

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