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**SUSTAIN TO THE INTERETHNIC COHABITATION AND
POSTWAR RECONCILIATION BY THE REACTIVATION OF
RURAL ECONOMY**

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is the presentation of an interesting and significant project in the peace building field realized in post-war Eastern Bosnia.

The project called RASPBERRIES OF PEACE is an idea carried out by the Zemljihradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac (Cooperative "Together" of Bratunac).

It was conceived in Bratunac, near Srebrenica, a place chosen on one hand for the consequences of its recent history, on the other hand for the links between the creators of the project and the Forum Žena of Bratunac group.

The presentation is the result of research and, above all, of direct interviews both to Forum Žena of Bratunac, and to Zemljihradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac members.

The main goals of this study are:

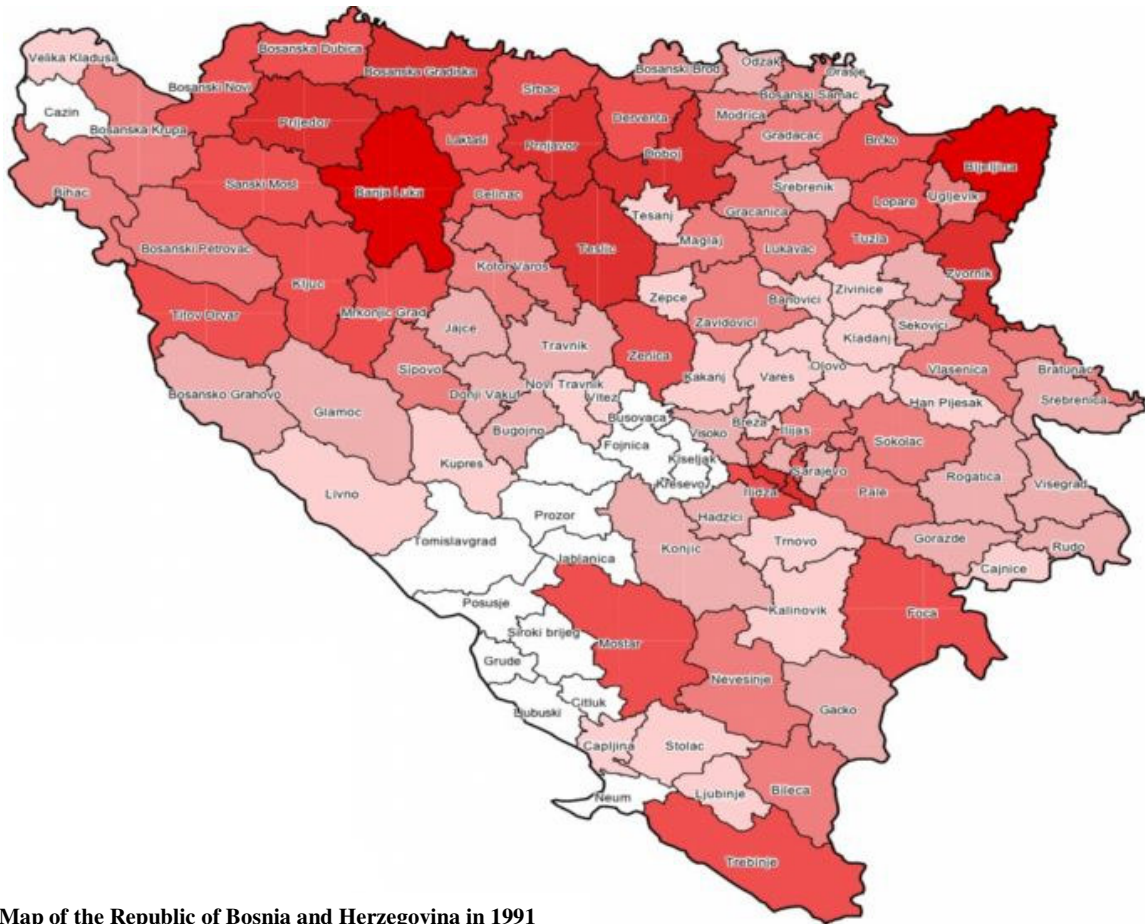
- to understand how the idea was born,
- the background and the efforts made to realize the project,
- the impact over the quality of cohabitation,
- the quality of life for the inhabitants of Bratunac,
- to find out whether it is possible to export a similar experience to other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A look at Bosnian history of the 1990s will help us understand the atmosphere in which this idea was conceived, the real difficulties met in building it, the importance and the changes for the local inhabitants.

A BRIEF VIEW OF THE LAST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY IN THE REPUBLIC OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The war in the former Yugoslavia started on 1992 and caused thousands of murders and massacres. Entire villages were destroyed from both sides.

Before 15th October 1991, date of its parliamentary declaration of sovereignty as the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹, the country saw the three major ethnic groups (Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian) cohabiting peacefully.



Map of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1991

After the declaration, the three groups began a war for territorial control. The conflict was particularly violent in the Eastern part of Bosnia, on the Serbian borders.

¹ The independence of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized by the EC on 6 April 1992 and by the United States of America the following day.

The Serbs wanted to maintain Bosnia and Herzegovina within their own borders. Since the area of Central Podrinje (Srebrenica region) was the link between the two regions of the Serbian Republic, it was particularly important for them.



Actual Map of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Eastern Herzegovina and the Serbian Republic were primarily inhabited by Serbian population, whereas Central Podrinje was primarily inhabited by Bosnian population.²

This was an obstacle for the Serbian Government which wanted to reinstate the control over the region.

When the fight for the control started, it was particularly fierce.

Some of the towns which suffered the worst atrocities were Srebrenica, Cerska (west of Srebrenica), Kravica (where Bosnian forces from Srebrenica killed several dozens of Serbian soldiers and some civilians), Bratunac, Konjević Polje, Gorañde and

² Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srebrenica_massacre and the “Report of the Secretary-general pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998) – Srebrenica Report”, <http://www.haverford.edu/reig/sells/reports/UNsrebrenicareport.htm>

The population of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (4.4 million) was composed by 44% Bosnians (known until 1993 as Muslims or Bosnian Muslims), 17% Croats and 31% Serbs.

Žepa.³

In 1992 all these towns were part of the enclave of Srebrenica (900 km²) predominantly inhabited by Muslim Bosnian population.

After 1992 Serbian military and paramilitary forces gained some territory reducing the enclave of Srebrenica to 150 km.⁴ The Bosnian population converged in Srebrenica town, which increased to a number between 50.000 and 60.000 units.

Since March 1993 Srebrenica had been under the protection of the UN. On 16th April 1993 Srebrenica and its surroundings were declared "safe area" by the United Nations Security Council (resolution 819⁵).

In doing that, the UN Security Council "*Demands that all parties and others concerned treat Srebrenica and its surroundings as a safe area which should be free from any armed attack or any other hostile act; Demands also to that effect the immediate cessation of armed attacks by Bosnian Serbian paramilitary units against Srebrenica and their immediate withdrawal from the areas surrounding Srebrenica; Demands that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) immediately cease the supply of military arms, equipment and services to the Bosnian Serbian paramilitary units in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina.*"⁶

But the "safe area" agreement was violated by both parties:

Srebrenica found itself inside the domain of the Drina Corps, the name given (on geographical basis) to the military forces of the Army of the Serbian Republic (VRS) on the place and Serbs attacked the Srebrenica civilians daily, because they said Srebrenica was used by Bosnian forces to launch counter-offensives against the VRS.

It is also true that the no-fly zone was used by Bosnian forces to dispatch helicopters

³ Cfr. Report of the Secretary-general pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 53/35 (1998) – Srebrenica Report; <http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/reports/UNsrebrenicareport.htm>

⁴ Cfr. footnote 3.

⁵ Resolution 819 (1993) - <http://www.nato.int/ifor/un/u930416a.htm>

It is interesting to underline as Security Council resolution 819 was taken against the deterioration of the situation in Srebrenica and its surrounding areas as peacekeeping operations. But the resources made available to implement this resolution (as the following resolutions n. 824 and 836) were insufficient. Not only: the interpretation of the term "safe area" was not clear to the Security Council, as well as what actions to take in a similar peacekeeping operation.

Moreover, the Force Commander of UNPROFOR declared that the nature of the safe area mandate proposed was incompatible with peacekeeping. To protect the safe area against Serb attack was rather a peace-enforcement operation.

⁶ Resolution 819 (1993). www.nato.int/ifor.un/u910925a.htm

with ammunition for their divisions.

In March 1995 the situation got worse: the President of the Serbian Republic (Karadžić) ordered the VRS forces to separate physically Srebrenica from Žepa, making the communication between the two enclaves difficult, creating a state of unsafety and no hope to survive for the inhabitants of Srebrenica.

Serbian forces entered the UN Safe Area in July 1995 with little resistance from the largely demilitarized Bosnians and with no significant reaction from the international community.

At this point on 9th July 1995 President Karadžić ordered the VRS Drina Corps to capture the Srebrenica town. But this was not a simple war plan: the two highest ranking Bosnian Serbian politicians, Radovan Karadžić and Momcilo Krajisnik, in contrast with the Bosnian Serbian military commander General Ratko Mladić, decided to allow the Serbs to stay in this part of the country, removing all others ethnic groups, even if this meant genocide.

Before the arrival of Serbian troops, the evening of 11th July 1995 a column of Bosnian men, between 10.000 and 15.000 including members of an Army Division of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, decided to reach Tuzla in the north of Bosnia, trying to escape through the woods.

Other Bosnian from Srebrenica found a shelter in Potočari, where Serbian soldiers executed hundreds of men and women.

In the morning of 12th July, Serbian forces entered Srebrenica promising the Muslim people that were planning to take the Bosnian refugees to Kladanj, a territory under Muslim control.

Serbian TV was called at Srebrenica and, during the shooting women and children were separated from the men, put on buses and reassured by General Ratko Mladić that everybody would be reunited with their relatives once arrived at destination.

However, when the cameras were turned off the men were deported, tortured and killed by the Serbian army.

The buses which had already left were stopped and the soldiers searched for men

among the passengers. No men ever arrived in Kladanj.

Sometimes the buses did not arrive at all.⁷

The mass murder in Srebrenica in 1995 had been planned and more than 7.800 people were killed, mainly men between the ages of 16 and 60.

The coordination and the methodical nature of the execution are the proofs of this plan.

The execution fields were usually in isolated areas. Among these areas there were Bratunac, Kravica, Sandici, Tišca, Petkovici, Orahovac, the Branjevo Military Farm, Kozluk, Zvornik.⁸

It is believed that the inhabitants of Kravica took part in the killings.

The first large-scale mass executions began on the afternoon of 13th July 1995 in the valley of the River Cerska, west of Konjevic Polje.⁹

The majority of prisoners were from Bratunac and when some of the soldiers recognised acquaintances from Srebrenica, they beat and humiliated them before killing them.

Corpses were massed in graves dug with excavators.

In a second time, the majority of the corpses were exhumed and relocated in an area of 50 km² around Srebrenica in order to delete the proofs of the crime. Often the corpses were cut in parts and buried in different graves.

*“By 2006, 42 mass graves have been uncovered around Srebrenica and the specialists believe there are 22 more mass graves.”*¹⁰

The Srebrenica massacre has been the greatest massacre in European history since the end of the Second World War.

The special court for the crimes of war, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)¹¹, ruled that the Srebrenica massacre was an act of

⁷ Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srebrenica_massacre

⁸ Cfr. <http://www.un.org/peace/srebrenica.pdf>

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Cfr. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Srebrenica_massacre

¹¹ It is interesting to learn about the following cases and sentences: Blagojevic and Jokic's (Dragan), Momir Nikolic's, Dragan Obrenovic's, Deronjic's, Rajic's, Krstic's. In particular, Momir Nikolic's case helps to understand the dynamic and the cruel tragedy of Srebrenica and Bratunac. www.un.org/icty

genocide. This is the first legally recognised case of genocide in Europe.¹²

A Srebrenica Genocide Memorial was built in Potocari, near Srebrenica, in memory of the victims. 8.373 names are written on the stone inside the Memorial – which opened officially on 30th September 2003 – but the exact number of the victims or of the missing people will never be known.



**Potocari:
the memorial
stone reporting
the 8.373 names
of the killed or
missing Muslims**



Potocari: the plaque at the entrance of the Muslim cemetery



Potocari: the Muslim cemetery

The Army of the Serbian Republic under the command of general Ratko Mladić, the

¹² <http://www.un.org/icty/>

special state security forces of Serbia known as the "Scorpions", the civil police and voluntaries from Bratunac, different military forces also from Bratunac, all took part in the massacre.

In September and October 1995 the Brigade of Bratunac together with the civil authorities carried out the exhumation of the victims, their dismemberment and relocation in smaller common graves.

The most appalling fact is that a lot of participants at the massacre were from Bratunac¹³, they knew the victims and the survivors.

Not only. Serbian troops entered Srebrenica on 11th July, in the evening. Only one night passed between the decision to kill all the men and the take over of the enclave.

In the following seven days everything was prepared, organized and done.

The organization was mainly made by Bratunac nationalists.

On 24th August 2006 the Bosnian Serbian government wrote a secret list of Bosnian Serbs who participated in the Srebrenica massacre.

892 of those are probably still in a power position or employed by the government of the Serb Republic.

Four and a half years after the event of Srebrenica, the UN has publicly admitted responsibility for not preventing the tragedy.

When the Dutchbat commander made clear that the Bosnians could not defend themselves, and the Dutchbat troops could not protect them without air force support, his requests were ignored by his superiors, either at local level, or higher.¹⁴

The reason why the request of Dutchbat commander for urgent air force support was ignored is still unclear.

In declaring Srebrenica a safe area (and in a second time a demilitarised area) the consensus in the UN Security Council was limited. There was consensus to follow a policy of relatively passive enforcement, a diplomatic measure that would exclude the UN forces from an armed confrontation with the Serbs.

The Dutch battalion did not do enough to protect the refugees in Srebrenica, and when

¹³ Cfr. Nolić (Momir)'s case, <http://www.un.org/icty/rappannu-e/2004/index.htm>

¹⁴ <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/srebrenica.justice/ASUN.htm>

at the beginning of the Serbian offensive the Bosnians asked UNPROFOR to have the weapons back, the request was rejected by UNPROFOR because it was UN responsibility to defend the enclave.

UN failed in implementing a peacekeeping action in an environment in which there was no ceasefire and in allowing the Army of the Serbian Republic to use this action to reach their goal.

BRATUNAC

Bratunac is a town located on the east border of Bosnia, in the southwest of the Drina river and in the north of Srebrenica.¹⁵ It is administratively part of the Serbian Republic.

According to the 1991 census, its population was of 33.375 inhabitants composed by Bosnians (64.2%), Serbs (34.2%), others (1.6%).¹⁶

During the war everything associated to Bosnians and other non-Serbian ethnic groups was destroyed.

*The ethnic cleansing campaign was successful and has resulted in an almost exclusively Serbian town of Bratunac, since the town was settled with the Serbian refugees from Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, the town and the surrounding villages are believed to be a stronghold for nationalism and extremism and the area is believed to have harboured several war crimes suspects.*¹⁷

During the war in Bratunac 4.221 houses over a total of 5.205 were destroyed or damaged.

In 2002 an esteem shown around 22.000 inhabitants, more than 60% of which were women.

The population of Bratunac is currently composed as follow: 12.000 Serbs from Bratunac, 2.000 Serbian refugees from other towns and 7.000 Bosnian Muslims who have recently returned.¹⁸

Only since 2001, when the local authority changed and policies in favour of the return of the refugees and evacuees started, the reconstruction has begun.

Projects to sustain these policies were financed with European funds and with the contribution of European and North-American NGOs; the United Nations started a programme to encourage the refugees to go back home by delivering the necessary materials to reconstruct their houses.

The political and economic situation improved. Consequently, the request to return

¹⁵ The Drina river marks the border between the Republika Srpska and Serbia.

¹⁶ <http://www.answers.com/topic/bratunac>

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

increased.

Reconstructing the houses is not enough though. People need the essential things, primarily financial aid in order to start working their land again, so to be able to live with dignity and independence.

The economy is based on agriculture, some cows for the milk and the domestic production of cheese.

Thanks to the climate and to particular environmental conditions, Bratunac has become an area specialized in the cultivation of fruits of the forest: until 1991 over 1.500 tons of raspberries and a similar quantity for what concerns bilberries, blackberries and strawberries were produced per year.¹⁹

Since 2003 the Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac puts together Serbian and Muslim producers with the aim to encourage the economic growth of Bratunac and its surroundings as the pre-condition to start the dialogue between the resident communities again, since it had been violently interrupted in 1992 by the war.

Local people are aware that the only way to live together is to rebuild together the socio-economic tissue. And this is the only solution to local problems.

¹⁹ Ib.

THE IDEA

RASPBERRIES OF PEACE was born to sustain the existence and the work of the Farm Cooperative "Insieme" of Bratunac, in order to give a concrete aid to the returned refugees.

The idea of the project has been developed from the experience of Radmila Žarković and Skender Hot (two active pacifists with a long experience, who worked for several peace associations and that also during the war continued in their activity for re-establishing peace conditions) together with some Italian NGOs and Associations.

The experience "Carovana di Pace"²⁰, having as one of the main aims a responsible tourism, in order to understand and to dialogue with population of the former Yugoslavia, was fundamental.

"Carovana di Pace" is a project realized by Assopace (an Italian Association). It encourages interaction among the local population.

Citizens from Italy and other countries can visit different villages and towns of former Yugoslavia and take part in the conferences organized by the promoters.

During the period 2001-2004 the project touched also Bratunac. This stop was proposed for the first time by Radmila Žarković in 2001.

The stop and the conference were organized in collaboration with Forum Žena of Bratunac. More than 100 women from Bratunac participated.

It was during the dialogue with them that the direction and the idea of the future project "Raspberries of peace" was conceived.

Women at the conference told about their experience before, during and after the war. The majority of them had in common the refugee camp experience.

After the beginning of the international programmes for the reconstruction of the houses, they were able to go back home and to have their properties back. But after a while they understood it was not enough.

There were a lot of socio-economical problems due to friction between the different ethnic groups and to unemployment.

²⁰ For more information you can visit the website <http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/article/articleview/3300/1/42/>

At the time in the country, there was no dialogue between Muslims and Serb Orthodox, there was no concrete opportunity to remain for the returned refugees, it was very difficult to find funds to create and to continue an activity.

It is not easy to come back and to live in a climate of diffidence and fear, with no money to buy food or to pay for the heating in winter because there were no jobs.

For these reasons a lot of women returned to the refugee camp, where it was possible to have food to live.

Most Muslim women who had been evacuated from Central Podrinje already lived in the surroundings of Sarajevo and Tuzla, with no possibility to have a job, to get micro credits, to go back home, where the situation was critical and with no chance to get financial independence.

The majority of the refugees returned just to sell their properties.

In seeing the situation Radmila Žarković, Skender Hot and some Italian Associations decided to do something to give an opportunity to the dialogue and to help these women to find a job.

When the pacifist movement Forum Žena of Bratunac was contacted, they agreed to cooperate in a project with the aim to sustain and facilitate the refugees' return and the multiethnic cohabitation.

The first steps towards the right direction were moved.

It was difficult to understand what exactly to do and how: it was necessary to give the traditions and the pre-war economy a closer look in order to identify the most suitable activities for the area.

A problem was that the majority of the population was composed by women with children, old people and people with physical problems caused by war. Furthermore, people were and are poor, and most of the houses in Bratunac had all been destroyed or damaged.

This meant finding a suitable opportunity for these people, granting continuity and sustainability to the families.

Moreover, it was necessary to understand if there was an interest in the project and to proceed to the trade analysis.

A further step to be taken was to find funds and to proceed with a sensitization campaign.

In any case, to start any activity, it was clear that people could not be asked to provide with too much money or to ask for loans for a long time.

Table 1 The phases of the project

2001-2003	Typology of cultivation Is there interest in the project? The way for finding funds Sensitization campaign
2003-June	Establishment and registration of Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac
2004	Technical experiments with open nurseries and a greenhouse
2005	Rent of a warehouse and a freezer installation
2006	Purchasing of premises where to gather, refrigerate and store the products, and where to place the offices Technical assistance Cultivation of a new variety

The experience of the active pacifists and the experts of the organizations involved with "Carovana di Pace" allowed to create the guidelines and to identify the leading principles for the realization of the project.

In order to reach the goal it was decided that a Cooperative of Farmers should be the means to realize the project.

An Italian NGO (A.C.S.: Associazione di Cooperazione allo Sviluppo) and three

Italian Associations (Agronomi senza frontiere, Associazione per la pace and Cooperativa Sant'Orsola) sustained the project.

The interest showed by the P.A.T. (Provincia Autonoma di Trento- Italy) was also extremely important. Through its councillor for International Cooperation, the P.A.T. found a bank ready to grant a loan to the cooperative for the beginning of its activity and the purchase of a shed.

By explaining the project to other Italian town councils the P.A.T. obtained their consensus and the security necessary to obtain the loan.

P.A.T. played an important role gaining trust in the project from several institutions, thus allowing its realization.

The main steps of the project were the following:

♦ **2001** The idea to support an activity which could represent a substantial aid for the people who decided to live in Bratunac was carried out by Forum Žena of Bratunac.

♦ **2001-2003** Researches showed that before the war, the growing of fruits of the forest was a typical activity of the area and, because of the environmental conditions, it could be possible to obtain products of a very high quality (the first researches were conducted by ICS Sarajevo and Forum Žena of Bratunac).

Particularly, raspberry trees could produce fruits for ten years at least and their growing did not require a strong physical effort.

The market studies revealed a great request of raspberries at worldwide level: this meant that the raspberry production was an activity really able to produce an income for the local families.

The refugees had a possibility to go back home and to stay there and, without large investments, a family could become economically independent.

It was decided that the raspberry production was the best solution to start a new activity in Bratunac.

Some Muslim women decided to try the new experience, and the project took off.

♦ **2003 – MAY** In May 2003 the idea to establish a Cooperative was born: Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac.

◆ **2003 – JUNE** In June 2003 the Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac was established and registered in order to allow the realization of the project.

A sensitization campaign was carried out by Forum Žena of Bratunac members. A free meeting was organized in order to list the aims and the opportunities of the cooperative, and to explain that it was open both to Serbs and to Muslims.

It is important to highlight that at that time, there was no dialogue at all between Muslims and Serbs.

It frequently happened that when two neighbours of different ethnic groups cultivated their own land close to each other, they did not even greet each other.

◆ **2004** With the aid of an Italian agronomist, technical experiments were made: two opened nurseries and a greenhouse were built in order to obtain raspberry trees to be used by the Cooperative members and to start the production.

◆ **2005** A warehouse and a freezer installation were rent: the Cooperative started to produce and to sell the products.

◆ **2006** In 2006 the Cooperative found the funds to purchase the premises where to gather, refrigerate and store the products, and where to place the offices.

The premises were renovated and ready in two months and opened at the beginning of July.

Since 2006 the Cooperative has also guaranteed technical assistance to all its members and it has started a limited cultivation of a new variety.

The following year currants, bilberries and others fruits of the forest could also be planted.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RADMILA ŽARKOVIĆ AND SKENDER HOT



Radmila Žarković
and Skender Hot;
September 2006

Radmila Žarković has been an active Serbian pacifist since 1993. She began her activity with the group Forum Žena of Belgrado.

Thanks to her work inside the ICS - Sarajevo (Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà Sarajevo), she was in contact for a long time with the Muslim women of the pacifist movement Forum Žena of Bratunac.

She was an activist of Forum Žena of Mostar, where she lived with her family before the war.

She was married to a Serbian General and they had two daughters together.

The marriage ended due to their different lifestyles. Consequently, Radmila had to leave Mostar, where she still cannot return.

Radmila is now living in Sarajevo, where she collaborated with the Ministry of Defence to pass the law that allows conscientious objection and set up the Civil Service.

Her honesty and her zeal for peace have created the basis for confident relationships with all peace groups.

Skender Hot lives in Tuzla with his wife and his daughter.

He worked for ICS Sarajevo for a few years and at that time he met Radmila.

These people are sacrificing their families to the success of Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac: they spend almost all their time in Bratunac.

They know that many people count on them and that their behaviour is helping the Bratunac people to rebuild their lives.



Two frontal views of the shed Zemljoradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac



A behind view of the shed



Some workers during the job time inside the shed

HOW PEOPLE WERE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT AND HOW IT STARTED

When the project began and the cooperative was founded, the members were only ten.

The main goal of the initiative was to support dialogue and to provide the local population with a job opportunity.

Apart from that, thanks to their experience, the founding members knew that the only successful way to isolate the extremists and nationalists was through the implementation of the economic activities. The consequence would be a new peace process.

At the beginning, the project was looked at suspiciously.

People from both sides (Orthodox Serbs and Muslim Bosnians) did not believe it was a valid project for a serious job, a real opportunity to remain in Bratunac.

On one hand nobody took action against the plan, but on the other hand nobody seemed interested in it.

The first associates bought their plants of raspberries with a loan guaranteed by the cooperative. The loan had to be given back in the following years, as the production of raspberries and of the income of the families increased.

The activity began, the production of raspberries took off and people started showing interest.

The neighbours, who had not said a word, started to ask for information about the trees, the kind of cultivation and the production. At first with shyness, almost fear, then with less hesitation. The first step towards the dialogue and the cohabitation was taken.

By their own initiative, the inhabitants of Bratunac and its surroundings began to ask the cooperative to become members.

In September 2006 the associated families were 341, for a total of more than 3.500 people involved.

The cooperative grants micro-credits to the associates to purchase the raspberry plants and supplies them.

The members cultivate autonomously and produce fruits. The cooperative guarantees the purchase of the production.

The Cooperative purchases also the production of non members, should the conditions be favourable.

The Cooperative supplies free technical assistance too, sending the agronomists – employees or volunteers – to help the growers.

Currently the numbers of people directly employed by the cooperative are:

►► **FIX:** Eight (4 Serbs + 4 Muslims): 1 president (Skender Hot), 1 manager (Radmila Žarković), 3 agronomists (Nermina Husić since 2005, Muslim; Marjana Beatović since 2006, Serb; Dragan Malović since 2004, Serb), 1 agronomist responsible of the internal production (Predrag Marković), 2 security guards.

►► **SEASONAL:** Seventeen (12 women: 11 Serbs and 1 Muslim + 5 men: 1 Serb and 5 Muslims) for the picking, the selection, the freezing and storing of the raspberries. The number can change according to necessity.

► Ten drivers who go to the producers to take the plastic cassettes containing the productions.

The criteria of positive discrimination to hire staff are: the job is given to those who return, to the widows with children, to people without an income.

ACS, Assopace and Agronomi Senza Frontiere are still cooperating with the Forum Žena Bratunac and the municipality to encourage the take off of the economy on solidarity and sustainable basis, the reconstruction of a social tissue based on cohabitation and reciprocal recognition.

THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE IN BRATUNAC

As already said above, at first the inhabitants of Bratunac showed no interest in the project.

Their doubts were mainly caused by the fact that the project was financed by non-governmental organizations and international aids.

In general, projects financed in this way live a short life and the international community helps for food or home reconstruction, but it does not give a tangible opportunity to become independent.

The Zemljihradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac is a project which gives a serious possibility to the refugees (from both sides) to return home and stay there.

The success of this experience is proved by the fact that in Bratunac there is the higher percentage of people who decided to remain: they try to rebuild their own lives together with civil and multiethnic cohabitation.

The rebirth of the rural economy on sustainable basis and the creation of a microeconomic system based on domestic cultivation of fruits of the forest is particularly suitable for the social and economic conditions of this area.

Indeed, this economic activity is suitable for the current demographical situation in Bratunac: firms are small, the activities do not require great equipments, therefore they are good either for families of women only, or families with aged members.

Moreover, picking fruits in June and July, allows the older boys to give a hand without interrupting their school routine.

The main goal reached by Zemljihradnicka Zadruga "Insieme" Bratunac is the level of partners' consciousness: they know (in the real sense of the term) that the cooperation between the different ethnic groups and the dialogue can stop and isolate the nationalists.

In order to solve the mutual problems, it is necessary to re-establish the local production, to cooperate to create self-confidence, dialogue and reciprocal attention.

All this will help to find a feeling of safety for everybody.

ZEMLJORADNICKA ZADRUGA INSIEME BRATUNAC: SYSTEM, COSTS, ORGANIZATION

The Cooperative wants to sustain the producers in the cultivation, picking, conservation and sale of fruits and processed products, at the best conditions for its members.

Some pictures representing different moments of the harvesting and collecting process



To reach its aim, the Cooperative has built a 3.000 mq nursery for the production of new varieties and fruit trees.

A 400 mq greenhouse, with microclimatic conditions suitable for intensive fruit cultivation, and the basic structures for fruit growing were built.

In the first half of 2006, a shed in Bratunac was bought.

Once the shed had been renovated, a half was converted into a refrigeration system, and the other half into offices and warehouse.

The refrigeration system is composed by three cells.

Fruits are placed into a cell (capacity: 150 tons) at 0°C and then into a second cell (capacity: 300 tons) arriving at -20°C.

Once they have reached the temperature, goods are stored there for 12 hours and then put in a warehouse cell (capacity: 350 tons) at -30°C.

6 refrigeration motors placed outside make the refrigerator cells work.

The shed and the refrigerator system cost around 700.000 euros.



Four steps of the nursery construction; two pictures of the cultivation of raspberry trees inside the nursery; a view of the nursery; the refrigeration system; the offices

Currently the production is being sold to the premises of Sarajevo, Zvornik and Serbia. The cooperative has bought everything which was necessary to follow the EU regulations.

The official opening of the new complex together with the Raspberry Party at the beginning of July 2006 was an opportunity for several actors to get to know the initiative, both economically and socially.

What became clear in my interviews to the workers, was that at the beginning they

became members because of their need to work, in order to eat and live with dignity. However, this simple fact was a way to create a dialogue.

People directly involved in planning and implementing the project know this process and exploit it to build the foundations for cohabitation. The final step is to reach the dialogue between Muslims and Serbs.

When people ask for work, they only think to get an income. They are not willing for peace. Only later they become aware that they can live better not only because they have an income. They understand that the conditions for a peaceful cohabitation exist.

A significant example is given by the experience of two female agronomists, a Serb one and a Muslim one. Initially they did not know each other and they were there just to work. Now they are friends, work together all day and think that a peaceful cohabitation between Muslims and Serbs is possible.



Nermina Husić and Mariana Beatović

Among its goals, the cooperative wants to reach salaries able to cover the standard cost of living.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the average cost of living is 500 euros, but an average salary is only 250 euros.

Other goals of the cooperative are:

- to enhance the production of fruits of the forest through modern and eco-sustainable cultivation techniques;
- to train local agronomists;

- to build nurseries in order to obtain very high quality reproductive material;
- to introduce new raspberry and strawberry varieties (resistant and adaptable) in order to have a longer period of life and vegetation and to reach a more effective use of work force;
- to create a laboratory to transform part of the harvested product.

How can they obtain this?

Agronomi Senza Frontiere played an important role helping to build nurseries and to teach modern and eco-sustainable growing techniques.

Even if nobody in this association is on the place, internet contact is available between the parts, to clarify what kind of problem the trees have, what is the best solution to solve it, to suggest new grafts.

In September 2006 a little cultivation of raspberries and currants for a second harvest in autumn was tested. Having two harvests means to have more work and seasonal workers for longer period. But it would be wrong to think that in the autumn and winter period people relax.

After the harvest, it is time to sow the fruit trees inside the nursery. After a while, it is necessary to plant them separately. In March, it is time to start open cultivation.

There are also training courses for local growers and agronomists, and training for the new financial rules (taxation) introduced in ex Bosnia.

HOW THE EXPERIENCES OF THE EXPERTS INFLUENCE THE PROJECT

The experience of the active pacifists and the Organizations involved permitted the realization of the project "Raspberries of piece" and the achievement of important goals.

How?

From their experiences, the experts know how to approach a similar problem. Peace is a long process that has to involve the local people, and without dialogue is not possible to build peace conditions.

They know that using basic needs (food, work, a sense of security), they can create the network for having a peaceful cohabitation.

When the economic conditions improve, people are unlikely to look for fights or revenges.

Initially people were not enthusiastic for the project, they were sometimes indifferent. Only when the first trees had grown, curiosity became stronger than diffidence.

People started to ask for information about cultivation, hoping to find a job: a channel for exchanging experiences was opened.

The more Cooperative grew, the more the process of asking information was like a circle expanding itself. Even the inhabitants of the villages around Bratunac asked about the project. Once the people had entered, new links with other people became easier. As a consequence of the process, fear and rivalry decrease.

Now, after only six years since the birth of the project, living in Bratunac is very different. The refugees have an opportunity to remain, they do not feel the hostility and the sense of revenge as they did before.

The social tissue is more compact: there is more cooperation between the inhabitants. The indirect victims of atrocities have often met the families of the criminals who had committed the crimes (with difficulties, understandably).

There is the will to reconstruct a dialogue, but a lot has still to be done.

POSSIBILITY TO EXPORT "RASPBERRIES OF PIECE" EXPERIENCE TO OTHER CONTEXTS

The success of "Raspberries of peace" and the possibility to start it was mainly due to the experience of several experts in the field of peace building and the will of some inhabitants of Bratunac to rebuild a new social tissue to live together.

When the project was proposed to the Forum Žena of Bratunac (a pacifist movement of Muslim women existing for several years with peaceful proposals) there was no dialogue between Serbs and Muslim and there were several socio-economic problems.

The Forum accepted the proposal and accepted to cooperate with the Serbs in order to reach a peaceful, liveable context.

Serbs and Muslims started the project together, implemented it together and are working at it together.

From the beginning, the Mothers of Srebrenica movement has also cooperated in the project.

Only reading paragraph 2 of this elaborate, it is easy to understand how hard for a mother of Srebrenica can be to cooperate with the mothers or the relatives of the murderers of their children or their entire family.

The main factors of success in the project are the cooperation between the experts and the local people, and the will of the inhabitants to create a new opportunity to live together, in a peaceful context.

An important role was played and it is still played by Radmila Žarković and Skender Hot, with their will to realize the project, their passion to reach the goals.

Exporting this experience is possible and advisable.

Key elements are the availability of people with a remarkable background in the field of peace building, the existence of good channels to obtain loans and the necessary guarantees for the local people involved, the will of the local inhabitants to start the project. It is also important to plan a project for a long period of time. Peace is a long construction process.

CONCLUSIONS

The war in former Yugoslavia was fierce and caused a lot of personal tragedies.

For the first time in European history after the Second World War, a genocide was committed and the international military intervention showed its failure.

The international programmes for reconstruction in former Yugoslavia too have been seen from local inhabitants as a failure: too often, when the mass-media move their attention to other countries or emergencies, people who live difficult situations are abandoned to themselves.

Too often international aids are focussed on house or school reconstruction instead of helping local people create the basis to avoid other wars or fights, to rebuild a society based on reciprocal respect and on dialogue, to help people to be independent from external aids.

Raspberries of Peace testifies how the involvement of the local population is important to achieve the goals, and it shows the guidelines to re-establish the conditions for a peaceful cohabitation in post-war territories.

It is also true that the international programme for the reconstruction in Bratunac allowed legal owners to have their houses and lands back, and the ICTY intervention for the persecution of war criminals was crucial to remove the politicians in Bratunac and Srebrenica who took part in the ethnic cleansing.

In my opinion, the key elements for the success of the project, are the following:

- the arrest of people involved in the massacre by ICTY;
- the international reconstruction plan which allowed the refugees to get their properties back and (even if under armed control for the first period) to stay in their native towns;
- the intention of a part of the local population to assert the conditions for peaceful cohabitation;
- the experience of the Italian NGOs, of Radmila and Skender and of the Forum Žena of Bratunac: the intervention of those people who strongly believe in peace, who have experience in the field is fundamental to help a peace process.

Bratunac is currently the ex-Bosnia town with the higher percentage of refugees who came back and settled, and where nationalists are more and more isolated and blocked.

This means that only when the projects for the reconstruction of dialogue and peace are planned over a long period, with proper skills and local people actively involved, it is possible to help.

Furthermore, planning a sustainable project, independent from foreign aids and able to encourage self-esteem in the local population is highly important.

Independence for local population is necessary in order to maintain a real and lasting peace building process.

It is possible to re-establish contact between two parties and to reduce the hostility, through economic activities. Economical factors as means to achieve peace are also a way to be independent from foreign aids.

It is for this reasons that I think there should be more grants to support projects of this kind.

Projects need to be financed even after the first emergency period.

WEBSITES

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