

Most Mira Youth Festival
Kevljani, Prijedor
Bosnia and Herzegovina
11 to 16 May 2009

An Evaluation Report



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"I changed a lot since I started coming to the Festival"

(Excerpt from a child participant's comment referring to personal changes or gains, 15/05/09).

"The children are smiling more. Visually you can see the change. We were lucky to be included in this Festival. There needs to be more of this.

We need this"

(Excerpt from focus group with teachers, 14/05/09).

"Everything is great. Nothing is difficult we can do anything we want if we want to do it. The most difficult thing was hip-hop when we were trying to learn the movements"

(Excerpt from a child participant's comment referring to greatest challenges, 14/05/09).

"At the start I thought all looked difficult but at the end it wasn't it was super"

(Excerpt from a child participant's comment to greatest challenges, 14/05/09).

"During this week in Kevljani it was great. I met lots of friends. I wouldn't change anything. I would love the Festival to happen next year!"

(Excerpt from a child participant's comment referring to personal changes or gains, 15/05/09)



"The most important thing is that it happened. I am pleasantly surprised as we've been working on this idea for a year or more but we had not actually reached the framework of what the Festival would look like. Only once we had let ourselves into the adventure could we finally see what it was difficult to imagine. Now it is becoming clear, it is a nice gathering today. The most beautiful thing is that all children are wearing the same T-shirt. They all look the same and you can't distinguish between them."

(Transcript 8, quotation 75, Teacher on the Festival Day)

1. INTRODUCTION

From 11 –16th May 2009, Most Mira provided five days of workshops and one final Festival day, to encourage creative collaboration amongst Bosniak (Muslim), Croat and Serb children from participating schools and youth clubs in Prijedor Municipality. This was made possible by a team of sixty eight dedicated volunteers from 15 countries, the continued commitment of schools, youth groups and partner organizations in Bosnia and the generous support of the Sir Halley Stewart Trust, the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust, the W. F. Southall Trust and ArcelorMittal, and a group of generous private donors.

This is a summary report of the impacts, challenges, learning and suggestions generated by an internal evaluation, undertaken by 2 people both involved in Most Mira and experienced in the techniques of evaluation. Special attention is paid to evidence and feedback data gathered from those young people of Prijedor Municipality who either participated or supported this initiative, the group whose needs led to the establishment of Most Mira.

Most Mira (Peace Bridge) was founded in 2005 to bring together the divided communities of Prijedor, in Northern Bosnia, by celebrating the creative potential of all its young inhabitants, to widen the horizons of this first post-war generation and to reignite excitement about the cultural and social potential of young people within the Municipality (for an account of the historical and political setting and the setting up of Most Mira see Appendix).

The Festival Day held on 16th May was attended by over 1,000 people including children, volunteers, and community members and ran from 12 noon until 8pm. Workshops took place between 11.30 and 2pm daily from children aged between five and fifteen years old. Activities during the week included art, drama, music, dance, circus skills, event logistics and journalism or 'peer research'. These activities and the concept of the Festival were introduced to children during a roadshow held in the final week of April, which included visits to all the participating schools and youth groups.



2. PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND ORGANISATIONS

375 children from the following schools and youth groups:

Kevljani Primary School (part of Omarska School)
Primary School *Vuk Karadžić*, Omarska
Primary School *Kozarac*, Kozarac
Hambarine Youth Centre
Ljubija Youth Centre

3. AIMS OF THE FESTIVAL

- To enhance opportunities for children and young people from this cross cultural society to engage with each other.
- To create an independent social and cultural space open and appealing to all.
- To give young people a chance to choose from a wide-ranging menu of creative activities which facilitate collaborations.
- To create new forms of participatory art combining different creative disciplines including art, drama, music and dance forms.
- To give children from Serb, Croat and Bosniak and all other families, who are separated at school and at home, the chance to do things together
- To simply experience fun and laughter together so creating an atmosphere conducive to the above aims.

4. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The methods selected to evaluate the approach, outcomes and impacts of this project needed to satisfy two requirements:

1. the evaluation had to be consistent with the overall approach and objectives of the project i.e. to maximise participation and creative collaboration amongst all stakeholders, but especially the children themselves;
2. the evaluation needed to be integrated into the existing activities as far as possible thereby avoiding adding unduly to the existing workload of the volunteers, teachers and young participants.

Hence the approach taken employed playful formats wherever possible which would gather image-based feedback from children and suggestions in small undemanding 'soundbytes'. During the workshops, a period for reflection was set aside each day. Central to this period was the creation of an *evaluation tree*, adapted from Reflect Action Research.

On four of the five days workshop volunteers were assigned a simple activity to conduct with participants which were added to the tree, creating a visual representation of how the week was evolving and provided immediate feedback to volunteers on how their sessions were being received. This was particularly helpful given that the majority of volunteers did not speak the local language and so it enabled them to get a better understanding of what was working and what was not.

For the first activity participants were given papers cut in the shape of circle and asked to draw a facial expression on one side to indicate how they were feeling about the workshops and Festival thus far, and on the other side to explain in brief why they had drawn that particular expression. The second reflection phase involved paper cut in the shape of tree leaf, on which participants were asked to write what had been the biggest challenge they had faced that week. Thirdly, using the shape of apple to represent fruits participants were asked write what was the biggest personal change or gain that had occurred for them during the week. The final activity involved clouds depicting dreams and recommendations for a future event. This approach was selected for its creativity, mirroring of the festival's theme of nature, the ability to document change over time and to enable all participants to give feedback when only one evaluator was available on site to gather the data.



The final evaluation tree as it was erected on the wall of the Community Centre

On the other hand it did not allow in-depth responses and probing. In terms of analysis, this was a challenge as the children interpreted each activity in different ways and did not stick to the specific question asked. In the leaves exercise for example many participants chose to reflect on how they were feeling about the activities thus far rather than on challenges. However, this constitutes an inevitable aspect of evaluation work with young people where creativity and individual choice are the governing principles.

A form of peer research was incorporated in the workshop on journalism. Participants were trained to use digital cameras and basic interviewing methods. They selected topics to explore through visual and written media and captured the Festival from the perspective of participants. A difficulty encountered in the peer research was that participants tended to seek out their friends to interview and selected photos for inclusion in their displays on this basis. However, this was gradually challenged throughout the week.

Combined together these methods enabled a wide spectrum of stakeholders, whether involved directly or indirectly in the festival, to give feedback if they wished. All participants, volunteers and teachers were informed about the purpose of the evaluation and the evaluation tree approach being used. Furthermore focus groups and interviews were purely voluntary and consent was gained at the outset, with the option of withdrawing at any stage. While no adult or child was obliged to provide evaluation feedback, a clear majority wished to contribute their responses and suggestions.

The evaluation data gathered was analysed using a simple method of qualitative coding on two software packages, namely Atlas t\i and Microsoft Excel. On Atlas t\i, a qualitative data analysis application, coded segments were then analysed further for typicality, spread and suggestions or preferences applicable to future activities.

The evaluation focuses upon three key areas: the project's impact on all participants (children, local communities, schools, volunteers and partners), the challenges (for organisers, participants and others living in the vicinity) and learning, considering what worked, what did not work, and how can this be transferred for future events and for others. Finally, the report offers suggestions from all involved for future events and for the strategic direction of Most Mira beyond this initial festival.

The content and methodology of the evaluation sought to facilitate creative collaboration amongst children and between children and volunteers and to encourage the participatory approach which underpins Most Mira's work.

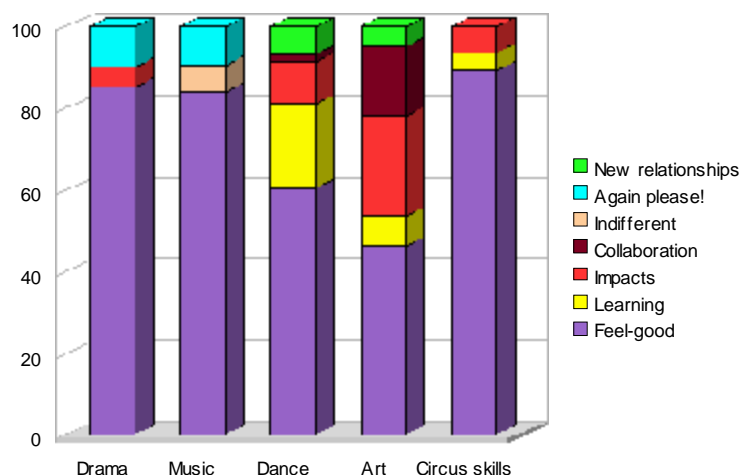


A cluster of evaluation faces drawn by workshop participants reflecting responses to the 'Festival experience' on day two

5. IMPACT ON THE CHILDREN: 'A GREAT EXPERIENCE'

5.1. General response

While the children's responses were not universally positive – see challenges section below - the general content and tone of the feedback data gathered, is overwhelmingly positive. This is apparent in the photograph below of the faces drawn by young participants on Day Two of the workshops. Children were also invited to elaborate in words on the reverse side of the facial



expressions they had drawn. This data was then coded and is summarised in the bar chart above.

It is clear from the chart that by far the most dominant trend at this early stage was a feel-good factor – faces and content which merely reflected participants enjoying the workshop experience. It is striking to note that even at this early stage, more specific impacts – especially concerning new relationships, skills and other positive outcomes – are apparent in the dance and art workshop groups. When we examine the qualitative responses it is apparent that even at this early stage children are already calling for more of the same in the future:

“During this week in Kevljani it was great. I met lots of friends. I wouldn’t change anything. I would love the Festival to happen next year.”

“This is super. I like everything and nothing should change. I think it is great we are learning something new. I would like all these people to come back next year.”

“Many new friends”: engaging with strangers



Dance workshop

Children also spontaneously identified interaction with other children with whom they had no previous knowledge as integral to these first impressions. The range of responses dealing with this theme include references to merely having access to 'new' young people i.e. social exposure followed by a process of getting acquainted, and developing new friendships:

*“I have acquired a great experience.
I’ve met new people and we’ve learnt so much in a new way.”*

*“Meeting and getting to know one another.
Having fun together and acting.”*

It is impressive that even at this early stage children are experiencing the benefits of engagement and the potential to develop new social ties which could be sustained beyond this project:

*“At this Festival I had a wonderful time I met many friends
and done many different things.”*

Certain responses also demonstrate a growing appreciation by young people that working together has the potential to have new and exciting group experiences. This is apparent in the following response from a young participant in the music workshop:

“During this week I’ve learnt how children can play together and sing.”



Dance performance on the Festival Day

Hence the children were benefiting in three ways from the opportunity to meet and engage with new young people:

1. social exposure and getting to know each other
2. having fun together and developing new friendships
3. collaborating in a creative context – dancing or creating new art and music forms together

*“It is very good that children are working together in workshops so that they create new friendships, with children from other schools as well. We are observing what is happening and it is all leaving an impression”
(Transcript 8, quotation 62, Teacher).*

However not all the children were confident enough to engage with strangers from the outset, and this is apparent in the following insight offered by one of the volunteers:

*“On the first day workshop leaders reported that children were initially shy, particularly performing or doing ‘silly things’ in front of their friends. They stayed largely within their friendship groups. However, it was noted that children grew in confidence during the workshops, especially in terms of performing and started to mix more.”
(Transcript 1, quotation 5, Volunteer).*

The formation of new relationships constituted one of the primary outcomes which the peer researchers chose to emphasise:



“This work was created by children. They made it as a sign of friendship. They decided to do it in different colours and sizes. This was done by children of different age groups and different nationalities”. Participant, 13 years old.

The development of new relationships pervades all the evaluation data gathered and indicates that in this respect the project certainly has a positive impact on many. The extent to which these relationships will be sustained will depend on opportunities for ongoing contact beyond May 2009. However regardless of the extent to which these circumstantial relationships can contribute to greater integration between different groups in the area should not be measured by enduring relationships alone. It could be argued that through exposure to peers from different backgrounds, children develop a *social literacy* or a means of opening themselves to peers who are strangers which is underpinned by positive experiences of what was gained when they previously did so in a secure and affirming environment. The Festival project would therefore constitute the context in which such a positive attitude towards engagement can be forged.

5.2. “We Learnt So Much”: Acquiring New Skills

The children also mention both the opportunity to develop English language skills – volunteers coming from outside of Bosnia used English to communicate with each other and when interpreting support was in short supply, with the children.

“I met many new people. I’ve learnt English better and experienced beautiful and unforgettable events.”

This benefit is also noted by teachers, such as in the following:

*“Many kids speak English and it is a good exercise for them to speak with foreign people. So I hope that it won’t be the last Festival here”
(Transcript 8, quotation 72, Teacher).*



Arts workshop

Children also commented on developing skills more specific to particular workshop groups.

*“Today was great because we learnt to make things out of plastic.
We learnt some new things.”*

“Me and my colleagues we were learning circus skills and having a great fun.”

“I am very happy because I learnt how to dance different dances.”

Some of the skills acquired seem so specific that their applicability to settings outside of a circus or Festival may seem limited. However the ways in which these more challenging skills were encouraged had as much to do with the collaboration and support the activities called for, than it did with the skills in their own right.

*“The kids learnt so much that will stay with them forever from circus skills to painting a backdrop, stage or a painting. They learnt many skills that will be very useful for them”
(Transcript 8, quotation 84, Teacher).*



Children participate in circus skills performance

5.3. Avoiding The Monotony Of The Classroom: Benefiting From A Break From The Norm

Many young participants were very open about the workshops offering a welcome break from the routine of an average school week:

"It is funny we don't need to only sit. It is not boring."

*"I like everything very much especially because there is no school.
It is good that you take us from the last two very boring lessons."*

*"The kids tried all the workshops and were able to learn things.
The culmination is that kids now like the space here as well as the workshops.
The methods used in the workshops are very attractive and teachers can learn something.
For six days we avoided the monotony of the classroom!"
(Transcript 8, quotation 76, Teacher).*

5.4. Receiving 'Things'

"It is great we got shirts and oranges"

*'We didn't know what to expect. After the first day we were very excited and positive.
The kids told other kids who didn't come and they wanted to come too.
They felt very welcome here, everyone was very nice.
They liked coming on the bus and the whole scenery.
For some reason although they are not poor kids but they loved having t-shirts.
That was very important to them. Also the fact that they get crisps and chocolate was another
positive feedback we received, even though that isn't something they are normally lacking.'
(Transcript 8, quotation 58, Teacher).*

This particular finding was somewhat unexpected. To some extent we anticipated that the 'things' created during the workshops would make a more significant impression on the children than the small material offerings each child received. However it seems that the process of giving and receiving was positive in itself. It is possible that this outcome was enhanced for many by the element of surprise – the children were most often not anticipating that they would receive T-shirts featuring art work they and their peers had generated as part of the poster competition several months earlier.

5.5. Rewarding Outcomes

From the evidence gathered it is clear that for those participating in workshop groups where focus was placed on developing relatively demanding outputs and performances for the final Festival day, that the culmination of such a process was satisfying for those who contributed. This outcome was most apparent at the end of the week:

"The Festival was fantastic. This week went well and our task went very well."

*"For me I had a great time being in the drama workshop. This is an extremely beautiful experience.
I liked playing the role of the scientist.
If I had a chance to participate in another show I would not change anything."*

*“The challenge was to act everything properly and we achieved that.
This was a great experience that will be useful in the future.”*



Music Workshop Festival day Performance

5.6. *“We Can Do Anything!”: Confidence Gained*

Workshop facilitators sought to maximise participation and ownership by focusing up front on providing participants with the know-how they required to practically realise their visions. The volunteers brought together a wide spectrum of skills and experience and so many of the children gained confidence when it came to putting their imagination into practice. This outcome is apparent in the two quotations gathered from young participants below:

“Everything was great. We can do anything because anything is possible we want to do it.”

*“Everything is great. Nothing is difficult we can do anything we want if we want to do it.
The most difficult thing was hip-hop when we were trying to learn the moves.”*

5.7. Concluding Comment: Impact On The Children

A common thread running through most of the children’s responses was pleasure in things that were ‘new’ to them: new relationships, new skills, and a refreshing departure for schooling routines. This is interesting in that it contrasts with the common response among the adults consulted in the preparatory stages – an embrace of cherished cultural traditions. This reliance on tradition has also been apparent in recent cultural events organised locally for children. There was no evidence in their responses of the children being intimidated or overwhelmed by being confronted with new skills and experiences in the Most Mira Festival.

6. IMPACTS ON THE LOCAL RESIDENTS

Evidence was not gathered from local residents in a structured way. However there were reports of conversations which took place between Bosnian speaking volunteers and individuals walking or driving past or who attended the final Festival day. The following account refers to an episode which was witnessed by a group of volunteers:

"A grandfather from one of the neighbouring villages was trying to get his granddaughter to come home and change into something warmer. She had been helping out in the afternoon with the preparations. She wouldn't come and told him 'you go and bring my jumper!'. By the end of the week he was really pleased about the Festival and wanted it to continue for longer. He thought it was great that children can get their hands dirty and do different things. He thought it was great that the volunteers were young and from all over the world and didn't tell the children what to do. He felt that it was the children driving the process. He said it was unfortunate what had happened during the war, that he had maintained neighbourly relations with Muslims but politics gets in the way. He volunteered to help with cutting grass and logistics for the Festival next year."
(Transcript 1, quotation 2, anecdotal accounts).

Further accounts referred to other similar moments, such as the Festival Day when men of different backgrounds from neighbouring villages sat down in front of the village shop in the vicinity of the Festival field to share a beer for the first time since 1992. The youth Festival brought adults together to focus on the rich creative outputs which their children and grand-children had created collaboratively. This seems to have had a contagious effect for some on encouraging engagement where tension and distrust have previously been more dominant.

7. IMPACT ON THE VOLUNTEERS: "IT'S BEEN SO INCREDIBLE!"

7.1. Volunteering Ethos

If the ethos of Most Mira Youth Festival 2009 had to be described in one word, it would be volunteering. In both the planning and delivery of the Festival, in the UK and in Bosnia, only essential goods were paid for. All work was done by volunteers. Two or three volunteers travelled to Bosnia once a month for a year to help coordinate activities with schools and local partners. All volunteers were recruited on the basis of their skills and willingness to work in challenging circumstances, consisting not only of a lack of basic infrastructure, but also of the challenging content, context and purpose of the Festival. Most Mira covered the cost of travel for all volunteers, including return flights for international volunteers. During the week of the festival, accommodation was provided in 4 rented houses and a number of volunteers camped on the site. Most Mira also provided three meals a day, prepared by the volunteers using a field kitchen lent by the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This saved money and helped the team be more self-reliant.

Volunteers came from: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, St. Lucia, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, United States of America and United Kingdom.



Volunteers preparing for workshops

7.2. Benefits for the Volunteers

The evidence gathered for the evaluation about the response of the volunteers is dominated by a general sense of achievement and enjoyment experienced while contributing to the Festival project:

“It’s been so credible. The most amazing opportunity offered for free. I just slipped into it and it’s been amazing” (Transcript 8, quotation 7, International volunteer).

For volunteers interested in pursuing a career in humanitarian or development work, the opportunity also involved work experience which could prove useful when asked for international field experience. Others simply referred to the responses of the children as reward enough:

“A little girl who I’ve been working with all week came up to me today and threw her arms round me and said “I just want to thank you, this has been the best day of my life” (Transcript 8, quotation 2, international volunteer).

“I really had a great time there, I enjoyed so much seeing all those happy kids and I was actually really amazed of the result of the week, especially for a first time!” (Transcript 8, quotation 33, international volunteer).

While others demonstrate an interest in sustaining or even deepening their involvement in Most Mira activities:

“I am always thinking about Bosnia...I have to say that week had a brilliant feel to it, and it affected me in many ways...I was so happy to be there. In fact I’d like to become more involved in the project if that’s realistic” (Transcript 8, quotation 32, international volunteer).

This cohort of volunteers, now relatively well-versed in the challenges and practical considerations of facilitating participatory creative activities for young people in this setting, constitute an invaluable resource both for Most Mira and its partners. Furthermore, as discussed later in the report, the rapport developed between the volunteers and the children (and in some cases teachers) is also of strategic importance going forward. Hence it is recommended that the charity carefully consider how to ensure that the experience, skills and enthusiasm of these volunteers is sustained and harnessed for the future.



Puppets workshop rehearsal for the Festival day

8. IMPACT ON THE BOSNIAN PARTNERS

8.1. Schools and Youth Groups

A number of partners made the Festival possible in different ways. The schools and youth groups were the key to engagement of children and parents. Without their participation the Festival would not have happened. The head teachers' and youth group coordinators' leadership and standing in the community was an invaluable asset which resulted in increased engagement. Although Most Mira brought in resources and expertise, as well as good will, they still had the difficult task of bringing on board parents and their staff, in order to overcome their lack of resources and to build up the trust. Mistrust amongst different communities is still part of the day-to-day existence in the region, but there is also mistrust of the international community's repeated interventions that are not always helpful or useful in the local context.

Most Mira is very grateful to schools and youth groups for their leadership, patience and efforts and is hoping to continue working with them productively in the future.

8.2. Non-Governmental Organisations

Partnerski Omladinski Pokret – POP (Partnership Youth Movement) is an NGO based in Banja Luka whose staff and volunteers became part of Most Mira over the last year. They helped with logistics, recruited Bosnian volunteers, helped deliver the workshops and all aspects of the Festival. There is no doubt that their involvement in the Youth Festival was a positive and useful experience for POP, but Most Mira acknowledges that it has been an added strain on their limited resources and are extremely grateful for their contribution.

What follows is an excerpt from email correspondence with POP written after the Festival:

“Dear Tish and the rest of the Most Mira crew,

it was my pleasure to cooperate with you on a birth of the first Youth Festival. A new experience for all in our team, and quite some inspiration and a positive energy has been shared among us. For me personally, it came like a fresh air. I am sorry that I couldn't get my self more involved and I believe that our staff and volunteers made their best. Currently, they organize creative workshops in Youth House in Banja Luka, they just can't stop it after Kevljani :). You empowered them to do so”.

This demonstrates that the momentum created by the Festival alongside the participatory workshop-based approach to engaging young people in creative activities benefited our partners whose work with young people in Bosnia continues. It is therefore recommended that Most Mira consider options for extending further support for local partners in a better position to offer activities which encourage creative collaboration throughout the year and not merely annually.

Other partners whose contribution made the Festival possible are:

- Agencija Lokalne Demokratije – helped provide puppet workshops by
- Associazione culturale 'Teatro del Corvo' from Italy
- Positive Play - based in Sarajevo. Provided team building training through sports and games.
- Tačka - An art group founded by arts graduates who deliver training workshops for young people in the Prijedor area.
- Serious Road Trip - provided Circus Skills workshops for the Festival.
- French Cultural Centre in Banja Luka

9. LOGISTICS

9.1. Budget

The logistical challenges of organising a week-long Youth Festival for 400 children and nearly seventy volunteers in rural Bosnia, while based in the UK, were immense. In addition to doing it on a voluntary basis with no paid staff, and on a very small budget, a few months before the start of the Festival, global recession erased nearly 30% of the budget, as most of the Most Mira funding was in pound sterling and most of our expenditure was in the Euro-linked local currency (konvertibilna marka). Plans for materials, transport and travel, accommodation had to be constantly revised to make savings, which caused additional strain on the core logistics team.

Despite all these challenges, and with the help of the last minute private donations, the Festival was delivered on time and on budget.

9.2. Health and Safety

In order to ensure safety of the site, equipment and volunteers, Most Mira established a good working relationship with local police who regularly patrolled the area. The Armed Forces of BiH were also very cooperative and helpful.

In the run up to the Festival Most Mira addressed a number of safety concerns. Travel insurance was purchased for international volunteers. The safety and insurance of children was covered through the schools as they were attending the workshops as a part of their school activity.

Some Most Mira volunteers already had a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance as they work with children in the UK, but local volunteers did not have it as there is no equivalent system in Bosnia. The only way to overcome this was to draft a Volunteer Code of Conduct which was signed by all volunteers as a way of clearly stating the boundaries and expected standards of behaviour.

Most Mira had allocated trained First Aid volunteers throughout the Festival. A local doctor and an ambulance team volunteered on the day of the Festival. One child and two volunteers suffered exhaustion from the hot weather. One child and one volunteer had to be seen by the doctor for minor injuries.

Dealings with officials and authorities are time consuming and require language skills and a good understanding of the system. These tasks consumed most of the bilingual volunteers' time on this occasion.



Field kitchen provide by the BiH Armed Forces for the use by volunteers

9.3. Other Logistical Issues

Other logistical requirements such as field toilets and transport (buses) worked well but these were hired from professional services and cost money. Cooking, electricity, the water supply, the stage and the sound system were more challenging to provide, and we will need more investment next year.

It is clear that next year Most Mira needs to provide more tents for workshops to protect participants from the elements. More time is needed for volunteers to prepare on the ground, and as there is no public transport, more cars are to ensure better mobility. Accommodation needs to be provided for all volunteers as camping facilities were not sufficient.

In addition to more money, there is a clear need form more locally based volunteers who would be able to work on the Festival throughout the year and they need to be well-resourced. As the Festival grows, secure storage of equipment will be required locally as it will be unfeasible to transport equipment back and forth all the time.

10. CHALLENGES

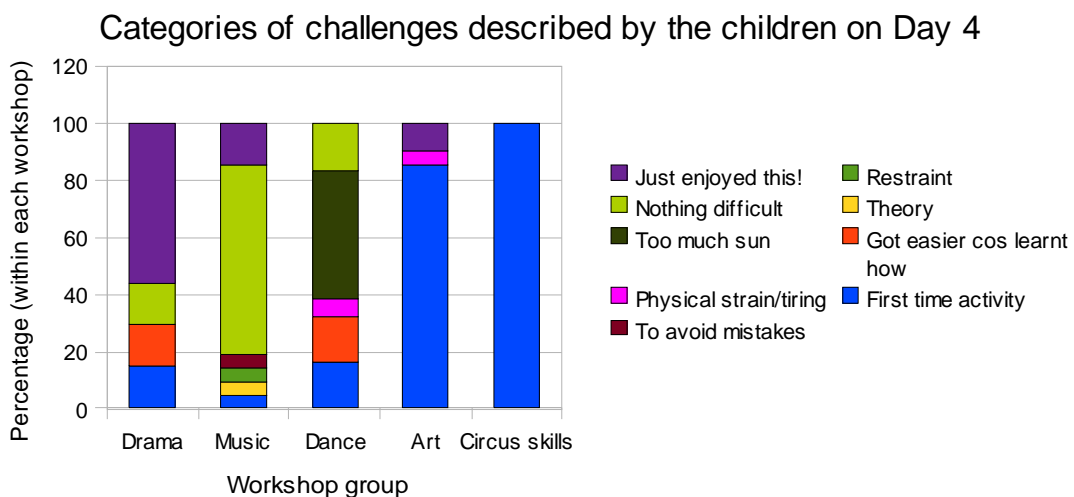
As presented so far, extensive feedback largely refers to the positive outcomes described most emphatically by the children themselves. However, the workshops also triggered a range of more difficult experiences. Data about this was gathered when workshop facilitators asked the children to note anything they had found challenging on or before the fourth day. The photograph below shows a group of these 'challenge' leaves – the format in which this evidence was collected.



Leaves (challenges), fruits (personal changes and gains) and clouds (suggestions) attached to the evaluation tree.

10.1. Challenges Identified By the Children

The challenges identified by the children followed very clear patterns, and are summarised in the bar chart below.



Many of the difficulties identified by children in the art and circus skills workshops concerned the incremental process of developing the necessary skills to handle new activities:

“The hardest was to ride the unicycle.”

Juggling was also identified as challenging, alongside the following activities in other workshop groups:

- music theory
- particular dance choreographies
- and making masks

However many children describe the sense of satisfaction they experienced when an activity that was initially challenging became more manageable:

“At the start I thought it all looked difficult but at the end it wasn’t it was super. The hardest part was capoeira at the beginning. I thought it would be difficult but at the end everything was easy.”

“When we were learning movements with Florah I didn’t know them but then I learnt.”

For many children however the experience was merely associated with fun and not associated with difficulty:

“Nothing was difficult. It was a great time. Thanks very much.”

However one challenge which was identified by a large number of children but especially those in dance workshop concerns the over-exposure to the sun and mid-summer heat. The workshops were held over midday and so the children were expected to be at their most active at the hottest point in the day:

“Everything is super, even the sun.”

“Everything was easy the only thing is too much sun.”

“The tents were not big enough for the larger workshops to fit all participants inside. This was a problem in the heat” (Transcript 1, quotation 8, anecdotal accounts).

This child uses her or his cloud to suggest more sheltered space for future activities:

“If we can practice inside so we can be out of the sun”.

This need for more shelter is corroborated by this following teacher who identifies this challenge as relevant to overcoming any adverse weather conditions:

“The weather was good today but it would have been ruined if it had rained as there is not enough indoor space” (Transcript 8, quotation 80, Teacher).

10.2. Challenges Identified by Adults

Those hosting the event faced other challenges in addition to the above. One such challenge was to convince partners and other stakeholders about the credibility of participatory methods and the need to deliberately keep creative outputs open and undetermined. The gap between the philosophy of the core project team and the expectations and orientation of others they encountered is illustrated in the quotation below:

*“We would have liked it if we had known more about the workshops so we could have picked the best children to perform in a competitive spirit. We could have picked five good students for each workshop to motivate the lazy students.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 42, Teacher).*

Another challenge experienced concerned the issue more pronounced at the beginning of the workshop week when some children were found moving from workshop to workshop. One teacher suggested the following:

*“The children are so creative, they go through the content so quickly. It would be more challenging if they moved workshops and tried different things.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 49, Teacher)*

However later in the week volunteers found that the phenomenon of 'floating children' disappeared as children became more engrossed in their allotted workshop group. Nonetheless this constituted an important strategic decision which needed to be made: whether to prioritise diversification of activities or to encourage new relationships and skills acquisition through keeping children in the same workshop groups throughout the week.

Parents also needed to be reassured. During the week of workshops there were occasional incidents involving nationalist symbols and slogans being drawn on T-shirts which were confiscated by teachers. Fortunately, due in part to the intervention of one head teacher and volunteers who had replaced the garments, the situation was diffused:

“Some parents were upset after they heard of an incident the previous day where one child had written a Serbian slogan on his t-shirt and in retaliation another child had drawn the crescent and stars. Both children had had their t-shirts confiscated. Several parents went to the school and demand that their children be withdrawn from participating on the final day. They were persuaded to come and see what was happening at the Festival before making final decision. When the parents came and saw what was happening in the field the situation was diffused and the parents left, agreeing to leave their children at the Festival” (Transcript 8, quotation 86, Teacher).

It is unclear whether the children drew these symbols and slogans onto the T-shirts themselves given that they arrived at the workshop with the offending T-shirts already inscribed.

The other challenge outlined concerned differing levels of engagement of teachers with the workshop groups and volunteers. The presence of teachers was helpful in many different ways, and for many of them the week was a welcome opportunity to work alongside the volunteers enabling the children to create and collaborate, it is clear that for some of them the workshops constituted a welcome break from the demands of the classroom. For all sorts of reasons, such as language barrier, or type of workshop activity, there was no consistent approach to engaging the teachers who accompanied the children, and this meant that there were gaps in the practical and translating support which some of the workshops needed.

It is therefore recommended that should the Most Mira run similar events in the future, that a clearer role be negotiated with schools and their staff.

11. THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

This section focuses on whether and how different groups were effectively involved in the participatory process which underpinned the Festival for Most Mira.

11.1. What Worked

From the outset the core Most Mira team was aware of the lack of creative opportunities which used participatory methods in the Prijedor Municipality. The quotation below attests to the project successfully improving access to such experiences for the young people of Prijedor:

*“One of the parent’s came over bringing coffee and joined in the conversation. She said ‘The children are very excited that something like this has been organised here. Normally the kids get taken somewhere like Sarajevo. It is the first time that something like this has happened here’”
(Transcript 8, quotation 66, international volunteer).*

The key question is whether the children themselves were actively and creatively engaged in the experience, and whether they got what they needed from it.

*“For the children we really need happiness and pleasure. All these children come from families where there is some kind of trauma and when they get home there is sadness and they don’t have the time to play. Here when they come they can forget that, they are juggling balls and stuff like that. Especially in this area we have really suffered”
(Transcript 8, quotation 64, Teacher).*

To what extent did the activities and approach genuinely ignite the interest of the children themselves?

*“You can see everything in the children’s behaviour! The kids were reserved on the first day but after that more kids were signing up to join”
(Transcript 8, quotation 60, Teacher).*

On Thursday 14th May, some children from Kozarac School were unable to attend workshops as they had to perform at the school event in the honour of the Minister of Culture who was visiting from Sarajevo. The following anecdote indicates that some children would rather have attended the workshops than perform in front of a Minister:

*“Nothing was difficult. Kids loved the workshops. The most difficult thing was to tell the kids that they couldn’t come when we had our celebration. We had to call them back off the bus! ... I would like this Festival to become a tradition”
(Transcript 8, quotation 78, Teacher).*



Photographic workshop exhibition

This event is corroborated by other teachers from the same school:

*“There was a problem on Thursday with our ceremony. We had to get half the choir off the bus [bringing children to the workshops] as they were very disappointed that they had to stay. That says it all!”
(Transcript 8, quotation 93, Teacher).*

*“The kids are really very excited to come here. It was very difficult yesterday as some kids had to stay and the Head Teacher had to come out twice to ask them to stay.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 56, Teacher).*

It is the clear from the account below that children from Omarska School were similarly engaged in workshop activities and preparations for the final Festival day:

*“They [children] are talking about the Festival all day long. Most of the kids from Omarska are going to school and when they go to school they keep talking about what they have done during the Festival”
(Transcript 8, quotation 59, Teacher).*

However the evidence gathered for the evaluation indicates that other stakeholder groups also demonstrated a sense of satisfaction that the children had finally been brought together to meet and work with each other and that 'things were coming together' after an extensive period of planning and preparation:

‘The most important thing is that it happened. I am pleasantly surprised as we’ve been working on this idea for a year or more but we had not actually reached the framework of what the Festival would look like. Only once we had let ourselves into the adventure could we finally see what it was difficult to imagine. Now it is becoming clear, it is a nice gathering today. The most beautiful thing is that all children are wearing the same T-shirt. They all look the same and you can’t distinguish between them.’ (Transcript 8, quotation 75, Teacher).

From the above quotation it is also clear that some regarded the practice of putting all the children regardless of demographic background, into a fun version of 'Festival uniform' worked to encourage them to engage without reservations and avoid assumptions and stereotypes.

Furthermore, the conviction that international volunteers engaged in Festival activities brought a beneficial dimension of newness just by coming from elsewhere, is also borne out in the quotation below:

*“The foreigners brought peace. They are creating a place where ethnicity does not matter. Having outsiders come in creates a positive atmosphere”
(Transcript 8, quotation 68, Teacher).*

Others also commented positively on the role played by volunteers:

*“I have been impressed by all the workshop leaders and volunteers. They welcomed us by smiles, both children and teachers. I was very touched the first day and it is a memory that will stay with me, them welcoming us with flags and smiles. It looked to me like a family, like parents welcoming their children, it was emotionally very positive”
(Transcript 8, quotation 55, Teacher).*

*“The Festival isn't like I imagined it is much better. I like the volunteers they are so...so...how to say...they work a lot...always smiling. They are patient with the kids. It isn't easy to work with kids”
(Transcript 8, quotation 70, Teacher).*

The powerful contribution made by Most Mira volunteers cannot be underestimated. As evident in the quotation below, they were able to establish a rapport with young people in an environment in which distrust constitutes a common response to strangers. These volunteers were also clearly successful in unleashing the spontaneous creativity and participation of the children.

*“Some children were quite shy. I had a group of ten who I worked with during the week and I built up a real relationship with them.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 9, Volunteer).*

Outside of having successfully engaged the children, some of the teachers, and the volunteers, the format of the workshops followed by the final Festival day seems to have been effective:

On the journalism group - “It was good for the children to be able to look back and see what has happened. It was good today as they could show their pictures and pulled their parents over to show them” (Transcript 8, quotation 20, Volunteer).

The above suggests that the mode of engaging first with the children themselves outside of power relations with parents and teachers, and then later with their parents through the creative outputs children had generated allowed for higher levels of participation and ownership amongst the children. In this way parents could witness the creative collaborative process and what it had produced both in terms of experience for their children and creativity for a wider audience.



Children arriving

11.2. What Did Not Work?

Two comments – one from a child and the other from one of the international volunteers – suggest that there was a contradiction between the overarching theme of the Festival - Nature - and the practical manner in which the project and its participants engaged with that environment.

“One piece of advice, maybe, that could make the Festival even better for next time : I think it could be interesting to insist more concretely about the respect of the environment during the workshops, as regards rubbish for example, which kids actually threw away everywhere without even thinking about it. I think that's the shame to have "nature" as a topic, to use recycle materials etc. for the workshops and not to take this opportunity to show the kids how they can protect the environment in everyday life” (Transcript 8, quotation 34, Volunteer).

Although some recycling facilities were available, the charity should invest in, recycling infrastructure if it plans to host similar events in the future, for example each workshop tent could have its own recycling bins instead of just one at the bottom of the field.

11.3. Prioritising Structure And/Or Prioritising Participation?

The final issue raised in the data and relevant both to what worked and what didn't work, concerns a central difference in perspective.

Some volunteers and children alike were clearly comfortable with what is referred to as 'craziness', 'chaos' and 'disorganisation':

“Here everything is crazy! Everything is great and fantastic.”

“Hopefully, we'll have time to meet at the next Most Mira Festival in Kevljani next year. So, if it stay to be same like this time with all those people, it is going to be a crazy and most beautiful thing” (Transcript 8, quotation 31, Volunteer).

*“At the beginning it was very haphazard and I hadn’t a clue what was happening, especially on the first night. But I think it had to be that way, that we were thrown in at the deep end”
(Transcript 8, quotation 5, Volunteer).*

“Yes there was a good amount of disorganization! It would have been stiff with it...too much like school. It didn’t matter if something went wrong, working it out has all been part of it. All the volunteers have been great” (Transcript 8, quotation 14, Volunteer).

Some individuals appear to regard loose logistics as a necessary aspect of creative participation, which is thought to involve overruling carefully thought out outcomes and tight control over quality and final delivery. But there is also an argument for tighter logistics in order to ensure that the children can enjoy the creative participatory process within a well-equipped and ordered environment. In this case there were too few people responsible for central coordination of activities, and this combined with budgetary constraints meant that the ideal level of organisational efficiency was not achieved in Most Mira’s first project.

The comments below indicate that that some – however accommodating – felt this shortcoming more than others:

*“There could be a lot more organization as there was confusion over who was doing what, but I’m sure it will work much better next time.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 4, international volunteer).*

*“In art there was so much going on, it was very confusing, who was working with who and who doing what. But I don’t want to sound like I’m being negative”
(Transcript 8, quotation 6, Volunteer).*

On the other hand, it is necessary to note that there were also very affirming comments on certain logistical aspects:

*“Some of the organization like sorting the food everyday was just amazing, this was a massive project but it all came together”
(Transcript 8, quotation 13, Volunteer).*

The experience of some of those outside of the delivery team who witnessed the project evolve over time, was of a more tightly organised 'ship':

*“Organizationally the Festival is great and it has been conceptualised very well. Everything is going well and as far as that goes I wouldn’t change anything.”
(Transcript 8, quotation 54, Teacher).*

Overall, the Festival project was clearly effective in engaging the creative contributions and support of children, many teachers, parents, and volunteers. However, there is clearly a need to improve on logistics and find better ways of encouraging all stakeholders to practice a more consistent respect for the natural environment.



Participants of the Festival Day performance

11.4. Suggestions for the Future: *“I Would Love This to Continue”*

One of the most consistent findings across all the data sets gathered from the range of stakeholders consulted is for more of the same! Hence in this respect the Festival was a resounding success. As mentioned earlier, if the charity considers its contribution to enabling children to create and collaborate across ethno-religious lines are fundamental to further activities, sustaining engagement with these same young people and building on the new relationships and skills developed this time around is crucial. Here is a sample of the comments reflecting a general call for 'more':

*“This is the first time, the second time will be better and the third time etc. etc”....
“Yes, I’d definitely welcome the Festival again. We are exhausted but we will have something to talk about” (Transcript 8, quotation 73, focus group with Teachers).*

And from the children:

“This is super. I like everything and nothing should change. I think it is great we are learning something new. I would like all these people to come back next year.”

*“During this week in Kevljani it was great. I met lots of friends.
I would not change anything. I would love the Festival to happen next year.”*

*“I had a great time in drama. English people are very nice and interesting.
Here we are learning to act. I would love this to continue even next week.”*

“Everything is great, only that there was more of it.”

As part of the final written feedback exercise on Friday of the workshop week, children were encouraged to describe suggestions for future events on paper cut in the shape of clouds. Contributions made for this exercise are entertaining and affirming given the faith they demonstrate in Most Mira to deliver against their expectations! For the full listing, please refer to Appendix 4. Children suggest that lions, tigers, snakes and fire-eating, alongside international celebrities (Dr Dre, 50 Cent) be included in future events.

This demonstrates a clear need to ensure that children's expectations for any future events are carefully managed to minimise disappointment without losing the high level of enchantment already evident.

On a more practical note, a series of suggestions were made by a wide spectrum of individuals – regarding longer breaks, a participation from particular schools and youth groups, more translators so that communication between volunteers and the children is easier, the inclusion of older children, to name just a few:

“I am very tired. This is fun and nice work.”

“Everything is great but we need more breaks.”

“For you to learn to talk so we can understand you.”

“More translators would be good” (Transcript 8, quotation 8, Volunteer).

“One of the parent's came over bringing coffee and joined in the discussion. ... She has one child taking part in the circus skills group. Commented that she has an older child coming here in the evening and complaining why high schools are not included” ((Transcript 8, quotation 8, Volunteer).

From the schools, particular requests were made, namely:

“There are lots of things we can talk about over the coming months. It would have been helpful if we had had a clearer idea of the programme. It wasn't clear that the main show today was not starting till five or I wouldn't have been here all day” (Transcript 8, quotation 79, Teacher).

“I liked best the idea of bringing people together and in the future I would like even more children to be involved. Apart from Trnopolje there are a few other schools around Prijedor who could be included. Apart from that the idea that people spend time together. The programme in itself is not a contentious issue. The overreaching idea is the most important” (Transcript 8, quotation 83, Teacher).

“The final day should be shorter, it is too long for the kids. Also it would be useful to avoid days like today as it is municipal day and so many people are there and some officials who it would have been useful to have here. It would be good to have a day when nothing else is happening” (Transcript 8, quotation 82, Teacher).

Unfortunately suggestions from the schools and youth groups that did not participate were not gathered. Some of the schools were approached and invited to participate but opted out for various reasons, however, they be approached again during the follow-up visit.

12. A NOTE ON THE MEDIA

The media strategy by the Most Mira Board focused on the Festival and children, while trying not to deny the reality of the local divisions and the painful history of the region. A press release was drafted by the Most Mira Board and distributed on the 8th May to the key local and national press contacts identified by local partners.



Audience on the Festival Day

Although limited and somewhat cautious publicity, it still generated lots of interest. All reports and interviews closely kept to the press release and were extremely positive. In the 6 days of the Festival, there were five live radio interviews with Federal Radio in Sarajevo, Radio Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and radio Republika Srpska from Banja Luka. Three TV reports were broadcast on two local TV stations in Prijedor and two were broadcast on the national TV of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The final report from the Festival was broadcast on the main national TV news bulletin on the day of the Festival, just minutes before the Eurovision Song Contest, which guaranteed the largest possible audience in the country. One journalist from the national TV network was skeptical about the aims of the Festival. But by the time he left, he was so overcome by positive impressions, having seen how happy the children were, that he commented that his audiences would probably not believe what had been achieved in this field in Kevljani.

The UK media were not brought in, but Most Mira is preparing a photographic exhibition and a short video about the Festival.



Circus Skills performers take a bow

13. IN CONCLUSION

The data gathered for this evaluation has provided rich insights into the methods used and the different responses to the experience of both the workshop process in the different groups and the final celebration of the creativity they generated on the final Festival day. It is clear that for an outstanding majority of children, teachers, partners and volunteers, the event achieved impressive results and would be worth building on in the future. Nonetheless, several areas need improvement should Most Mira wish to do it again. Tighter logistics and more time for preparation on the ground would be of special benefit, especially more time for the volunteers to discuss and work through workshop techniques and content and to engage with teachers. What remains striking however is that according to the evidence presented and discussed above, all stakeholders have demonstrated some level of ownership, through their suggestions and desire to participate in the future. Furthermore, an extensive web of new relationships between the children themselves and amongst the volunteers and teachers offers a powerful foundation for building on this first journey with the set of methods referred to here as *creative collaboration*. Given the familiarity of the children with this mode of operating, levels of participation and young ownership of future activities could potentially be taken further.

It also seems crucial to share the lessons learnt, the footage and photographs of the character and quality of the experience and the fruits of these creative activities, with all those organisations and practitioners within and outside of the formal schooling system who have an interest in inspiring young Bosnians. This first Youth Festival undertaken by Most Mira was in most respects a huge success, and those who took part in it, supported and delivered it should be congratulated.

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Drama Performance on the Festival Day

Table 1: Children's feedback data (fruit – changes i.e. personal outcomes, and gains), Day Five

Workshop group	Changes	Coding
Drama	At this festival I met a new group of people, new challenges and I had a great time.	CHALLENGES, NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Drama	Challenges were super. I met many girlfriends. Lucie and Tony are super.	CHALLENGES, NEW RELATIONSHIPS, VOLUNTEERS
Drama	Playing with everyone. Acting influence is excellent.	COLLABORATION
Photography	I've learnt how to take pictures and work in different groups. It was super	COLLABORATION
Drama	Beautiful experience.	FUN!
Drama	Drama is beautiful. Everything is beautiful, magical, divine. I like everything and other workshops were also beautiful and interesting. Ciao!	FUN!
Drama	It's unforgettable and beautiful.	FUN!
Photography	It's beautiful.	FUN!
Photography	It's unforgettable.	FUN!
Photography	During this week I've learnt how children can play together and sing.	INTERGROUP CONTACT
Photography	I met many new people. I've learnt English better and experienced beautiful and unforgettable events.	LEARNT ENGLISH
Photography	I've learnt English better and I've met many new friends.	LEARNT ENGLISH
Drama	At this festival I had a wonderful time I met many friends and done many different things.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Drama	It is really really super here because we've made many friends.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Drama	It's super I met so many friends.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Photography	Everything is super, we've made friendships with a real group.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Photography	Yet another beautiful experience and friendship-building exercise.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS
Drama	I have acquired a great experience. I've met new people and we've learnt so much in a new way.	NEW RELATIONSHIPS, LEARNT SO MUCH
Drama	Everything is great. Everything is super here and we've done so much.	REWARDING
Drama	The challenge was to act everything properly and we've achieved that. This was a great experience that will be useful in the future	REWARDING
Photography	I changed a lot since I started coming to the festival.	STRONG IMPACT

Table 2: Children's suggestions: What would you like to see and experience in future event?

I would like next year to use the trampoline
Acrobatics
I would if you could bring lions
Clowns
Skateboard and scooters
Pole dancing
I would like to have animals from the zoo
To make costumes
More workshops and to do more stuff
To play more and to have two weeks
I want to act
For you to learn to talk so we can understand you
I want more boys
If we can practice inside so we can be out of the sun
Swings and sticks
Dance and music
We like everything a lot. We would like it that the Festival happens again next year
Snakes
We want breaks to be longer
I like everything and would love that it happens again
Snoop Dog
50 Cent
Pink
A lot of animals
Dr Dre
Monkeys
The plates
Games
Magicians
BMX
Volleyball
Basketball
Juggling
The wire
Tigers jumping thorough the fire
It would be super if we could improvise a little bit more and work with other workshops like drama and dance
If you organise Festival again I would like to see more workshops
Everything is good at the festival, next year will be another
Everything is good
I'd like to see tennis
Creative games
Everything was super
More creative activities
I'd like for us to put up tents and to learn how to juggle and walk on the wire
We would like you to change the venue so that we do not have to be so hot
You should have some more sports like football
Fire eating , Jumping through the fire

APPENDIX 2: Background Information

The area of Prijedor is known for its recent violent past. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), this area housed the infamous Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje camps where Bosniak and Croat people were held. By the end of 1992, the war had resulted in the death and forced departure of most of the Bosniak and Croat citizens of Prijedor.

According to the last pre-war census in 1991, Prijedor municipality had a total population of 112,543: 49,351 (43.9%) identified themselves as Muslims (Bosniaks); 47,581 (42.3%) identified themselves as Serbs; 6,316 (5.6%) identified themselves as Croats; 6,459 (5.7%) identified themselves as Yugoslavs; and 2,836 (2.5%) were identified as other nationalities. By the end of 1992, the war had resulted in the death or expulsion of the entire Bosniak and Croat populations from Prijedor. The Research and Documentation Centre (IDC), based in the capital Sarajevo, claims that around 5,200 Bosniaks and Croats from Prijedor are missing or were killed during the war.

Following the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, the country was divided into two entities: the 'Federation', made up primarily of Bosniaks and Croats, and 'Republika Srpska' (RS), made up mainly of Serbs, where Prijedor is located. Immediately after the war, Prijedor's population was almost entirely Serb. Now, it is the most ethnically mixed municipality in the RS, with the highest number of Bosniak returnees. Yet despite this progress, only half of the pre-war Bosniak population of 49,500 has returned (source: US State Dept's 2006 International Religious Freedom Report).

The Majority of returnees are in the town of Kozarac. As a lot of inhabitants of Kozarac were forced to go abroad during the war, they have been working and are now investing a lot in reconstruction. There is one primary school in Kozarac with nearly 500 pupils, most of whom are of Bosniak background.

Omarska, a town with 10 surrounding villages, houses an iron mine and processing plant now owned by the ArcelorMittal. Omarska has one primary school with nearly 800 pupils, the majority of whom are Serbs.

About Most Mira Organisation

The founding of Most Mira was inspired by a fieldtrip involving ten MA students and their lecturer from the course Understanding and Securing Human Rights within the School of Advanced Studies at the University of London. The trip involved the group staying in Kevljani for ten days in June 2005. Witnessing the deep divisions and segregation between ethno-religious groups in Prijedor alongside the lack of opportunities for children to participate in fun and creative activities, the idea of creating an independent space where a participatory cultural event open to all and encouraging engagement could occur, was born.

Most Mira charity was founded in 2005 by Kemal Pervanic, a former resident of Kevljani village and Lea Esterhuizen, who together with Kirsteen Tait and Zrinka Bralo constituted the Board of Trustees, who along with members of the original student group which visited Bosnia alongside a number of other individuals with a keen interest in this work, functioned as the core delivery group. This group has been responsible for oversight and coordination of the planning, implementation and evaluation processes of the project. At the heart of Most Mira however are 70 volunteers from 15 countries with diverse and combined expertise in education, arts, human rights, media, research and post conflict peace building who facilitated the workshops and the final Festival day.

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