Towards educational inclusion in Bosnia-Herzegovina "Project ethnography" in development anthropology

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Abstract
Over time, the relationship between anthropology and development has been so problematic that today many key issues and open questions remain unresolved in the academic world. Although engaged with post-modernism theoretical legacy, more recently, attention has shifted from these approaches to the work of the development organizations themselves, highlighting the bureaucratic and organizational practices through which their power is exercised. Looking at how international projects actually "work", the most recent anthropology theories aim to move beyond the negative, critical stance that has been so dominant in the past. Moving from an educational project of decentralized cooperation, this paper hopes to contribute towards demonstrating the importance of "project ethnography" in exploring development policies and practices in post- war Bosnia.

Parole chiave: project ethnography; educational inclusion; decentralized cooperation; Bosnia

Introduction

Over time, the relationship between anthropology and development has been so problematic that today many key issues and open questions remain unresolved in the academic world. Throughout history this issue has been vigorously debated between the anthropologists directly engaged in the development's actions (e.g. working as consultants or as part- or full- time staff members in various development agencies) and the scholars who have strongly emphasized the very critical anthropological contribution in deconstructing the "discourse of development" (Escobar, 1991; Hobart, 1993; Ferguson, 1994).

In fact, over the last two decades, anthropological studies have drawn attention to the problems of 'development' as a *discursive regime*, arguing that such ideas are paradoxically used to consolidate inequality and to perpetuate poverty. According to Arturo Escobar, for example, development policies became mechanisms of control that were just as omnipresent and effective as their colonial counterparts (1995). Asking for alternative visions for a post-development era, the author illustrated how the development apparatus generated categories sufficiently robust to withstand and even shape the thinking of its occasional critics while poverty and hunger became widespread.

More recently, attention has shifted to the work of the development organizations themselves, drawing attention to the bureaucratic and organizational practices through which their power is exercised[1]. Although engaged with post-modernism theoretical legacy, the most recent anthropology theories aim to move beyond the negative, critical stance that has been so dominant in the past (Agrawal, 1996; Gardner and Lewis, 1996; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997). As Sampson argues, it would be easy to conclude that the donors and developers are always naive, bad-intentioned, corrupt or that the development actions impact negatively and unsuccessfully on the different local contexts (2002); this oversimplified picture of "development" has blinded us to the concrete problems which cause some organizations and projects, despite good intentions and declarations, to falter.

Paving the way for a more reflexive and ethnographically nuanced approach to the study of 'development', many contemporary ethnographers have put forward the idea of exploring how international projects actually "work", looking at the ambiguous relationship between the formal project model and the social practices involved in their endorsement (Mosse, 2005). By rejecting the postmodernists' idealized and reified views of the so-called "development apparatus", generally understood to be an undifferentiated and monolithic block, these new perspectives have illustrated how the international community embrace multiple and often conflicting discourses, meanings of social change and how different types of organizations, with distinct structures, origins, action strategies and values compete with one another for influence within the development actions.

Moreover, the Nineties were characterized by general and radical changes of cooperation scenarios, such as the research of new paths and development strategies. Within the framework of a severe critique of traditional two-fold cooperation strategies, we assist in affirming new approaches ("from the bottom") and rhetoric (as "participation" and "civil society") and to the proliferation of the actors engaged in the development field (voluntary associations, unions, local administrations, etc.). As Pazzagli points out, the significant growth of the NGOs role in co-

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[1] See: Olivier De Sardan, 1995; Pottier, 1997; Lewis, 1998; Stirrat, 2000; Markowitz, 2001; Mosse, 2005.

operation processes not only "pushed the donors towards a major formalization of the politics they intended to pursue and of the procedures of resources allocation" but also to promote multiple routes of interpreting the notion of development (2007). The widespread adoption of bottom-up participation as opposed to top-down modernization approaches has opened up challenging opportunities for anthropology in providing a critical understanding of fresh development approaches and discourses such as "participatory development" (Nelson and Wright, 1995; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

These new ethnographic works lead the way in overcoming the over-simplified and dichotomous views of development. The opposition, for example, between the "bed" development industry and the "good" local organizations and movements (e.g. local associations, indigenous and grassroots organizations, popular movements) fail to understand why NGOs are often more accountable to head office than to local needs and circumstances, and are driven by even stronger bureaucratic imperatives than many government agencies (Nelson, Wright, 1995; Fisher, 1997).

Therefore, according to this new perspective, the ethnographer's involvement in the sphere of project activities cannot be seen as a "compromising" condition, but rather as a privileged one in order to understand how certain ideas, interests, resources and practices are negotiated among the different international actors, such as donors, stakeholders, bureaucracies and local élites (Hoben, 1982; Mosse, 2005). As Agrawal clearly stresses, these epistemological and methodological spins in development anthropology can be understood as a shift from the slogan "I will critique, I will reject" to the new way of interpreting the ethnographic contribution in the development field: "I will engage, I will critique!" (1996).

Within this framework, I would like to demonstrate the importance of *project ethnography*[2] in exploring the multiple developers' narrative and practices, the formal and informal negotiations among the social and organizational actors and power structures that concretely shape the field of international cooperation. In order to do this, I will refer to fieldwork conducted within a development educational project implemented by an Italian NGO in Bosnia-Herzegovina from 2004 to 2007 (Tarabusi, 2008). The ethnographic experience aimed to "follow" the project, conducting multi-local research both in Italy and in Bosnia, performing participant observations among Italian NGO staff and following the various institutional coalitions between donor and local governments, Italian consultants and beneficiaries or Bosnian civic groups.

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[2] A vision already invoked by Roger Bastide in the 1970s when he considered applied anthropology as a science oriented not towards action, but rather to some practices and planning processes in the same way it has always focused on other cultural practices and processes of "spontaneous" change (1971).

3

Following project trajectories allows us, in other words, to grasp the expression of ideas on development or, more broadly speaking, on social change from the different social and institutional actors, calling for innovative research strategies that both capture people's perceptions of change and analyze the interconnecting system (Markowitz, 2001). Namely, the ethnographic analysis of projects, that link international donors and community based groups, development practitioners and local political authorities, generates a series of procedural complications associated with discerning the contour of the field itself and the researcher's position in the "volatile" development sphere. Conducting NGO fieldwork in Andean Peru, Liza Markowitz revealed her attempt of "studying up and over" through a sort of "polymorphous engagement" (2001, p. 43), using an assortment of different research techniques: interviews of a journalistic nature, newspapers and documents perusal, informal socializing and telephone and e-mail, and dialogue across a number of disperse sites.

This ethnographic experience will allow us to provide a critical understanding of the processes involved in the so-called *decentralized cooperation*, a critical trend established in the Nineties to provide viable alternatives to the traditional development "top-down" strategies (Ianni, 1999; Pazzagli, 2007). Involving the participation of new subjects, not traditionally part of the "development industry" (e.g. unions, local administrations, voluntary associations, etc.), decentralized cooperation programs invoke a new ideological framework to a vision of cooperation based on bi-directional flow between Northern and Southern institutions. New buzzwords such as *participatory development and bottom-up development*, strongly emphasize the role that civil society should play in development processes, placing in opposition the State on one side, and the "local" on the other (Ianni, 1999; Tarabusi, 2008).

Despite the rapid growth of such experiences (especially in France and in Italy), less attention has been paid by anthropologists in exploring how decentralized cooperation actually works. This paper aims to contribute towards breaking down the "black box" categories of partnership, participation and civil society by exploring how these discourses are translated into development practices in the post-war Bosnia education sector.

Imagining Bosnia, inventing other peoples' traditions

The context of post-Dayton Bosnia-Herzegovina can be considered paradigmatic in many ways.

Firstly, the Dayton General Framework Agreement for Peace[3] provides legal foundations for the international community to intervene in practically every

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[3] The Dayton Peace Agreement, reached in November 1995 with U.S. leadership, ended a brutal three and a-half year ethnic and territorial conflict in Bosnia Herzegovina that erupted after the dissolution of the state of Yugoslavia. Full text of the Dayton accords can be found at http://www.oscebih.org.

sphere of Bosnian affairs (from organizing elections to supervising local authorities, from human rights monitoring to controlling the police and judiciary sectors). Military, political and institutional interference of the international community has been officially sanctioned. The Peace Implementation Council (PIC), and two specific bodies, the Office of the High Representative (OHR) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), act in a quasi-protectorate form to monitor and implement the Dayton Agreement[4].

As Helms points out:

> These are at the center of what is most often meant by "the international community," so that this term, especially when used by Bosnians, can very often be read to mean "the west," or "western governments" (2003, p. 17).

Under Dayton, central governing powers are kept weak, with many governing functions remaining at the two entity level, which have their own governments and parliaments. Below the entity level are cantons and municipalities in the Federation in addition to municipalities only in the Serbian Republic.

In fact, the agreement reached at Dayton, and signed in Paris on 14 December 1995, divided, Bosnia into two highly autonomous regions, which were simply called "entities" to avoid disputes on their exact status: the *Federacija BiH* (Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina), occupying 51% of the Bosnian territory) and the Serbian entity, allowed to maintain its wartime name of *Republika Srpska*, retained 49% of the Bosnian territory. Each semi-independent entity has its own ethnically-organized political structures, controls citizenship, and can "establish special parallel relationships with neighboring states". The Federation is further divided into 10 cantons, each of which is supposed to be ethnically homogeneous. At the state (Bosnia and Herzegovina) level, a weak central structure is set up. It includes a joint Presidency with three members directly elected by the three national groups and the Parliament, which elects the state-level government.

Considering that this framework includes the profound interference of the international community, it is not surprising to discover that the context of post-war Bosnia is suffering a high degree of political and institutional fragmentation and, at the same time, a pronounced weakness of the State and government structures. In the educational field, for example, 13 Ministries of Education operating at state, entity and cantonal levels are accountable for educational policies. Nevertheless,

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[4] The PIC contributes towards the establishment of the methodologies to follow in implementing the DPA, while the OHR took on a central role in the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, entrusting the High Representative with the task of coordinating the work of the main agencies involved in the country, implementing the PIC guidelines and dialoguing with and supervising the local authorities to ensure they respected the agreements.

the Ministry of Social Welfare can be charged for educational issues instead of the Ministry of Education, as transpired in the Posavina canton, otherwise some municipalities can be charged for them instead of the cantons (as happened when their respective majority ethnic groups conflicted with each other). While these aspects are largely recognized by the international community, other processes tend to be obscured.

Indeed, far from representing a neutral and apolitical process, Dayton practices embody a particular way of imagining contemporary Bosnia by reiterating the long-established orientalistic discourse on the Balkans. According to David Campbell, the Dayton Accord deeply masks specific assumptions about identity, politics and political space, assuming a nexus between identity and territory and rejecting dynamic and negotiated nature of cultural identities (1999). As Robert Hayden argues, international diplomacy practices have constituted "Bosnia" as a particular place with specific people, not only imagining 'primordial' communities, but rather of making existing heterogeneous ones unimaginable" (1996, p. 783). Subsequently, ethnic identities can be statistically represented in census data and mapped, removing from all consideration those aspects of individual and communal identity which are fluid and hybrid (Campbell, 1999, p. 11).

The emergence of "Muslim" as a national category can be considered an example. Although contemporary discourse has made "Muslim" synonymous with "Bosnian", the relationship between religious and national domains is infinitely more complex. The effect is to establish these markers of identity as pre-given and socially salient, helping to naturalize the territorialized politics of ethnic/national self-determination. This process is furthered in the representational conjunction of identity and space (usually ethnicity and territory) in a map based on the national absolute or relative majority in each municipality and on ethnic differences that are supposedly fixed and natural. These assumptions are related to the nationalist imaginary according to which those belonging to a specific ethnic group should live together in a specific place, as long as those spaces are as homogeneous in character as possible.

As David Campbell argues, these processes are not unique to the Bosnian context, but follow a logic akin to Bantustan apartheid's policy (1999). Indeed, the concept of the "canton" has had considerable significance for identity politics in both South Africa and Bosnia.

By imagining a place where the ethnic differences are supposedly fixed and natural, these discourses obscure that previously the conflict boundaries between rural and urban areas was much more significant than ethnic differences in shaping social inequalities or that cultural difference was part of people's most immediate experience of social life. This has been well documented by many informal institutions based on the friendly relationship between people belonging to different

communities such as the notion of *komsiluk* or "good neighbourliness" that has existed since the Ottoman empire (Bougarel, 1996).

However, culture essentialism shapes most of the international effort in Bosnia. Project society acts upon and even perpetuates the cultural boundary between "us" and "them", the West and the Balkans, inventing other people's traditions. Many development practitioners, for example, continually interpret our difficulties in implementing a program in terms of the barriers posed by stubborn Balkan traditions, envisioning contemporary Bosnia as immobilized on a time of "transition" that should be encouraged or forced from the *outside:*

> *Here, Muslim, Serb and Croat communities have always made war…This led to breathe an air of separatism and exclusion everywhere... How you can promote a different way of living among different peoples? Imagine how difficult this can be...*(Jelena, project manager of a Finnish agency)

> *There is a strong resistance to change ..... is a matter of culture* (Heinrich, consultant in a Danish NGO)

While "justifying" the conspicuous international effort in Bosnia-Herzegovina, these developers' narratives tend to obscure the Dayton's underlying ambiguities and the failures of Official Aid.

Educational Inclusion in Bosnia-Herzegovina
As the data presented by the Country Reports on Education highlighted, the effects of war on the education system in Bosnia-Herzegovina are the most devastating of all Central-Eastern Europe countries (2000). Many problems strongly threaten this sector at the beginning of the new millennium: ethnic, linguistic and curricular segregation of the schools, the issue of repatriated children, the need of teacher training and the "old" issue of special schools, structures charged for supporting children with special needs' schooling during the socialist period.

Within this framework, the international effort to "educational inclusion" have been occurring at a variety of levels since 1996. In mid-2002 the international community began a significant effort to "modernize" and reform the Bosnian education system to better prepare the country's youth to play productive social, economic and political roles in the future. The first time that the concept of inclusive education was recognized and included in a state-level education policy was in November 2002, in a document produced by the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (OSCE) and entitled "Education Reform Strategy: Five Pledges on Education (A message to people of BiH)". While this document became the basis for developing policies, laws and regulations in the field of education, the

OSCE established a Department dedicated to supporting the education reform process in Bosnia in 2002[5].

However, despite significant time and energy devoted to its implementation in recent years, more recently some international reports have highlighted some unexpected outcomes and unresolved issues in the educational field. Educational inclusion is still far from being realized.

On the one hand, since "educational inclusion" has become one of the main goals of the "new political agenda", various development initiatives have been performed by international agencies according to very heterogeneous logic and even conflicting approaches. As a result educational inclusion is nowadays understood quite differently by Bosnian people and can represent different things ("education in human rights", "school practitioners' training", "pedagogic activism", "abolition of special schools").

In addition, the unequal distribution of international resources has produced many disparities and differences between urban and rural schools and among the different areas in the local context. Indeed, most funds were directed to three main areas - Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla - or to those sites that most symbolized the war, such as Mostar. Instead, areas where there were real needs have been neglected. This effectively marginalizes a large portion of Bosnian teachers, who perceive any new reforms far removed from their normal everyday working lives. Informal conversations with teachers and heads of the primary schools show, for example, that they are often confused about the reform or very suspicious about the changes expected by the "internationals".

Within this framework, an educational program of decentralized cooperation, founded by the General Direction of Cooperation in Development of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was promoted by the Emilia-Romagna and Marche Regions in 2004.

The programme, entitled *Protection and reinsertion of children with physical and psychological handicaps, victims of armed conflict, and the promotion of social entrepreneurship* date back from the humanitarian period (1995-1998), when the "Cooperazione Italiana" was involved in relief aid. Subsequently, the original project has continually been reformulated over time by the Italian Regions, according to the real needs in contemporary Bosnia.

A multi-dimensional programme operating on educational inclusion at different levels emerged: planning a strategy of integration in 41 of the country's primary

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[5] For information on the OSCE mission in the country, see the website (www.oscebih.org/oscebih_eng.asp) and the following publications: *Education Reform Strategy, A message to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (OSCE, 2002), *Raising debate: Is BiH respecting its international commitments in the field of education? Questions for the citizens of BiH* (OSCE, 2005), *10 Years of OSCE mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina* (OSCE, 2005).

schools (on a social-educational basis), promoting social entrepreneurship and disabled children's psychological-physical rehabilitation by means of new health structures equipment, implementing organizational and professional changes in local schools and supporting the promotion of institutionalized networks within the educational sector.

The leading role played by the Italian Regions in promoting such programmes and the involvement of two local actors in its implementation are the stuff of decentralized cooperation policies. While a social cooperative, based in Pesaro, was committed to achieve the social entrepreneurship and health structures equipment goals, a non-profit organization, *EducAid*, based in Rimini and engaged in the field of educational international cooperation for many years, was charged by the Emilia-Romagna Region for implementing the socio-educational projects' activities.

Performing participant observation among the Italian non-profit organization staff, I found that its members tended to distance themselves from the international community's official discourses of "modernization", "quality education", "European standards".

> *Our project doesn't aim at transferring some standardized models, materials or skills from Italy to Bosnia, but rather to promote multiple idea of "inclusion" according to the different schools' histories, resources, personnel's values...That is, we try to promote the research of "Bosnian paths" linked to people's own ways of interpreting "inclusion"* (Carlo, EducAid staff)

Despite many international agendas based on the implicit assumption that local communities can only develop once they have assimilated some inputs from the *outside* (such as technical equipment, expertise, etc.), EducAid staff pointed out the importance to pursue a "bottom-up participation" by involving the local community and partners able to identify and respond to grassroots needs.

There were, it is true to say, some fundamental principles underlying the new development strategies of decentralized cooperation; but my informal conversations and participant observation among the staff suggested something more substantial. Namely, emphasis on "participation development", "bottom-up approach", "civil society" was not just the result of some accurate project design or formal development policy, but rather of social informal negotiations among the "project community", developing over time a spectrum of shared meanings, languages and values as well as common ways of "doing things" together (Tarabusi, 2008).

9

The "project community"
From May 2005 to August 2007, I followed the EducAid staff, commonly called "consultants" or "experts", moving from Rimini to the local offices of the project, set up in Sarajevo and Banja Luka, visiting Bosnian schools regularly and meeting the local teachers, activists and governmental officials in different sites. The staff was composed of a group of Italian teachers, school directors, educators and social practitioners working in a number of Italian schools, and educational or welfare services.

Despite the different institutional and professional contexts they belonged to, these consultants shared a common set of values, languages, "frames for actions" and a way of interpreting social reality coming from their shared experiences of "consultants" in Italian non-profit organizations. For example, the notions of "democratic school", "social inclusion" and "educational village", to which they frequently referred, were taken for granted by the EducAid staff, but meaningless for an outsider. The historical background of non-profit organization seems to play a very prominent role in promoting and reinforcing the consultants' common views of "educational inclusion", distinguishing what to do or not to do in the field.

Visiting Bosnia and talking with some local actors, continual referral was made to the values and practices embodied in CEIS[6], an Education Centre which has played a prominent role in the founding of the non-profit organization (so it is not surprising that the EducAid office is located in the garden of the Education Centre!). The set of values to which the Centre historically referred to seemed to act as a "filter" through which the Italian consultants made sense of their working activities in the development field, formulated theories and discourse of "local culture", implicitly distinguished what is good or not to achieve in Bosnia, re-interpreting the main issues of the formal project design.

The idea of "workshops for promoting integration", for example, described in the program as useful to the "psychological-educational support in the case of trauma and of reinsertion", was reformulated by the EducAid staff according to their own social representations of educational inclusion. In the consultants' minds, the

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[6] Founded in the aftermath of the War (1946) to help Swiss factory worker, the CEIS (Italian-Swiss Education Centre) benefitted from a particularly charismatic figure, Margherita Zoebeli, who dedicated her whole life to the construction of an "educational village" which represented one of the hinges of active pedagogy in Italy in the 1950s and 60s. It was a reality that, more than once, saw her local activity interwoven with experiences of educational cooperation in developing countries and that, from the mid 1990s onwards, convinced her to activate a systematic commitment in this field, then championing for the founding of an association.

workshops' activities should have been an opportunity of cultural changes for the local schools. Rather than focusing on the sole inclusion of disabled children, these activities were conceived as a way of improving social learning activities, bringing people together and pushing them to interact with each other. Subsequently, the previous idea of physical integration ("inclusion in education") was replaced with the new slogan "education to inclusion", focusing on the social character of learning processes:

> *We would like to support the idea of educational inclusion working on the whole "school community"... Inclusion, then, is not so much a problem of physical integration, but rather a process of social change [...] we should promote teachers' awareness of their educational role ... a teacher does not simply "teach things" but is able to train in depth all the students to be "future citizens"* (Lisa, EducAid Staff)

Even the idea of "network" was commonly evoked by the Italian experts. According to them, the activities promoted in the Bosnian schools could not be isolated from the whole education sector and the wider civil society, but rather supported by a range of local "partners", significantly engaged in the educational work:

> *Taking into account the school only, we would be making a big mistake… the project is not just confined to the "walls" of the schools .. Rather, the goal we have to achieve is to "build" partnerships with the most important actors operating in the education sector such as NGOs and local institutions.*

Practising Partnership. Some critical issues

The social services (commonly known in Bosnia as "Social Work Centres"), the Pedagogical Institutes and the non-governmental organizations were identified by the EducAid staff as the strategic partner for project implementation. With this objective in mind, some formal meeting were arranged in Sarajevo and Banja Luka between the Italian staff and the Bosnian leaders, practitioners and officials working in these institutions.

Despite the consultants' expectations, some critical aspects emerged during these meetings, and it was surprising for them to find out that the problems did not concern partner involvement in the project, but rather the relationship between the local actors themselves. The idea of "horizontal network", evoked by the Italian staff, appeared very far from the Bosnian institutions' cultures and approaches, shaped by the pre-existing logics operating during the socialist period. In other words, to perceive the Pedagogical Institute as a partner was quite "natural" for

11

the Italian consultants, but rather "compromising" for the local teachers and directors.

In the former Yugoslavia, where education was founded by the central State structures and by various decentralized, autonomous public funds, the Pedagogical Institutes aimed both to conform the curricula to the ideological framework of the "system" (Federal Council of Education) and to "inspect", ensuring that these directives were faithfully followed and put into practice by the schools. The schools subordinate role to these institutions was part of a wider and more complex hierarchical structure of the education system. Nevertheless, little energy was spent to re-think the role these institutions could play within the wider education system today. Despite the international effort in "modernizing" the education sector, the structural and cultural changes of these structures is still a matter of controversy. According to some international actors, these institutions should play a key role in the system, providing services to the schools and supporting teacher training. However, spending time in the local schools it was clear that local teachers' social imagination and representations of such institutions were closely linked to their historical and traditional functions. In fact, during my fieldwork the majority of teachers were suspicious and worried about their officers' involvement in the project.

To better explain what I mean I shall refer to *participatory activities*, organized in many areas of the country to promote teachers and heads' participation in planning the above-mentioned workshop. The presence of officials from the Pedagogic Institutes in these activities, to which they absolutely wanted to participate, generated some unexpected outcomes. In the course of the first two days, when the officials were absent, the teachers had planned art activities and theatre performances in their own schools, but in the following days I noted that their behaviour and ideas tended to adapt to the officials' expectations. The new workshop activities they planned seemed, for example, to be strongly linked to the formal didactic curricula. Then, the previous activities, focusing on social relations and friendship links, were replaced by the maths or physics laboratories, aimed at supporting children with learning difficulties. Despite the Italian consultants' wished for outcomes, the local schools developed a range of activities emphasizing the didactic contents. This mainly occurred because, from the Bosnian teachers' perspectives, such participatory activities did not represent a "neutral" context – as the Italian staff had supposed - but reproduced at the micro level the macro power structures historically shaping the education system (Tarabusi, 2008).

Visiting schools, in fact, I noted how some pre-existing logics operating during the socialist period still contribute to inform the relationships between the Institutes and the schools in addition to reinforce certain social representations of their institutional functions within the whole educational sector of post-war Bosnia. At present, Pedagogical Institutes are charged for a competitive assessment at the can-

tonal level. At the end of the year, a ranking is usually done that establishes which schools are "good" and which are "bad" by adopting a set of quantitative and technical criteria (the marks obtained by pupils, number of pupils, spaces in the school building, etc.).

Beyond the relationship between schools and Pedagogical Institutes, a number of critical issues have arisen, even between the educational and social services, commonly known in Bosnia-Herzegovina as "Social Work Centres". In the former Yugoslavia these institutions were committed to many social and health issues, such as people with special needs' care. Formal interactions with schools were institutionalized by several consolidation procedures: a team of experts from the Social Work Centres, after carrying out an in-depth observation of pupils in primary schools, formulated a report aimed at categorizing deficits and supporting teachers in disabled children's care. However, Bosnian teachers appeared very sceptical and mistrustful of the work carried out by the Social Work Centres' personnel, perceived to be disinterested in what happened inside the schools, and aimed at providing a range of "top-down" instructions to schools. According to government officials, working at the cantonal Ministries of Social Affairs, this could be considered a consequence of the juridical and normative framework still operating in the country:

> *In the past, educational inclusion was only a matter of schools, while the Social Work Centres were exclusively committed to social care. But today we face a new challenge. The problem is that the international community is reforming the educational sector without taking into account the relationships between the social and educational sectors ... then, each sector is still following its own laws and criteria….so, the child's care "shifts" from the school to the social sector and from the social sector to the school, without intertwining each other.*

Thinking "civil society": conflicting views and local NGOs

As I mentioned above, partnerships with local NGOs and Bosnian civic groups was increasingly emphasized by the Italian consultants. And, in more general terms, *civil society* has become an integral part of any type of development project currently implemented in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite the many mechanisms through which the notion of civil society has been viewed in various contexts, the approach of western donors in Bosnia has been to place greater emphasis on the quantitative growth and distribution of NGOs and associations not directly dependent upon State institutions. According to Belloni, we can understand that international activities aimed at "building" civil society in Bosnia as part of a "social engineering plan" are addressed to the quantifiable growth of NGOs, and to the "capacity building" programs using the transfer of technical skills to local organi-

zations without taking into account the socio-cultural and historical background (2001).

We know, for example, that a hundred years ago and up to the Titoist period, Bosnia was packed with voluntary charities known as Vakuf, civic organizations, community groups, intellectual clubs and other organizations and activities which today would be called "civil society" or non-government organizations (see also, Sampson, 2002). But, we also know that kinship, clans, family relations, social networks, informal links, and neighbourhood ties of loyalty have played a prominent role throughout the Balkans before and during communism. From different perspectives, "these parallel structures are the true civil society, the social self organization to fulfill grassroots needs in a hostile political environment" (Sampson, 2002). However, from the international community perspective, the problem has been to replace these pre-existing informal institutions with new formal institutions, considered as a "middle ground" between the State and families (Belloni, 2001; Helms, 2003).

In light of this, it is not surprising that exploring international publications, I found that many authors forgot to replace the word "Bulgaria" with that of "Bosnia", clearly showing implementation of the standardized model developed by the EU in Central-Eastern Europe. This is precisely what happened to the Danish agency, appointed by the EU to develop a civil society building program. Beyond the international effort to build civil society, the informal conversations with some development practitioners and the scrutiny of international publications showed how the development actors interpreted in different ways the role that civil society can play in fostering democratization of post-war Bosnia. On the one hand, civil society was perceived as a balance of government structures able to reinforce and sustain the State (e.g. *Human Development Report* and the *Peace Implementation Council).* According to many UN consultants, local NGOs were apolitical tools, engaged with the State and only able to pursue the goals of what they called "the new political agenda". On the other hand, many development practitioners recognized civil society as a space of social justice and pluralism, able to promote the citizens' participation in the democratization process (Belloni, 2001, p. 168). In this case, emphasis has been placed on the role that NGOs and civic groups should play in opposing and transforming the same State institutions. Such representation of civil society is much more part of the wider ideological framework of decentralized cooperation. According to EducAid staff, for example, local NGOs were a means of challenging the governmental officials' dominant discourses of "modernization" (Tarabusi, 2008).

Yet, despite the conflicting meanings, the paradox is that civil society is always recognized as a kind of "solution" to the unexpected outcomes produced by the international community itself. It therefore follows that local NGOs should face the political irresponsibility of local leaders resulting from institutional and politi-

cal fragmentation, and the increasing interference of the international community in the political life of the country as laid out in the Dayton Accords. Alternatively, local NGOs are useful to challenge the State's structures since the sphere of politics and government has been strongly associated with corruption and exclusive nationalisms. Bosnians often tend to equate "state" (*držˇava*) with the ruling party and the government (*vlada*) (see also Helms, 2003).

While international assistance has been provided for nationalist elites, this increases their grip on power while entrusting political change to their good will. The international actors contribute to this view, attacking political corruption and nationalist parties, and championing the NGO sector as democratic and morally upright. Despite such conflicting meanings, my fieldwork has shown how the international community's idealized views of civil society differ from the tangible conditions in which the Bosnian civic groups and organizations function in post-war Bosnia. Firstly, the relationship between governmental and non-governmental actors force us to reconsider the idea of local NGOs engaged with the state or aimed at supporting the political authorities. Government officials appeared very skeptical or uninterested in the work of non-governmental sectors, particularly because of the limited attention the international community has paid to the Ministries and social services. This is in stark contrast to the disproportionate funding of non-governmental organizations, many of which disappeared after 1998-99[7].

On the other hand, most activists and practitioners talk about their dependence upon international resources, seeing a very unfavorable future, believing that they will be forced to survive moving from "project to project" without a social or political perspective (see also Bosnian NGO Foundation, 1998). Within this framework, they are merely taking advantage of a set of conditions that benefits them, appearing much more interested in establishing relations with the international sector than the state institutions. Moreover, many Bosnian civic groups still see their activities as apolitical. By considering politics and government as a place of corruption and exclusive nationalism, some local NGOs gain an air of legitimacy when they emphasize their humanitarian, non-governmental, even apolitical character (see also Helms, 2003).

Secondly, ethnographic experience invites us to even re-examine the discourse of civil society as a space of social justice and pluralism. Perceiving civil society as a counterbalance to the power of the ruling nationalist elites, the international community neglected the important fact that national parties continue to maintain their monopoly and influence, and perpetuate intolerance, using civil society and the State in combination. This is confirmed not only by the presence of the so-

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[7] This aspect is also underlined in the reports produced by *NGO Foundation for Bosnia and Herzegovina* and by *Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues,* the first organization to deal with the work of social policies transition in Bosnia, carrying out an analysis of the local non-governmental sector in cooperation with local experts and the relevant Ministries.

15

called "ethnicized NGOs" in the country (Stubbs, 2000), that have close links with exclusionary projects at the formal political level, but also by separatism that often shapes local NGOs practices. Participant observation among NGOs staff in Banja Luka, Tuzla and Sarajevo confirmed how different initiatives have different objectives which, rather than being complementary to each other, tend to be in competition. In my informal conversations, many local activists working in the education field, for example, were accustomed to differentiating their activities from those which were conducted in the other entity. This mainly occurred in the Serb Republic, where separatism is very pronounced.

In seeking "to promote" or build civil society, international agencies have rarely understood the very different interests of these distinct groups nor have they developed any kind of sophisticated understanding of the impact of their interventions on relationships within civil society or within society as a whole. Funding from international agencies has contributed to mistrust within the sector and in the wider society. Consequently, in many ways, rather than challenging dominant assumptions at the level of formal politics, civil society in Bosnia-Herzegovina has tended to mirror the so-called "mini state thinking" (Deacon and Stubbs, 1998) and to give "voice" to the interests of limited groups who largely share the languages of development or what we can call the jargon of global civil society. Many local NGO activists, for example, have visited Italy to attend conferences, training courses, meeting donor representatives, applying for money and managing projects. In other words, there is an important relationship between project society and the creation of new elites. These new local elites are intimately tied to Western ideas and funding, skilled with "project management", usually speak English, tend to earn more money than their parents ever did, and even more than senior government officials (Sampson, 2002).

This effectively marginalizes a large proportion of Bosnian citizens, who perceive civil society as an unfamiliar term, far from their daily lives. Talking, for example, with some children's parents, villagers, and teachers, I found that they are often confused with the term "civil society" and frequently tended to associate it with "civilized", understanding it as an offensive term because it was perceived as an international attempt to "educate" Bosnians. The long history inherited from the Ottoman and Yugoslav periods, the notion of *komsiluk* and the set of informal relationships and social arrangements mentioned above, deeply differs from the liberal version of "civilty" and makes them suspicious of the international community effort (Belloni, 2001). In addition, many citizens view NGOs as an alternative enrichment channel for intellectuals without any prospects or new local elites, often associated with "the internationals". Therefore, rather than pluralism and social justice, civil society appears to embrace conflicting relationships among multiple institutional and social actors defending their own set of interests and competing for space in the public sphere. Uncertain relations with the State, dependency

upon the international community in addition to conflicting relations within civil society itself, invites us to re-examine the international community's imaginative work of civil society, showing how boundaries between *us* and *them* in Bosnian society are again subverted and replaced by new social structures and hierarchical power relations.

Conclusions
Ethnographic work highlights that development projects are part of a social and political system in which different perspectives are negotiated among multiple actors all competing for influence (Tarabusi, 2008).
As Mosse argues,

> They articulate relations of power which make certain ideas, values, problems and strategies of action (i.e. certain form of discourse) authoritative. The anthropological task is to identify the social structures and interests upon which organizational processes and "culture" are predicated (1998, p. 21).

In this paper I attempted to show how different people's narratives, organizational cultures, reciprocal representations among and within the project community, partners and stakeholders profoundly shape development practices addressed at changing the educational sector in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
For instance, participant observation among the Italian non-profit organization's practitioners revealed that their practices are much less linked to the formal project guidelines than to organizational meanings and professional histories. Moreover, following project trajectories allows us to grasp the expression of ideas about development or, more broadly, about social change, looking at how certain discourses, such as "partnership", "participation" and "civil society" are translated into development practices.
Ethnographic experience shows how the project community's idealized and reified views of participation, partnership and civil society differ from the actual conditions in which Bosnian institutions, sectors, civic groups and NGOs function in post-war Bosnia. While the decentralized cooperation programs invoke a new ideological framework to a vision of traditional cooperation strategies, strongly emphasizing the "local", development practices face the risk of ignoring the perspectives of Bosnians in their real everyday lives. In other words, new buzzwords such as *participative development* and *bottom-up development* romanticize the "local" and tend to reinforce the pre-existing logics as opposed to challenging them. Instead of responding to people's needs, emphasis on civil society therefore risks to further undermine State sovereignty and governmental structures and to reinforce the

17

power of the ruling nationalist elites, while participatory activities tend to reproduce power hierarchies and institutional structures that should be dismantled.

In giving a bottom-up vision of development processes, project ethnography aims to move beyond the negative, critical stance of post-modernist theories that were been dominant in the Nineties. In this view, anthropology can play an important role, contributing to break down the "black box" of development processes, namely, to highlight the nature of institutional interests, multiple and conflicting meanings of social change, strategies of local elites and bureaucracies and organizational cultures that intertwine within a project.

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