# What can Student Community Engagement programmes contribute to the development of citizenship in a society recovering from conflict?

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**Abstract**

This paper looks at the contribution that higher education might make to the development of citizenship and civic responsibility in a society recovering from conflict. Drawing on some preliminary research undertaken within a student community engagement project at the Dzemal Bijedic University in East Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, it raises questions about the role of higher education in post conflict recovery, the kind of citizens and young people needed to build and maintain peace and the ways in which participatory and transformational learning might be integrated into an otherwise more formal HE curriculum.

Student community engagement (SCE) involves a range of experiential, community based projects in which undergraduates undertake part of their learning within a community setting. It differs from work placements (where students are often passive observers of a role they hope to move into in the future) and volunteering programmes (where students give their time voluntarily for what are often routine tasks). Having its roots in both the Science shop movement in Europe and a history of

Service Learning in the United States it is part of a wider community university engagement ethos, aimed at supporting the development of partnerships between the university and its local community which are for the benefit of both. Such partnerships are concerned with the development of civil society and with addressing issues of marginalisation and social justice.

SCE entails students working closely with community partners to develop practical projects which they undertake in university time and for which they are given academic credit towards their degree.  Such projects should provide scope to develop their skills, to apply theory to practice, to reflect on their learning and their abilities and to make a real contribution to their community partner. It involves an affective and interactive approach to learning where students participate in the design of their learning programme and are encouraged to interrogate their own perceptions: of themselves, of their role in the world, of others and of the community to which they belong . Consequently it includes the development of skills and attitudes as well as knowledge in the aims of the learning programme and differs from an often more familiar didactic approach to learning.

The research project in Mostar is a partnership between the Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton in the UK and the Department for International Relations in Dzemal Bijedic. Over the past six months it has supported faculty from both institutions to develop a Student community engagement programme for undergraduates from the Schools of Education, Drama Pedagogy, Languages, Humanities and Mechanical Engineering in East Mostar. Working with the support of a local NGO students have made contact with an orphanage, a nursery, primary schools, a self employed tourist group and a disabled people's organisation. Student projects include designing prosthesis for people who have lost limbs through contact with mines, therapeutic drama work with orphaned or special needs children, the development of guides to the local area in English and German as an income generating activity and supporting the learning of other European languages in primary school classes.

This paper aims to problematise some of the assumptions underlying the project and to look at the contribution SCE might make to the development of

citizenship. It will start by unpicking different conceptions of citizenship (Liberal, Communitarian, Civic-Republican, Gaventa and Jones 2003) and the significance of each of these to a society still divided along ethnic lines. It will raise questions about whether, in a context where the introduction of an independent state gave rise to ethnic conflict, a civic republican identity, uniting people under the emblems of statehood can ever make for a stable society.

It will also look at the concept of Social Capital, developed by Putnam in relation to post industrialised America, (see Putnam 1993) and whether notions of bonding and of bridging social capital might be helpful in understanding both the process of emerging ethnic divisions and the rebuilding of inter-ethnic trust. Putnam's own research also looks at the role of volunteering in building social capital and suggests that college graduates in America are twice as likely to become involved in community activity as those with a high school education and that those who get involved as young people are more likely to continue this involvement throughout their lives.

The paper summarises the different kinds of citizenship programmes that various education institutions have adopted. These include 'learning about' citizenship as part of the national curriculum at secondary level, to the Global citizenship programmes initiated by Oxfam and delivered through adult and community education. It asks how learning about citizenship differs from learning to be a citizen and looks at the impact of secondary socialisation on the attitudes of young people who are leaving home for the first time and developing independent identities.

Finally it identifies models of learning that are appropriate to SCE: reflective, experiential and transformational, and at the difficulties of integrating these into higher education curricula more used to taking a didactic approach to teaching large groups (Taylor 2007). Using Ignatief's notion of the need to build a sense of individuality in order to combat the dehumanisation of violent conflict, it suggests that the development of a sense of self is a necessary step towards understanding the broader connections we share with others. (Ignatief 1998) Citing Bourner's defence of the inclusion of personal development in undergraduate programmes (Bourner 1998) it sees SCE as a way of enhancing both 'inner knowledge' of self and 'outer knowledge'

of social responsibility and social connectedness.

While it is too early on in the research process in Mostar to draw firm conclusions this paper examines some of the issues that need to be taken into account when introducing concepts of citizenship into higher education. It suggests ways in which undergraduates might be encouraged to redefine themselves in relation to others in an ethnically divided society and how those redefinitions might eventually contribute towards a stronger civil society and greater social cohesion.

## Introduction

The themes of this conference are concerned with the role of Higher Education in the twenty first century, the relationship between knowledge, higher education and society (Taylor, introduction to report) and its responsibilities to a local, national and global community. Background papers from the Global report raise questions about the social commitment of universities, the potential of HE in reconstruction and peace building and the kinds of knowledge needed for a sustainable world (Escrigas, foreword to the report).

This paper builds on some of these themes and looks at the contribution that higher education might make to the development of citizenship and civic responsibility in a society recovering from conflict. Based on the experience of a doctoral research project in Bosnia and Herzegovina it raises debates held with colleagues there about the role of higher education in post conflict recovery, the kind of citizens and young people needed to build and maintain peace and the ways in which participatory and transformational learning might be integrated into an otherwise more formal HE curriculum.

## An Action Research Project – Brighton and BiH

Much of my work in Brighton currently involves the design and development of new curricula that brings together student learning and community involvement. Working for a Community University Partnership programme our role is to promote relationships between the university and its local community which address issues of inequality, marginalisation and disadvantage and are for the mutual benefit of both the university

and its community partners. Student community engagement (SCE) as it has come to be called, involves a range of experiential, community based projects in which undergraduates undertake part of their learning within a community setting. It differs from work placements (where students are often passive observers of a role they hope to move into in the future) and volunteering programmes (where students give their time voluntarily for what are often routine tasks). Having its roots in both the Science shop movement in Europe and a history of Service Learning in the United States it is part of a wider community university engagement ethos, aimed at supporting partnerships between the university and its local community which are for the benefit of both. Such partnerships are concerned with the development of civil society and with addressing issues of marginalisation and social justice.

SCE entails students working closely with community partners to develop practical projects which they undertake in university time and for which they are given academic credit towards their degree.  These projects should provide scope to develop their skills, to apply theory to practice, to reflect on their learning and their abilities and to make a real contribution to their community partner. It involves an affective and interactive approach to learning where students participate in the design of their learning programme and are encouraged to interrogate their own perceptions: of themselves, of their role in the world, of others and of the community to which they belong . Consequently it includes the development of skills and attitudes as well as knowledge in the aims of the learning programme and differs from an often more familiar didactic approach to learning.

As a model I feel this has particular pertinence for the development and strengthening of civil society and for promoting, among a student generation, interest and investment in it. Where civil society is strong there is huge potential to learn from and gain experience within it. But in a context where its structures are shaky – it also has a lot to offer. The opportunity for students to use their experience in real settings, to understand first hand the difficulties experienced by different community groups, to have the chance to become involved in shaping and building a new organisation builds confidence and challenges academic learning in a real world context. It may also build trust.

A joint action research project with a partner university in BiH provided us with the opportunity to explore how this works in practice and to evaluate the contribution a student community engagement programme can make to both a students' sense of themselves and to the organisation they work within. We have worked with undergraduates in Bosnia from the Schools of Education, Drama Pedagogy, Languages, Humanities and Mechanical Engineering. Through the support of a local NGO students have made contact with an orphanage, a nursery, primary schools, a self employed tourist group and a disabled people's organisation. Student projects currently include designing prosthesis for people who have lost limbs through contact with mines, therapeutic drama work with orphaned or special needs children, the development of guides to the local area in English and German as an income generating activity and supporting the learning of other European languages in primary school classes. Students are learning not only how to utilise the skills learned in the classroom but also to understand the range of different groups (ethnic, generational, able bodied, disabled, advantaged and disadvantaged) that make up a community and to get to know them as individuals.

**Background and Context**

Following the breakdown of Yugoslavia and subsequent Balkan's war Bosnia was part of an enforced democratisation process through the Dayton accord. Agreements to end the war included power sharing between political parties representing separate nationalist groups and the introduction of democratic voting procedures.  The war itself has been interpreted as a struggle between civil society and ethnic division, between those values of multiculturalism, tolerance and a shared national identity that were present in the region before the war and the identity or ethnic politics that have shaped relationships since. (Chandler 1998). But while the Dayton Accord left behind it the institutional structures for a democracy, civil society as it is often interpreted in the West remains weak (op cit). The older voting population grew up under the 'strong hand of state provision' in Tito's Yugoslavia and had their lives disrupted through sudden and violent civic conflict. They were brought up to follow rather than to agitate and to depend on the state for their every need. The war and its aftermath left many

disillusioned with political solutions and with little trust and less security there has been a retreat from civil and political involvement into a sense of 'keeping your head down' and 'looking after your own family' (interviews with colleagues, 2007/8). Despite many attempts in this post conflict period to rebuild a sense of national or shared identity and to move from nationalist politics to a functioning democracy, progress has been slow (Deacon and Stubbs, 1998:103). Many of these approaches are aimed at persuading people to act as a group rather than as individuals while predominant concerns, around jobs and livelihoods and family security are largely personal (personal interviews 2008). The badges and representations of national identity are there, with flags and anthems appearing daily on news broadcasts and international organisations, including NGOs and the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) have provided financial and human resources to try to support institutional and organisational processes. But it has been suggested that this may have inhibited the development of local structures. (Chandler 1998, Burde 2004). People have not felt sufficient ownership or familiarity with the culture and workings of democratic processes to adopt them easily in the ten years since.

The development of a stronger civil society, of greater participation in the democratisation process and a sense of citizenship transcending ethnic identity have been seen as key to longer term stability in the area. (OSCE DB 1997k:5). While structures can be imposed from the top and policies can enshrine human rights it is not easy to legislate on voting, on participation and on tolerance. All these are values that need to develop from the bottom up and from people feeling sufficiently confident to be involved. A strong civil society in which individuals participate in local and national decision making, create spaces for a range of different voices and take a stand on human rights could provide the basis for the development of a more active kind of citizenship. (Chandler 1999:135, Diamond 1994, Seligmann, 1992, Cohen and Arato, 1992, Keane 1998).

*'Rebuilding tolerance and pluralism in BiH ….accountability, legitimacy and competency in public life are the key, and these can only be achieved through the active participation of the electorate, buoyed by a strong, plural*

*associational base, by a web of social, cultural and functional relationships which can act as a 'societal glue' and as a counter balance to the market and the state'. Simillie, 1996:13*

Bosnia had extensive higher education provision and a relatively high level of involvement in local political and civic life prior to the war (Heath 1981, Ignatief 1998, McFarlane, 1988), but the concept of civil society that developed in Eastern and central Europe was a backlash to communism and not focused on supporting a democracy. Many of the anti war activities of the early 1990's grew out of the universities (Mostar's club of intellectuals was the first organisation whose members were not supporters of governing nationalists). But these were not strong enough to counteract the influence of the media nor were they part of a wider democratic process. Their failure has only contributed to increased cynicism around activism and civil society since.

### Notions of citizenship

In this context HE may be better placed working through civil society movements than through promoting the badges of national identity. Merrifield (2002) differentiates between notions of being a citizen (of a nation or a political system, and participating in national and political bodies) and acting as a citizen, i.e. in the interests of a wider group and participating actively in the wider activities of community life.

Gaventa and Jones (2002) identify three ways of understanding citizenship: Liberal, (formal rights enshrined in law and conceptualized at the level of the nation state), Civic republican, a practice involving participation in public affairs and a public culture rather than group identities, and Communitarian – arising from an individual's sense of belonging and identity, socially embedded and concerned with common good rather than individual interests,. That is: citizenship as a right (liberal, that of being a citizen), as a responsibility, (civic republican, that of acting and participating in affairs of the state) or as an attitude (that of feelings and association, related to a communitarian sense of belonging).

Since the declaration of independence by BiH in 1992 and the Dayton accord in 1995, Bosnian nationals, (which includes Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) have legal rights

as members of one nation state that reflect a liberal view of citizenship, but it is the history of the enshrinement of those rights and the rejection of what Serbs saw as a non-Serb homeland that shifted a former period of tolerance into sudden ethnic violence. Consequently, while a civic republican participation in state decisions may eventually form the basis of a stable democracy it does not automatically generate local participation. An alternative view of citizenship, linked to a more communitarian model may be a more meaningful first step if the next generation is to transcend familial ethnic divisions and invest in a sense of community.

School curricula, (including that of the national curriculum in the UK and new curricula introduced into secondary schools in BiH) often focuses on a civic republican view of citizenship, introducing people to governance procedures, laws involving human rights and policies on equality and difference. Programmes introduced in schools in Bosnia after the war included elements of national identity as well as a way of coping with the past (McEntaggart 1999). However while most students questioned recently in focus groups (2008) now claim to have a 'Bosnian identity' (rather than a Bosniak or Serb or Croatian) few are actively involved in their local context outside of the family home.

The term 'global citizenship' has been used increasingly in relation to education programmes and international activism and this includes a communitarian and a civic republican notion of belonging that extends beyond membership of an immediate group. It depicts a kind of citizenship that is defined by associational status rather than any legal sanction but invokes a sense of the responsibility to participate in world affairs or to be active within issue based politics. It takes the term citizenship out of the realm of national legal rights and links it with a sense of human rights that belong to every individual.

> *- what many persons are really identifying with is no longer*
> *bounded by or centred upon the formal relationship that an*
> *individual has to his or her own territorial society as embodied*
> *in the form of a state. Traditional citizenship is being challenged*
> *and remoulded by the important activism associated with this*

*trans-national political and social evolution. (Falk 1994: 138)*

Global citizenship, as defined by Oxfam, includes 'the skills, knowledge and values needed to secure a just and sustainable world'. (Oxfam, 2007), and is concerned with connections between people, our responsibilities towards them and problems and issues concerned with living together. It is the combination of skills, knowledge and values, promoting a sense of 'common good and connectedness' unlinked to territory or statehood that may form part of a process of reconciliation. As such it describes an ethic of 'moral universalism' which has predominated in the West since 1945.

A sense of global citizenship, of commitment to issues, to diversity and to human rights and a felt rather than a learned concern may be more easily developed through contact with civil society than taught in a classroom.

**The importance of Social Capital**

Social capital (Putnam 1993) as a concept, overlaps with both communitarian and civic republican views of citizenship and is concerned with the social ties and shared values or norms that bind people together and facilitate participation and collective action. But while Gaventa differentiates between social connectedness and individual interests, Putnam suggests that social capital is a strengthening of social connectedness through promoting individual responses of trust and reciprocity. 'The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts' (Putnam1993:19), closer involvement in a wider community is seen as both a private and a public good.

Putnam draws attention to the difference between specific reciprocity, which he refers to as bonding social capital, and generalised reciprocity – bridging social capital. Bonding reciprocity involves connections with specific people or groups who are known – horizontal participation with those who share a common purpose or identity. Bridging reciprocity is concerned with connections beyond immediate known groups to involve those with different identities or different needs. He also refers to linking reciprocity, which concerns links and ties to those in power or authority. Where bonding social capital is exclusive ('good for getting by') bridging social capital can be 'good for getting

ahead'. Putnam stresses that 'A society characterised by generalised reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society, for the same reason that money is more efficient than barter. … Frequent interaction among as diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalised reciprocity… Social networks and norms of reciprocity can facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit'. (1993:21). To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves.(1993:411)

In BiH, where many cities are still organised along ethnic lines any move to a more a public culture rather than separate group identities will depend on a sense of generalised reciprocity and bridging social capital more than formal rights enshrined in law. Reciprocity has to be based on trust, but Putnam differentiates between 'thick trust', (he length of time you have known someone) and thin trust, (more generalised trust which involves giving most people the benefit of the doubt) (1993:136). Social trust of this kind is often associated with other forms of civic engagement and social capital but is dependent on a belief that by giving (time, money, resources) or sharing these will ultimately benefit the whole. Those who naturally trust others tend to be all round good citizens who are more engaged and more trustworthy. A decline in trust, at an individual or a group level generally leads to an increasing reliance on the rule of law, contracts, courts, juries etc – on the mediation of formal institutions. In BiH where there is still substantial distrust of these formal institutions any further decline in trust further threatens peace. The demise of the former state of Yugoslavia and the subsequent distrust of state as a means of law and security, a culture of fear and the belief that security comes from 'sticking together' reminiscent of Putnam's bonding social capital (Putnam 2001, Ignatief 1999). Like other ethnic conflicts war grew out of 'the collapse or absence of institutions that enable individuals to form civic identities strong enough to counteract their ethnic allegiances' (1993:7). The disintegration of the state led to ethnic fragmentation and the need to create new means of security through assumed blood ties.

In this context an education programme based on state concept of citizenship is unlikely to be able to redress this. Civil conflict by definition explodes any civic sense of citizenship and regroups people around defended ethnic identities. Even when

mainstream political culture appears to agree a peace and transcend this by uniting both groups into one society, hidden political cultures and allegiances are passed on within the family through primary socialisation (Jarvis 1987). Through this socialisation process a subsequent generation grows up with a particular world view which rarely includes neighbourliness or connectedness outside of ethnic divides. Socialisation takes place within a family or immediate community despite any hidden curriculum in schools designed to challenge this. The school curriculum may aim to reproduce social order to persuade people to reunite under a new sense of state or to develop their own sense of resilience. (Illich 1971 and Macedo 1994, McEntagart 1998), but socialisation creates deep rooted assumptions that are hard to change.

However while patterns of behaviour may be difficult to shift within a generation it may be possible to do this between generations. Socialisation may be unconscious but it is not a thoughtless process. According to Jarvis

> *'Individuals do not merely receive these impressions from culture and have them imprinted; rather there is a process of thought and then, also, one of externalisation. Hence individuals actually modify what is received and it is the changed version that is subsequently transmitted to other people in the social interaction. (Jarvis 1987:14).*

**Citizenship, Social Capital and the undergraduate curriculum**

Higher Education may be well placed to contribute to the building of social capital and a communitarian sense of citizenship and participation. The move in some universities to consider third stream work and community engagement offers the opportunity for greater involvement in civil society and a chance to learn experientially rather than to be taught. The priority for many young people to find employment, to develop a sense of self worth and to be able to envisage a future (Interviews 2008) makes any active involvement in a potential work environment seem attractive.

Traditionally 'personal development' has not formed part of the undergraduate curriculum, particularly in BiH where teaching is often formal and delivered through exercises and lectures. It is only in the past 20 years that is has significantly entered

the UK curriculum as a way of enhancing an individual's self knowledge and ultimately making them more effective as professionals. Bourner (1998) argues for personal development and social involvement as legitimate concerns of higher education. He links the development of 'inner knowledge' of self with the 'outer knowledge' of knowing about the world and suggests that social involvement (with groups, through community development activities) may be a way to develop personal knowledge and social connectedness among undergraduates. Helping students to understand how they act in specific situations and why, and their choices in terms of acting differently may enable them to be better professionals and better citizens.

If social peace depends on the ability to communicate and to negotiate difference, then a mixture of inner knowledge of self and outer knowledge of the world are as necessary as each other. Rather than focusing on a top down taught notion of citizenship higher education may need to concern itself with the development of students of individuals, their sense of themselves and their connection to civil society, and experiential learning. If HE is serious about preparing young people for 'coping with conflictual relationships and facing difficult choices in complex societies and politics ' (Frazer 2000:88) it will need to address both elements of self-knowledge and 'knowledge about' in a way that encourages people to act. 'Civic education framed in terms of knowledge and perhaps values but without an experiential component has little impact on behaviour' (Merrifield 2004:21). Adapting the curriculum to look at both personal and theoretical issues, including a 'definition of self and personal view towards other people' through active participation may be the best way to achieve this. (Miller, ref Nicaragua crusade 1985:208).

There is some evidence in 'Bowling Alone' of the role that education can play in developing altruistic behaviour in the longer term. College graduates in the USA are twice as likely as people with high school education to volunteer or to donate blood (Putnam 1993:118/9), and those who volunteer while at college are twice as likely to return to volunteering later in life. Formal volunteering and informal helping has also been shown to contribute to employment. Volunteering is part of a syndrome of good citizenship, volunteers tend to be more interested in politics, and political cynics are less likely to volunteer (1993:133).

Merrifield (2002) identifies a number of elements needed to help learn connectedness, or 'the art of engaging, questioning and knowing when to act'. She recommends programmes that help people to acquire new knowledge by linking to what they already know, that practice what they preach by providing a democratic learning environment, that provide opportunities to try out problem solving and while learning about individual problem solving processes. She advocates reflection as a way to help people to reinterpret how they see the world and scaffolding to gradually take on more responsibility with more understanding, and hence deeper self reflection.

Tocqueville, quoted in Chandler (1998), suggests that 'citizens need to be educated in the values of democracy through voluntary associations, which serve as large free schools, where all the members of the community go to learn the general theory of association' (Tocqueville 1945, vol 2:124).

If we want students to act as a citizens as well as 'be' citizens this requires the ability to communicate and collaborate and to act together for a greater good. In order to do this they need more than a knowledge of structures but to understand how power operates and how, as an individual it is possible to have an impact, to, in Dewey's terms, link the 'I' to the 'we', to 'know and understand something of the conditions of other citizens' (Merrifield 2002 p 5), in particular those who are experiencing the problem.  Merrifield cites the importance of deliberation in a democracy, and that deliberation requires both voice and listening, negotiation, compromise and influence, neighbourliness, empathy, the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Bellah (1985) talks about habits of the heart claiming good citizens are more than 'active' citizens, they have a sense of connectedness to others, an awareness of common interests, a willingness to live with or resolve difference without recourse to violence.

The less defended people feel in relation to their own group the more they are open to valuing difference in others, breaking down stereotypical images and moving away from seeing people collectively. Enabling an individual to understand themselves better through increased personal knowledge makes them less likely to stereotype others and as such to 'dehumanise' them.

*'To the degree that individuals can learn to think for themselves – and so become true individuals- they can free themselves, one by one, from the deadly*

*dynamic of the narcissism of minor difference. In that sense the function of liberal society is not merely to teach the noble fiction of human universality, but to create individuals sufficiently robust in their own identity to live by that fiction'* (Ignatief 1999:71).

Models of student community engagement based on reciprocity and mutual benefit could provide the basis for building an active sense of citizenship. While it is too early in the project to draw firm conclusions about its impact on students' behaviour, SCE, through experiential and reflective learning has the ingredients to challenge earlier socialisation processes and provide a lived alternative. It offers students the opportunity to get personally involved in negotiation, participation and decision making, in power holding and power sharing. It builds a 'communitarian' sense citizenship, not through encouragement to act collectively or to follow, but through developing inner knowledge of self alongside outer knowledge of the world.

For young people facing a potential future of unemployment and lack of direction, the chance to see what they are able to achieve, to gain a sense of their own power and worth, to develop a stronger personal rather than a collective identity could also help build a stronger civil society and develop trust.

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