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ICE BREAKERS

FOREWORD

The program “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers” has been developed by **the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia**. The project aims at renewing old ties and creating new ones among young people, academic and artistic circles, media outlets and civil society organizations from Belgrade and Pristina, thus contributing to dialogue, reconciliation and normalization between the two societies.

We are after breathing life into intercultural dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo so as to:

- Support implementation of Belgrade–Pristina Agreement;
- Promote joint, cross-border activities by young people, academic circles, the media and civil society organizations;
- Break down stereotypes on both sides through art, culture, debate and youth exchanges;
- Ensure quality media coverage of Kosovo–Serbia reconciliation and normalization processes that are crucial to the two country’s accession to the EU.

With support of different partner organizations and donors we initiate and organize different activities such are seminars/study tours/art colonies for young artists from Serbia and Kosovo; cultural activities such are festivals “*A Month of Pristina in Belgrade*” and “*A Month of Belgrade in Pristina*” with young artists presenting their art works to the public in Serbia/Kosovo; joint cross border campaigns; and many other actions.

This booklet is designed by young artists from Serbia and Kosovo who have participated in a study tour held in October 2017. They spent ten creative and working days in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Prishtina and Prizren, making friends and exchanging experiences and knowledge about their societies and cultures. They have summarized some of their impressions in this booklet. Hope you will enjoy it!

- On behalf of our organizational team,
Jelena Dzombic
Program Coordinator,
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia

Aleksandar Dražić

I was born in Novi Sad in 1993. I am studying sociology, and currently working on development of „Cultural Center LAB“ and „Media Center Klinika“ in Novi Sad.

I was thinking a lot how to start this essay in order to describe in the best way my impressions on this study tour and our trip to Kosovo. After a lot of thinking I decided not to write it in classical way having introduction, elaboration, conclusion. So, I decided to start the essay with conclusion. Meeting young people from Kosovo and spending almost two weeks together was an incredible experience for me. I believe that breaking of prejudices we have towards each other is so important for the future of this region, and that is way I applied for this program. Culture area is the first one which can help in breaking of the walls, and that is why it is my honor as one of the participants from Serbia to present our culture and current artistic trends to the youth from Kosovo.

I didn't have prejudices when I went to Kosovo, and I knew that it's not dangerous for me to be in Prishtina. I applied for this study tour primarily because of my lack of knowledge when it comes Kosovo and its culture. I have to admit that I knew very little about history of Albanian people, and generally about Kosovo. While talking with participants from Kosovo I realized that they also learn about Serbia mostly via media, where one can hear predominantly about political dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina. We came to this study tour to meet with each other, and to find common topics to work on, and to discuss whether daily politics is necessity for us at all, and are these negotiations separating or connecting two societies, and what is the scope of it. Through this initiative I learnt that there are much more common issues that connect these two societies, than those that separates it, and that we should build our future on our commonalities, and not on conflict.

Arbnora Ademi

Hi, I'm Arbnora Ademi and I'm 19 already. I am from Kosova and I study acting in the second year. In my free time I like to read and paint. I also like to watch movies in my free time. When I grow up I want to be an actress. I am so social and I like spending time with new people, getting to know them. When I was a kid I used to play with my brother's toys. One day I want to travel so far.

As days go by I understand that I'm just a human who tries to fill my soul, to fill my soul with adventures and memories. To find pieces of my soul anywhere I go. In a rainy day full of life, where rain is destroying the dryness in a such beautiful way I want to see the pureness of life and different cities. Such a day to be alive when I open my eyes and see a different wall, as I turn my head around I see a different view, a different place and a different feeling. I'm feeling small in a city when everything is so huge that makes you feel small and unimportant. Why would I love feeling unimportant I've been thinking lately and I realized that when I feel small I feel the need to do bigger things to reach the highness of the city, to be equal. I'm feeling great in Belgrade, every street reminds me of a street in my city. I'm not feeling home sick.

I wake up and meet new people, we share pain, happiness and love together. I see solutions, dreams and goals behind of them. People who give as much as they have. People who receive less than they have. People sharing stories and tears. People crying over what's done and people celebrating the present. I see people hugging each-other as their tears flow. People capturing every moment. Shiny eyes and holding hands. People sounding so weird and beautiful. People trying to talk to each-other with international signs. People telling people the secret places they usually cry. I see stories behind stories.

We talked about the past but the future seems to be brighter so we decided to go for the future. To make it as bright as possible.

Let's make art and see the world as a beautiful place to live in, let's enjoy the other's company without questioning their nationality. It's fun.

I met people I'd love to keep in touch for the rest of my life, I created connections with people I thought I never will.

I would love to know the right words to describe this study tour but sometimes just explaining how hard it is makes you understand it all.

May the fall come again and meet us together.

Ana Novaković

was born in Pristina in 1987. She created her first artworks there.
She works, studies and teaches at University of Novi Sad. She creates stuff
as a media nomad artist at Sunny Quay in Novi Sad + she's a mom.

From I to WE

Is my sense of belonging only a construct
Everything is so small now
In my hometown
Home is the place I left

It seems that I loved this city
No mater I hated the hate in it
And always imagined myself elsewhere

People lost their lives
Someone was stupid to think
It would bring any good

Our suffer means nothing
Compared to the raped and beheaded

I tried not to sleep in Pristine,
Nor Belgrade
Insecurity faded by time

First I remembered some words
While having lunch in Belgrade
Qka po bon?
What does it mean
I asked

Than I remembered some places
As we drove through the city
Slower than the walkers

And I cried silently because of memories
One could feel the unneeded aggression.

And I remembered the smell of winter
While walking the Skenderbeg street
Everything was somehow new and
Old.

Than, I remembered some faces
Sihana was a baby
So strange and beautiful
She still is.

Kaltrina is a pharmacist know
Everyone in the hug
I remembered the energy of youth
And Art
As we were surrounded by it
That helped a lot

Felt Ashamed I couldn't come earlier.

A city became a victim of architectural rape.
As if someone wanted it to look
Completely different
But that someone,
Didn't expect that we perceive the mask.
The mask of "other"
"Other" which is the same Instrument
Of gaining power by manipulating with fear

We were free of hate
But it took a while to understand
We want the same thing
We wanted the same rights
We wanted to be part of the world
We wanted people to be proud of love
Not terror, tyranny and crime.

Our parent judged our lack of fear
We healed each other's wounds
By crying together.

We tried not to sleep in Pristine,
Nor Belgrade.
We were thirsty for knowing each other
So many worlds
Regrouped by values and sensibility
Not nation.

Eni Pirana

Hi! It's Eni. I am this young guy from the city of Prizren, Kosovo. I always was into arts and still am. I am always looking forward to be as much active as I can in this field. Currently, I am in my second year of my bachelor studies in Communication Design.

Things that we see or things that we experience makes us what we are. From the moment I heard about the “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers” program I knew that it is an opportunity worth taking and a new experience for me. I always had this urge of visiting Serbia or Belgrade and Novi Sad. This country and these cities that I was hearing about through my life over and over again. But somehow, I never had the opportunity to visit them, that is maybe one of the reasons that I am always going to be thankful to the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights and “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers” program, because it gave me this great opportunity.

Meeting new people, people of great value and extraordinary virtues, visiting sites, places, museums, culture centers and having the chance to discuss interesting topics with very important people from the field, inspired me a lot and widened the range of my understanding further more. To be honest these were the reasons that pushed me to seize the chance to participate and be a part of this project.

One of the things that I enjoyed the most was the process of “Cultural Hitchhikers” . I had the chance of seeing and living the life that my peers do. Everybody has the right not to think as the majority and not to agree with everything that is being said. I had adopted different images about Serbia as well, but the process of “Cultural Hitchhikers” debunked a lot of non-positive ones. After all, we are all the same and we are neighbors. I can proudly admit that my thoughts and beliefs about the people and the country has changed for good. There will always be people that are going to reflect negativity and this is a worldwide phenomenon you can't get ahead of it, but things such as this program will always help to rupture taboos that have been built by society which are wrong.

Art as a platform was and always is going to be this tremendous tool of fixing problems. In my opinion the greatest ambassadors of a country actually are the artists, instead of the badly selected politicians in power. Art and artist give the best advertisement of their country and the true reflection of it, which is why project like this should never stop. These activities are so much needed for the next generations as well. I can't pass without mentioning my impressions when I visited the recently re-opened Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade. The exhibition fulfilled my expectations. Seeing that art in Serbia and Serbian art followed the periods of history in art when they were occurring amazed me very much.

This initiative and all encounters with other participants shattered the “ice” for me and gave me this comfort and freedom to come to Serbia again, meet my friends and have a great time.

Ilma Kitivojević

born in Prijepolje, lives in Belgrade, and studying at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade.

I don't call myself an artist, I just think that everything in life is art. What you do. How you dress. The way you love someone and how you talk. Your smile and your personality. What you believe in and all your dreams. The way you drink. Your tea. How you decorate your home or party. The food you make. How your writing looks. And the way you feel. Life is art.

My first touch with the word “Albanian” was hearing that noun in the media in a negative sense or hearing some jokes about them when I was little. I didn't pay much attention on it till I grown up a bit and heard many other (mostly negative) stories about them, when it became more than just a joke. The media, as the third world war's weapon, tried to show them in the dehumanized way, killing every aspect of an Albanian individual and mentioning them as “Shiptars” . I know that that word has a beautiful original meaning, but it was always presented as something evil and inferior. Divide and rule, the golden rule of our politicians.

Somehow things like this have contrary effect of me, instead of taking it as it is served, it woke up curiosity in me. Shiptar. Hm. I wondered what does it mean, where they come from, what is their fault, why they deserved this epithet? On the beginning of my research I didn't find satisfactory answers because internet was full of hate speech and I don't speak Albanian to be able to read books in their language. “Such a mysterious nation”, I thought. Is that even Slavic language? By every answer, even more questions were raised. My anthropologic and linguistic curiosity was much stronger then the negative media influence. Besides all of my theoretical questions my wish was to infiltrate into Albanian society and see what kind of people they really are, what they think about us and what is their side of the story. After all, could you really hate somebody that you've never seen in person, who's language you don't speak and who has nothing to do with the crimes that people on their territory committed? If it is like that, I thought that the whole world should hate me because I live into the same borders as some really serious war criminals? Why not to give them a chance, maybe I will meet some nice people? Then I heard for this initiative and I thought there is finally something that will feed my curiosity. Art, meetings, traveling, that is a perfect match.

Since beginning I started to observe with purpose to notice what are the characteristics that separate our two cultures, what is the line that divide Albanians and Serbians. The first barrier was the language, but since we all speak English that barrier was broken and I started to observe more carefully. We talked, ate together, drunk, walked, worked, laugh and cried together. There was some unique energy of the group, like all of us makes one simple human being that feels. In that one complete, complex and emotional human being I couldn't recognize who was Albanian and who was Serbian.

I accepted everyone's energy and felt good, I found it therapeutic. First, I was amazed by energy, talents, visions and good will of the “Other” group, and after that, the trip to Kosovo helped me understand them more. Really pretty, peaceful places, populated by kind people were my first impressions. As we were going out, I realized that not only I like the participants of the projects but

also random people of Kosovo who seemed to be very polite, ready to help, kind and so hospitable. I was offered drinks and food, friends of the Albanian participants were happy to meet us all, and despite I was talking Serbian on the streets of Prizren, I was offered a coffee, when later on I found out that actually I was offered a coffee by an Albanian minister in Kosovo's Parliament. "Such a normal people with their feet on the ground", I thought.

I never knew that in Kosovo there are so many people full of qualities, artists, youngsters who fight for their space (Termokiss), I am surprised by a vivid art scene, night life, street art and all the creative people I've met on my way. The image of the barbarian Albanians who would beat you if they heard you speaking Serbian was completely broken. The stereotype of Albanians as a closed people is broken too, because I felt more than welcomed wherever in Kosovo I stepped in.

People in fact are afraid to discover their "enemy" culture because they might discover them as a normal and very kind people and they might get confused then. For them it is much easier to live in the deception and apathy of knowing so little, they don't have to force their minds so they just live in a complete ignorance. We must fight against it, especially through the art which is a common language of all of us, which should be our tool to express ourselves and expose some topics that others are afraid to put on the table. We must be brave and persistent, because the road is long and hard but we are the ones who have the responsibility of creating the new future.

Flutur Mustafa

born in Ulcinj, Montenegro; based in Prishtina, Kosovo.
Freelance Artist & Author
Master studies - International Law - University of Prishtina
Published books: "Pertej Lajthitjes" 2014 and "Na dy" 2017
Co-founder of NGO iAct
Co-founder of Seanema Film Festival

I have this ability to go back in time when telling a story. Well I hope you will have the patience to read mine until the end. It all started when me and a couple of my friends saw the "Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers" call for applications. I was familiar with the initiative before because some of my friends already participated in this program.

We all submitted the CVs at the same time and hoped for the best, but only I got accepted.

I tako, moj prvi dan u Beogradu. Strašno. Kažu mi kako eš do Beograda, kad si Albanka nije baš bezbedno. Pa tako može sto uda da ti se dogode. Pazi se. Zaboravila sam da vam kažem da imam ovu manu kad priam, ne mogu da se skoncentrišem na jedan jedini jezik, jer priam i srpski i albanski i engleski. Sta u?

In my eyes, Belgrade was particularly dark city thanks to the influence of mass media, bad politics, and random propaganda. The city that as an Albanian you can't visit. Is it irony that all the beautiful streets/buildings in downtown Belgrade are named Palata Albanija (Palace of Albania), Skadarska Ulica (Shkodra Street), Prizrenska (Prizren Street), Kosovska (Kosovo Street), etc.

Thanks to its architecture, Belgrade can seem a little bit dark and gothic. First thing I saw when I arrived in Belgrade was the sign with the street name sign "Prizren Street". I must admit that I was more than proud but that feeling did not last much. Someone thought that we might miss our President and Prime Minister and they decided to put their pictures in front of the National Parliament. Next time, add to the list the leader of the opposition as well. He is nicer than these guys. We can't assure you that you will see Vucic or Brnabic in Pristina. We don't do marketing.

Jokes aside, I was very upset but did not react until I discussed this topic with Jelena, Tamara & Ivan, organizers and new friends from Serbia. They found it problematic as well. We went through this with jokes, especially with Ivan and we reached a new level of knowing each other. Through radical jokes, combined with our positive thought that both have. For example, it was impossible to take a proper picture with all the participants. That's when the Albanians have to make a solution and bring the drone, since we are the main drone distributors for Balkans since 2014.

The first night was the icebreaking night. Being an Albanian from Montenegro that wasn't a big challenge. How I got into the "Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers" program? Perks of living in Pristina since 2013. The true challenge was keeping up with three languages. Ivan [a new friend from Serbia -- Ed.] gave the idea of making a caricature of mine walking through the streets of Belgrade with three balloons that showed the three languages I mixed all the way of the study tour.

I wanted to see the real Belgrade and the real Serbians. Not those guys with uniforms. Not that ugly, psycho, crazy man that decided to bomb and destroy Yugoslavia to feed his greed, pride and sick mind. Whatever.

In life you should always check about both sides of the medal. Through the victim's eye and through the raiders eye. I was about to turn five when the NATO bombing happened. I remember my mother, in full stress, whispering a strange name like Mr. "you know who" we didn't need this, while me and grandfather checked the sky for NATO airplanes through binoculars and cheered and clapped whenever one would pass. The village was full of refugees that fled away from war. That was my first contact with war. For me it was very strange to accept the violence of one nation towards another.

Imagine being seven years old, and first thing you learn in school is the song "Hey, Slavs". As a rebellious kid, I would

always have my critic opinion for everything. The biggest trauma of my life was learning to sing a hymn of a dead country that did not mention my nation anywhere in the lyrics. I still know it. Being an Albanian from Montenegro it's not a piece of cake to be honest. But that is another issue.

Od kad sam došla na studiranje u Prištinu, upoznala sam razne ljude koji su delili line prie iz rata i svega drugog što se dogodilo u periodu od '94 do '99. I plakala sam puno. Ali opet, htela sam upoznati i tuinca koji je ove stvari uradio. Zapravo, kad sam ula Aninu i Teodorinu [polaznice seminarara iz Srbije – Ed.] prie, videla sam kako nismo mi ta generacija koja je zapravo kriva. Nije se to desilo u naše ime. Ništa od toga. Ivan [polaznik seminarara iz Srbije – Ed.] bi esto rekao “Idi i vidi sam, ko je, šta je.” A mi smo baš ovo uradili. ‘Veni, vidi’, slušaj pažljivo, voli. A palainke, nigde nisu ukusnije kao kod “Glumca” [poznata poslastiarnica u Beogradu – Ed.].

It was a pleasure being part of the seventh generation of the “Intercultural Icebreakers”. I am very glad that I had the opportunity to get in touch with different point of views, cultural views, political issues, debates and different ways of interpreting art. What I really liked was the way we got into each other and became really close friends. We are the generation that needs to discuss what happened, understand the mistakes of the both parties and try to move on. It is not about forgiving each other, it is about accepting each other the way we are.

Nese me pyetni se cili qytet me ka pelqyer me se shumti do thoja Novi Sadi. Ndoshta ka ndikuar edhe moti I cili nuk ishte ne favor tonin sa ishim ne Beograd dhe rrezet e diellit qe vendosen te favorizonin Novi Sadin. Mirepo mu duk vetja sikur te isha ne nje pjese te qytetit te Shkodres apo Sarajeves. Ndikimi austrohungarez ishte mese i dukshem. Aleksandri dhe Stanislavi u perkujdesen qe ta njihnim qytetin e Novi Sadit sikur te ishim vete banore te atij qyteti.

What took my attention while in Novi Sad was the old factory that became cool place to grab a beer or a Turkish coffee and have a nice chat. Well, nice until a very nice lady decided to come in with her dogs (I have this fear of dogs) and I reacted in Albanian. I started to talk with her and explain how I am afraid of dogs and that has nothing to do with her personally. Guess what? Yes, exactly that. She called me “Shiptarka”. And all of my fellows stared at her, at me and waited for my reaction. I tried to clarify the term into a non-pejorative meaning telling her that I am an Albanian. Anyway, she insisted on hers and I tried to explain my fellow Albanians what she said. While my Serbian fellows tried to calm me down.

Anyway, if we refer to a German as a Deutcher, he won't get mad. Actually, he would feel very good. I accepted (barely) to be called Shiptarka. There is no need to get mad at the end of the day.

The term Shiptar means Albanian. In Kosovo accent you don't say Shqiptar, but Shiptar and you pronounce the letter A with full mouth. But with the media all around us, this term got its pejorative and negative meaning. Nevertheless, call us Albanians. Sounds way better.

I think that the best way to get through the prejudice is sitting with each other and listen carefully. Listen to understand and not to reply. Hate doesn't hurt the one that is hated but the one that feels and feeds this feeling. We already saw what hate did. If hate could do such things imagine what love would do. Love yours, know yours first so you could understand, accept and respect the other.

I would like to write much more but I don't know when it's enough. Until the next time.

Ivan Dinić

Sociologist, human rights activist, photojournalist, skater, cyclist, runner, human.
Always on a pursuit after story, although often stories pursue me. Hard thinker
and avid reader. Man of a few words, but dependable, honest and loyal.

Transformation of adopted images about culture of the 'Other' through encounter and exchange with the 'Other'

For me personally, the image of the 'Other' was not that strong, but rather very vague and non-existent. I did not know what, or whom to expect. During my life, during my past, I have come across different individuals that are Albanian, and I had very different experiences, good and bad. So, the only impression that I had, is like with any other foreign nation, I knew that there were good people, and there were bad people. My story actually started with my upbringing, where my mother raised me in a way that I always judge the individual, and always measure the man, not a group.

On the other hand, we, as a group, as a nation, as a society are inevitably influenced by the events, by the collective consciousness, and our own experience. Knowledge of the things that happened during the war, me being relatively young and aware of things that played out, especially after the war, and declaration of independence by Kosovo, created a subconscious fear, that followed me during my application period, as well as while we were entering Kosovo and Pristina.

At first, I was not certain on what to expect, when I considered the 'Other'. I knew that they voluntarily applied for participating in this program, so they must be more open and honest than the most of people that are under the influence of propaganda on both sides. I knew that they are all young, and probably energetic, eager to learn and gain new experience.

First thing that happened is that somehow, probably by some reflex, all of people from one group formed at one table for dinner, while the other group had another table. From my professional experience, this is normal, people are more comfortable with other people that are more like them. The moment organizers mixed us up, after a couple of minutes, people mingled and chatted like they are all from the same group. Topics were exchanged, and opinions traded, and no one was shy, no one did not find anyone who they did not talk to. The fact that we were always together, in everything, while we were eating, sleeping, working, walking, having fun, only helped bond us together. That bond was not only in things that we did together, but also in things that we experienced together. Both groups were really open and expressive about their past, and their experiences. There were a lot of tears, a lot of emotions in the air, a lot of hugs. This meant that everybody was honest and comfortable with showing what they feel, and that is very, very important. 'Other' must be given back its humanity, that either side took away so physical destruction can be justified. 'Other' can cry, 'she' has seen her dolls on fire, 'he' has seen his father go to war, 'they' had to run and hide for their lives, 'we' were afraid, 'all of us' suffered. That is what everyone communicated to everyone. We all thought that we know a lot about each other, but we found out much more than expected.

Phrase 'differences bring us together', although very worn, serves a good purpose, we were all very similar in our interests, in things that are universal for most young people anywhere, but were very

different in cultures we come from. Language, to begin with, food, way of life, approach to living, studying, history, culture, experience, it was all different.

One of the most important things for me is that I have made friendships with lovely people, with whom I felt safe in a place my culture considered unsafe and hostile, where that place actually is not at all unsafe and hostile. Now I know that I can get on a bus, and one call later, someone can pick me up from the station and I will have a place to sleep, if I need it. This is also valid if anyone from the group would need my help. I hope that the rest of the group shares my opinion.

For me personally, I am very glad that I have made friends, and that my fear from the start of the essay does not exist anymore.

Leona Velia

Hi, I'm Leona velia and I'm 18, I live in Peja. I want to study acting and I will be an actress. On my free time I like to read, watch movies and hiking. I like art and usually I try to be part of things that include art. I love festivals and I always try to follow them.

As a person who is eager to gain new experience and to try new things, to meet new people, learn about new culture, and break those kind of walls, this study tour was the right way to do these kinds of things I always wanted. Every human I met there left some kind of impression in my head or I learnt life lessons from each of them. The opinion I had earlier for these two countries was different from other people I know because I really never want these things to continue, like pain and bad memories. In a way, you only need a day to change this opinion about Serbia. You can't have a bad impression for people who are kind and good to you and treat you in a right way.

I think art can break those walls and can give the right message we want to share and maybe in a way you can change the way some people think. If someone thinks in a wrong way and lives in a box you have to help them to get out of it and see the beautiful things. Just because you don't like the way they think doesn't mean that you have to leave it like that. You can help.

Also in this essay I wanted to thank all of friends from Serbia, I was so glad to meet all of them. I am so happy that we created a lot of memories together. I will never forget it.

Katarina Ilišković

After finishing the Faculty of Media and Communication in the field of Digital Art and New Media I started doing graphic design, video editing and photography. Besides that, when I'm isolated from the world I love to make wire sculptures, especially flowers, and ceramics.

When we talk about culture all of us have some first thoughts that pop up in our mind, things like language, food, historical monuments, architecture, music. We tend to think that we know our and also others culture really well threw books, television and the most important new age tool – the World Wide Web. But aren't that only presumptions that we have to discover as right or false.

After reading the synopsis of the study tour, I saw that we have the task called "Cultural Hitchhikers" in which we would have to exchange our ideas of culture with other participants. At that moment an avalanche of questions flew over me. I began questioning myself what does culture really mean to me and as I started searching for answers I felt kind of lost when I came to the conclusion that the only way to know the culture you have to experience it. So yes, we always have some presumptions in our minds what should represent someone's culture but that are not the real once. Like we are talking about a particular language that we maybe never heard. The important thing is that we know what is their language even if we wouldn't recognize it somewhere. We heard about some delicious specialties from that region but in reality, it's not really theirs and as we would continue there would be more and more misunderstandings but these don't have to be a bad thing if we ever get the opportunity to correct them. That moment where we exchanged with each other the ideas of our and their culture at the study tour was at the same moment funny, unpleasant but also relieving. Through these talks the ideas transformed into real facts.

There are so many different opinions about the others and not all of them tend to be good, some are bad with many prejudices. Prejudices as always stand in the way and prevent the connection between others. I would say there are three groups of people when we talk about culture. Those who are with no prejudices open to experience and learn about it. Those who have prejudices, but prove after a while if they are right or wrong and the last group is the one convinced in its own prejudices who will never change.

Things tend to change when we let ourselves free to experience and connect with other's culture in reality otherwise we're only standing in our way.

Mirjeta Shatri

Hi,

This is Mirjeta Shatri, a young lady who often dreams of being a clown and a gymnastic teacher who plays with refugee kids around the world. I like to talk through my writings to the readers, readers like you, who are spending seconds of their life just to read what I wrote. Cool, isn't it?

I can feel your presence!

Dear reader, I invite you to be with me until the end of this Microsoft word named Mirjeta Shatri – Observation.
Thank You!

When I was born, I already had a name, belonged to a close group called family, had a nationality, a religion, and as girl I'm pretty sure my family bought me some pinky clothes, too. With other words, since I was born I already was part of many groups which made me in a way or another to be identified with them, to have an identity. And, if you're human being, I'm pretty sure you share similar story, right? Only with different shape maybe, because we are the same nature construction but with different shapes. Anyway, this is another issue. You're here to read my kind of "essay" which starts now.

After you read this piece of text, you are going to play a video and then maybe everything I wrote will make sense. Down below is video that represents hungry people whose bodies already send signals that they need to eat. As an observer of this video, I can't make any conclusion of who are these people, where do they come from, what nationality are they or what religion do they have? Which groups do they belong and identify themselves? Anyway, does it matter? Do we need this information? Not me! Not now! All I can conclude is that these young people are sharing and enjoying their big pizzas. Yippy!

Let's go next. Down below is another picture that represents some young people playing a game. As an observer of this picture, I can't make any conclusion of who these people are, where do they come from, what nationality they are or what religion do they have? Anyway, does it matter? Do we need this information? Not me! Not now! All I can conclude is that these young people are having a lot of fun. Yeah!

If you are waiting to see other pictures, you're right. But if you're waiting to read same text as it was written for other pictures up, then you're wrong. This is a picture that I don't want to describe. I give you the chance to interpret by yourself.

Okay. Here we are again, in our short journey. This a goodbye picture. And if you pay attention to these human beings' shapes, you notice this picture is so diverse and full of life.

Now you're going to read the closing part.

This was a piece of what my brain saw and felt and a piece of other people existence during a short period of our being together as a group itself, as a group created by a common language defined as Art. Well, we don't want to define art, because then we limit it. This was a piece from our life, which is art, too, as long as we consider art something special, unique and very valuable. Our art matters. Our art goes beyond given groups, and given identities which make us judge, discriminate, hate. Our art breaks the ice and the borders between groups.

Teodora Savić

I was born in Belgrade, Serbia. I'm a student of English Language and Literature at the University in Belgrade. I've been playing a violin for 6 years, piano for 4 years and harp for 5 years. I was always amazed by the art. Art is a part of my life. It brings happiness to me and its very inspiring and amazing how art can be seen by human eyes.

Ars longa, vita brevis – that's how old antient Greeks were saying, meaning Art is long, life is short. For me, art is the essence of life. It doesn't need to include only seven types of art. Arts exist in ourselves as well. Everyday, on different places we can see different versions of art. Every one of us is a piece of art. All of us carry pearls which makes as precious and special. Everyone is special in his/her own way.

This study tour meant a lot to me. It opened so many new doors, I met great people, and had so much fun. I'm grateful to the Helsinki Committee that provide us with this opportunity to see the world form a different angle. So many beautiful moments stuck in my mind, and I'll never forget it. Thank you all for opening some new doors, I'm so glad I was part of an awesome group of young and talented people! I hope we will continue to move the borders and to broaden are horizons together!

Azem Deliu

Azem Deliu, born in January 1996 in Skënderaj, Kosovo. He published his first poetry volume "The Funeral of Rain" in 2013 (Onufri, Tirana)

His greatest success was the novel „The Illegal Kisser“ (Onufri, Tirana 2016) which, besides being a national bestseller, has already been translated into English. Interest for the author is growing also in other countries. French press called him „the great author of the small country“ and "the new star of European literature". He is a member of the Association of Philosophers of Kosovo since the age of 19.

His next novel will be written in "Artist in Residence" program organized by Cultural Centre "The Castle" (ZAMEK) in Poznan, Poland.

He thinks that freedom does not create art, but art creates freedom.

What Belgrade?

If I would write about Belgrade the Albanian fools would get mad.

They would say that I have written in a sacral tone.

If I would write about Belgrade the Serbian fools would get mad.

They would say that the poetry is a territorial claim.

But I won't write about any of those Belgrades.

If I will write about the rainy Belgrade, where I've pulled out my umbrella while
eating the cigarettes as they were meat.

About the silhouettes that were flying above Hotel Moskva.

About the Belgrade of Danilo Kiš.

I would not write about the nationalist's Tirana neither

I would rather write about Kadare's Tirana.

For a poetry line I understand I have stepped onto

The owner and tradition, the blood and nation and besa.

I won't write about the Belgrade that thinks that my father is a terrorist.

Neither about the nationalists that would want me turned into ashes.

I will write about the marvelous meetings with the artists.

About the cigarette smoke and walks on the rain.

Therefore, I have nothing to fear

I won't damage entire nations

Poetry is not an act of treason|

Nor a territorial claim.

Vana Filipovski

comes from Belgrade, Serbia and she is 26 years old. She has graduated International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences, and holds a master degree in Peace Studies. Currently, she is enrolled on Master program of Management in Culture and Cultural Policies at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is interested in photography, film and writing. This was her first time visiting Kosovo.

“Belgrade seemed always great and I really wanted to see it, I just don’t know why I never did.”

When we want to get to know other culture better, we usually decide to visit their country, or, in this case better said is, their cities. In order to understand differences within the culture of “other” we need tangible sources and aesthetic experiences. Precisely that we gain during the sightseeing and exploring in cities unknown to us.

First thing that we encounter with is architecture. “Architecture is the very mirror of life. You only have to cast your eyes on buildings to feel the presence of the past, the spirit of a place; they are the reflection of society.”, noted I. M. Pei. In the first hand, we unconsciously get connected to the buildings and other structures more than with people, as it can be similar to the ones in our cities. The reason for it is simple. To connect with people, we need to open ourselves, to understand them by learning about them, so that we can finally integrate within the new environment. Therefore, that long process is something we cannot completely finish while we are visiting a new place. On the other hand, what we can do is to learn about their culture by comparing and contrasting it to the similarities we share, or in contrast, to excite about the opposites. Objects of that comparison are quite often, buildings or other architectural constructions in cities.

City represents space of the unstoppable processes of changes within societies that share it. They keep all the historical events in their buildings, roads, monuments and squares. Moreover, as Milan Kundera pointed out, cities have a strange tendency to reflect in one another. All of them have the same basic structures: buildings, monuments, streets, etc. What they represent and how they are shown is made by the differences in cultures. However, that neutrality that all cities share is important point for finding a common ground between “us” and the “other”. By expressing similarities within the differences, we are getting curious which inevitably leads to learning about the “other”. If we get to the point of learning, we are therefore opened for understanding.

Before our trip to Kosovo, I couldn’t visualize their cities nor I had ever tried to find pictures of them. It was something so strongly embedded in political issues that I wasn’t interested in their real shapes. I had the information I needed in order to interact with people around me during Kosovo-Serbia topic, but I had a difficulty imagining their way of living and spaces they share. Probably, my imaginative abilities couldn’t get through because the main problem about creating communication between our two societies is precisely that “space”. Therefore, I was more than

curious to see what makes those spaces unique, which shape they have and how people interact in them. Visiting of Pristina and Prizren helped me in that completely.

Even though my first impression was that Pristina is very dark and grey with extremely strange urban planning and even stranger architecture, those unusual shapes in the same time attracted me. Moreover, I found Prizren one of the most beautiful cities I've seen with little crooked streets in cobble, cafes and old shoe cleaners. By physically being in cities of the "other" and looking at their buildings, my constructions of Kosovo reshaped with realistic imagery. I started comparing Pristina to Belgrade, Prizren to Novi Sad. By doing it I created intangible strings that eased not just the intercultural differences, but political issues as well. It suddenly wasn't that important what happened between us in the past, but what is happening in front of me. I'm looking at nice streets, buildings, cafes and lots of food, and I'm thinking it's not bad at all. So, why was I told it's not really smart to go here?

"Pristina is 5 hours far from Belgrade and I heard it has really good clubs. However, I've never even consider going there."

By visiting Pristina and Prizren, I deconstructed my assumptions and replace them with images in front of me. Suddenly, imaginative cities and their buildings became real. Also, people who live in them. I could observe their common interactions as part of their everyday living, while we are doing our everyday things as well. Those cities helped me create another perception, and opened the questions that I can deal with furthermore, but now not influenced by media or any other storytelling, but my own perspective.

Shpat Maloku

comes from Belgrade, Serbia and she is 26 years old. She has graduated International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences, and holds a master degree in Peace Studies. Currently, she is enrolled on Master program of Management in Culture and Cultural Policies at the University of Arts in Belgrade. She is interested in photography, film and writing. This was her first time visiting Kosovo.

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