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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 for accession to the EU of both countries.

With support of different partner organizations and donors we initiate and organize different activities such are seminars/study tours 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 study tour held in April 2016. 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. During the study tour they have created different multimedia installations which later were presented at the exhibition in Belgrade, and 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



Dardan Zhegrova

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of “the other”

*“How I imagine it to be, probably I would feel free
I didn't thought of something bad
I've been there sometimes before that
meeting people can be superficial
but at night it is much deeper
we talk till morning all in one bed
thinking of plans we make ahead.
I was walking down the street
than I got back and got a treat
from a stranger I still don't know
but when you think back it was a great show
I have my darkness I guess we all do
but we are just people we should be true
someday soon this will be over
we will go back to our routine
all the memories before sleep
we should really try to make this deep.”*

I started my essay with a short poem which I wrote during my stay in Belgrade because it can show an emotional approach to the entire project and my experience. I think that it is really ok to be an idealist and to believe in an equal and free life from all the negative prejudices that our societies had built and are still trying to turn our everyday life into propaganda.

As an open platform art can bring together much more than any other profession can bring. There is no compromise ideally, but on the process of work especially group work – ideas can be combined and even more powerful. Diversity of the people backgrounds somehow brings up a new form of communication which transforms the images of one another that are already constructed. Experience on multiculturalism can show that on a deeper lever there is a unified sense of being – and using the art tools to express that is a much more pure way of deconstructing and really trying to reach understanding in a universal aspect.

Dardan Zhegrova
born 1991 in Prishtina /Kosovo
lives in Prishtina/Kosovo

Dardan Zhegrova's works play with the flux between language and its translation into visual representation. In his works emotion is used as an artistic medium that potentially could act as a means to question our assumptions about intimacy and expression. Mostly known for his videos the artist can be regarded as a poet in a time where physical proximity is being replaced by an ubiquitous availability through modern means of communication.



Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of the «other»

"It often happens that by entering the room we forget why we even came there. The easiest way to remember is if we go through the same door. It is scientifically proven, that participants will forget, specific task, three times more often if before its execution they pass through the door of a room, than if they do not. The reason is that our brain perceives a door as a border of events and believes that the decisions made in some room are stored in it when we leave. Therefore, we may remember if we go back to that room again." D. Velikić

Border... Serbia-Kosovo. The door of a van that drove us from Belgrade opens. A frontiersman enters. According to the Balkan norms he is masculine, which means that he has trimmed hair (2mm) but on the back of his uniform collar coat long neck hair are jutting out, because God why would he give two hundred dinars on a haircut when he can do it by himself in the mirror with a Braun trimmer, which he probably confiscated at that same border. Brisk, coarse gestures and well-rehearsed strict face expression. I think all that dedication to performing authority made wrinkles on his forehead. He demands that we give him our documents. He takes only Serbian ID cards while Kosovo's refuses to touch. Like that act would give legitimacy to the existence of Kosovo as a state. Instead, he asks for document (in Cyrillic), which they previously gave them when this group of young artists, my friends, went to Belgrade. He forwards the document papers and identity cards to colleague (also Serb) for routine check. It didn't last long. After a few minutes he passes off documents through the window to our driver and waved his hand approvingly. We continued on.

The van stops again and the door opens. This time Kosovo Albanian frontiersman approaches. Just like his fellow Serb he is Balkan normatively masculine. Obviously displeased because van's license plate are "Belgrade". His duty is to regain legitimacy, which his colleagues took two hundred yards away, and therefore he speaks curtly, aggressive, accusatory in Albanian, although it is likely that he know Serbian. Free estimate – I wouldn't give him less than 35 years. At the time he was in school education system in Kosovo was still on Serbian. I do not understand what he is saying. Jehona responds in Albanian. He hears his language and in the moment his face expression changes. Shrunken lips slowly spreads in smile. His voice is now much more pleasant. They exchanged a couple of sentences, and then he laughed deeply and honestly. Jehona has a good sense of humor.

These two situations are unfortunately dominant idea how "other" are/is perceived when it comes to Kosovo-Serbia relations. Seminar "Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers" gathered us, young people, who do not want to reconcile themselves with the fact that it is still impossible to break boundaries that someone set long time ago. We believe that we have necessary tools for this deconstruction. Mainly we are all artists, full of energy, enthusiasm and subversive power; it is necessary to recognize this subversiveness, to support it and nourish. Our art and creativity of any kind is not stained with nationalism and therefore I think it is one of the fronts to fight against it.

Marko Mitrović

Student of sociology in which the most interested in the study of gender and sexuality, as well as theories that deal with issues of identity in general. For many years engaged in activism and NGO sector. A great lover of the arts, especially the visual arts. In his free time engaged in graphic design. He believes that individuality is always above the collectivism therefore he is a major opponent of the nationalist ideology.

Qëndresa Loki

Love for an unknown city

In my mind full of madness, a secret love was blazing, love that was locked in one of the roots of my heart, right there where I thought it could never be. I was always standing in front of "it", from the first day that I meet "it", I was staring at "it" like crazy in every corner, I felt like moving the leaves the wind has thrown here and there, it was flying away from me up in the sky with its colorful wings of a butterfly. I had it so close to me. So close, that I did not dare to touch it, but I followed every move of it and with each move it dazed me. Enchanted?! Is that what I am now? No!?! Maybe it was sweetness I felt every second when I had it close to me. Crazy?! I would say I am, because he did not know that I felt him, that I loved even his loud laughs, his noisy yells, velocity of his movements, even the traces of his shoes left on the rainy streets. Did he have any clue that I used to stay in my room every night, locked? In this very room where red wine intoxicated me every night, in this room where every night I thought of him while staring at the Moon from the window. Every night I used to sleep alone in that room, to lie down on white sheets where my dreams were telling me his story every night. Every morning used to find me alone. I did not have him close to me to tell him: Good morning! Or, as a matter of fact, I had him – in my heart, in my eyes, in my breath, in everything I had. But how could I let him know? Even if I told him, he would not understand me or would not want to hear these words from me. But who am I to love him so madly, he does not know me and he never will, he will never know that I felt him. Ahh, if only I could scream at him so he can hear me from this distance!! I left him there. There where I found him in the first place. The only thing that I took from him is a bottle of red wine, which will keep this secret love. I will always love you like the first day I saw you, my lovely Belgrade.

Qendresa Loki (09.11.1990)

Born in : Hani I Elezit – Kosovo

Primary School and High School finished in her birthplace.

Graduated in Psychology at University of State in Tetovo.

Now is a student in the fourth year at Universiteti of Pristina in acting , this month she will graduate.

Participation in some performances at Kosovo National Theatre in Pristina. Theatre “ Dodona” in Pristina. Theatre “ODA” in Pristina .

Participating at “ Seriali 192” wich transmitted in RTK (Radio Television of Kosovo).

Participating in some short movies, secondary movies and long movies , cooperation with production of Kosovo , Macedonia, Turkey, Belgium, Switzerland.

“Family and friends are best gift that God blessed us with them.”

Transformation of learned images of culture of “the other” trough encounter and exchange

The perception of the "knowledge" imposed on you, redefining "facts", the first experience of the 'unknown'. Relocating the unconsciously learnt into the domen of concious overview.

Upon arriving to Kosovo we are confronted with the precious process of occurance and self-indentification of an identity, as well as the materialization of the basic human need for belonging to a certain group, or a nation, its customs, language, culture.

The only thing remaining unchanged is that everything around us is changing constantly, and that is the first and the essential fact that history as a science needs to teach us. As long as we are unaware of this, we remain closed to the other, to whom we, in a historical perspective, entrust the most valuable element of our identity, our culture.

The second predicament of our perception is viewing the palpable, interpretation of the materialistic elements of a particular culture. To be aware of its symbolic meaning does not necessarily mean that we are aware of its constant infuence. Element is not a static matter, but ongoing event and its influence on and the consequences of its irritation are, like the butterfly effect, almost unpredictable.

In the means of undestanding the uniqueness of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia there is a thin line between prejudice and fetish.

The idea of this short text is not to share a direct experience of the author, nor to offer answers to current relevant questions, but to encourage the necessity for questioning our attitude towards the young culture which, along with us, undertakes the responsibility of not only its own legacy, but the legacy of others as well.

Stanislav Drča

Student of the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad at the Department of New Media.

Born in Novi Sad in 1993, where he finished high school "Jovan Jovanović Zmaj".

While running away from defining a single style, theme or medium, his work most often we can find in the form of interactive installations, happenings and sculptures in the domain of socially engaged visual creativity.

He has had over forty group exhibitions in Serbia and abroad.

stanislavdrca.com



Shqipe Gashi

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of “the other”

Breaking borders, being opened to new things, getting to know each other, being part of a group; two groups came together but ended up as ONE. Each of us has his/her own story. We're entering each other's story in a specific, current chapter. The energy vibrates. We understand each other. We're all different, but we accept each other and we also have a lot in common. That's the solution the government, the politics, the media, the people from Kosovo and Serbia must seek. Not only the people from Kosovo and Serbia. Actually, all people in this world. It's a beautiful thing to come together with people you know very well, with people you just know a little bit and with people you didn't know before. You get to know the people that were close to you even better, you maybe change the opinion about the people you just barely knew and you realise that your first impression is not always the right one. And then there are the new people you get to know and they have the chance to become your new friends. They enter your world and just like the other ones, they leave some footprints in your lifeworld and then we can decide if we wanna take them further with us on our road.

“How art can change images?” – This is one of the topics, Demir just gave to me and which I chose for the continuation of this essay.

In general there are many ways to show different images through art. Writing an essay, for example, can be a way of doing that, because you write things down and you tell a story through your deepest thoughts. Just like a book, or a poem, or a song. So, one way to express yourself are words. You can also make music or/and dance and express your feelings. Through a theatre play or a film you can tell a story to the audience and pass across a message. At this point I have to mention the play that we saw at the Faculty of Arts in Belgrade. Even though I didn't understand a word, I understood the struggling of the characters and there wasn't a single moment that left me indifferent. I think this is something to think about, when it comes to linguistic, ethnic and other divides. And there is one more thing I'd like to mention. Bojana and Qendresa told us about the time they started a conversation, both of them in her mother tongue, but they perfectly understood each other, even though they didn't understand the language. This is such a wonderful thing. Two humans just talking, maybe not understanding everything or anything at all, but still getting along. Sometimes, in our society, it can be really difficult to understand people. Maybe you're from the same country, the same nationality; speak the same language or do the same job... but sometimes you just don't get the other person. And that's okay. We don't have to get each other all the time, but just knowing that there is some kind of connection between us, that there are ways to understand each other, that there are people who understand your energy, your thoughts, that's really valuable, pleasing, relaxing and wonderful...

I think that breaking these “images of the other”, these prejudices people have, is not that difficult. One of the best things to do is to bring people together. Like at this seminar, for example. I'm really thankful that I had this great chance to be part of it. It opened my mind even more, it made me more communicative and more creative, maybe it also changed me... all of this will help me in my future life as an actress and especially as a human being. Of course there are people who unfortunately don't get this chance. And this is where we can use art to reach the people, to touch them. This is why I think that with any art form there has to be a good story behind it, a simple one, a story of life and a message. As an actress I'm going to use these experiences to understand people more and to express the emotions on stage.

During the last few months, but also these days during the seminar, I found out that that I'm good at expressing myself through words too. This is another way to express myself, my experiences and to tell a story...

This seminar was a great experience for me and I learned a lot about humanity; people in general, the Serbian and also the Albanian culture, about life, about myself. These last nine days were really intense. In our group I felt like being in another world. Now I'm sad that all of this is coming to an end but I'm so happy and grateful that I can go back to “reality” with so much more in my pockets and that I can share it with other people in my life.

Shqipe Gashi

Shqipe Gashi was born and grown up in Vienna. Her parents are from Kosovo, so she grew up speaking two languages and living under the influence of two cultures. Both, the Albanian and the Austrian culture are very important part of her life. She visited school in Vienna. Then, she worked in a kindergarden, studied science of drama for a year and played in a theatre group. It was always her dream to become an actress. In year 2012 this dream came true. After many auditions, she was accepted at the acting school in Prishtina. Now she's in the last year of her studies working on her diploma play.

Dardan Hoti

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of “the other”

Together with the process of being raised in a certain community and a culture we learn to adapt to the norms and traditions constructed by the certain point of view of that community which is often a rigid base of its culture. Various cultures often consist of different opinions and thoughts about certain people or certain cultures. In the best case possible, these opinions are built in a fluid and unstable base - these are destined to be empirically broken down at some point of one's life, when this person gets to know the “other” - a culture or an individual, when the person realizes that his or her perception of the other had been totally mistaken. The worst are the opinions that are built on a rigid base of a certain collective or personal experience some people of a certain culture might have had with people from some other culture; these opinions are the most difficult ones to be deconstructed, because it always gets harder when emotions and memories get involved. However, here's where the art crashes in.

Art is one of the easiest and most stable ways to subversively and gradually but surely deconstruct some people's or some individuals' opinion towards the “other”.

Throughout years, we all must've one way or another get involved in a discussion on “should politics get involved in politics or vice-versa”, the thing is that practice has shown that art doesn't go beyond politics, art is what's missing to the politics. Art is a political power of people to connect and overcome mutual prejudices. So, the connection is closely linked.

To get practical and contextualized, the concrete problem between Kosovars and Serbs is our governments' interest in keeping the dissent and the “conflict” slippery going on. While, people involved in arts and civil society have simply decided to move forward and not get stuck in something that happened times ago, which still, cannot be forgotten, but, that doesn't mean getting stuck to it. People involved in arts and civil society has proved that if you are willing to change something, the change lays somewhere within you. In my experience as a journalist, I have had the valuable chance to witness many cultural exchanges between Belgrade and Prishtina, and trust me, what you see there is unbelievable and totally different from the media propaganda we are victims of everyday.

I assume that the only problem that the two societies are facing now is actually not the lack of mutual activities or cultural exchanges, but their visualization, so, the power of art and other activities like this one we are attending is definitely huge and undeniable, now what we should focus on is undoubtedly its visualization. We have to make it go viral, in order to break the burden that “politics” have imposed on us, slowly but strongly.

Dardan Hoti

Dardan was born in 27th of January 1989, and has graduated in Faculty of Philology, department of Journalism. He has worked for almost six years in the field of journalism. In 2010, he started working for "Tribuna Shqiptare" newspapers, to continue later working for the online portal "Indeksonline". After this, he worked as a journalist and editor in "Tribuna" newspaper. For more than 2 years, he has worked as organizer and editor in The News Agency "KosovaPress". Throughout his work as a journalist, he was awarded with the prize for the best report on poverty from United Nations Agencies, UNKT. He has been a member of the Association of Journalists in Kosovo, since 2014, currently in his second mandate. Within these six years, he has also been engaged in various projects that were mainly focused in promoting and protecting human rights, integration and protection of non-majority communities, marginalized groups and achievement of gender equality.

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of “the other”

How can you deal with Other if you can't deal with yourself?

Conformation of the patriarchal culture is in the collective and binary system Us-Them, on which an individual is able to identify himself or herself as a member of a collective. In a patriarchal society, one is not able to function as an individual; therefore, they simply have to belong to a certain collective so as not to stand out from it or to be rejected by it. Self-identification through the binary system permeates each segment of a (functioning) patriarchal society. An individual is a part of a family, which is a segment of a certain caste in a certain society, which is a part of a certain nation, religion, culture and so on. Gender, culture, social and all other roles are pre-set, with more or less allowed modifications, depending on the degree of transition of a patriarchal society. A binary system functions at the level of collectively unconscious by the principle of the Known and Unknown, which dates back to pagan communities. The problem with self-identification is that it does not allow an objective viewpoint of the Other, and that a personal point of view forever remains unknown and open to arbitral implementation of negative images. Encounter with the unknown has always sparked a certain form of fear in people; manipulation of it easily incites people to irrational hatred and desire for aggressive demolishing of the unknown, so the fear for their own existence is avoided. Also, if a collective is uncertain of its own essential ideas (whether social, national, religious, cultural, lingual, economical, etc.) according to which it is expected that an individual identifies as a member of that collective, an amount of fear of the inability of the identification and the existence of the collective, as well, is multiplied. Added to that, if the encounter with the Other was repetitive and aggressive, it can also contribute to the enclosure of the collective as well as the rejection of the exchange and the enabling of the functioning of the mentioned group at the same time. Aggressive campaigns in the efforts to unmask the Other, and forcing to globalize the collective conscience can often produce, in such cases, negative effects.

The question of identification and the collectives in general gets additionally complicated in the Balkans. The centurial chaos of the ones between the two kingdoms escalates with the diversities inside the Balkan itself. The systematic deconstruction of the historical and cultural legacy has started in the time of communism in the name of a higher level of unity; and made us collectivism schizophrenic. And so it continues, in less visible forms, till this very day. The destruction of the artifacts, in all forms, brings us to a point of instability, disabling us from coming to a conclusion to who we really are, and because of that can in no way be a suitable or a positive ground for the birth of even a minor desire for discovering and learning about the Other. The source of the diversities of the collective itself remains unidentified, and with that does not bring us any closer to the resolving of the problematic situation inside the society itself, but with the manipulation of the fear, guilt is even implemented in the Other. Situation gets significantly worse in poverty when a person has to struggle for his daily bread.

Intercultural icebreakers

Abstracting the current state, the source of the problem and the essential reasons behind the conflict, additionally dehumanizes the relationships between the people of the Balkans. With the manipulation of the mass media, politics and such, it becomes almost impossible to comprehend the Other. The preservation of the strained relationships is, in some way, desired for the both members of the binary system, because it delays the confrontation with your own self, and enables ignoring the fact of self-denial. Additionally, by reading literary works, and by accepting and receiving information about the Other via other artifacts, it is possible to come in contact with the imago logical images that are often typified, taken out of the context and made into a parody, which usually represents the only information about the Other which is later fueled in various ways.

Coming in direct contact with the Other, the abstractions become overpowered by the concreteness. The fear of the Other, visible in the initial moments of the contact, with the presence of prejudice, which are often a part of the unconscious. However, even after only twenty four hours, the prejudice and barricades conditioned by the language and preconceived imago logical ideas are visibly reduced. In the following few days, individuals, taken out of their collectives, neglect the previously learnt, and are led by the human instinct. So, it is necessary to build a new collective in the limitations of the given circumstances and to identify with it. For that cause it is not necessary to throw away everything one has learnt until that point, but rather to see it from a different perspective. Encountering the unknown doesn't necessarily have to result in the deconstruction of one's self; on the contrary, it should result in ones upgrading.

The geographical nearness on this area has, somehow, always resulted in the distance in human relations and culture in general. The first learnt words of a foreign language, even out of context, often bring us into the grounds of the Other. Demystification of the name, even as a mark of an authentic existence of the Other, brings us into ground of the Other and to an avoidable recognition that the abstraction or a number is not the question, but a human being. Confronting the question What do you know about the culture of the Other? - terrifies us. Manically going over the archived content of the learnt brings us to a revelation- we do not have concrete information, apart from stereotypes. Stereotypes are ever present. It is not easy to scratch above the surface, let alone to break the ice. We are not prepared for what lays under.

The thought of how members of two completely different cultures, two opposing cultures, find common grounds, laughing, discussing, exchanging their experiences and impressions, seems a little utopist. And nobody expected that to happen on the first night. The following days, in a unnatural speed, develop and deepen relationships, with various interventions from the people who have dedicated their whole lives and work to the dialogs between the two cultures, not only these, mentioned, but all of the cultures who exist on the basis of the binary system.

„Je suis un autre“

Turning yourself into an objective resonator of languages and experiences in which poetry would be made without its intentional involvement, is not just the question of the problem of the poetic of a single poet. It is a problem of the twenty-first century. It is a problem of every living person that lives in the Balkan. It is something that a very small population, generally speaking, is ready to confront. How objective can you really be? Did empathy ever help anyone and what is its use? Why should we 'clean out our backyard first' to even understand the concepts of the backyards of others? And why do we want so badly for our neighbor's cow to die, when that will not bring us a drop of milk more? Is a man born evil or is that just the genetic modification of the unique species born on the Balkans? I am not sure.

Dardan would just add to this, "This is like too much, palidhja. „

And I'm so indescribably missing Jehona's contagious laugh.

And I don't see why these two people would be any different from me. Not why would I be different from them. In the end- each and every one of them was in my shoes, and I was in the shoes of each and every single one of them - without any borders, barricades or walls.

Bojana Vojnović

Soon to become a graduate in Comparative Literature. During the day, I work with kids in a bilingual kindergarten and teach French people to speak Serbian (by making them read in Cyrillic). At night, when I'm not lost in a good book, I boss around Serbia Fashion Week volunteers. I believe closing hours of library reading rooms are the most awkward moments ever (and I've seen quite a few).





Natalija Nikolić

Transformation of learned perceptions of the culture of “the other“ through encounter and exchange

“I thought we wouldn't be allowed to speak Serbian in the streets.”

Followed by each of my visits to Kosovo and Albania, upon returning to my hometown, Belgrade, I am often asked curious questions about the lives of Albanian people, the surroundings they live in and their relationship with the Serbs. In my answers I find great joy in tearing down their perceptions built on prejudice and hatred, the images have been built into the system. I am also no longer surprised when I hear that one of the many distorted ideas is that it is not allowed to speak the Serbian language in Kosovo anymore.

I was of the same conviction myself. In the period in which I lived on the relation Belgrade – Kosovska Mitrovica, and when I was eager to discover more about South Mitrovica by wandering its streets, I wouldn't dare to speak Serbian, and if I really had to say something, I would do it in a low voice.

Where did all of this fear come from? You have to understand, my only contact with Albanian people beforehand had been indirect, via television that permanently bombarded me with stories about horrific crimes Albanians had committed against Serbs. I felt as if someone accidentally noticed or heard that I was a Serbian, he would call „some really dangerous guy“ who would appear in less than 2 minutes, throw me into his black car with tinted, armored windows and take to an isolated place to torture and rape me.

Imagine how fearful you must be, the amount of anxiety running through your veins infected by the media. For God's sake, people (all normal people in the world, at least) do not care what language you speak or what you are talking about, unless you are not harassing them in some way. I am of the belief that – when you find yourself in a smaller community, let's take an Albanian one for example- of course it is noticeable if someone is a foreigner. It's obvious that Albanians can “smell” a Serb, firstly because an Albanian recognizes and knows the Serbian language, unlike the Serbs in central and northern Serbia who have no idea what the Albanian language sounds like. A non-local Serb in Albanian surroundings has no idea where he can eat the best burek, lahmacun or drink the best macchiato, Russian tea or ayran.

The truth is that you will not get beaten up in Kosovo if you speak the Serbian language, Albanians who know how to speak Serbian will even gladly speak to you and with nostalgia will often tell you how before the war they had many Serbian friends, and one who was really good or that they had worked in Serbia or that they are even working with Serbs now.

During the “Serbia and Kosovo: Intercultural Icebreakers seminar both young Albanians from Kosovo and young Serbs from Kosovo, were free to talk, sing and in many other ways express themselves in their native tongues in the streets, in cafés, in museums, stores, everywhere! I would say that that kind of freedom is more prominent in capitals of our countries where life is much faster and people don't really look back or around themselves.

In Prizren, a guy, a passerby, directed a look full of hatred towards me upon hearing me talk in Serbian. The feeling is uncomfortable, all sorts of thoughts go around your head in a nano-second- what was that for, I haven't done anything wrong, I love and want to learn more about you and your culture, and then the unavoidable- why we, the innocent and young, have to clean the shit that our government has thrown on us.

To be Serbian means to carry the heavy burden of the war, which needs to be lifted forever; a seed of peace, love and friendship should sown in its place. And that is something that takes time, needs to be done in steps, individually, and by this I even consider the resolving of the situation with that young man in Prizren- I smiled at him, and at first he gave me a confused look and after that a smile. After that he turned around and looked at me curiously! In this exact way changes for the better are being made- step by step.

Hello! Здраво! Tung!

I'm an open-minded person, addicted to cigarettes and Turkish coffee. Most of my life I have spent listening to music. My biggest and only interest is Albanian language and culture.

As for those less important stuff about me: My name is Natalija, I'm 20 years old, 2nd year student of Albanian language, literature and culture at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Philology.

Ermal Gërdovci

My first time in Serbia was very nice. I have visited two beautiful cities and met very kind people. As it was my first time travelling out of Kosovo and Albania, I did not know what to expect, but I was amazed by what I saw. I realized many things about myself during this project in Belgrade, but also about people that live in Serbia. I was surprised how the prejudices that I had about people from Serbia were breaking down one by one, especially because I was there and not a single problem has come up. People, at least the ones that I met, were not offended by me talking in Albanian language or when they realized that I am Albanian from Kosovo. I have comprehended that people are so much different than how politics and media make them appear. I have learned a lot about Belgrade from the museums that we visited and lecturers and people who told us nice things about it. I visited Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade which I liked a lot. We were surrounded by positive energy that we, participants, created along with our workshop leaders Tamara and Demir, who held interesting workshops. We associated with each other very quickly and always helped each other. I believe that I will stay in touch with everyone for a long time. I hope that we will meet all together again in Prishtina or in Belgrade. I will miss everyone a lot.

My name is Ermal Gërdovci 20 years old, i study film-directing in Academy of fine arts in Prishtina. Obsessed in film. I'm also an actor. I played in 4 professional films and i made 4 school films... favorite director Wes Anderson. I listen to a lot of music, every kind of music. Favorite: indie rock, old school hip hop, sometimes jazz.. favorite musician Biggie Smalls i have a very big painting of him on my wall...I'm human... yeahhh

Ljiljana Cerovina

Art as a platform for deconstruction of existing images of "the other"

A big salute to the people who organized this wonderful project, this was an extraordinary experience for me, which I can now vouch for when the impressions have settled down.

Breaking down taboos, prejudice, especially nationalistic barricades, has always been unique and appealing to me, so when I first saw the post on Facebook about the Intercultural-icebreakers, I immediately decided to sign up. And, to my great pleasure, I officially became a part of a project according to my liking! I'm feeling proud. That was an extraordinarily well-thought-out program and the overall organization, interesting activities and wonderful trainers.

By the way, I was born in Kosovo (where I still live) and ever since I could remember, and I am a child of the nineties, I have been a witness to separation in this area and of all the bad things that came with it. Things like these, as was our socializing in Pristina, Belgrade, Novi Sad and Prizren are the only evidence we need that there is a different perspective in looking at our differences. There are some different, new people, new ideas that we pretty much brought to life and the best part of it all is that we are continuing what we have started.

Looking into the future, that now seems even nicer are brighter, saying goodbye and forgetting some ugly times, creating love and healthy surroundings for all of us, for our future generations because, in the end, everything comes down to one man, to that one life that is a priceless gift, why would we waste it on insignificant things and "cure" our life discontent with escapism and nationalism?

Wonderful, wonderful people, amazing experience. I am very content that I have gone through all of this, and saw that there was, after all, another, more beautiful way to experience our differences; and this is what takes us to the essence, to our matching human essence. You want and try to be a human being, or you don't. It is that simple and has nothing to do with your ethnic origin. I MYSELF CHOOSE TO BE JUST A HUMAN BEING.

Ljiljana Cerovina

Everything on Earth has a purpose, every person a mission.

My mission is peace and love. Between that, I am studying psychology and law. I am citizen of the world, I was born in Pristina on September 9, 1991.

I am very interested in making of new friendships, and helping people to realize that we are creators of our lives. I can't live without music and my friends. I truly believe that we are living on the beginning of new age, of one human race. I am gonna make some trace in my life, something good. For me that would be love and only love.

Edin Alija

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I truly consider this experience of Icebreaking very important to me and for at local level. In saying this I mean that the experience I have gained is the experience that will motivate me to reconsider the society I live in.

This project allowed me to find great friends in the artists from Serbia. During the whole project, we spent a lot of time with each other. We exchanged experiences, ideas, points of views, beers and other things and we kind of became aware of the Other. I loved the methodology trainers used and, in general, the concept of the whole project was very attractive. I think that changed us all in at least one small way. It made us think that there is something happening over the wall. Not only that. It was constantly raising our curiosity so we started investigating the Other's culture and totally normalized the feeling of having the Other as a stranger. It is good because the wall is broken so I think that this could be of higher value only because the toughest thing is done.

I learned about Serbian culture, picture, music...

I was fascinated by some lecturers. One of them was Borka Pavicevic, she had that very Bohemian way of observing things. What I was fascinated with was that she totally had very artistic solutions to some big political issues. Then there was Sasalic. He made many good points about the art as a medium that can change the society - starting from literature - and I totally understood his lecture, and it even added a new hint to my creative thinking. Ismet Sijarina had a great lecture in Prishtina about LGBT rights. He was being like an artist in philosophy and in the same time a philosopher in arts.

I think that the selection of the cities where the workshops were made was also great. Because we saw a hugely urban Belgrade with lots of noise and dynamic surroundings than Novi Sad that seemed quite a happy and better place for living. That was the same case with Kosovo - Prishtina and Prizren.

I am generally very happy for being part of this project because it was an experience that will have influence on my upcoming artistic career.

Edin Alija

He was born in the city where the film festivals flourished and this is the reason why his great passion is film. He is a student of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Pristina and he believes that the film can change the world.

Miloš Đorđević

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My expectations for this project were neither too high nor too low. They all boiled down to meeting interesting people, and being a part of a good project, which all came true, but from the start I knew that our - people from the culture- direct influence on the wider population would have to wait. I am aware of all the hardships, and I am aware of the willingness for cultural improvement amongst us living in the Balkans. I still don't expect a sudden change, but I know that the future will bring the change because the world will rest upon the shoulders of us youngsters. And there are a lot of young people both in Kosovo and Serbia ready for a change. The new generations are to come, and all we have to do is to start making the change and give it our best. Having seen in person the energy young people can create, now all that's left is for that energy to be channeled to the right place and progress is sure to follow. When I visited Kosovo, I saw a statue of Bill Clinton, and I saw American flags raised, and I realized you don't have to be a genius to see that this is a clear-cut case of modern colonial politics. Despite the fact that in my opinion, Albanians deserve their own country, the idea of their own state is promoted and guided by foreigners and people who might hold power in Kosovo today. American presence in Kosovo will remain there for a long time; they never leave their bases no matter where they build them. I would like Serbians in Kosovo to stop being discriminated against. I have a feeling that their presence is being ignored. I'm studying in Vojvodina, and in Vojvodina we have about the same population of Hungarians, Bosnians and Serbs. I believe in equal rights for all, regardless of ethnic origin. In a number of institutions in Vojvodina, there are signs in both languages. Everyone can attend universities. Everyone can watch TV in their own language. So it would only be fair that the Serbians in Prishtina could watch TV in their own language. I also have a few more suggestions: removing historically inaccurate facts that spread hate from textbooks. For example, in Serbia, the “Kosovo myth” has been around for a while, and it's spreading false, harmful information about Serbian and Albanian relations. I think that the 1989 movie “The battle of Kosovo” should be banned from TV, because it stirs up ordinary people's misconceptions – they anyway do not differentiate facts from lies in most cases. It drives people towards hate, only this time not against Turks, but against Albanians. As for Kosovo, all of the statues that represent soldiers with Kalashnikovs should be taken down in my opinion and replaced with famous people from arts and literature. Also, the media should work on censoring stereotypes about Serbians and Albanians, because they reinforce negative ideas that are hard to remove. It took us ten days of intensive work at our seminar to remove a few of those stereotypes. In the end, I am very satisfied and proud that I got involved in this project even though my art has not been critically reviewed so far. I know for sure that from now on I will work hard on promoting peace and cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia. Slowly but surely, Kosovo's art scene is growing and becoming something to look out for. I will also try to promote the idea of a museum of modern art in Prishtina, because I believe that's something that Prishtina badly needs.

Hello, my name is Miloš Đorđević. I was born in 1993, I am studying visual arts on Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. I do paintings, sculptures and installations, I love architecture, fine arts, philosophy, semiotics, history.

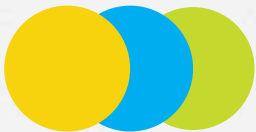
Rajmonda Ahmetaj

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A bunch of emotional opinions that were stuck in my head from the time of war showed up the first moment I entered the TV Room at Hotel Palace where the lectures were held. The first thing that came into my mind was what am I doing here? How could I come here? How could I come visit Serbia, the country that started the war and still would not recognize my country as independent; and this is not all - Serbia has to apologize for the crimes its forces committed in Kosovo, to extradite war criminals, to dissolve the parallel structures in north Mitrovica, to return the pension funds, the cadastral registries, cultural artifacts ... it is a long list of what Serbia should do before I or everyone else would try to forgive. And that's why being there I felt like a traitor. I felt like I don't have the right to be there. To feign friendship - well, I didn't feel like it. This feeling haunted me. I was trying to find a reason why to be there. What made me be a part of this project was its title - "Intercultural Icebreakers" - its dealing with culture was what made me feel like somehow this was another level of being in Serbia. I was an artist who cannot change much in policy; well, that was what I was trying to convince myself about.

But the people there were so kind and welcoming and ready to cooperate, so different from what I expected. They made me change my mind. I felt myself welcome and even loved by students at the Acting School. They let us watch their rehearsals even though the play was still not finished and their teacher somehow didn't want us there.

And then the people in the project - Sasa Ilic, Milena Minja Bogovač, Borka Pavicevic, Tamara Tomasevic, and Demir Mekic - made me see that the Serbs were not the enemies. In fact we were fighting for the same thing, for freedom, for freedom of speech, for a safer and saner world.



Rajmonda Ahmetaj

Rajmonda Ahmetaj is acting student. She was born in Deccan where she finished her elementary and secondary school. She was part of the amateur drama group and later was part of the gymnasium singing choir. She finished the Faculty of Economy and, in 2012 she started to study the Faculty of Dramatic Arts. Now she is the 4 th year, working on her diploma play. During her studies she played in several plays.

Jehona Berisha

Those were wonderful days. Everywhere we went we learned something. Place that left the strongest impression on me was the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade, maybe because I study at the same Faculty in Prishtina. Novi Sad reminds me of Prizren, maybe because of its paving stones and the beauty that the city has within. But Belgrade was really something else. I did not expect it to be so beautiful, big, organized and so overpopulated.

I liked every lecture that we had from the first day until the very last. Every workshop game that we played with Tamara and Demir upgraded the spirit of our group. The best and the most creative one was game with our personal stuff that we liked the most, which we gave to the others and they thought up their own stories for those items. I have to mention also the game with words, during which we laughed until we cried.

We became associated with each other so much during this project and now I am feeling sad because everything has finished. But we will all keep in touch. I will go again in Belgrade, but this time I will not stay in Hotel Palace, but at Natalija's home, in Novi Sad at Bojana's. It does not matter at all if they are from Serbia and I am from Kosovo, everyone of them is lovely and good person, worthy of respect.

I am very happy that I was a part of this project and I will gladly continue to participate in the projects like this.

Thank you all, you were so good to me!

Jehona Berisha

Third year student at the University of Arts in Pristina, Film Directing Branch.

I conducted practice in Red Communication company, engaged in various advertising where I helped around the screenplay, in casting and in recordings. I have recently started working in the company marketing the production Asha.

I have good communication skills, time management, organization, also have the clear vision, originality and skill in working in a team.

Dina Morina

The beauty of Belgrade leaves everyone speechless, but everything completes when you meet people who live there. They understand you, respect you and in my case, they even approached me and helped me to learn their language. Through the different lectures in Belgrade, besides about art, creativity and culture, we also learned about how we came to this point. People are good and kind and the bad situation was created by the longtime politics. I was walking down the streets of Belgrade at 1am and nothing bad has happened to me. I got lost and one man helped me to find the hotel by using Google Maps and he did not react badly when he realized that I am from Prishtina. I felt bad when my friends from Belgrade and Novi Sad came to Prishtina because the weather was lousy and I did not want them to spend all their time on workshops, lectures and at the hotel. I wanted them to see the same things that I saw when I visited them – happiness, joy, harmony that they had when they were staying with people from Kosovo. Everything got better when the weather started to change, sunrays looked so beautiful in the city of Prizren, just like the smiling faces of our friends from Serbia. The way that they listened about the history of Kosovo – the way it used to be and the way it is now. It is very nice to get together and try to bring out the best in order to create beautiful things, things that will convince people that there is no difference between us – we are all humans and above all, we are good people. I will never forget Tasha and Demir, who fulfilled our every day with happiness, different games and jokes. This was the first time, but not the last, that I took part in a project like this. Unfortunately, this seminar is coming to an end, but I am sure that friendship between us will never end.

Dina Morina was born 31.07.1997 in Prishtina. She was a tv presenter 2005-2009 in KTV in Prishtina. She decided to study filmmaking and she is on second year of university. She worked from 2015-2016 as a journalist in Klan kosova. Right now she is making a documentary for a place where Albanian and Serbian people go and spend time together in Gracanica

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