‘This has to be Changed’: Creating New Habits of Youth Citizenship in Bosnia-Herzegovina

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15 August 2014
You Citizen Working Paper, No. 5

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Abstract: Since the Dayton Agreement brought an end to formal hostilities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and established a new political framework for the country, international organizations and intergovernmental agencies have expended significant funds and energy in promoting democratic governance, including citizenship and civic participation, in the country. Part of this effort has included funding for projects promoting youth citizenship and engagement, reflecting concerns about youth being particularly ‘vulnerable’ to the negative influence of residual ethno-nationalism, but also reflecting hopes about the ability of the ‘next generation’ of citizens to effect change in Bosnia. As we demonstrate in this paper, efforts to promote youth citizenship involve trainings and activities intended to instil new everyday ‘habits’ of citizenship, including habits of tolerance and dialogue, as well as volunteerism and engagement. By encouraging new habits of citizenship amongst youth in Bosnia, NGOs emphasize active citizenship in civil society. In doing so, NGOs navigate between pre-existing ideas of citizenship in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the best-practices and policy recommendations of international NGOs and donors, as well as the perceived needs, interests, and experiences of youth themselves. Using social network analysis as well as key-informant interviews with youth activists, this paper analyses the coordinated efforts of Bosnian NGOs to effect change by activating youths in civil society.

Key words: Youth; active citizenship; civil society; social network analysis; divided societies; habits.
There is a very low level of self-confidence and the belief that they as individuals or small groups of people can change something. And our idea is basically that changes are coming from individuals. That someone needs to think about this situation and say ‘OK. This has to be changed.’ And then to look for people who think in that similar way (BH002).

Introduction

The woman quoted above directs a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Bosnia-Herzegovina that encourages active citizenship amongst youth. She argues that young people need to think differently about their roles in their communities and the country as a whole and to develop new ways of acting. She reflected on the expectations of people when the country was part of Yugoslavia. There was volunteering and engagement then, it is often remembered, although such “volunteering” is also alleged to have involved forced voluntarism, and other widespread human rights abuses carried out while forging the nation. All that changed, however, with the breakup of Yugoslavia, the transitions away from state socialism, and the bloody war in the region. Many other people with whom we spoke argue that the post-war governments are ineffective, are entrenched in ethno-national politics, and do not represent or act on the will of the people. As such, the state exerts little in the way of a moral claim on either identity or action. The connections and impulses that are implied with the term ‘citizenship’ – and that used to be associated with action and practices in daily life – have been broken.

It is in this context that NGOs throughout the country attempt to instil new habits and practices of citizenship, particularly among young people. These efforts are supported – or perhaps guided – by networking activities amongst NGOs from within Bosnia and international organizations that provide funding and other support. Of particular interest in this regard is the way that citizenship is understood and deployed by these NGOs and the people who participate in their work. There is no direct translation of the term citizenship into the ‘local languages’ of Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian (B/C/S). Instead, two terms are used to capture different aspects of citizenship: gradanstvo, drawing from the word for city and implying a civic form of citizenship, and državljanstvo, which implies legal standing as a citizen of the state. NGOs and other activists shy away from državljanstvo, preferring instead to use the
term *gradanstvo*. In emphasising the civic aspects of citizenship, they attempt to instil new habits and practices of citizenship involving active participation in localities, communities and civil society, while maintaining a distance from the state and political parties.

In this paper, we examine the efforts to encourage an engaged and active citizenship in young people in Bosnia. In the first section of the paper, we outline our approach to this topic, which relies on the use of three key concepts: habit, pedagogy, and network. In invoking the term *habit*, we refer to patterned activities that become established, or sedimented, over time. We use the term *pedagogy* to refer to the production and maintenance of discourses, in this case, of citizenship. Through the term *network*, we highlight the relationships between organisations and the circulations of ideas, resources, and pedagogy that promote particular forms of citizenship. We argue that, in attempting to encourage new habits of citizenship amongst youth in Bosnia, NGOs emphasize active citizenship in civil society, or a form of citizenship that aligns with *gradanstvo*, and that is thereby layered onto a pre-existing idea, if not practice, of citizenship. In doing so, these NGOs draw on a pedagogy of citizenship that circulates through a network of international, donor, and local organizations, and that is adapted to circumstances within the country. These circumstances include the poor economic situation and high youth unemployment, the seeming paralysis of the government which has institutionalised ethno-religious fractures, and the disaffection of youth with the political situation and the legacies of war. In the second section of the paper, we briefly describe the contexts in which new habits of citizenship are encouraged in Bosnia and our methods for analysing these efforts. The third section explores the nature of the NGO and donor networks operating in Bosnia and how they attempt to work between individuals and their social contexts in order to create an environment in which civic forms of citizenship can be enabled. Finally, turning to interviews with young people who are involved in NGOs promoting youth citizenship and civic engagement, the fourth section examines the habits that are encouraged in citizens, and what these imply for the sites – civil society, the state, and political parties – in which citizenship is enacted. We are particularly concerned with the “aggregations” of individual practices of citizenship, and the new collectivities that might emerge in and through them, but also, as we
emphasize in the conclusion, the placticity and indeterminate nature of these habits and customs of citizenship.

**Habits, Pedagogy and Networks**

The idea that habits and practices of citizenship can be encouraged is long-standing. Philosophical and theoretical arguments about the qualities and comportment of citizens can be traced back at least to Aristotle, for instance, and ideas about how citizens should behave have been incorporated into moral and character education in school systems around the world. This idea, however, takes on particular significance in the context of a transnational effort to promote citizenship, often in the context of peace-building and reconciliation, as in Bosnia. In these efforts, the relationships between individual practices or enactments of citizenship and the institutional context or framework are critical.

American philosopher and pedagogue John Dewey believed that social habits, including democratic habits of citizenship, are learned and can thereby be transformed. According to Dewey (1922), habits are practices and dispositions acquired through the social environment. They are acquired, he believed, through experiences that in turn shape expectations for the future. Following from this, he expected that habits of democracy and citizenship could be learned and sustained through experience and education. Importantly, experiences of working together created “the habit of amicable cooperation” that provided an affective impulse toward democracy by releasing “emotions, needs and desires” that “call into being the things that have not existed in the past” (Dewey 1988/1939: 228). It is through engagement and participation, then, that new kinds of citizens – with skills, habits and dispositions toward democracy – can be fostered.

The past, however, is not irrelevant to the habits of amicable cooperation, shared future experiences, and democratic citizenship. According to Sullivan (2001), habits are complex and can carry multiple meanings. As they are practices, habits become sedimented and are layered onto other habits, other sedimentations. The interaction between these layered habits – some of which might lead to cooperation, but some of which might have been implicated in past conflicts – can lead to unpredictable social configurations. If those previous layers are not just individual
habits, but instead are social customs and norms, new habits may be overshadowed or may not take hold.

The distinction between customs and habits is critical for the efforts to implant new ideas about citizenship through engagement. According to Lumsden (2013: 72), habits are individual and they orient individuals in terms of their identities, ways of behaving and beliefs. Customs are similar in the ways that they orient practice, but they operate at the collective level. Efforts at broader social transformation, rather than just changes in the habits of individuals, then require collective effort to loosen the sedimentation of previously existing habits and customs (cf, Sullivan 2001). McNay (2000) notes that individual and small scale changes in practice can take on greater authority if they are externalized and embedded in social and political institutions. As successive changes become institutionalized in policy and practice, the result, however, is an uneven, perhaps contradictory, institutional landscape (cf Brenner et al. 2010). In post-conflict settings such as Bosnia, entrenched social and political divisions are often particularly resistant to change, making efforts to transform the everyday practices and relationships of citizenship especially difficult.

It is in this context that a pedagogy of citizenship is circulated by international organizations and agencies in order to promote new habits and, in Sullivan’s (2001: 98) terms, to “loosen the sedimentation” of prior habits. Pedagogy refers in this instance to discourses that promote and, in some senses, “educate” a population in a particular social order. Critical education scholars are most often concerned with pedagogies promoted by dominant social institutions and agents (Kaplan 2007, Pykett 2010). This type of pedagogy is rarely written, as a curriculum might be, but instead is a shared knowledge that provides the normative underpinning and guidance for desired behaviours, practices, and in our terms, habits. A loosely connected set of government agencies, international organizations, think tanks, foundations, universities and NGOs circulate, promote, and act upon this pedagogy in the expectation that some individuals will learn new ways of being and acting as citizens (Staeheli et al. 2014). In the words of the woman whose quote began this paper, it is promoted in the hopes that someone will say “OK. This needs to change,” and that the individual will have the skills to initiate that change and enrol other people in the effort.
The pedagogy of citizenship that is currently operative in post-conflict settings reflects a belief that democracies are more stable and peaceful, and that democracy can thereby reduce tension and enmity within countries that have been torn apart by war while enhancing security worldwide. But this pedagogy, and democracy promotion more generally, also reflects ideological commitments on the part of the West to liberal democracy; its “mission” is to influence the beliefs, values, habits and customs of people such that liberal democracy comes to be seen as natural, universal, and almost unremarkable (see Gagnon 2014). Among the values that are promoted are forms of cosmopolitanism, including commitments to human rights, tolerance, and justice, and self-sufficiency, so as not to be a burden on the state or others. To instil these values and habits, NGOs organize workshops on intercultural communication, leadership, research and problem solving skills, and entrepreneurship (Staeheli, et al 2014). These workshops, however, are usually only the first step, as the habits of citizenship are to be learnt through hands-on activism and interaction with others in communities and in civil society. This attention to experience and active learning reflects Dewey’s (1988/1939) belief that building democratic habits is best accomplished through shared experiences and action; these beliefs provide the pedagogical base for citizen training efforts that circulate transnationally (cf Boyte 2003). It is hoped that habits of citizenship learnt at the individual level will be embedded within social and institutional practices, and will create and enrich civil society toward the goal of broader and long-lasting societal change.

This view of how change can be facilitated or enabled depends on an expectation that habits can be loosened or disrupted by changes in social and political context, as for example, when NGOs and international agencies provide workshops and training sessions for youth from different regions of the country, or when an NGO successfully lobbies for a new national law mandating the establishment of local youth councils. There is a certain “plasticity” to habits formed through these efforts. This means change can be encouraged and habits moulded, but that the resultant forms cannot be ensured. In part, this is because of the interactions between existing sedimented habits, or of what Allport (1979 [1954]) called a “web of habits.” Rather than being sedimented in neat striations, once loosened, habits may become entangled. Noble (2013: 176) observes that these entanglements create networks and spaces of interdependence (and potentially of repulsion). “It is”, he continues, “the
movements between spaces, not just repetitive actions within them, which are formative of the plasticity of habit.” In this way, the efforts of NGOs in Bosnia, and elsewhere, to foster the emergence of new, active citizens can be seen as attempts to create new contexts that will encourage particular practices and habits of citizenship in accordance with the broader pedagogy. One of the limiting aspects of these efforts and of the pedagogy of citizenship more generally is that the changes are most likely to be seen within individuals. While Dewey (1998/1939) expected that they could be aggregated up (into those habits of amicable cooperation and customs), any customs that might actually take hold can at best be hoped for and anticipated, rather than be predicted.

Our approach to understanding the ways in which new habits of citizenship are encouraged draws on the ideas just outlined and will be elaborated through our empirical analysis. To summarize, we understand habits in the individual sense in terms of habits that may be evaluated in the way they lend themselves to democratic customs, both through encouraging new habits in individuals and through networked efforts to change the social and institutional environments in which habits are enacted and customs emerge. The pedagogy of citizenship is centred on the expectation that bad habits of prejudice and hate can be and must be replaced through the good habits of tolerance, dialogue, and respect. As we demonstrate, this is expected to be achieved through practical and communal “learning by doing.” In Bosnia, “doing” involves activities that transcend ethnic divisions, as well as effecting changes in structures and institutions. Relatedly, there is also a social/temporal meaning to the term habit. Previous habits are sedimented, loosened and entangled in the process of making new habits. So, for example, notions of citizenship in Bosnia are layered with the memories of Titoist social values of brotherhood and solidarity, ethnic division, and Western liberal conceptions of democratic citizenship advanced in the post-Dayton state-building era. Each of these, in turn, interacts with understandings of citizenship as being both civic in its orientation and as being located within the state. It is in part through this mixing of conflicting notions of citizenship – as an idea that is translated and transferred across ideological space – that habits may be plastic, and the possibility for creative but indeterminate change emerges.

Beyond the individual and social/temporal understandings of habit, there is the spatial notion of habits as forming within and as part of social environments or
habitats. This spatiality of habits is significant, because NGOs make a concerted effort to ensure that their activities and the young people who participate in them move between different ethnically identified enclaves. This movement across and between spaces is expected by NGOs to loosen the sediment of past political affiliations and practices, often associated in Bosnia with ethnonationalism or with socialism (for those who yearn for a more distant past than the war). In facilitating this movement, and in organizing and funding these projects, NGOs in Bosnia work to build and maintain networks – relations of interdependence – with a variety of other actors, from local youth centres, to municipalities, schools, government institutions, international NGOs, and foreign donors. The interaction and movement of people, funding, knowledge, practices, and ideas through networks of civil society actors likewise opens space for indeterminacy and creativity. Whether new habits of citizenship can aggregate into changing customs, into a new identity that transcends ethnic division, and into institutional structures and practices that are open to the new habits are the questions with which civil society actors and youth activists struggle, hope for, and often despair.

**Dilemmas of Citizenship in Bosnia**

As with most post-conflict settings, processes of peace-building, stabilization of the country, and moving forward with a common vision for the future are complicated in Bosnia. In this case, however, many of the most powerful protagonists do not agree whether the country should even exist. Members of different ethno-religious groups seem to cooperate in daily life, but there is little sense that wounds have really healed. While the results of the first post-war census in Bosnia had not been released at the time of writing, there is an expectation that the country is as ethnically segregated as it was at the end of the war. There are separate school systems and curricula for Bosniak, Croatian, and Serbian areas, and three separate – but very similar – ‘local languages’ have crystalized. Yet after the end of the war, western governments and international agencies poured money and effort into building what they hoped would be a unified state and nation. Critical to this were efforts to support and develop a civil society composed of NGOs and latterly citizens who would be aware, engaged, and committed to ensuring the state fulfilled its roles and could adapt to changing circumstances for a better future, rather than sinking back into nationalist fighting and
politics (Jeffrey 2012). In this section of the paper, we provide a brief review of some of the key elements of these efforts as they relate to the sedimentation of habits and the difficulties of creating new habits and customs.

We begin this short review from the period after World War II, because the people we have interviewed frequently invoke the Yugoslav period with longing and nostalgia. It is, therefore, the first layer of the sedimentation of habits with which we are concerned. The socialist period is often remembered as a time of relative well-being and mutual co-existence. People recall a time when there was greater equality, when there was something to be proud of in the country’s history, and when people did things together, such as cleaning a shared stairwell or maintaining a communal garden (cf Neuffer 2002). It is recalled as a time of brotherhood and solidarity. It was also a time when *državljanstvo*, the kind of citizenship associated with legal standing in the state, meant citizenship as a Yugoslavian, with access to rights of housing, employment, health care and a particular set of opportunities and obligations. Yugoslav state sovereignty also allowed for a worldly and mobile populace, and perhaps even a sense of moral agency (Greenberg 2011). While there were undoubtedly problems and discontent, many people remember it as almost a golden period, and some young people who may not have experienced it directly nevertheless invoke a Yugoslavian identity over an ethnic identity. But Yugoslavia did not survive Tito, post-socialist economic transitions, or the machinations of various ethno-nationalist leaders to assert dominance and to carve out territories for their national groups. In Bosnia, this was manifested in a violent war that killed over 95,000 people, saw territories ethnically cleansed, and turned neighbour against neighbour. It is not our purpose to recount the history of the war (see Silber and Little 1995) or to detail the political reconstruction of the country (see Toal and Dahlman 2011). Our task focuses on the ways that the formal institutions and practices of citizenship (associated with *državljanstvo*) emerging from the post-war reconstruction form a sedimented layer on which efforts to promote a new habits of citizenship in civil society (drawing to some degree on *gradanstvo*) are entangled.

The Dayton Accords provide the institutional framework for post-war Bosnia. While formally establishing a unified country with a national parliament and a presidency that rotates between the leaders of the three main nationalist parties, effectively the country was divided into two “entities”: the Republika Srpska (RS,
which after the war has a predominantly ethnically Serbian population) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (which now has a predominantly Bosniak and Croatian population). Each entity has a president, parliament and executive branch. The Federation is further divided into 10 cantons. Both the RS and the cantons of the Federation include municipalities, which also have some legislative and governing responsibilities. Finally, the Brčko District is an independent, local administrative district created from both the Republika and Federation. The country thus has an administrative and legal structure that is already ‘entangled’. The structure was largely imposed by international agencies and western governments after the war, and actions of all governments within the country are monitored – and sometimes contravened – by the Office of the High Representative, ad hoc institution created to implement the Dayton Accords.

It was in this context that international agencies and organizations entered the country to encourage a civil society that could foster democracy, to build something together, and to create the habits of cooperation and working that would give citizens the tools to hold the state to account (Jeffrey 2012). Much as Dewey (1988/1939) argued, there was a sense that democracy would emerge and be sustained through the creation of personal attributes in citizens that could then project habits and attitudes onto state institutions and practices. The key was in building the base of people who could act as citizens in a very complicated social environment that was reeling from the effects of war and who seemed to have lost the bonds of social capital that are promoted as “making democracy work” (Putnam 1993). International organizations and their funding came into the country, in some senses anticipating that the experiences from other post-socialist transitions would apply in Bosnia.

Progress on this front has been slow, and the indications of the functioning and acceptance of market democracy that would enable entry to the European Union suggest that institutional change has stalled. Some analysts have adopted what Brown (2014) calls the “Ugly American” theory. This theory suggests that the reason democracy has not progressed is because of the clumsy, and even corrupt, implementation of democracy and citizenship programmes from the west (and primarily from the US) that are not sensitive to the history and contexts of Bosnia (see also Chandler 1999). They argue it is naïve to expect that the violence of the war would be suddenly put to the side just because people work together to address a
problem in a municipality. And while the US has traditionally relied on elections as
the primary indicator of democratic consolidation, the rush to elections also forced the
creation of a fragmented national government in which even simple acts can be
blocked by democratically-elected officials who operate on ethno-nationalist
principles. In such a context, is *državljanstvo* is unlikely to attract any sense of
loyalty, affinity, or identification that compels people to action.

In countering those arguments, Brown (2014: 187) proposes spending time
with democracy promoters in order to avoid simplistic responses and to attend to
“individual voices that communicate the micropolitics of the mundane. Narratives,
self-evidently speak: they can provide a sense of the human-level aspirations,
hesitations, setbacks and dilemmas” that motivate actions of donor agencies and of
the people working on the ground to instil new habits. He continues that it is
particularly important to “focus on the narratives of people who are among the more
energetic, articulate, dynamic and enthusiastic for change. By putting their voices
into conversation, we can also reveal an ongoing negotiation over the meaning of core
principles in a society.”

In attempting to understand the efforts to create new habits of citizenship in
Bosnia, we follow a similar path to that articulated by Brown. It would be easy to
argue that western donors and governments have simply attempted to impose a way of
being a citizen or to unreflexively apply a particular pedagogy. The distinction
between *državljanstvo* and *gradanstvo* is not explicit in the pedagogy of citizenship
that currently circulates, for instance, which blurs – perhaps intentionally – multiple
meanings of the term. As we demonstrate in our analysis, however, many NGOs and
youth workers in Bosnia do not rely unreflexively on discourses of citizenship
promoted by international organizations, but instead, adapt to the social environments
in which they are situated. Listening to their narratives, we can begin to understand
not just how these agents attempt to instil new habits of citizenship, but also how they
adapt to the sedimented habits of existing citizenship practices and why.

Our analysis is based on two sets of information. The first is a database of
NGOs and other organizations that operate in Bosnia and that include goals of
fostering citizenship for youth in their mission statements. Reflecting the open nature
of what citizenship entails and the different politics and strategies (including
strategies of getting funding) for promoting citizenship, we include organizations that
mention citizenship, empowerment, participation, and engagement in their mission statements or programmatic materials. This database was built with publicly accessible information, largely from websites, Facebook, other social media, and our observations in the country. We use this to understand the structure of the networks – the entangled relationships – between different organizations, their donors, and their partners.

In order to visualize this composite set of relations among these various actors, in the first instance, we turn to the use of social network analysis (SNA). Following Fuhse and Mützel (2011), we see SNA as a relational, hybrid qualitative and quantitative methodology useful for visualizing and analyzing relationships between different actors. Using the database of youth NGOs in Bosnia, we created network diagrams illustrating the partnership connections between and among these youth NGOs, other local organizations and state agencies, as well as their various donors, including international NGOs, transnational organizations, and foreign governments. The network diagrams are useful in highlighting potentially influential actors within the network and the forms of relationships that emerge between the diverse set of actors converging around youth citizenship promotion.

We use SNA as a grounded, iterative methodological tool in conjunction with key informant interviews of NGO practitioners and participants. In contrast with networked ethnographies of already existing and coherently articulated networks (Riles 2001, Routledge and Cumbers 2009) and attempts to provide an abstract or ideal-type analytical framework for transnational NGO networks (Roberts et al. 2005), we examine civil society networks from both ends: diagramming actually existing sets of relationships between civil society actors in the aggregate, and conducting interviews and ethnographic research with the practitioners and participants in this field, to understand how these networks form and function. Of particular interest is why these relations take the shape they do, and how these relationships form through an institutional landscape shaped by particular political processes. To understand this, we rely on 33 interviews with representatives of the organizations and people who are actively engaged in trying to promote new habits of citizenship amongst youth in the country. In the final section of the paper, we focus in particular on four youth activists who are prominent in three of the organizations that are part of the network. These interviews are used to examine the habitual
practices and knowledges that flow through these networks, as well as the expectations of the sites or arenas in which citizenship is enacted. Before turning to these interviews, however, we examine the civil society networks through which the habits of citizenship are taught and emerge.

**Networks and the Habits of Citizenship**

This section analyses the complex network of relations that have emerged between youth organizations in Bosnia, state agencies, and international donors, as they assemble around the issue of youth citizenship. As mentioned in the previous section, organizations promote particular habits of citizenship through training individual youths. However, their aim is to aggregate these individual habits into institutional or social customs and to create new contexts where these habits of citizenship can take hold. In order to achieve this aim, youth organizations network with other organizations throughout the country to both diffuse and institutionalize these habits. Beyond this, some organizations also work with state agencies in order to institutionalize opportunities for active youth citizenship in public policy and programmes. In so doing, these organizations go beyond merely aggregating citizenship habits through sheer number of participants and geographic spread of activities; they are filling the structural gaps between political institutions in Bosnia.

Likewise, in drawing upon a transnational pedagogy of citizenship, these organizations are also filling a knowledge gap between the experiences of youth participation in Bosnia and youth policies and practices promoted by international NGOs. In working to fill these gaps, the network of NGOs becomes a space of negotiation over citizenship formation. This section explores the network strategies that NGOs undertake in pursuing their work and the structures and contexts that emerge through their combined efforts.

All the NGOs we interviewed share a commitment to a bottom-up effort to change the practices and perceptions of individual young people. This often involves imbuing them with the professional skills needed to “make a difference” (BH028). After several years of conducting trainings with youth, many organizations have amassed extensive networks of youth alumni. One youth NGO we spoke with reckons that, in the decade they have been conducting youth training, some 40,000 have participated in their programs. Other organizations report that former participants
work in municipalities, ministries, mayoral offices, other NGOs, media, businesses, and other positions of influence. Organizations hope that their trainings help to launch these youth, and that they now use the skills and ideas they learned through the programmes to effect change. The effect such programs have on the individual is admittedly hard to evaluate, and, as one director mentioned, it is harder still to measure the social impact. The opacity of the results does not dull the optimism of practitioners, but rather gives them room to hope.

Beyond placing their participants in positions of influence, there is an assumption amongst some respondents that trainings must be implemented on a national basis and work across ethnic divisions if they are to have social impact. Furthermore, working in different regions in Bosnia is assumed to make an organization more credible in the eyes of local partners as well as foreign donors, again leading to social impact. Yet this is not purely instrumental, as working across divisions within the country also reflects a concern with practicing the values of tolerance and cooperation. As one project director told us, “For us, it is important that we are recognized in Banja Luka [in the RS], as much as in Siroki Brijeg in the South [near the Croatian border], or Sarajevo in the same level… We always try to have both sides participating, young people from the Federation and young people from Republika Srpska” (BH0028). Having a balance of projects and partners in both the Federation and in the RS is important both for instilling habits of tolerance and cooperation and also for achieving policy change at the national level. As this project director went on to say, “When we are formulating the legislative part [of our work], we strive to cooperate with Republika Srpska, if not directly then through our partners who work together with the authorities there.” In the absence of a single, unified youth ministry, organizations like this one must work to fill a structural governance gap through networks of local partners and political institutions.

Indeed, despite a highly fractured institutional landscape there is a striking degree of cohesion among the various actors involved in promoting youth citizenship in Bosnia. In Figure 1 below, the field of youth citizenship promotion is depicted as a single, small-world network, in which every node, that is, every youth organization (blue), international NGO (green), or state agency (red), is connected in some way to every other. One organization in particular stands out in this graph, namely, KULT Institute for Youth Development (or Association KULT). A self-described youth
organization that promotes “the involvement of citizens in decision making processes,” KULT seeks to encourage youth to become “recognized members in the society, who are ready to take the responsibility” to improve their society, and it does this in part by offering non-formal educational trainings on issues such as “volunteer work, civic engagement, tolerance, public relations, democracy, the European Union, mental health, etc” (KULT, 2014). This NGO has been especially successful at positioning itself between international donors, government agencies, and local partners, in carrying out this work. As the graph illustrates, within this network of youth organizations KULT is the most central, meaning that it serves as the most crossed ‘bridge’ between nodes. This is a reflection of KULT’s strategy of helping to establish and partner with local youth councils. KULT receives funding from municipalities to implement projects with these local partners, and receives core programmatic funding from international donors in order to coordinate these activities on a nation-wide basis. This network of partners allows KULT to diffuse its programs and practices to other organizations throughout the country. The organization also lobbies the government at all levels to enact and implement youth policy. This high number of strategic connections likely adds to the KULT’s legitimacy and recognisability, which in turn allows the organization to attract more partners and donors, in an upward spiral.

[Figure 1]

Indeed, although every node is closely connected to every other, the network structure in the graph above is noticeably hierarchical. Organizations such as KULT, the Youth Communication Center (YCC), the Nansen Dialogue Centre, and Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) have been successful at attracting both international donors as well as numerous local partners. It may be that these organizations serve an intermediary role, using their professionalized capacity to connect smaller local partners with larger NGOs, as Roberts et al (2005) suggest. This is, to a certain extent, corroborated by our interviews with organizations in Bosnia. For example, one Sarajevo-based organization told us that (using international donor funds) they often provide funding for various small-scale initiatives to be carried out by local partners. These discrete projects serve as a form
of capacity substitution for the smaller organizations. As we were told: “Small local organizations out there in the field do not have capacities to apply for donations from bigger donors, nor do they know how to do it” (BH028). Through partnerships and funding, then, smaller organizations acquire new professional habits and project management practices, enrolling them within the wider network and making them beneficiaries as well as purveyors of the citizenship pedagogy. Other organizations participate in building the network by sharing information and publicizing activities of partner organizations. One organization director described a division of labour in which one NGO put in the time and energy to organize the network, while another generated “content” for the network in the form of trainings, education, projects, and events (BH007). In this way, knowledge, practices, and resources are shared laterally between organizations in the network.

While some larger Bosnian NGOs work to instil new professional habits in their local partners, many also look to international NGOs and transnational organizations, particularly the EU, for guidance on practices and policies related to youth work in Bosnia. “Basically, everything is done according to the best practices from Europe,” we were told (BH028). This organization participated in study visits to youth centres across Europe, then applied what they learned to their own work. In one case, the “entire methodology” for a particular project had been taken from guidelines provided by the German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ). As the project director explained, “We tried hard to adapt it as much as possible to the mentality of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the mentality of the [local municipality].” In this way, this NGO sees its work as filling a knowledge gap, between the best practices of Europe and the local “mentality.”

However, just as with the structural governance gap discussed above, this knowledge gap filled by the networks is a space of politics and negotiation. One organization director provided an example of what this entails: “We were involved in Council of Europe and some other regional and European initiatives since the beginning, but we discovered very quickly that, maybe we were sleeping for the last 10 years from 1990 to 2000 because of the war…. In Europe, there is already some kind of heritage of youth policy framework” (BH001). The European youth policy framework, he said, was already well developed, consisting of different tools, institutions, policies, and budget recommendations, and national indicators. Yet the
idea of having a youth policy did not seem on the horizon anywhere in Bosnia. In doing his own research on youth policy in Bosnia, however, this director, himself a young man, found that there actually had been an “unbelievably developed youth policy in socialist time.” In Sarajevo alone there were 14 state-funded youth centres and a socialist youth league active throughout Yugoslavia. Yet “when internationals came here, they were usually saying: ‘this is a new thing for you.’ We were like, just people who were not educated or whatever, and now you come from the United States to give me this new concept.” Instead, “we had a system of pretty good care for youth, but it collapsed with the state.” When the new institutional framework was developed, consisting of fourteen governments and 142 municipalities, he suggests, youth policy fell between the cracks. Structural and conceptual gaps thus emerge between the sediments of old and new political practices and institutions, as well as the imported policies and practices of international donors, creating a space for young citizens that NGOs attempt to fill. The following section will examine in more detail these direct attempts to promote habits of citizenship among youth by NGOs in Bosnia.

Habits, Action, and the Sites of Citizenship

As organizations attempt to facilitate institutional changes and new customs of citizenship, they intervene in the lives, practices and habits of individual young people. In this section, we consider the specific skills and outlooks they emphasize and how youth are positioned with respect to families, civil society, the government and political parties. In addressing this, we implicitly raise the question that youth themselves ask. If institutions, families and communities often encourage uncitizenly behaviours, what environments or sites encourage good habits? In short, what are the sites in which new habits can transform citizenship?

The organizations we spoke to each believed that youth had to be given specialized knowledge and skills to act as citizens: they need to be “empowered” and “activated” in civil society, we were repeatedly told, through trainings and practical activities. As a first step in creating new habits, NGO directors told us that they offered workshops on a range of topics, ranging from human rights to gender equality to intercultural communication. These more abstract topics, though, were seen as
insufficient; as the director of one organization explained, most youth lack the ability to “do anything practically in terms of activism,” so they need to learn how to design a project, create a budget, implement activities, and negotiate with donors (BH001). Additionally, youth need to learn leadership skills and soft skills, such as communication. Such skills are not taught in schools, and so were delivered to youth through experiential initiatives associated with what we have called the pedagogy of citizenship. Many organizations asked young people to design, fund, and implement their own projects, or “civic initiatives.” Through these non-formal educational activities, youth learn to take action themselves in civil society, suggesting an alignment with *gradanstvo*.

These projects often only have a small impact on the places in which youth live, but are described by the organizations as having a bigger impact on the lives, outlooks, and habits of the young people who participate in them. Furthermore, the project assistants of one organization argued that the real significance of such projects would only emerge if they were linked with broader, institutional change (as described previously). So rather than simply organizing a garbage pick-up, for example, the organization would also encourage youth to take an advocacy approach and pressure the mayor to install new trash bins; this, they argued, would bring improvement to the entire community and would have “truly changed something” (BH028). The project assistants claimed that while such projects do not necessarily lead to immediate improvements, they leave “footprints” of civic activism. They leave an impression on the youth and create habits of acting on new ideas. As the young women pointed out, they are themselves living examples of this process.

Young people, however, do not operate in isolation and the habits they develop are grounded – sedimented – in part by their relationships to families and friends, communities, and environments created by the government and political parties. As they become engaged in civil society and civic initiatives, young people are also repositioned with respect to social environments that sometimes encourage and sometimes discourage particular habits of citizenship. One woman, for instance, recalled that she was first introduced to civic activism and volunteering by attending a training program advertised in the local newspaper. Her mother initially encouraged her to go, and although she was hesitant about continuing, her friend convinced her to stay involved. She recalls the effect that this training on civic engagement and
volunteering had on her political awareness: “You start paying attention to other things. You start watching the news. Before that I was not interested at all in things my parents watch” (BH028). In contrast with her school, which she insists “does not teach [students] to think critically, or to get immersed in events,” she noticed that after participating in the NGO training, she was getting involved and starting to “have more arguments and discussions.” She reflected: “You realize that you have the power to change some small things, and when it works out, you build on it, and you start seeing progress. When I look at where I stood four years ago and where I stand now, I can’t believe how much progress I’ve made and how much I have improved and increased my knowledge.” The training in which she participated infused her with a critical awareness of the political circumstances in the country, as well as the desire to do something about it. This awareness was facilitated by her friends and families, arguably made her a better civic citizen, but also dampened her affinities with the government and parties.

Her colleague shared a similar story with respect to learning habits of citizenship, and importantly, about where she should enact that citizenship. Throughout the sector, civil society is presented as a space where youth can become engaged politically outside of formal politics, and relate to other similarly politically aware youths, forming new contexts in which the habits of citizenship can be practiced. The second woman recalled the shift she underwent. The meetings held by the NGO created “a really friendly environment. We used to come to the meetings to organize some activities but we were looking forward to the coffee time together after the meeting. We had no greater ambitions” (BH028). Over time, however, she became aware that she and the others developed a desire and capacity to act and effect change. As she put it, before getting involved with the organization, she was politically engaged, but “engaged in the wrong way.” She explains that she became a member of a political party at the age of 15 thinking that it was the road toward activism and building a career. This view of political engagement was in part a product of the more conservative approach of her parents. “Luckily,” as she puts it, a friend from high school encouraged her to get involved with various organizations around Sarajevo. At this time she completed a training run by the organization she works for now. After two years, and after “understanding better the political system, and understanding what was going on in that circle” she told herself “I will never
again join a political party and I would not recommend that to young people. Instead I would tell them to build their own capacities and work hard on becoming professionals and experts in the future, people who can be hired by politicians to resolve certain problems. There is no use from politicking only.” The young woman’s experience with this NGO has not diminished her interest in politics, or her interest in getting a job, but it has reoriented her toward the view that political change can best be brought about through the efforts of civil society professionals who can be hired by the politicians to provide advice. Likewise, rather than following the traditional route to a stable career through party connections, her new NGO network connections have allowed her to acquire professional skills, knowledge and experience that she uses as an employee of the organization that trained her. As the second woman from the organization suggested, working from a base in civil society, and drawing on the skills learnt there, activist/professionals would be better able to make the government function more effectively and democratically. While a partnership might emerge, the expectation was that these agents would remain rooted in civil society.

That stance was not accepted by all organizations and youth activists, however. A third organization with which we spoke emphasised personal and social transformation through creative projects and direct action, including flash mobs, sit-ins, protests, guerrilla gardening, and the like, all of which were eschewed by the organization mentioned above. This organization had a more explicit commitment to strengthening a culture of human rights at a regional – not just national – level. This orientation may be why it did not emphasize policy advocacy, but instead prioritized social transformation. Indeed, while the organization described above has extensive links with the government at all levels, the director of this organization told us that “it's a dead-end to work with the government” (BH007). As she put it, the individual politicians might change, “but the parties and the concept of the work,” in other words the political customs of the country, “haven't changed in so many years.”

Despite the stark difference in political outlook between these two organizations, their methods are strikingly similar. Like the other organization profiled above, this organization also encourages youth to carry out projects and actions, which could include anything from a street protest to a community forum. The director of the organization, however, believed that it is the experience of coming
together, across ethnic divisions, in mutual cooperation, and outside the framework of the state and political parties that provides the most value. As the director explained, throughout the course of undergoing training and carrying out an activist project, a new youth activist “has travelled [throughout the country] 5 to 6 times, he [sic] has slept in a hostel with 20 other kids, he’s partied a bit, and he’s learned” (BH007). Through these experiences with youth from different regions and ethnic backgrounds, the young activists gain a capacity to cooperate with others and are “enabled” to “either communicate what they are thinking in their own local community, or bring new kids in the organization.” In this way, these new habits of respectful, mutual engagement, might develop into customs of tolerance and respect for human rights.

It might be tempting to again invoke a notion of *gradanstvo* in describing the kind of citizenship they promote. Yet the story is more complicated, the sedimentation of habits more entangled. The organization claims it is well beyond its ability, or even desire, to instil some sort of new sense of national identity among Bosnian youth. Yet one of the goals of their work is to teach youth the idea that “their country is not somewhere else. It’s Bosnia” (BH007). Youth learn that to solve problems facing them, to advocate for and claim their rights, they must “communicate with the mayor of their own town where they live.” Youth learn that “they cannot write to the president of Croatia from Mostar,” that “their capital is not Zagreb or Belgrade,” and through this realization youth may begin to see a shift in their sense of belonging, and their orientation toward national space. By reorienting youth toward a focus on daily interactions and experiences, the organization sees itself as contributing to an emergent, as yet-to-be-determined collective identity, based not in the abstract language of human rights or citizenship, but on the needs and issues of youth themselves. In fact, citizenship was not a word the organization used, and the director (like many others) suggested that the concept could not be translated into any meaningful term in Bosnia. This perhaps explains why the director insisted that youths’ country – and perhaps their citizenship? – is not “somewhere else”, such as the transnational or global level. So while encouraging habits of what others (including their donors) might call citizenship, the director at least, left open the questions of where identity and citizenship might be located, if indeed they were even meaningful. While appearing to enact the pedagogy of citizenship and loosening the sedimentation of habits, just what kind of individuals emerge would emerge, and how
they might relate to each other, remain indeterminate, open-ended questions in this organization’s work.

Conclusion

As the NGO director quoted above notes, after years of war and a peace agreement that largely demilitarized but also institutionalized ethnic and political divisions, it is not the job of NGOs to build a national identity. Instead, such NGOs see their work as “strengthening individualism,” albeit a particular kind of individualism oriented toward activism in civil society (BH007). To achieve this – that is, to strip away the bad collectivist habits of ethno-nationalism and state socialism and instil new habits of active engagement – NGOs draw upon a Deweyian belief in personal experience as the progenitor of democratically-inclined habits. Many organizations seek to create such learning experiences through trainings, workshops, and youth camps, which gather youth from different backgrounds and encourage them to create projects together. As such, although many organizations emphasize that they seek to promote a specifically individual form of “empowerment,” they are also creating new social environments and contexts where civil customs, that is ways of being and acting together, can emerge. In this way, these NGOs inevitably promote and create new forms of community. Nevertheless, as some of our respondents have emphasized, it is difficult to predict and impossible to control how such experiences influence the individual participants, let alone society as a whole.

In this paper we have argued that these efforts to promote youth engagement and active citizenship in civil society align with more civically-oriented notions of citizenship, or gradanstvo, in contrast with a state-centred notion of legal national citizenship or državljanstvo. However, as we have also shown, NGOs promoting youth citizenship are involved in actively negotiating between pre-existing ideals of citizenship and notions of citizenship promoted by international NGOs, as well as the experiences, interests, and needs of youth. Likewise, as we have sought to demonstrate, such efforts are not uniform, but rather, diverge around the question of whether or not to engage with state agencies and formal political institutions. Some organizations see their work as creating social change through individual youth, while others maintain a close yet critical distance to government in order to lobby for policy change. Nevertheless, all the organizations we spoke with seek to strengthen civil
society and seek to activate youth as citizens therein. Lacking coherent paths for engagement with the state, civil society is held up as the space where youth can act as citizens.

The recent catastrophic flooding that hit Bosnia in May 2014 brought to the fore dissatisfaction with ineffective government (KULT 2014b), memories of war and destruction (Sito-Sucic and Djurica 2014), and also hopes of “rediscovered solidarity” through volunteerism and civil society activism (Nikolaidis 2014). Similarly, the protests that swept the country earlier that year, awakened hopes for new expressions of solidarity in common discontent and new forms of popular, democratic practice (Štiks and Horvat 2014). Still, there remain lingering fears that social and political pressures could have centrifugal rather than centripetal effects on the country. This paper has focused on the efforts of young activists who have placed their hopes for their personal and collective futures in civil society activism. What the fruits of their labour will bring remains to be seen, and remains a subject of further study.

Notes

1. Hereafter, Bosnia.

2. Pilot studies of the census conducted in 2013, for instance, suggest that up to 35% of young people identified themselves in non-national terms, including “Yugoslavian” (Pasic, 2013).

3. A decade after the formal end of hostilities, there is considerable disagreement over the number killed in the war, with estimates ranging from 25,000 to over 300,000. This figure comes from the 2013 edition of the Bosnian Book of the Dead.

4. Such language is difficult and problematic for many reasons. Many people in the country (and perhaps a very large portion of the youth population) wish to move away from such ethnic identifiers, believing it reinforces ethno-nationalism. Others point out that it ignores ‘minority populations’, such as Roma and Jewish citizens who effectively are erased in this description of the population.

5. Confidentiality has been promised to respondents and their organizations for information gathered through the interviews.
References


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