



RESEARCH PAPER

Student integration in Bosnia and Herzegovina: a study of the United World College in Mostar

Executive Summary

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge with gratitude the support provided by the following, all of whom contributed to the design, implementation and reporting of the study:

- CfBT Education Trust, for support at every stage of the project
- The Head, teachers and students of the United World College in Mostar (UWCiM) for the co-operation and facilities offered to the researchers, and for their willingness to respond to data collection requests
- The administrative staff of the UWCiM

who were involved in the arrangements for visits to Mostar, for translation services and for technical assistance provided during meetings and seminars

- The Head and Deputy Head of the Gymnasium Mostar for their kind permission to allow access to Gymnasium students and teachers for data collection purposes, and for their own availability for discussions with the researchers
- Parents, past UWCiM students and other members of the Mostar community for their readiness to respond to enquiries from the researchers.

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1. Introduction and context



“ Now at peace following the Dayton Agreement of 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen much rebuilding, including the Mostar bridge, which was reopened in 2004. ”

The 1980s were an unsettled time in Yugoslavia, as the death of President Tito in 1980 was followed by moves among the six republics comprising the federation to assert their independence. Conflict first broke out in 1991 as the Yugoslav federal army attempted to re-establish control over the breakaway republics of Slovenia and Croatia and, in April 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) declared its independence, leading to a period of intense inter-ethnic conflict between Serbs (Orthodox), Croats (Catholic) and Bosniaks (Moslem). Mostar, the fifth largest city in BiH, which had previously been populated by all three ethnic communities, saw many Serbs leave in the first year of the war. The city was additionally riven by a ‘war within a war’ between 1993 and 1994, when fighting between the two remaining communities led to many deaths and the destruction of large parts of the city (including the widely publicised 16th century Mostar bridge).

Now at peace following the Dayton Agreement of 1995, Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen much rebuilding, including the Mostar bridge, which was reopened in 2004. Deep divisions still remain, however, among the three ethnic communities. In some parts of the country, manifestations of these divisions include the education of young people in separate schools and universities. Mostar is one such place, where Croats and Bosniaks for the most part live separately in the so-called west and east parts of the city with separate schools, universities and other facilities catering for their respective communities.

In 2005 an initiative was launched to encourage young people in Mostar to mix in ways that they would not do otherwise, by two organisations with similar missions of promoting international peace and intercultural understanding. The scholarship-funded United World College (UWC) movement has 13 colleges worldwide, sharing an ideology based on a belief that bringing young people from around the world to live and study together will help to break down the barriers of prejudice that often grow up through not knowing or interacting with others. The International Baccalaureate (IB)

organisation, whose aims include the promotion of greater international understanding, offers to schools worldwide three programmes (Primary Years, Middle Years and Diploma). This UWC-IB collaboration led to the establishment of a new UWC, the United World College in Mostar (UWCiM), through which scholarship-funded students aged 16–18 would come together to be taught in mixed groups including students not only from Mostar and other parts of BiH, but also from other countries. Students would follow a two-year English medium programme leading to the award of the IB Diploma, taught by a teaching staff made up of experienced expatriate IB Diploma teachers as well as local teachers who were being trained to teach IB Diploma courses for the first time.

The UWCiM took in its first cohort of students in August 2006, with the fourth cohort beginning their studies in August 2009. Initially, residential accommodation was provided for all students from outside Mostar. Halfway through the first year this policy was changed to require all Mostar-based students also to live in the UWCiM residences (which are based in both parts of the city). The location identified for the UWCiM was the top floor of the prestigious Gymnasium Mostar, already more progressive than many schools in Mostar in having ‘two schools under one roof’, offering programmes through the Bosnian and Croatian languages respectively. As in other divided educational contexts within BiH, Gymnasium Mostar students are taught through their own language: the Serbo-Croat language which existed before the war, with small variations across the communities, is now considered to be three separate languages: Serbian (written in Cyrillic), Croatian and Bosnian. Each programme of Gymnasium Mostar has students studying for four years between the ages of 15 and 18, its own teaching staff and own Head (with one Head taking responsibility as Head of the Gymnasium overall and the other acting as Deputy).

While anecdotal evidence existed during the first year of the project with respect to its effectiveness, no data had been systematically gathered which could be used as the basis

for conclusions in this respect. The CfBT-funded study that is the subject of this report was designed as an impact evaluation of the success or otherwise of the project in encouraging greater integration between:

- the three groups of BiH UWCiM students
- the UWCiM BiH students and UWCiM students of other nationalities
- the BiH Gymnasium Mostar student body

It was intended from the beginning that the study's outcomes would inform not only future decision-making relating to the UWCiM,

but also policy-makers and planners within Gymnasium Mostar and within BiH more widely. It was also hoped that the findings might be of interest to others working in post-conflict situations, particularly in the context of education and schooling.

[Note: In order to avoid potential confusion through the use of 'Bosnian' as an adjective, which may be used to describe those of Bosnia and Herzegovina nationality as well as those of Bosniak (as opposed to Croat or Serb) identity, the abbreviation BiH has been used throughout when referring to those who share this nationality.]

2. Methodology



The methodology adopted as the basis of this study was essentially an evaluation based upon an 'illuminative' model structured around the three stages of observation, enquiring further and seeking to explain. In aiming to inform not only policy-makers and planners in the wider national and international context but also those working within the UWCiM itself, the methodology was both formative and summative in its focus.

“...the methodology adopted was primarily an empirical study ... based upon fieldwork undertaken in Mostar, as well as through electronic links between Mostar and Bath...”

In evaluating the extent of the success of the UWC-IB project in encouraging greater integration between UWCiM students from the three BiH groups, between UWCiM BiH students and those of other nationalities, and within the BiH Gymnasium Mostar student body, the methodology adopted was primarily an empirical study. It was based upon fieldwork undertaken in Mostar, as well as through electronic links between Mostar and Bath, and was informed by:

- a literature review of published research relating to education in post-conflict situations and other sources relating to the breaking down of prejudice
- an analysis of documentation generated within the context of the UWC-IB project.

Practicalities determined that an ethnographic approach to gathering data through on-going first hand observations by the researchers would not be feasible, and data gathered thus took the form of accounts of the perceptions

and recounted experiences of a number of key stakeholders, including:

- UWCiM students, from the different BiH groups and internationally
- teachers and senior managers/leaders from the UWCiM (local and expatriate)
- parents of local UWCiM students
- members of the Mostar community with links to the UWCiM
- UWCiM alumni (a small number)
- Gymnasium Mostar students, from the two Gymnasium programmes
- teachers and senior managers/leaders from the two Gymnasium Mostar programmes.

The study's methodology followed a well-established pattern, in the context of perception-informed illuminative evaluation, of making use largely of questionnaires and interviews as the major data-gathering instruments. Each method has its particular strengths and limitations, and a combination of instruments was deployed using questionnaires to access the views of the largest number possible of a particular group, followed by interviews with a smaller number of that group for more in-depth discussion of issues arising. Thus, in addition to the usual steps taken to build in maximum reliability and validity to the research process, data and findings, validity was enhanced through the triangulation of data by seeking and comparing perspectives of different stakeholder groups.



“... participation
in May 2008
and May 2009
UWCiM graduation
ceremonies.”

A preliminary visit to Mostar was undertaken in February 2008 to carry out informal, fact-finding, open-ended discussions with small groups of UWCiM students (both first years and second years), UWCiM teachers (including the Head), UWCiM resident tutors and a teacher with shared responsibilities across the UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar, as a means of identifying major issues to form the focus of subsequent data-gathering instruments. Interviews were conducted in English, the working language of the UWCiM. A courtesy visit was also paid to the Head and Deputy Head of Gymnasium Mostar (jointly), to confirm their permission to seek the views of Gymnasium students later in the year through questionnaires and interviews: this was conducted in the local language, with the aid of an interpreter. Documentation relating to the UWC-IB project was also collected during this visit and subsequently, to help to inform the development of data gathering instruments, and to be included in future analysis.

Subsequent elements of the empirical component of the study included questionnaires and interviews undertaken during 2008 and 2009 with a range of stakeholders, as outlined in Appendix 1. Questionnaire completion was

voluntary but elicited responses from all student groups, including local, regional and international subgroups of UWCiM students, Bosniak and Croat programme Gymnasium Mostar students, and male/female students – with a tendency in all cases for a larger number of female students to respond than male. In addition, in April 2009 an evaluation seminar was held in Mostar, to which small numbers of different stakeholder groups were invited (UWCiM teachers and managers, Gymnasium Mostar teachers and Heads, students from the UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar, and parents). At the seminar a presentation was made of tentative conclusions (with the aid of an interpreter) before participants divided into groups for discussion followed by plenary feedback. The ideas and views expressed through the seminar helped to inform, illuminate and refine the conclusions drawn tentatively up to that point. Additional less formal contact in Mostar also informed the study, including visits to UWCiM student residences, attendance at full college assembly, attendance at a theatre performance by UWCiM students at the local arts centre, and participation in May 2008 and May 2009 UWCiM graduation ceremonies.

3. Findings

Findings from the study will be discussed in two main parts:

- Integration between UWCiM students (BiH and international)
- Integration within the Gymnasium Mostar student body, and between the UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar student bodies.

In each case we have drawn on data gathered from different stakeholder groups, and considered the extent to which any changes appeared to have been evident since UWCiM students' arrival in Mostar. Where appropriate, reference will be made to relevant research-based literature to inform the discussion. Of the literature reviewed, work which had notable resonance throughout the analysis of data gathered was that of Gordon Allport, whose

seminal book 'The Nature of Prejudice' was first published in 1954 and has continued to influence researchers and practitioners since, including Dovidio *et al* who produced 'Fifty Years After Allport' in 2005. Allport formulated what has come to be known as the Contact Hypothesis, which, in summary, argued that prejudice between groups may be reduced if the following key conditions are present:

- equal group status as perceived by members of each group
- common goals, shared across and between the groups
- inter-group co-operation, involving collaboration rather than competition, and
- support of authority, law or custom.



“One who still believed he had been open-minded on arrival noted his realisation that this was partly because he had never previously been confronted with issues of nationalism...”

3.1 Evidence of integration between UWCiM students

Findings here are summarised under two main headings:

- How UWCiM students are perceived to be ‘now’ compared with when they first arrived at the UWCiM
- Factors believed to have caused any changes in UWCiM students since arriving.

3.1.1 Changes in students since arriving at UWCiM

Strong messages came through from all those questioned (UWCiM students, UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar teachers, parents of local students and alumni) of perceived changes in students since arriving, leading to greater integration between international and local students, between international students (including, for instance, Arab and Israeli students) and between the three groups of local students. Two local alumni interviewed at the end of their first year of university in Mostar suggested that stronger friendships had been forged overall across the three BiH groups than between BiH and international students, as they actually had more in common (notwithstanding having arrived at the UWCiM believing there to be something strange about the other BiH groups before getting to know them). Interestingly, a similar point was made by a UWCiM teacher with respect to Arab and Israeli students, whom he perceived to understand each other better than they did other international or local students because of all they shared in common. Clear messages emerged of changes in student attitude towards greater open-mindedness and flexibility since arriving (with, indeed, evidence in some cases of more positive attitudes in the second year of the study than in the first). The vast majority of students believed, for instance, that they were now more prepared to change their opinion about an issue than they had been on arrival, and that they were more likely now to choose to mix with people from other cultures than they had been previously. An interesting tendency in questionnaire responses was not only for more responses to be received from female students than from their male peers, but also for female student responses on the whole to be more positive than those of their male counterparts.

Issues arising will be discussed under two main headings as follows:

(a) Own self-confidence and development

Personal development and attributes such as self-confidence and resilience were noted consistently by students as aspects of change observed in themselves. International students noted the complete change of lifestyle they had experienced, the adaptation they had to make to the demanding level of study, interacting with large numbers of other students all the time (in residences as well as in class) and the challenges such changes presented which could sometimes be negative as well as positive. All noted their own increasing maturity and independence which had developed more quickly than they imagined it would have done at home though, as was highlighted by one student, some increase in maturity and independence was to be expected in anyone between the ages of 16 and 18, especially if they were to leave home. For some students (largely those from BiH but also some international students), the different style of teaching and learning at the UWCiM had presented something of a shock, expecting as it did greater independence and providing less prescription than many had been used to. This had been difficult for some to adjust to at first, though was now felt to be far preferable to their previous experiences.

A number of international students noted their surprise on realising that their initial self-image of open-mindedness may have been exaggerated (through, for instance, realising how ill-informed some of their previous perceptions had been), as well as their shock at how narrow-minded some peers were on arrival. One who still believed he had been open-minded on arrival noted his realisation that this was partly because he had never previously been confronted with issues of nationalism, and that being open-minded and accepting is easier in some contexts than in others. A number of international students noted on reflection their own naivety on arrival, when they had come to Mostar believing they could change the world. Although the process of accepting that this would not happen was sometimes difficult, two students who raised this point (both second years, nearing the end of their time at UWCiM) felt that they were now more realistic – though still optimistic – about what they could achieve.



“An interesting aspect of growing confidence related to individual views, with around two thirds of students believing they now had stronger views of their own than they had on arrival...”

Local students invariably believed that they had changed noticeably since arriving (though not necessarily, as one student pointed out, because they were not open-minded before); they had matured and learned to take responsibility for themselves, as well as becoming more open-minded and aware through mixing with people from many backgrounds (including other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and, for instance, sharing in celebrations of festivals that they would not previously have celebrated. A common view among these local students was that they all now cared about a range of issues that they had not cared about previously. Second year students observed that individuals' own growing confidence was something that developed over time; they noted some first years being surprised to see second years sitting down to dinner together after a big argument, which second years did not find strange. Some who were not native English speakers had found such interaction difficult at first, lacking confidence to join in, but this had also improved with time.

An interesting aspect of growing confidence related to individual views, with around two thirds of students believing they now had stronger views of their own than they had on arrival, and being more prepared to defend their own value system to those who do not share it. Lest it be inferred that growing certainty about their own views and beliefs suggests a lack of willingness to be open to others, it is interesting to note that a very high proportion of students now felt more prepared to have their personal opinions challenged; an indication, it would appear, not only of growing confidence in their own values but also of willingness to debate, to listen to others and to be challenged to defend their ideas. Thinking critically before making judgements was noted in student interviews as a positive development in this respect.

Similarly, a large majority of students felt that they were now more inclined than they had previously been to encourage others of different cultures to learn about their own culture. In interview, this view was illustrated by one student who spoke of having learned to tolerate others' ignorance of her own country, rather than to take offence at it, feeling now that it was her responsibility to

educate them. Many also felt they were now more likely to challenge preconceptions held by others of different cultures than they had been previously.

Also of relevance to the individual's own development is the issue of strong identification with one culture. Around a third of students felt they now identified less strongly with one culture than they had previously, while a similar proportion claimed to feel less convinced than they had previously of the superiority of their own culture compared to some others.

The effect on previous relationships is an interesting area discussed in UWCiM student interviews. Relationships with families were noted by some local students to have changed, for instance, with one student reporting that it hurt his mother to see him turning into a western man, though more positively a number of students felt they could now have more mature conversations with their families as they shared with them new things they had learned. Similarly, relationships with previous friends were noted by a number of local students as having changed, with some having lost friends with whom they no longer seemed to have much in common. Others had kept friends even though they had changed: a common feeling was that previous friendships could be sustained if all involved wanted them to be, and if previous friends were interested to learn from and be open to the experiences of the UWCiM student, but probably not otherwise. More than one student in interview referred to the experience of going home in the holidays (for those whose family/previous friends were not nearby) as an indicator of how much they (and their priorities) had changed.

(b) Attitudes to others

A point volunteered on many occasions in student interviews related to the prejudices both international and local students now realised they had held on arrival at the UWCiM, in terms of pre-formed expectations about how people from other backgrounds would behave and acceptance of stereotypes based on a lack of first-hand experience. A large majority of students believed that, compared with how they had been previously, they were now more interested in the individual



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and his/her personality than in that person's cultural background or nationality. This point was consistently reinforced in interviews, with comments being made on several occasions that individuals were no longer particularly aware from which group individuals came. New friendships had arisen as a result, between various combinations of local and international students, including (as pointed out in interviews on several occasions by local students, and reinforced by UWCiM teachers) across the Serb/Bosniak/Croat communities. In student interviews, both local and international students remarked on what was perceived to have been a clear division in the earliest days of the college between local and international students, as individuals sought out those with whom they felt most comfortable. Indeed many in interviews referred to having been pushed through their comfort zone, to meeting and knowing others, and moving beyond nationality and religion in getting to know others as individuals. All were of the view that they had learned to adjust and that levels of integration had increased as a result: poor levels of English on arrival had also been a hurdle for some that had subsequently been overcome.

Similarly strong messages came through about perceived changes in relation to being aware of, informed about and interested in those from other backgrounds. The vast majority of students claimed to be more interested in what happens in other regions than they had been previously, to be more informed about people from other regions than they had been on arrival, and to be more aware of the cultural conventions of people from other regions than when they arrived at the UWCiM. Local students believed they had become more open-minded and aware through mixing with people from many backgrounds, one student describing how mixing for the first time with Chinese and African students had given her a different perspective. A linked phenomenon noted by both international and local students was that of becoming more prepared to speak about their own countries and international issues. Sometimes this could be difficult, with passions running high, but it led ultimately to better mutual understanding and breaking down of prejudices.

Issues relating to the formation of relationships with others were also particularly important in terms of changes noted since individuals' arrival at the UWCiM. A large majority of students, for instance, believed themselves to be more willing now than they had been previously to co-operate with other people, and to try to find a pathway through an issue that does not offend people of any culture. A common theme in student interviews was the growing acceptance of others and their right to be heard, with an expectation that issues would be discussed and, while not necessarily leading to agreement, that individuals would remain amicable and respectful of each other.

Numerous stories were recounted in interviews of student friendships such as those from different BiH groups who had become good friends, or a local student whose parents had originally wanted him to live in the student residence on 'their' side of the river, but in the second year had not objected when he asked to move across the river to share with a best friend from another country. More than one local student recounted crossing for the first time to the other side of the river from that on which they had grown up, at the instigation of friends made among the international students.

A number of local parents spoke very positively about their children meeting students from other cultures and making new friendships: one reported her son having brought two international student friends home to watch an international football match on TV, for instance, while another reported her daughter having invited home for dinner friends from Spain and China, as well as having learned phrases and songs from different countries through the international friends she had made.

A challenging set of three questions was asked of students in questionnaires, all relating to the notion of tolerance of others and staged in terms of the likely degree of challenge to the individual. While two thirds believed they were now more tolerant of the views of others even if they did not agree with those views, only just over half felt that they were now more tolerant of the views of other people if they found those views completely unacceptable, and as few as around one third felt they were now more tolerant than they had been before.



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of the behaviour of other people which they found completely unacceptable. It is not surprising, perhaps, to find such responses to increasingly challenging situations: indeed similar patterns might be expected in any cross-section of population, and a previous study by Hayden *et al* (2000) of students in international schools worldwide showed similar results. Such questions raise the thorny issue of just how tolerant one should be of views and behaviour of others that challenges one's own value system: should one go down the road towards cultural relativism, accepting any behaviour no matter how challenging if it emanates from a different cultural context and, if not, where should the line be drawn?

Responses to a separate question suggested that over three quarters of students were prepared to observe the cultural conventions of others when in their presence, and was presumably interpreted by respondents as relating to less challenging contexts. Meanwhile a large majority were more accepting that all people have the right to express their views freely, while a similarly large majority believed they were more respectful now than they had been of another person's viewpoint, even if they totally disagreed with that viewpoint. More challenging perhaps is the question concerning acceptance of the rights of other people to put their views into practice within their own society, even though such practice would be unacceptable within the individual's own society. Here, perhaps unsurprisingly since behaviour rather than views was involved, relatively low numbers (though still the majority: well over half) felt that they were now more accepting of such rights than they had been previously.

In summary, strong evidence emerged from students, teachers, local parents and alumni to suggest that attitudes of UWCiM students (both local and international) had indeed changed since arrival. Such changes were perceived to have led to increasing levels of open-mindedness and flexibility which enabled friendships to be forged within and across the various groups, and to increased levels of integration across the UWCiM student body.

The next section will consider the factors perceived to have caused these changes.

3.1.2 Factors that had caused changes in UWCiM students since arriving

All stakeholder groups were asked what factors they perceived had caused changes in UWCiM students since their arrival, and factors that arose are grouped under the following main headings (which clearly overlap to some extent):

- learning in class
- student residences
- interacting with others (students, teachers, local community) from different cultures
- extracurricular activities.

(a) Learning in class

By far the strongest factors perceived by students to have been influential in this category were learning in class how to consider issues from more than one perspective, and taking part in a course that discussed critical thinking. A number of other factors also believed to have been influential, if not at the same high level, included learning in class about other countries and regions (e.g. their history, geography, politics), undertaking extended pieces of work (such as projects) on topics related to a number of cultures, considering examples from a number of cultures in the subjects studied in class, being taught that all cultures should be equally respected, and being encouraged to be tolerant of cultures whose practices are different from one's own.

Such perceptions were consistent with a common view expressed in student interviews that the formal curriculum, encouraging discussion in class and engaging with issues, was one of the factors causing change in individuals, with teachers sometimes influencing the changes (and some teachers being more proactive than others in encouraging interaction), and sometimes facilitating the environment in class which encouraged this to happen. Sessions such as the 'World Today' and 'Global Awareness' encouraged discussion of, sometimes difficult, issues which caused individuals to reflect on their own views and beliefs. Group activities in class (including working together in pairs in science laboratories) were also noted, by both students and teachers, as being helpful in



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bringing people together. Clearly some parts of the curriculum (such as the IB Diploma Theory of Knowledge course) lend themselves to discussion of issues of integration more than do others.

Teaching styles were noted by many local students as having led them to change, by expecting them to participate in discussion and to express opinions where they would not previously have done so, coming as they did from a much more prescriptive, didactic system of education. (It was noted that this style of teaching was also new for some international students). Though this had been difficult for them at first (coupled with their lack of confidence in speaking English), all now much preferred the new style and appreciated the supportive relationships they had formed with their UWCiM teachers.

(b) Student residences

Almost without exception, living in residential accommodation was the factor most strongly felt by UWCiM students, teachers and local parents to have influenced change in UWCiM students. While the point was made by many students that it was the whole experience (combination of curriculum, residences, social interaction and being based in Mostar) that led to changes, all students were nevertheless of the view that the single most important influence on their attitudes was the residences, where all now lived in rooms shared with others of different backgrounds. Living with others, sharing meals, communal rooms, bedrooms and social time, meant that individuals had to find a way of dealing with each other (regardless of national/cultural/linguistic background) since as they lived together they had to make it work, accommodating each other's different behaviour and practices.

The importance of learning to compromise, not only in terms of different cultural practices but also when, for instance, one is a 'morning person' and another a 'night person', was highlighted in a number of interviews, as was learning to co-operate with respect to shared practicalities such as cleaning the bathroom. Some had clearly found sharing accommodation difficult at first, particularly if they had not been used to sharing a room

at all (one student believed that coming from a large family had helped her to adapt compared with a room-mate who was an only child), but had learned to adjust to each other. Local students related this point to a growing understanding of the need for all communities to work together rather than not interacting, as had been the experience for some from BiH: getting to know well their room-mates and house-mates (including those from the other BiH ethnic communities) had been very important for them, and they felt that sharing residences had helped them to mature and to learn how to get along with other people. One student reported having had difficulties with her room-mates when she first arrived, partly because of her lack of English but also because of different ways of doing things: they had had many arguments at first. Now she was really pleased to have had that experience, as through it she had learned a lot about people from other places and had made good friends. Another student, who had not met many people from other places before coming to the UWCiM, felt that she had learned a lot about peaceful co-existence particularly through the residences. More than one student described the process of learning to adjust to each other in a residential situation as being analogous to living with one's family: having its ups and downs but essentially being a mutually supportive environment.

A related crucial effect of shared residences highlighted by students was increased levels of awareness and understanding of world affairs. Where previously individuals may have taken little interest in various situations worldwide, having fellow students and house-mates from other countries caused them now to take more notice of such issues – as did conversations with those fellow students both in class and in free time. Being concerned about events in an area of the world because a fellow student and/or house-mate came from that country led to world news now becoming, as one student put it, 'news with a human face'.

(c) Interacting with others from different cultures

Issues discussed under the 'student residences' heading above clearly relate to interacting with others. In addition, mixing with students from a number of cultures



“On a related point, a large majority of students believed that studying away from home had been influential in causing them to change...”

within class was viewed by all students as being a major factor in causing them to change. Similarly perceived as having been extremely influential was having teachers from a number of different cultures, as was teachers setting an example of being internationally minded. Other factors believed to have been influential, though not to quite the same extent, were engaging in team activities at college with students from a number of cultures, mixing with students from a number of cultures in college clubs and societies, participating in seminars/lectures with guest speakers from different parts of the world, having interaction with members of the local community in Mostar, and having interaction with students of other cultural backgrounds both at college and outside the college/ Gymnasium. Interestingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, in questionnaire responses local students attributed greater influence than did international students to interacting with Gymnasium Mostar students. On a related point, a large majority of students believed that studying away from home had been influential in causing them to change (not surprisingly, this point was made principally by the international rather than local students). When asked, however, about the possible influence of parents, other family members and friends, few believed this had been important – though parental influence was felt to be stronger than that of other family and friends, echoing similar findings about the importance of interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds in an earlier study with students in international schools (Hayden *et al*, 2000).

(d) Extracurricular activities

This category includes all those activities organised by the UWCiM that are not part of the formal class-based learning/teaching context. Three factors stood out here in terms of the extent to which students believed them to have been influential: participating in college activities such as international days and international evenings, being encouraged to try new experiences from other cultures (such as music, food, dance, drama) and participating in community service (part of the IB CAS programme). Other factors felt to have been influential by a majority of students included being exposed to other cultures through films and TV programmes, visiting other places as

members of, for example, a choir or sports team participating in exchange visits, and taking part in activities related to the work of the United Nations (such as debating, role play, and Model United Nations).

The IB Creativity, Action, Service, or CAS (community service), activities were consistently mentioned in interviews on different occasions by both international and local students as influential in changing individuals, bringing together as they did students from different backgrounds with a common purpose (including those who might not necessarily study in the same classes and, sometimes, students from the Gymnasium) to interact with adults and children in Mostar itself, thus encouraging them to understand each other better. The range of activities offered locally as part of the CAS programme included, for instance, a series of public events drawing attention to the difficult position of the Roma people in BiH society, the UWCiM Winter Art Festival in Mostar, the UWCiM's Ecology group's eco-project and the Mostar-based International Human Rights Festival held in cooperation with the Helsinki Human Rights Committee in BiH. UWCiM teachers reinforced the perception that community-based activities such as CAS had been influential in causing greater integration within the student body, arising in part from students being paired with others from different backgrounds to work together on a shared activity. A number of local parents spoke very positively of the CAS activity in which their son or daughter had been involved, and the impact it had had on him/her, while one of the local alumni who had just completed her first year at university in Mostar explained that she had continued to volunteer at a local school for children with special needs after leaving the UWCiM, having initially resented being 'forced' to participate in CAS activities locally. Another alumna spoke very positively of her CAS experience, remarking on how important it had been that it was compulsory, especially in the early stages when some students were reluctant to participate. Representatives interviewed from two of the institutions in which students undertook CAS activities in the city (both schools for children with special needs) spoke very positively about the students' support and the positive impact their participation had on the children at those schools.

“...many of those interviewed – teachers and students – pointed out that it was still early days in terms of relationships being forged and trust being established, and that such changes take time to evolve...”

An additional benefit of CAS participation for local students, pointed out by one teacher, was moving around different parts of the city (in connection with CAS activities) that they might not previously have visited. Another teacher who grew up in Mostar herself, never crossing the river and not knowing the names of streets on the other side, noted in this connection that UWCiM students from Mostar now refer by name to streets on both sides of the river and are obviously familiar with the city overall in a way that she had not been.

In summary then, the positive changes in attitudes of UWCiM students noted by themselves, teachers and parents were perceived to have been influenced by a number of different but inter-related factors. Sharing residential accommodation (including bedrooms) was clearly a crucial factor in bringing students together in an environment that necessitated working out ways in which they could adjust to each other. No other environment (classroom-based or extra-curricular) would have quite the same imperative for making things work, and the very positive stories of friendships forged through living together would seem to bear testament to the importance of the role of the residences and, indeed, to the wisdom of the decision taken half way through the UWCiM's first year to require all Mostar-based students, as well as others, to live together as well as to study together.

Other aspects of interacting with others from a range of backgrounds were also clearly important, including interacting with teachers as well as fellow students and others from Mostar itself, with the IB Diploma's CAS activities being a prime promoter of such interaction. Perceived as no less important were some aspects of the more formal curriculum, where a combination of courses themselves, teaching styles and the expectations of and example provided by teachers were perceived to have been influential in encouraging the attitude changes and increased integration that were so clearly evident.

3.2 Evidence of greater integration with, and within, the Gymnasium Mostar student body

The main focus of this part of the study was on the extent to which the UWCiM having been established in the Gymnasium Mostar building had led to greater integration between UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar students, as well as whether there appeared to be evidence of the UWCiM's presence leading to greater integration between students within the Gymnasium itself. As was the case for the UWCiM students, issues arising will be considered first in terms of whether any changes seem to have occurred and then, if so, what might have caused them.

3.2.1 Extent of any changes

From questionnaires completed by Gymnasium Mostar students, interviews with Gymnasium and UWCiM students and interviews with Gymnasium and UWCiM teachers, a clear message emerged of relatively little change having been experienced by Gymnasium students as a whole since the arrival of the UWCiM. With hindsight, and as pointed out by many of those interviewed, it was an ambitious aim to expect that within only two or three years of the UWCiM opening it would have generated positive results not only within its own student body, but also within the wider Gymnasium context. Indeed many of those interviewed – teachers and students – pointed out that it was still early days in terms of relationships being forged and trust being established, and that such changes take time to evolve (bearing in mind that Gymnasium students previously attended schools in different parts of the city and many do not know each other when they arrive).

Most Gymnasium Mostar students in questionnaire responses, for instance, believed that since the UWCiM arrived they had not changed in terms of the same set of issues asked of the UWCiM students: being prepared to change their opinion about an issue, for instance, having strong views of their own, being prepared to have their personal opinions challenged and many other similar traits. That is not to say, of course, that the students were not prepared to do these things – only that they believed they had not



“ Teachers also spoke positively of observing willingness amongst many Gymnasium students to interact with UWCiM students, even though they noted that there was still work to be done in this respect. ”

changed at all in these respects since the opening of the UWCiM. Having said that, while those selecting the ‘no change’ option in these cases were often larger in number than for any other option, reasonably large numbers of respondents clearly felt that they had indeed changed to some extent. And even though changes acknowledged in questionnaire responses by Gymnasium students were certainly notably smaller in number than they were for UWCiM students, some changes could be noted in some areas – such as more students claiming they were now more prepared to observe the cultural conventions of others when in their presence than felt they had not changed in this respect, and more feeling they had changed than felt they had not changed in respect of being willing to co-operate with others. Interesting in this set of responses, as well as in many others, was a notable pattern amongst Gymnasium responses of female students believing that they had changed more (becoming more open-minded, interested and conciliatory) than did male students. Also interesting was a comparison of questionnaire responses from Gymnasium students and subgroups of UWCiM students to a common set of questions, which highlighted the markedly greater extent to which local students at the UWCiM believed they had changed than did students from either programme of Gymnasium Mostar.

Noteworthy, too, is that when responses were compared for the two questionnaires (completed in March 2008 and May 2009), and bearing in mind that the groups completing them were not identical in the two years, markedly more positive responses were given in the second questionnaire to items such as choosing to mix with people from other cultures, being willing to find a pathway through an issue which does not offend people of any culture, being prepared to observe the cultural conventions of others when in their presence, being willing to co-operate with other people, being more interested in the individual and his/her personality than in which culture he/she is from, and accepting that all people have the right to express their views freely.

It would seem, therefore, that Gymnasium

Mostar student perceptions as early as March 2008, while showing that many felt they had not changed, indicated large numbers who felt they had – particularly among female students. When compared with responses to the questionnaire distributed in May 2009, indications are that while there were still large numbers who believed they had *not* changed, there was also a trend towards greater numbers recognising changes in themselves. Such a conclusion – of changes among some but not all of the Gymnasium Mostar student body, and of greater change perceived as time went on – is reinforced by interviews conducted with students from both Gymnasium programmes. One group of Gymnasium students when interviewed in November 2008, for instance, suggested that approximately half of Gymnasium students were positive about the UWCiM and the other half more negative. Those whose perceptions were negative, it was argued, did not make an effort to meet UWCiM students, while those of a more positive frame of mind took opportunities to meet UWCiM students within the building, in coffee bars and elsewhere. Negative feelings were sometimes, they felt, a result of jealousies or resentments: a perception borne out by a number of comments in Gymnasium student questionnaire responses about the UWCiM having taken part of the Gymnasium Mostar building, and suggesting resentment of ‘foreigners’ coming to Mostar to tell those from BiH what to do.

This conclusion is reinforced by observations made by Gymnasium Mostar teachers, UWCiM teachers and students about the behaviour of Gymnasium students. One Gymnasium teacher, for instance, made the same point about a general resentment felt by some in BiH towards ‘foreigners’ coming to BiH to tell them how to live together when they had already done so prior to the war, which could explain some student perceptions. He and others, however, also spoke of the increasingly positive perception of the UWCiM within Mostar and the Gymnasium now that local as well as international UWCiM students had achieved good results in the IB Diploma and secured places at prestigious overseas universities. Teachers also spoke positively of observing willingness amongst many Gymnasium students to interact with UWCiM



“A number of teachers lamented the decision to go back to having separate staffrooms after the initial establishment of a shared Gymnasium/UWCIIM staffroom when the UWCIIM first opened, which had encouraged staff to integrate.”

students, even though they noted that there was still work to be done in this respect. In interviews, all Gymnasium Mostar students professed to be very positive about the UWCIIM and its students. Some described keeping in touch with friends from the Gymnasium who had moved to the UWCIIM, and making new UWCIIM friends as a result.

3.2.2 How changes in Gymnasium Mostar students were caused or inhibited

It is clear that some Gymnasium Mostar students believed that little if any change had occurred in them since the UWCIIM arrived, and views expressed by students and teachers from both Gymnasium and UWCIIM point to there being two main groups of Gymnasium students: those with a positive attitude towards the UWCIIM who would admit to having been positively influenced by it and who were willing to interact with UWCIIM students, and those with a more negative attitude who would claim not to have been influenced by it and who would not choose to engage in joint UWCIIM/Gymnasium activities. That is not to say that these are fixed groups; indeed there would appear to have been some movement over time from the latter group to the former. Meanwhile the majority of UWCIIM students, in response to questionnaire items, felt that having interaction with Gymnasium Mostar students had influenced changes in their own attitude to some extent since arrival.

Interviews with Gymnasium Mostar and UWCIIM teachers suggested that Gymnasium teachers also fell into two main groups: those in some cases resentful of the UWCIIM being established within the Gymnasium Mostar building and not interested in collaboration with the UWCIIM, and those who were more positive about the relationship and the benefits of collaboration to both UWCIIM and Gymnasium teachers and students. No doubt, as was pointed out in one interview, in both cases the attitudes of teachers would have influenced at least some of the Gymnasium Mostar students with whom they interacted. Gymnasium teachers interviewed spoke about UWCIIM teachers who did or did not smile and acknowledge them in the corridor, as UWCIIM teachers did about Gymnasium teachers. All acknowledged the barrier presented by language, more so for teachers than for students, since the majority

of Gymnasium students could speak some English, whereas many local teachers could not and very few international UWCIIM teachers had attempted to learn the local language. Some teachers spoke very positively about collaboration between Gymnasium Mostar and UWCIIM teachers in the context of, for instance, use by Gymnasium teachers and students of newly built UWCIIM science laboratories whereby extra-curricular biology, chemistry and physics practical classes were offered jointly by teachers from both programmes of the Gymnasium to groups of students also from both programmes, with the assistance of UWCIIM laboratory technicians. Collaboration between teachers in particular departments such as the Gymnasium and UWCIIM French departments was also cited as an example here. Others recounted extra-curricular activities such as hiking, in which both UWCIIM and Gymnasium teachers had participated and which led to them subsequently remaining in contact.

A number of local teachers with teaching responsibilities in both Gymnasium Mostar and the UWCIIM clearly provided an opportunity to form links for those teachers who wished to avail themselves of it. A number of teachers lamented the decision to go back to having separate staffrooms after the initial establishment of a shared Gymnasium Mostar/UWCIIM staffroom when the UWCIIM first opened, which had encouraged staff to integrate. Others spoke of the smoking room in which Gymnasium and UWCIIM teacher smokers often met, who were sometimes joined by non-smoking colleagues. Still others spoke of a willingness among many teachers to collaborate in principle, but of hurdles provided not only by language but also by non-coinciding timetables in the UWCIIM and the two programmes of the Gymnasium. A further point made by many was of a lack of real awareness among a number of Gymnasium teachers of the purpose of the UWCIIM, and of the need for Gymnasium teachers and students to be better informed on such issues.

All acknowledged that, even for those students with a positive attitude towards the UWCIIM, the practicalities of interacting could be off-putting; the different timetables operating in the UWCIIM and the two programmes of Gymnasium Mostar, for instance, could

“Also raised were the perceived language barriers, with many Gymnasium students lacking ability or confidence to speak in English and international students not generally speaking the local language”

make interaction difficult to arrange. And while all CAS activities organised by the UWCiM were open to Gymnasium students and some spoke very positively of participation by Gymnasium students, the fact that these activities were compulsory for UWCiM students but voluntary for Gymnasium students meant that fewer Gymnasium students were likely to participate (though some did). A number of teachers and students from both Gymnasium Mostar and UWCiM did, however, speak very positively about the activities in which UWCiM and Gymnasium students had collaborated, including sports activities (volleyball and basketball being particularly mentioned) – the facilities for which improved markedly during 2009 – picnics, fund-raising for a soup kitchen, a concert and cinema, for example. Many of those interviewed referred to the Student Council, with membership including Gymnasium students as well as UWCiM student representatives, which had organised a number of projects. Student Council links were also mentioned in interview by a number of UWCiM students as having been effective to some extent in encouraging UWCiM/ Gymnasium Mostar student participation in projects such as musical events, Model United Nations, and an art competition. A shared view was that greater efforts could be made by both UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar to encourage more interaction and greater mutual understanding. Although the Student Council appeared to have become less effective and was apparently more recently disbanded, it was hoped that it might be reinstated.

Many Gymnasium students and teachers interviewed were of the view that, while collaboration was happening in some areas, there was room for much more to be done – though acknowledging in most cases that these were still early days in terms of the UWCiM/ Gymnasium Mostar relationship and that the two institutions and their teachers and students had come a long way in a short time. In UWCiM student interviews, too, a shared view across international and local students was that there had been relatively little interaction between UWCiM and Gymnasium students, but that there was now more contact than there had been at first. Some suggested reasons included demanding and non-coinciding timetables in the UWCiM and Gymnasium, and that the UWCiM had not been in place long

enough for Gymnasium students to become used to the UWCiM students. Also raised were the perceived language barriers, with many Gymnasium students lacking ability or confidence to speak in English and international students not generally speaking the local language. Two Slavic speakers among the international UWCiM students, for instance, noted in interview that it was easier for them to interact with Gymnasium Mostar students because of their ability to understand the local language.

According to UWCiM students, some Gymnasium Mostar students seemed keen to be involved in UWCiM activities, but this tended to be when they had friends at the UWCiM (who had perhaps previously attended Gymnasium Mostar) or when they had aspirations to apply to the UWCiM themselves. It was also felt that often Gymnasium students and teachers seemed to have inaccurate perceptions of the UWCiM (for instance that it was only for rich students). One local student who had previously attended the Gymnasium reported in interview that her previous friends were not very positive about UWCiM students: partly because of a perception that they are all wealthy, and also because of other aspects they perceived to be ‘weird’ such as UWCiM students dyeing their hair unusual colours and holding ‘transgender’ parties. Indeed local students who had moved from Gymnasium Mostar to the UWCiM could act in some cases as an effective link between the two groups. One such student noted in interview that she was pleased to have been able to maintain her friendships with Gymnasium students, as well as forming new friendships in the UWCiM. Another who had previously attended Gymnasium Mostar had made efforts to make more friends there through, for instance, helping to organise karaoke evenings to which all were invited. Overall, two different perspectives emerged from interviewees with respect to Gymnasium Mostar students who had moved to the UWCiM. In one case some such students were described as having distanced themselves from their previous friends and appearing to perceive themselves to have become part of an academic elite (as it is usually the high achieving students from Gymnasium Mostar who are accepted at the UWCiM). On the other hand several examples, quoted more frequently, were given of students who by already having

“*Success of the first cohort in securing places in prestigious overseas universities was among the reasons for local opinion becoming more positive and increasing numbers of local students applying for UWCiM places.*”

Gymnasium friends before making UWCiM friends had acted as a bridge between the two groups, thus facilitating new UWCiM/Gymnasium student friendships.

An issue noted by many students and teachers, from both Gymnasium Mostar and UWCiM, was that encouraging students (or indeed teachers) to integrate required more than simply one group or another organising an activity and inviting the other group to join in. As one teacher remarked, students will not integrate just because they are told to do so. Several stories were recounted of one group (usually UWCiM) organising a party or social evening and inviting the others, who did not come. This was not, as one who had not accepted such an invitation pointed out, because those involved were necessarily hostile or unwilling to socialise, but because they felt a lack of confidence in moving out of their comfort zone (including in some cases a lack of confidence in their level of English and about how they would be accepted). Teachers who commented on this phenomenon invariably felt that some sort of administrative support was required to facilitate joint activities if they were to be successful. A number of teachers also emphasised the need for any proposed joint activities to be interesting and to have a purpose; some suggested that they should be compulsory in the first instance at least, so that students could not decline to be involved. Comparison with the intra-UWCiM situation here would seem to support such arguments, in that strong positive relationships forged between UWCiM students from various backgrounds undoubtedly had their origins to a large extent in the compulsory (and initially not always welcomed) shared residences and CAS activities, which may have led to

different outcomes had they been voluntary. The resonance here with Allport's Contact Hypothesis, as noted earlier, is striking. Allport's proposal that the reduction of prejudice between different groups requires common goals, institutional support, collaboration and equal group status has strong echoes in the views expressed by both teachers and students about the factors which needed to be in place if greater integration were to be effected between UWCiM and Gymnasium students.

Overall, when asked about relationships between Gymnasium Mostar and the UWCiM, many teachers and students believed not only that it was still early days in their relationship and that too much should not be expected, but also that positive steps were being made in the right direction. This point would seem to be borne out by the changes, if only relatively small, noted in some students' questionnaire responses. A number of those interviewed pointed out that the UWCiM is unusual to many local people in respect of not only the mix of students, but also the freedom given to students, the fact that students seem to dress differently from their local peers, and some of the activities organised. A lack of awareness and misunderstandings in the early days particularly had also contributed to a perception among some Gymnasium Mostar students that the UWCiM was an intruder in their building and to misconceptions that, for instance, all UWCiM students were 'rich kids' (when in fact they are all funded by scholarships). Success of the first cohort in securing places in prestigious overseas universities was among the reasons for local opinion becoming more positive and increasing numbers of local students applying for UWCiM places.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In investigating the extent to which the UWC-IB project has been successful in encouraging greater integration between students at the UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar, this study has arrived at a set of findings which indicate high levels of success in some areas and less success in others. Bringing together, within the UWCiM, students from the three BiH communities as well as from the rest of

the world appears indeed to have facilitated the integration to which the UWC-IB project aspired. Many examples were found in this study of friendships formed, preconceptions and stereotypes based on ignorance abandoned, and prejudices broken down – within the BiH student groups, within the international group, and between the BiH and international groups. Reasons for the



“The impact of the UWCiM on students at Gymnasium Mostar, however, was more difficult to discern, with evidence suggesting positive attitudes among some students and teachers, and more negative attitudes among others.”

changes arising in the student body are clearly complex, but there seems little doubt of the influence on the mindsets and attitudes of the UWCiM students of the student residences, class-based learning experiences, community-based (CAS) activities and interaction with those of other cultural backgrounds.

The impact of the UWCiM on students at Gymnasium Mostar, however, was more difficult to discern, with evidence suggesting positive attitudes among some students and teachers, and more negative attitudes among others. That change was slower to happen in the Gymnasium than in the UWCiM is, perhaps, unsurprising with language barriers and different timetables being among the constraints providing hurdles to UWCiM/Gymnasium student interaction. The absence of such hurdles and the requirement for shared residences in the case of UWCiM students were undoubtedly among the reasons for different outcomes in this respect. It must be recognised, however, that progress has been made with respect to increasing integration between UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar students, with some participation in joint activities and evidence of goodwill towards UWCiM students by many of their Gymnasium counterparts. Undoubtedly relevant here are the points made by teachers and students about the circumstances under which activities between the different groups are likely to have positive outcomes, which are consistent with follow-up studies to Allport's original work (see, for example, Esses *et al*, 2005).

In drawing conclusions about the extent to which the establishment of the UWCiM has led to greater integration between students from various backgrounds, it must be acknowledged that some of the factors might well be common to other contexts where young people from different backgrounds leave home to pursue their studies and/or are brought together in order to share common experiences. Shared study of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, for instance, in different schools worldwide might lead to greater mutual understanding between those involved. Shared accommodation and extra-curricular activities,

and a school/college ethos dedicated to the promotion of increased global understanding, might also lead to findings consistent with those arising from this study. In short, the experiences of students at any of the other United World Colleges could be similar to those of students at the UWCiM. While the location in which the UWCiM is set is unique, the experiences of UWCiM students may well have similarities in other contexts. It would certainly be interesting for further research to compare the experiences of students in Mostar with those in other United World Colleges. The findings of this study, however, stand alone in throwing light on the experiences of UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar students, and on some of the underlying factors influencing those experiences.

Arising from this study, a small number of recommendations are made, as follows:

- that the work already begun in increasing understanding among Gymnasium Mostar teachers, students and parents about the nature and purposes of the UWCiM be extended
- that opportunities be extended for collaboration between UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar teachers, to build on work already begun in the context of, for instance, the science departments
- that increased organisational support be provided within the UWCiM and Gymnasium Mostar for bringing together students from different backgrounds to participate, on an equal basis, in activities with common goals, with a view to increasing the likelihood that interaction will lead to greater intercultural understanding
- that further research be undertaken with UWCiM alumni, with a view to understanding their perceptions of the longer-term effects of their experiences in new and more recent contexts
- that BiH policy-makers and planners consider the evidence gathered through this study as a contribution to their thinking on the benefits of integrated education in encouraging greater inter-group understanding.

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Appendix 1

Data gathering methods employed during the project

- **UWCiM student questionnaires:** distributed to all students on two occasions: in March 2008 and May 2009, and answered on-line through English, the working language of the UWCiM.
- **Gymnasium Mostar student questionnaires:** again distributed to all students on two occasions: in March 2008 and May 2009, and answered in hard copy through the two local languages.
- **UWCiM student interviews:** undertaken with current UWCiM students during visits to Mostar in April 2008, November 2008 and April 2009. In each case students were interviewed in focus groups of 5 or 6, divided by first year and second year, 'local' and 'international' students, through the medium of English.
- **Gymnasium Mostar student interviews:** again in focus groups of 5 or 6, divided by Bosniak and Croat programme, during visits to Mostar during April 2008, November 2008 and April 2009. In this case the assistance of an interpreter was made available to allow students to be interviewed through the local language.
- **UWCiM teacher questionnaire:** designed for completion by all UWCiM teachers and made available, on-line and in English only (the working language of the UWCiM) in May 2008.
- **UWCiM teacher interviews:** Individual (one to one) interviews conducted with expatriate and local teachers, senior managers and resident tutors through the medium of English (the working language of the college) during visits to Mostar in April 2008, November 2008 and April 2009.
- **Gymnasium Mostar teacher interviews:** With the aid of an interpreter, individual (one to one) interviews conducted with local teachers from both programmes of the Gymnasium including the Heads of both programmes individually, through the local language, during visits to Mostar in April 2008, November 2008 and April 2009.
- **Parents:** Face to face interviews with a number of local parents. Again the services of an interpreter were employed, and interviews were conducted in Mostar in November 2008 and May 2009.
- **Alumni:** In May 2009 it was possible to interview a number of alumni who had graduated from UWCiM one year earlier and were now at the end of their first year of university (four in Mostar and one in the USA).
- **Members of the local community:** A small number of face to face interviews held in Mostar with members of the local community, with the assistance of an interpreter, in April 2009.



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