"So that we can make something."

The Story of Kupres

Table of Contents

Introduction 1
Methodology 3
A Great Loss 5
Back to Our Own: Pragmatism and Nostalgia 6
Only So Far 7
Scarcity and Competition 10
Building Momentum 11
The Missing Link 14
"Building Something" 16

Appendices:
I. Community Member Interview
II. Community Leader Interview
III. NGO Staff Interview

The following is written by Laurie Ball, Hart Fellow and Research and Policy Manager at Mozaik Community Development Foundation. Laurie can be reached via email at laurie@mozaik.ba or by telephone at +387 033 265 290.
Introduction

Mentioning the community of Kupres in Bosnia and Herzegovina is likely to bring to mind cold, long winters, ski mountains, and something of a 'mountain mentality' derived in large part from the high altitude of the community itself. The community is also often considered a 'Croat' community in no small part due to its history of being occupied, at least for a limited time, by non-Croat forces during both World War II and the most recent war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, according to the 1991 census, before the most recent war the municipality of Kupres was 50.6% Serb and 8.4% Bosniak, while 39.6% of the population was Croat. Citizens of Kupres recall these population demographics by saying that individuals of Serb and Croat ethnic groups were approximately equal in number with a small minority of Bosniaks.

The members of all three ethnic groups remember the pre-war period as a time in which ethnicity was not considered a major factor in community or personal relationships. In fact, in the last five years many citizens of Kupres say that, despite the fact that many Serbs and Bosniaks have not yet returned, relationships between neighbors of all ethnicities have begun to "normalize."

Economics in Kupres, however, have yet to experience a post-war normalization or invigoration. Prior to the most recent war, Kupres enjoyed a relatively prosperous economy as it was home to numerous industrial firms and enjoyed a small amount of winter tourism for the local ski mountain. However, the post-war economy in Kupres is almost entirely dependent upon such tourism: the city boasts 433 guest beds in hotels and motels as well as more than 78 beds in private home accommodations. In January and February 2005, approximately 25,000 tourists passed through the city of Kupres, with about 8,000-9,000 staying in the municipality of Kupres. This represents approximately a five-fold increase in tourism over the 2002 winter.

With an employment rate of approximately 60%, Kupres is on par with much of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but approximately 20% of Kupres' citizens have no source of income of any kind. Many citizens make due with a pension of approximately 160 Konvertible Marks (80 Euros) per month. However, despite these economic challenges, citizens of Kupres are coming together in efforts to promote their cultural and ecological heritage. In addition, citizens are coming together through community-based associations not only to protect the environment and provide for youth, but also to provide for others in the community in need of assistance such as the elderly, the ill, and the impoverished.

Kupres is a vibrant community in no small part due to the activities of these young non-governmental organizations, which have begun working in the last five years but most especially in the last year. The Omladinski Klub (Youth Club), Kupreški Visorovan (the Ecological Association), and the nascent Humana are among the examples of community entrepreneurship at work in Kupres. The Mozaik Foundation, then the NGO Development Foundation, worked with the Omladinski Klub to fund a project, conducted mostly by high school seniors, to clean the local river.
and renovate/restore certain areas of the park in the center of the city in 2004. This project is not the focus of this work; rather, this work focuses on the broader issues of participation in community activities and the impetus for such activities in Kupres.

This paper represents only part of a wider research project conducted by the author. Kupres is the third community in a three-community case-study that includes two other remote, returnee villages in different geographic areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This research is part of an effort by Mozaik to understand the motivations for and barriers to community engagement as well as the sources of community entrepreneurship in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such, the interview questions focus on citizen participation in formal community activities and organizations and informal community life.  

Community life in Kupres is shaped most directly by the activities of the community-based organizations listed at the top of this page. The aspects of community participation that I focused on in Kupres were consequently participation in activities organized by these organizations, knowledge of the organizations’ work in the past year, attendance at community meetings of any sort, contact with external NGOs and government officials, and the nature and frequency of formal and informal productive action among citizens.

I began this three-part research project with the hypothesis that individuals’ sense of ability and feelings of inclusion in community activities would be the primary factors influencing their motivation to participate in such activities. I expected the two most frequent answers to the question ‘Why did you not participate in X project?’ to be variations on, ‘Because no one asked me,’ and ‘Because I have nothing to offer.’

Due in part to the results of the first community case study in this research, a parallel question became, ‘Why do some communities have many activities in which to participate while others lack such activities?’ In the case of Kupres, most activities in the community seem to be products of non-governmental organizations based in the community itself. These organizations, in turn, seem to owe their existence and successes thus far to strong individual leadership and a general sense of frustration with the lack of other options for activities to improve community life (in the absence of a Mjesna Zajednica or productive relationships with the government).

An additional aspect of my earlier hypothesis was the idea that gender and trauma would be key variables affecting a given individual’s sense of ability and inclusion in community activities. In the case of Kupres, unlike the other cases included in the broader research, gender is not a clear influencing factor regarding one’s perceived ability to change life in the community. Family size in Kupres is markedly smaller than in previous communities studied, freeing women to participate in community initiatives. Both community-based organizations that have begun work in the last year (2004-2005) have been led by women. Education rates do not differ dramatically across gender, and perceived ability to make change also remains relatively constant across gender lines.

The second factor, survival of severe trauma, was less frequently present in Kupres than it was in the previous communities. While the trauma of forced displacement cannot be overestimated, the common experiences of internment and survival of massacre from the first two communities were

---

5 See Appendices I-III
6 Average education completed for women interviewed was 12 years, while for men it was 14.5 years. (Completed University education was calculated as 16 years of education.)
absent in Kupres. However, like in the first two communities, some of Kupres’ most impressive community leaders display clear signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and this seems to have only a limited effect on their ability or sense of ability to serve as agents of local change and activity.

Another factor that I expected to influence community participation is not an individual factor but rather a collective one: a strong sense of community identity, I hypothesized, would create a tradition and expectation of involvement in community activities. Kupres, in part due to its history as an economically well-off municipality in the former Yugoslavia, has no strong pre-war sense of tradition outside of the standard institutions of communism. Slowly, in the last five years, a certain expectation of community participation has emerged among the city’s ‘middle class,’ that will be examined further in this work but seems to be a product of frustration after five years of stagnancy more than anything else.

Another aspect of this broad research focuses on how development organizations and Mozaik in particular can better facilitate widespread community participation in community-based projects. Part of the answer to this question is a derivation of the first: if organizations better understand the motivations for and barriers to individual participation in community activities, then they can better design their efforts to include new participants. I also expected to see a certain level of feedback between the programmatic and individual aspects of community engagement such that successful previous projects would lead to an increased willingness on the part of citizens to participate in future collective efforts.

Individual leadership was another factor that I hypothesized might play a significant role in motivating citizen participation. In the case of Kupres, this proved to be an important factor in beginning local organizations and in building trust of those organizations among citizens. While the individuals directing the organizations have proven themselves to be honest leaders, they have also been inhibited by only limited abilities to work together and build coalitions and the lack of productive relationships with the municipal government.

The rest of this work focuses on the ‘story of Kupres’ and will be an ethnographic sketch of community life, with a consideration of what this story might imply for Kupres’ future. I will return to this data, and to the questions of participation, engagement and entrepreneurship explored above, in a comprehensive piece combining all three case studies.

**Methodology**

The research period included four weeks of living with a family in Kupres from Sunday through Wednesday of each week. During that time, I conducted one focus group, 26 formal interviews with residents of Kupres (including with the mayor and chief of police), 2 formal interviews with NGO workers from outside of Kupres who have worked there, and numerous informal interviews. The focus group included a group of 12 high school students to discuss their perspectives of life in Kupres and what they see and hope for in their own personal futures.

I conducted one-on-one interviews with community members, largely through a snowball sample selection process over the course of the research period. I made every effort to have equal

---

7 A snowball sample indicates that I interviewed everyone that I knew who was willing to be interviewed and asked those individuals for suggestions of who else I might interview. Toward the end of the research, I was able to cater these questions to target groups I knew were underrepresented in my study.
representation of men and women and young and elderly people, as well as representation from different ethnic groups and geographic diversity in terms of the precise location of an individual’s house within Kupres. While the end results were not ideal, they are somewhat representative. The interview subjects included an over-representation of Croats; the city of Kupres itself is dramatically Croat majority, with most Bosniaks and Serbs residing in villages on the outskirts of the city. While most if not all of Kupres’ citizens identify the entire municipality, villages included, as ‘their community,’ due to logistical limitations this research focuses most specifically on the city itself but includes interviews with a number of villagers as well.

Names used in the body of this work are fictional to protect the confidentiality of interview subjects, and any similarities to actual names of Kamenica residents are accidental. I did attempt to match fictional names with the actual ethnicity of interview subjects, such that Serbs tend to have typically Serb names, etc. Individual community leaders are specifically referenced by name in segments relating directly to their roles as leaders.

---

8Formal and informal interview subjects included 5 Serbs, 2 Bosniaks, and 22 Croats.
A Great Loss

'Before the war, we all worked together here through the Mjesna Zajednicas and the municipality, everything together. No one asked are you this or that or this or...We had more workers employed than we have residents now.'

- Bratko

While a certain degree of idealization of pre-war life is prevalent throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, life throughout BiH and in Kupres prior to 1992 was of course dramatically different from life in the last decade. A municipality of 10,000 people with many large, state-owned industrial firms offering employment, Kupres once attracted individuals from across the former Yugoslavia as residents. One woman, now retired, recalled moving to Kupres from the province of Vojvodina in 1954. Though she never became actively involved in community life through the Mjesna Zajednicas or workers unions as many men and women did at the time, she married a man from Kupres and, after the war, considered returning to Kupres to be "returning to her own."

Many people interviewed were members of formal citizens' or workers' groups before the war; pre-war Kupres was organized into 5 separate Mjesna Zajednicas covering the entire municipality. Typically, citizens relied upon the Mjesna Zajednicas to solve infrastructure problems and other community concerns. Recalled Anton, "Before the war, Kupres was a bigger city, everyone was concentrated in the city. Now all the ministries are in Livno. For anything that we need, whatever it is, we must go through the canton."

In addition to having centralized and accessible avenues through which to solve collective problems, pre-war Kupres enjoyed such economic prosperity that many problems were able to be addressed through individual initiatives. Because many of the firms working in Kupres were state-owned, the firms contributed to local development and infrastructure maintenance through taxes and individuals were rarely if ever expected to contribute financially to the collective good, according to Josip. He remembered wistfully, "Maybe only 10 municipalities had the standard of living that we had here in Kupres."

Unfortunately, however, Kupres' prosperity was to be interrupted early in the violence that racked the former Yugoslavia—the violence in Kupres is sometimes referred to as the "first shots of the Bosnian war." Kupres was considered a strategic point to the Bosnian Serb army in the early years of the war as it was a key link from Banja Luka to Mostar and a place from which the Serb army hoped to launch incursions to the coast. In 1992, the Bosnian Serb army took control of the city and Bosniaks and Croats fled. Most Croats fled to the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia, though many others later went further abroad to Germany, Norway and other European countries. Most Bosniaks went to the nearby cities of Bugojno and Travnik, though many of them also later found refuge abroad in Western Europe.

While the suffering of the people who were driven from their homes should not be underestimated and, as Jana remembered, "Destruction really is severe trauma," the fate of many Kuprešarki was often less severe than traumas suffered in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in large part because the citizens themselves mostly avoided division from within along ethnic lines.

---

Residents of Kupres remember that, while neighbors of differing ethnicities began to distance themselves from one another when the war began in Croatia, many citizens refused to cooperate with the various armies fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina and later in Kupres itself. A Croat man told the story of his Serb neighbor who was asked if his house could be used by the Bosnian Serb army as a staging point before Kupres was invaded in 1992, but he refused. Perhaps due to incidents like that, Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadžić once referred to Kupres' Serbs as 'rebellious.'

After the Bosniaks and Croats left Kupres, most Serbs remained in the city until early November 1994, when the HVO (Croat Army) took control of the city. Said Bratko, 'I left Kupres when the HVO was about 20 minutes away at my neighbor's house.' The city remained under HVO control until the end of the war in November 1995.

**Back to our Own: Pragmatism and Nostalgia**

'I think that as time wears on, people are in fact returning to a normal life, like that which they had before the war. So people relate with neighbors, they speak normally. In 1995 it was not possible for things to be normal like this because only Croats were here, then there were not Serbs or Bosniaks. The return of Serbs and Bosniaks began just in 2000.'

-Josip

Following the Croat army's arrival in the city, most Croats who today reside in Kupres returned to the city in the early months of 1995. This return was organized by the civilian government installed in Kupres by the HVO, according to Marija, who herself arrived in Kupres with the HVO in November 1994.

However, Kuprešarki did not return to the city that they had left behind. Despite hearing about the ravages of World War II (when Kupres was destroyed in 1942), most residents were emotionally unprepared to return to their destroyed home. Josip recalled, 'The last war was different (than WWII was for my father). Before this war, my brother and I had machines and all kinds of things worth about one million KMs. I lost everything and had to start all over.'

Despite his loss, Josip recognized that he lost far less than many other Bosnians did during the war since no one in his family was killed. In fact, Josip did not even permanently lose his ability to see and live Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multi-ethnic state. He explained, 'It's easy for me not to hate, I did not suffer as much as some others.'

Just as not all citizens of Kupres experienced the war in the same way, there are a variety of return experiences both between and within different ethnic groups in Kupres. Most obviously, the return of Croat citizens began five years before Serbs and Bosniaks began returning to Kupres. Many of the returnees associated their return with a desire to return to "their own" and their birthplace; but to many there was a sense of simple pragmatism behind the return home.

Stjepan seemed to combine these reasons and said, 'We have our own (things) here, before the war we had a store all together. In that way, I simply think that it's best that we returned to our birthplace.'

For others, like Vinko, the return was more a matter of necessity than choice. 'Until 1995 the Serbs were here, until our (army) freed it. Then we had to return. We did not have anywhere else to go,
any of us. Up there (in Livno) we lived in a hotel, it was like a refugee center, and so we had to return to our homes."

Many young people especially tended to focus on these pragmatic reasons for return. In fact, a number of people who were born in Kupres but who had left the municipality long before the war began, were recruited to return from different countries in order to work for the local government or school. Said one such man, Tomislav, ‘If I had not had had this work, I would not have returned to Kupres.’

For the elderly, the choice to return was often anything but pragmatic. Bratko, a 76-year-old Serb man who rebuilt his home after war for the second time in his life at age 70, said 'I was born here. My house is here, my land is here, my municipality is here, my people are here. My family has lived in Kupres for more than 500 years. Nowhere else is prettier, to me at least, than here.'

For the most part, the return to Kupres was an individual process, as was the subsequent reconstruction. Families returned as single units, rather than in groups of 10 or 12 families as returnees in many other parts of the country did. In addition, in part due to the pre-war prosperity and in part due to the fact that many Kuprešarki spent the war years abroad, most returnees reconstructed their homes with little if any assistance from the government or international organizations. Said Jana, 'We did not get help from international organizations; people financed reconstruction 90% themselves.'

What little international assistance has arrived in Kupres has focused largely on assisting individuals. Organizations such as UMCOR have worked to help returnees and to implement micro-credit programs for the most impoverished of Kupres' citizens, but the vast majority of Kupres' citizens are too "well-off" to qualify for such assistance while remaining too poor to provide for their families as they once could. In addition, little assistance was available for collective efforts in Kupres prior to 2001.

**Only So Far**

‘Here and there people changed a bit after the war. Before they were ...(sigh)... nowadays, now people look a bit more for their own interest.’

-Vinko

Despite the distinctly individual experiences of the war and return among people from Kupres, many individuals’ views of post-war social relations in Kupres are almost exact echoes of one another. When asked how things are with his neighbors, Bratko replied, ‘He who was a neighbor, is still today a neighbor. We in Kupres, thank God, know each other. In the whole municipality, we know who belongs to which clan, from the great-grandfather on down.’

Sulejman had an almost identical perception of his neighbors and his relationships with them, despite the fact that he spent forty years before the war living and working abroad. He said, ‘He who was a neighbor before is still now. We do not have anything against anyone, we have neighborly greetings, we speak a bit.’

These echoes are unsurprising due to the fact that, as mentioned in the previous section, the people of Kupres did not divide amongst themselves along ethnic lines during the war. Certainly, trust was temporarily lost and relationships put on hold, but much of that has been restored in today’s Kupres.
In fact, it is somewhat artificial to separate views of Kupres by ethnicity as Serbs, Bosniaks and Croats tend to coexist in a single communal space rather than in ethnically constructed communal spaces within Kupres itself. Many of the villages remain ethnically homogenous; however, some village residents are actively involved in multiethnic activities in the municipality.

Jana, one of the leaders of the newly formed non-governmental organization Kupreški Visorovan, seemed a bit surprised to be asked if her organization was multi-ethnic or otherwise diverse. She responded, ‘Members of our association are older and younger, but most are middle-aged. Always, they love Kupres. We do not think about or keep track of ethnicity; that does not worry us.’

Indeed, the idea of tracking members by ethnicity does seem to run counter to the culture of Kupres, where many people seem to shrink away from defining the community in terms of ‘who is what.’ Said Muhammed, ‘Here in Kupres, the problems are big for everyone, without regard to nationality. Normally, the problems are bigger for Bosniaks and Serbs, but not by too much. It is normal that the problems for returnees are bigger, that is normal in Bosnia and Herzegovina.’

However, there are indeed other, more quiet and unexpected, divisions within Kupres’ community that do not follow ethnic lines. Chief among these is the distance that often exists between those who moved or relocated to Kupres following the war without living there in the immediate run-up to the war itself and those who have always called Kupres home. These include citizens who lived abroad or in other Bosnian-Herzegovinian cities during the final years of the former Yugoslav state.

One woman, who was born in Kupres but spent much of her time in another city in Bosnia and Herzegovina, remarked sadly on a sense of loneliness that she has felt since resettling Kupres in 1997, two years after most Croats currently residing in Kupres returned there. She said, ‘I didn’t live here before; I don’t have too much contact with my neighbors now. I have contact with (a leader of Kupreški Visorovan), but for now I don’t have much beyond that.’

This difference between those who lived their whole lives in Kupres and those who have called other places both within and outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina home is not felt only by those who moved or resettled in Kupres later in their lives. According to one man, who, except for the time period during which he left Kupres due to the war, has always called Kupres home, ‘I think about 70 percent of the others who came (after the war), just came here. The live, they work, nothing more.’

This perception is not, however, entirely accurate as many of Kupres’ newest residents and those who resettled in Kupres only after living many years before the war in another location are active members and even leaders of some of the community organizations emerging in Kupres today. However, residents returning to Kupres who did not live there during the immediate time period before the war have confronted additional problems in seeking assistance restarting their lives in Kupres. Said one woman, ‘I looked for help from UMCOR and others. I have land from my father here but nothing else. But since I did not return to where I was before the war, I could not get any help.’

In addition to themselves feeling an inadequate sense of belonging and limited access to what assistance there has been in the municipality of Kupres, many of those who resided outside of Kupres and especially outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina are perceived as having ‘escaped’ the war by those who remained in Kupres or in BiH. In addition, those who were abroad often have access to more material resources than those who have no experience living or working abroad.
Vinko, who spent two years in Livno during the war and then returned to Kupres, said ‘There are problems, you know. These people who were there during the war, those who fought the war were here the whole time. From the first day of the war to the last day, until the freedom of Kupres was restored some did not return. But someone was in Germany. You don’t have money, you don’t have work, and he has everything. Where was he when I was in the war, you know?’

Vinko’s sense of the unfairness of economic disparity within Kupres is widespread among Kupres’ economic ‘middle-class.’ While Kupres’ citizens, many of them personally battling the difficulties that come with chronic unemployment and the sheer cost of restarting a life after war, may not be considered ‘middle-class’ by global economic standards, within the city itself there is clear economic disparity. There are individuals and families with access to sufficient income through either businesses or cash influx from abroad, in addition to individuals just getting by on small salaries and influx from tourism as well as those trying desperately to make ends meet on pension alone or nothing at all. The middle class and the most impoverished individuals were most likely to identify economic differences as a source of problems within the community, while the wealthier community members often felt that the economic differences were somehow natural or normal.

This economic tension is often traceable to a sense that many of the wealthiest citizens in Kupres gained their wealth during the war and its immediate aftermath—just when most Kuprešarki were losing all that they owned. Said one woman, ‘People who used to be rich are poor; they have nothing now. Everyone has it hard, some have it even worse than I do. Others got rich on account of the war. The court does nothing about that.’

Certainly, not all the wealthier people in Kupres gained their wealth off the war, as there are also significant wealth differences based on people’s connections abroad in Croatia and Western Europe. However, regardless of the source of wealth, many in the middle class see these economic differences as barriers to trust. Said Vinko, ‘We only trust each other so far. A little bit more with common people, like this, who scrape by a living. But those who live well don’t see the majority.’

Another woman, Andelka, also traced a lack of trust to economic differences. ‘People do not trust (each other). That is for sure. That is unfortunate. There are people who trust, but the majority do not trust. It has only gotten worse with time.’ Asked why the level of trust in Kupres has decreased over time, she hesitated and sighed. ‘People are looking out for their own place, trying to produce more money.’
Scarcity and Competition

'I would work on anything to get 50 KMs, even on the black market. I am 26 years old and I do not have a year's worth of things.'

-Vinko

Part of this economically-based distrust comes from the fact that citizens of Kupres are each competing for a slice of a very small pie representing the total resources available to the community. As documented in "A Great Loss," pre-war Kupres was able to draw on various industries for economic survival and even success, whereas post-war Kupres has been largely reduced to drawing on tourism for its economic survival.

Interestingly, many people interviewed in Kupres share the memory that Kupres 'did not have tourism' before the war; however, both major hotels (Hotel Maestral which was then Hotel Kupres as well as Hotel Adria Ski) were in operation before the war as well. In all likelihood, tourism is not remembered as part of pre-war Kupres because it simply did not occupy the place of the core industry that it now does and was not, as it now is, the primary source of income for the community.

Because tourism is the primary source of income for the community, and ski tourists passing through or staying in Kupres are only looking for limited goods and services, tourism as the means of survival seems to be breeding a sense of competition between residents, many of whom offer private accommodations in their homes.

Since 2002, tourism has increased dramatically in Kupres, especially with respect to guests staying in private rooms. In January and February 2005 alone, 25,000 people through the city. Of those, approximately 8,000-9,000 stayed in Kupres. In comparison, about 500 people came through the city in 2002. Given the mountains, altitude, and beauty of the city of Kupres, in addition to its proximity to the Croatian coast and major Croatian cities, it is logical for Kupres to proceed down a path toward developing tourism as source of economic development. As Muhammed recognized, 'There is a big chance (for development) here through nature and tourism.'

However, relying on tourism alone as the municipal development strategy is risky given the industry's notorious fickleness. Winter tourism and skiing in particular are dependent upon both the economy in general and the weather and snowfall. Unfortunately, as yet, other options for employment and development in Kupres are scant. Citizens of Kupres most frequently identify unemployment as the most significant problem facing Kupres today. The lack of private enterprise is also usually referenced as a main barrier to future economic progress. While numerous cafes and hotels operate in Kupres, countless other private enterprises either never reopened after the war or have closed in recent years. Said Andelka, 'I worked as a florist for 3 years in Kupres, but I stopped because of the taxes. You have to pay twice because of the government system, it was just too much for me.'

Other people are interested in starting up a business of some kind but lack access to the kind of capital necessary to begin such an enterprise. Mirjana, herself employed but not making enough money to meet her own family's needs, responded to a question about what types of activities would

---

10 Information in this paragraph is based on an interview with the director or the Turistička Zajednica in Kupres.
be beneficial to Kupres by saying, '(Someone) should support some kind of private business, now there is nothing on which to live.'

A major obstacle to business start-ups in Kupres is the difficulty of obtaining credit for such activities. Many, and perhaps even most, of Kupres' citizens fall into the middle category where they are not considered poor enough to qualify for social assistance through micro-credit programs but are not wealthy enough to support a standard bank loan. According to an UMCOR worker based in Kupres, many people who approach UMCOR about credit from Kupres are not poor enough to receive assistance through UMCOR because the organization focuses on providing social assistance to those in the most desperate economic situations.

It is therefore unsurprising, given the absence of substantial opportunities, that most young people either leave Kupres or wish to do so. In a group of 12 high school students, who all plan to attend college, only one was certain that she wanted to return to Kupres after college. When asked if or when he might return to Kupres, another student chimed in, 'When I am eighty years old!' A third student offered an explanation, saying, 'I am not sure, really. Most of us do not know because we don't have (anything), we don't have work here for young people.'

Another young woman from Kupres, who at 22 is older than the group of teenagers referenced above, said 'Maybe I will come back (when I finish university in Croatia), if they give me work, if there is something built here. If I have good work, then for sure (I want to live here).'

Her words sound similar to the reasoning given by Anton in "Back to Our Own: Pragmatism and Nostalgia" for his return to Kupres a few years ago. However, Anton returned not because something had been built in Kupres but instead because he wanted to build something. Now, almost three years after his return to his home, his response to the question, 'Can you do anything to make life better here?' was hesitant. He let out a long sigh and then said, 'From the beginning, when I returned, I was a big optimist that something would be built. Now I am a big pessimist. But I am an optimist about tourism and the association (Kupreški Visorovan)—there I see a chance that it could be better. But if the entire society does not recognize this, not even from that will there be anything. That is very important. If the society does not invest in tourism this time there will be nothing from tourism, we will only return to the beginning.'

**Building Momentum**

*If something is to be organized, we must do it ourselves. We cannot rely on assistance, the Americans will not guard our monuments, our songs. Our culture is rich. But today, people do not believe in anything.*

-Mirjana

In the last year, 'society' has begun investing in tourism, just as Anton hoped, through local community-based organizations whose mission includes promoting the cultural and ecological heritage of Kupres as a both a local asset and a draw for tourists. In July 2004, the community association Kupreški Visorovan was officially registered at the state level as a non-governmental organization whose mission is to protect and promote Kupres' ecological and cultural monuments.

The association, Kupreški Visorovan, has approximately 40 members and is governed by a board consisting of 9 officers elected by the entire association. The current board was elected during the spring of 2004, before the organization was official registered, and expects the next elections to take
place during the spring of 2005. Members, except for students and the unemployed, pay an annual membership fee of 15 KM. Most members are residents of Kupres, however, a significant number of members are residing abroad in Croatia or Germany but have personal connections to the municipality.

Activities by the association have been impressive for just one year of work: Kupreški Visorovan took part in organizing a small 'competition' for the most beautiful home area in the municipality, promoted a 'Gardening Day' and, most notably, organized a petition drive to oppose the establishment of a quarry in Kupres municipality. Kupreški Visorovan gathered 1,000 signatures on this petition and succeeded in blocking plans for the quarry.

This petition effort gained publicity for Kupreški Visorovan among citizens and helped to build not only awareness of the organization but also confidence in it. When asked who would work to solve a problem confronting the whole community, Vinko, himself a member of Kupreški Visorovan, first said, 'I don't know,' and laughed quietly. He continued 'For the most part, with the way our situation is, we call (the president of Kupreški Visorovan) and the association for most of our problems. They did some work against the quarry, they blocked it. They have, or their association has, built the most as far as I know. The others cannot do that.'

The association has achieved this success through reaching out to other citizens of Kupres for assistance, including citizens who are not members of the association. One man is currently researching and writing a report about the timber industry and ecology for the association, though he is not himself a member thereof. When asked why he has volunteered to work in this fashion, he replied, 'I love Kupres!' He is not a member of the organization because, 'They did not look for me.' However, when asked by the Kupreški Visorovan leadership to compile this report, he 'agreed without a word,' according to the association's president.

The leadership of Kupreški Visorovan relies on the same love for Kupres in explaining their motivation to work for the association and to serve as members of its board. The board members have multiple ideas for future projects, including a map with information about the municipality's cultural and natural heritage sites, but lacks funding for such projects. Said one board member, 'We have (things) in our head but cannot realize them!'

Many of the members of Kupreški Visorovan's leadership are also low-level government officials within the municipality (either city council members or non-elected government employees). Said Jana, 'People from the government are members of our association, but we criticize (the government) when we do not think they are working well. The initiative is one year old, from the get-go we were a democracy with people from different political parties.'

However, this relationship with multiple government officials has yet to provide grounds for a productive relationship with the government as the association has not yet even approached the government for cooperation on individual projects. While the association's desire to preserve its independence is certainly an admirable and important consideration, it is also necessary to involve the municipal government in projects toward which it should, given its governance responsibilities, contribute.

Another non-governmental organization exists, though is inactive, in Kupres and its leader has provided an example of the potential for cooperation between the government and non-government organizations. The organization Kupli, founded in 1998, worked to help returnees in Bugojno,
Kupres and Blagaj writing projects to benefit people of all ethnicities and especially women. In one project, thirty returnee women were given cows. This organization worked in large part with the support from the Maltese Aid Agency, but its leader, Gordana, also worked independently in Kupres on ecological initiatives.

Gordana worked with students in the middle school from Kupres (mostly grades 7-8) on projects to clean up around the school and town, especially an island in the main intersection of the town. 317 says she worked on this project because, 'It was my love and wish.' She found financial support for the project through the mayor and some private businesses in Kupres.

'The mayor was very supportive of my ideas, he told me it was just that he had a small budget—if he had more he would have given more. That mayor was very supportive of my ideas, he helped as much as he could.' The municipality contributed 500 KM to the clean-up project while private firms and individuals contributed, all combined, another 400 KM. Gordana is confident that she could have found more and explained, 'We didn't look for more. We were satisfied.'

Gordana is now a member of Kupreški Visorovan and continues to offer her talents to help other community organizations in their initiatives—such as the Omladinski Klub (Youth organization) and its Mozaik-funded project to clean up and restore areas of the city park during 2004. The youth organization, registered as a non-governmental organization in 2001, provided an internet club, photography and journalism activities, English and German courses, and other workshops and activities for young people (aged approximately 17-27) in Kupres until its offices were robbed in May 2004. Following the robbery, the organization has not been able to acquire adequate funds in order to restart its work, though many community members site the absence of activities for young people as a major problem confronting the community (and often manifesting itself in drug and alcohol problems).

The Omladinski Klub was initially funded through the Maltese Aid Agency but did seek government funding for projects through the Kupres municipal government. 'We looked (for financial help from the government), but, unfortunately, without results,' said the Omladinski Klub's leader Ivica Lović, who was himself an unsuccessful mayoral candidate in October 2004. The youth organization did not require a membership fee or payment for any services, though Ivica believes he could raise to 1,500 KM from local citizen contributions. However, Ivica also admits that many Kupres citizens remained unaware of the group's activities despite publicity through the local radio station, newsletters, and pamphlets.

Part of the limited success of the youth organization, despite the fact that it provided meaningful and needed activities for youth, may have been the result of its status as an organization that was heavily dependent upon one man for its survival. The youth organization was governed by a 30-member council body and a 5 member board, with three individuals who functioned more or less as presidents of the body. While the leadership roles given to youth through this structure were an important component of the work, in repeated interviews it was clear that community members often conceived of the Omladinski Klub as a one-man project. Typically, when asked about the organization, interview subjects would respond, 'Oh yes, Ivica worked on that!' While Ivica is clearly a respected and well-liked community figure, the project never came to be seen as something more broad and significant than a single project for youth by a teacher in the local high school.
One of the problems that seems to plague collective efforts in Kupres and in other areas of BH is the fact that many similar organizations do not join together for activities that speak to both of their constituencies or organizational goals. In Kupres, there have been a few positive examples of individuals from various organizations helping one another to get started and find their way through the registration process for new organizations. Ivica helped the leadership of Kupreški Visorovan when they were drafting their statutes and registering the organization, and in turn the leadership of Kupreški Visorovan is currently assisting the leaders of a newly emerging organization called Humana.

Ivanka started Humana, initially as a mothers' group but now a more broad group of approximately 35 young women who come together to discuss and try to solve social problems in Kupres by assisting individuals in need of help—especially the elderly and the ill. Ivanka is not from Kupres, but clearly loves the town which she and her family now call home and started Humana because, 'We do not have any kind of help here, and there are many young people. I want something for all young people, we need something for a better future.'

Humana does not yet have concrete activities planned, 'We just had a meeting, we have plans but we need documentation. We need to register, we have to go to the court in Livno.' However, it has been decided that members will pay annual dues, as they are able to, and ideas for future activities include establishing help for the elderly and sick children, provide a response to social concerns in Kupres, and establish workshops for young people providing education about alcohol and drug abuse, sexuality, and AIDS.

While there is clear overlap between the planned work for Humana and the Youth Organization, the two have not yet begun considering working together in the future—especially for activities such as the workshops for young people. Across the board, the organizations in Kupres—though filled with ideas and plans—are hitting up against the logistical hurdles of finding adequate funding to realize their plans.

The Missing Link

'I have not looked for help from the government in any concrete way. Everyone thinks that that matters, but from (the government) there will not be anything.'
-Andelka

One key element of this stagnancy in Kupres is the failure to incorporate the government into activities as a civil society actor. While non-governmental organization's desire to remain independent from the government can be important, as documented above in the case of Kupreški Visorovan, in allowing NGOs to criticize the work of the government, when community-based organizations are completing activities that are in fact government responsibilities (such as maintaining the center of town or cleaning the local river), government contributions to such projects are a reasonable expectation. However, community leaders repeatedly dismissed such ideas in interviews by saying, 'the government's budget is small.'

While the mayor also emphasized that his budget is small, he expressed a willingness and desire to work with non-governmental organizations in the community. 'There are, relatively, enough NGOs that work in Kupres. We maintain contact with all NGOS and I always find time to meet with them and places where we can work together,' the mayor said. However, the NGO leaders cannot site an example of cooperation with the government in recent years for community activities—sometimes
because they do not seek such help and others because the government refused to contribute to activities. Even among NGO leaders there does not seem to be a consciousness that budgetary limits are not simply a matter of total funds available (which are themselves small), but also of allocation decision decisions. While it is important to note that police officers are funded through the Canton rather than the municipality, there are currently 28 police officers in Kupres. That means that there is approximately 1 police officer for every 13 people in the municipality.

One man, when asked about the role of the police and his trust in them, laughed and said, 'We all know who does drugs, who sells drugs, etc. The police know also, but do nothing.' This distrust of the police was not unique to just this man. In fact, most citizens interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with and distrust of the police and local government, and the group of high school students even cited politicians (along with drugs and unemployment) as one of the major problems in Kupres.

Voter turnout in Kupres is low, as it is throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 2004 municipal elections, there was a 48% turnout rate for the municipality (with about 50% turn out in the city itself), of which 51% of the votes went for the HDZ, the same political power that has been in power in Kupres since the end of the war. The majority of people interviewed did vote in the municipal elections, usually out of a desire to fulfill their civic obligation or to bring about change. However, Vinko's response was typical, 'Yes, I voted. But I don't see anything done of it. All the candidates run the same campaign, but that's how it is...'

Bratko shared a similar perspective, 'I voted, I thought that it could be better, that it might change.' His wife interjected, 'But it they didn't!' Bratko continued, 'The SDS, the SDA, the HDZ, all of them. We say that they are not worthwhile, we know that they are not worthwhile! But that's how it is...'

These perspectives are echoed in people's opinions about the functioning of the government. Slavica's view was common among many citizens, ‘People come here normally and live. We have multi-ethnic villages without any kind of problems. But now, the worst thing is the unemployment. In that way, the belief in a better future seems not to exist. Now maybe there will be some changes, I don’t know. This local government looks a little bit like it does not want that.’

Local government officials, however, offer a different view of their own desires and motivations. One city councilor, who does not belong to a political party and was involved in politics before the war as well, said that he ran for office because 'one will feel that there is a need for something at some point. We are different people, but when more thoughts are involved it is always better. That's why I ran for office.' When asked if he can do anything to make life better in his community, he responded, 'Yes, I ran for office.'

Another city councilor, Muhammed, said he became involved in politics because, 'That was one of the needs of the Bosniak returnees above all else here. They asked me to become involved in politics...’ Many elected officials in Kupres and elsewhere in Bosnia and Herzegovina respond to questions about their motivations for political life by saying, as Muhammed did, that their constituents and neighbors trust them in the position.

11 Approximately 94% of interviewed subjects indicated that they had voted in the municipal elections.
However, few citizens reported feeling that the government was a place to turn when they had major problems that confronted the community. Indeed, in Kupres and much of Bosnia and Herzegovina, citizens tend to dismiss the idea of soliciting assistance from government officials with a shrug and a laugh. Petrov's response to questions about talking to government officials was largely representative, 'That I would go there and wait half an hour to talk to someone? Uh-uh.'

Though some citizens, like Vinko, said that they would turn to the NGO sector to solve problems that confront all of Kupres, most laughed or shrugged when asked who would work to solve a collective problem. Tomislav laughed quietly and then explained, 'Here in Kupres, many things are not solved how they should be. There is such high unemployment, not enough international attention, and so on.'

Part of the problem seems to be that citizens do not have a clear channel through which to solve collective problems or to lobby the government, with the exception of the nascent NGO sector. The Mjesna Zajednica structure, which in many parts of BH continues to serve as a link between citizens and their municipal governments, is not currently functioning in Kupres and has not done so since the war. Before the war, there were 5 Mjesna Zajednica's in the municipality of Kupres and people cannot now agree on how many should exist and how they should be structured. Though many citizens expect Mjesna Zajednica's to return to Kupres, their reestablishment does not seem imminent.

In the absence of Mjesna Zajednicas and in this nascent phase of NGO development, the space between citizens and the government remains a gap to be bridged. This gap is physical—in the form of inadequate relationships—and, more dauntingly, cultural—in terms of what citizens expect and demand from their government. However, there is reason for hope, based on the changes achieved so far and the energy currently present in Kupres, that the newly emerging NGO sector in Kupres might begin to fill this gap in the near future.

(Building Something)

'The situation in Kupres has changed, in general from apathy and pessimism, now you feel with people optimism and hope. Overall, people feel that it can be different, when there is the question of development of the society, possibilities of employment, and so on.'
-Mayor of Kupres

Time and again, people from all elements of society in Kupres said that they were hoping and ready for change in their community. In many ways, Kupres answers the question, 'After the reconstruction is (nearly) done, what brings people together?' For citizens of Kupres, the answers are the things that people say they love most about Kupres: nature, ecology, and culture. Above all else, a sense of civic pride and a desire to help neighbors—despite the lack of trust that many identify as a lingering problem in Kupres—is bringing many people together to try to solve some of the problems facing their community. Unfortunately, it took a sense of building frustration to bring people together: years after giving up on international assistance or government activities, citizens of Kupres began coming together to try to bring about change themselves.

However, despite the individual efforts between leaders to assist one another documented in "Building Momentum: Kupres' Nascent NGO Sector," the many organizations sprouting up in Kupres have not recognized formal opportunities to work together. While each of the organizations has distinct goals, there are enough similarities between their activities to provide common ground
for a coalition for future projects. The leaders of the organizations do not seem to have an effective mechanism for communicating amongst themselves about their activities nor do they have a tradition established of seeking partnership for initiatives—such as anti-drug workshops—that multiple organizations have identified as future goals.

However, an individual sense of solidarity among citizens in Kupres is relatively common, and many individuals recognize the need to come together with others in order to move the community forward. When asked if he could do anything to make life in his community better, Andelka responded, 'I want there to be change in this city, but for the better—so that it might be better in Kupres, not just for myself.' Most people interviewed responded in a similar fashion to this question, with many immediately changing to speaking in the collective sense, saying that 'we' can make change, rather than answering the question in the individual, first-person singular sense that they had been asked. For many, even in the collective sense, the answer tended to express a belief that change is possible, but this belief was often couched in uncertainty.

Some residents, however, are fully convinced that life not only might be better in Kupres, but that they in fact have a chance to make it better. One thing that sets Kupres apart from many other communities is the fact that so many residents in Kupres believe that, when working with others, they are in fact in a position to make life in their community better. Said Sulejman, 'I think that we can (make it better here). Time passes, life has remained without consideration of the catastrophe that happened here in our area...Every year it can and must be better.'

This conviction that Kupres can and must be better comes in part from a strong sense of collective identity, from the belief that being from Kupres somehow sets individuals apart and unites them. Frequently, when discussing any significance or meaning associated with being from Kupres, people replied that Kuprešarki are somehow different from other Bosnian-Herzegovinians due to their ability to survive difficult winters and life at such a high altitude. Yet in these conversations, most of them had in the dead of a winter many called 'the worst since 1966,' a certain love of Kupres came through most of the interviewees' answers. When asked if there was any meaning to being from Kupres, Branimir articulated a common sentiment when he replied, '(Kupres) is in my heart. I was born here. I think that there is nowhere better.'

More frequent still than this response was the constant repetition of the phrase, 'I am not a pessimist.' In the midst of telling their stories of trial and challenge—during the war, due to unemployment, in trying to organize citizens, in working with the local government—people repeatedly stopped their story-telling to reassure listeners, and perhaps themselves, that they still believed that things could and must be better. Despite all the challenges that have yet to be overcome—and that stand demanding some type of resolution in the near future—citizens of Kupres can be heard repeating the words:

*I am not a pessimist.*
Appendix I:
Community Member Interview

I am going to begin asking some questions about you, your family, and your home.

1. How old are you? Where were you born?
2. Did you ever go to school?
3. Do you have a job? Have you ever had a job?
4. How many people live in this house? Who are they? (age, relation to interviewee)
5. How long have you lived in this house? Who built this house? Does this house have electricity, gas and/or water?
6. When did you move to ________________? Where did you go during the war? Before the war, had you always lived in ________________?
7. Why did you return to ________________?
8. Do you have any family members that do not live in ________? Where do they live? How often do they visit ___________?
9. How does your family make its living? How did your family make its living before the war?
10. Would you say that it has been extremely difficult/difficult/or not difficult to support your needs and the needs of your family in the past year?
11. How is the situation with your neighbors now?
12. How often do you see your neighbors? Do you think of them as friends? Do you ever help each other? Can you give me an example?
13. Before the war, how often did you see your neighbors? Did you think of them as friends? Did you help each other? Can you give me any examples?

Now I am going to ask you some questions about life in your community. When I say your community I mean ______________-- (drawing on definition of community agreed upon during the focus group exercises during Week I.)

14. Have you ever worked with others to build a road, a school, a health center, or a water system?
15. If there were a problem that affected the entire community, for example lack of water or electricity, who do you think would work together to solve it? Who do you think would be first to start this work? Where do you think money and materials would come from?
16. Suppose someone in this community had something unfortunate happen to them, such as a death in the family or a money problem. Who do you think that they could turn to for help?
17. Where do you go when you need help? Where do you go for advice?
18. Suppose two people in this community had a fairly serious problem with each other. Who do you think would resolve that problem?
19. Do you think there are differences between the people living in __________? What are they?

As needed, probe with the following:

Differences in education
Differences in wealth/material possessions
Differences between men and women
Differences between younger and older generations
Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers
Differences in religious beliefs
Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

20. Do you think people in this community trust each other?
21. Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?
22. What is a problem facing __________ now? Have you tried to solve it? How/Why not?
23. Do you think that you are able to do things to make this community a better place to live? What can you do?
24. What 3 words come to mind when you think about __________?
25. Does it mean anything special to live in ____________?
26. Does it mean anything special to be from _______________?
Appendix II:
Informal Community Leader Interview

I am going to begin with a few questions about you and your family.

How old are you? Where were you born?
Did you ever go to school?
Do you have a job? Have you ever had a job?
When did you move to ________________? Where did you live during the war? Before the war, had you always lived in ________________?
Why did you return to ________________? Who do you live with in ________________ now? Who did you live with in ________________ before the war?
Do you have any family members that do not live in ________________? Where do they live?
How often do they visit ________________?
How does your family make its living? How did your family make its living before the war?
Would you say that it has been extremely difficult/difficult/or not difficult to support your needs and the needs of your family in the past year?

Now I am going to ask you some questions about activities in this community.

Do you consider yourself a main person (jedan od glavnih) in your community? How did you become a main person here?
Do others in the community see you as a main person?
Do you organize community activities? Can you tell me about the most recent one?
Do you have any activities planned for the next month? The next six months? The next year?
Who do you organize these activities with? Who participates in them? How do you spread information about activities within your community?
Have you worked with any associations (udruženja) or NGOs on any projects? Have you received funding from any associations or NGOs? Which ones and for what?
Have you approached the government for any kind of assistance? Can you tell me about how they responded to you?
Have you tried to get other community members to organize activities or help out with activities? Have you been successful? Can you tell me why?
Do you feel like you are able to change your community?

Now I am going to ask you a few questions about ________________.
What is the biggest problem facing ________________? Are you trying to do anything to solve that? Why or why not?
Do you think there are differences between the people living in _________? What are they?

*As needed, probe with the following:*
  - Differences in education
  - Differences in wealth/material possessions
  - Differences between men and women
  - Differences between younger and older generations
  - Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers
  - Differences in religious beliefs
  - Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

  Do you think people in this community trust each other?
  Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?
  What three words do you think of first when I say ______________?
  Doe is it mean anything special to be from ______________?
I am going to ask some questions about your organization.
How was your organization created?
What kinds of activities has it been involved in?
What is the main purpose of your organization today? Has this changed over time?
How do you distribute information about activities?
Do you have any activities planned in ___________ during the next month? Six months? Year?
Has your organization ever asked anything of the government? (How did they respond?)
Which level(s) of government have you been involved with? Has a government official ever asked your organization to do something? (What did he/she ask of you? How did you respond?)

Now I am going to ask you some questions about ____________.
What is the biggest problem facing ____________? Are you trying to do anything to solve that? Why or why not?
Do you think there are differences between the people living in ____________? What are they?

As needed, probe with the following:
Differences in education
Differences in wealth/material possessions
Differences between men and women
Differences between younger and older generations
Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers
Differences in religious beliefs
Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

Do you think people in this community trust each other?
Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?
Is Kupres different from other communities that you work in? How?
What three words do you think of first when I say ____________?