



PUBLIC SPACES THAT CONNECT CITIZENS IN MOSTAR, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

BACKGROUND

Mostar is considered to be the quintessential example of a deeply **divided local community**. The exclusive nationalist narratives continue to overwhelm alternative narratives and identities in Mostar. Underneath the surface, space for challenging these dominant narratives is opening, especially after the 2020 elections. **For the first time in 12 years**, political parties in Mostar were able to formally contest the stranglehold on power of the two nationalist parties controlling the city.

Outside of the formal political sphere, grassroots, issue-based politics related to problems such as waste disposal and illegal construction – have also started to gain a foothold. A continually and gradually improving security situation has allowed citizens to increasingly cross the imaginary boundary between East and West. Citizens are increasingly exploring potentially **shared spaces such as parks and pedestrian zones** or conducting matters of everyday life such as shopping, or even attending some cultural events, such as musical performances from across the region and regional literary festivals.

While there is an opportunity to exploit this current political and societal opening, the disconnect between local governance structures and citizens prevails, as do ethnic divisions and apathy among Mostar's citizens, even in the wake of the elections.

QUICK FACTS



Post war division
of the city has made it a symbol of the region's wider challenges



Until 2020, the city went **12 years** without local elections



Poor public services and a high percentage of brain drain



Citizens lost **faith** in local democracy



PIN AND THE BRITISH EMBASSY'S APPROACH

The "Mostar - Spaces to Activate and Rejuvenate" project has ushered in a fresh perspective for Mostar's residents. Led by People in Need in collaboration with partners Everyday Peace Indicators, OKC Abrašević, Agency of Local Democracy Mostar, and NEŠTO VIŠE, this locally-driven initiative empowers citizens to shift the public narrative. Instead of one entrenched in ethnic divisions, it encourages a celebration of shared social, cultural, and economic life. The project is working closely with the City of Mostar to achieve its intended outcomes.

Thanks to the generous support of **the Government of the United Kingdom**, since 2022, we've provided substantial assistance for the adaptation and renovation of 12 public and cultural institutions, with funds exceeding 500,000 GBP.

Additionally, we're actively aiding ten local organizations focused on civil society issues, partnering with public administration counterparts to provide grants totaling nearly 110,000 GBP by the end of 2023. These grants empower these organizations to implement projects that significantly enhance citizens' quality of life.

In 2023, we proudly introduced the "City for All" grant scheme, offering individuals, schools, informal citizen groups, and NGOs funding exceeding 175,000 GBP to bring their creative projects to life in community and public spaces.

Furthermore, our project has effectively revitalized various outdoor public spaces, including the installation of public lighting in the picturesque Trimuša park-forest, a project valued at 70,000 GBP.

We've also invested in the revitalization of parks Zrinjevac, Avenija, and Vrba. The largest investment in the project will be directed towards the cherished Mostar picnic area, Buna-Bunica, and the recreation zone Plaža ploča. Additionally, we've proudly gifted the City of Mostar and its citizens a modular stage, an impressive investment exceeding 30,000 GBP.

In collaboration with local partners and with the participation of over 32 grantees, we've organized more than 180 innovative activities and events, continuing our mobilization efforts in the City.

"We finally have activities that will enable mothers to socialize but also raise awareness about the importance of psychophysical health because mothers are the ones who invest the most effort and care in raising children with disabilities."

Matea Kegelj, Project Coordinator from the Association "Vedri osmijeh".

WHAT STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE

- Enhancing the revitalization of public spaces that hold significance for citizens while introducing sustainable and energy-efficient solutions in the region.
- Reinforcing collaboration with civil society organizations and fostering inter-organizational cooperation by allocating additional funds to support the realization of their small-scale project ideas and promote sustainability.
- Describing key points in transitional process of divided communities that could be replicated.
- Collaborating with civil society organizations to advocate for improvements across various aspects of citizens' quality of life.
- Elevating the responsiveness of city administration in addressing issues raised by both civil society organizations and the citizens themselves.