

# RETHINKING POST-CONFLICT MEMORY

## SARAJEVO, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA Mobility Semester 2021

### ABSTRACT

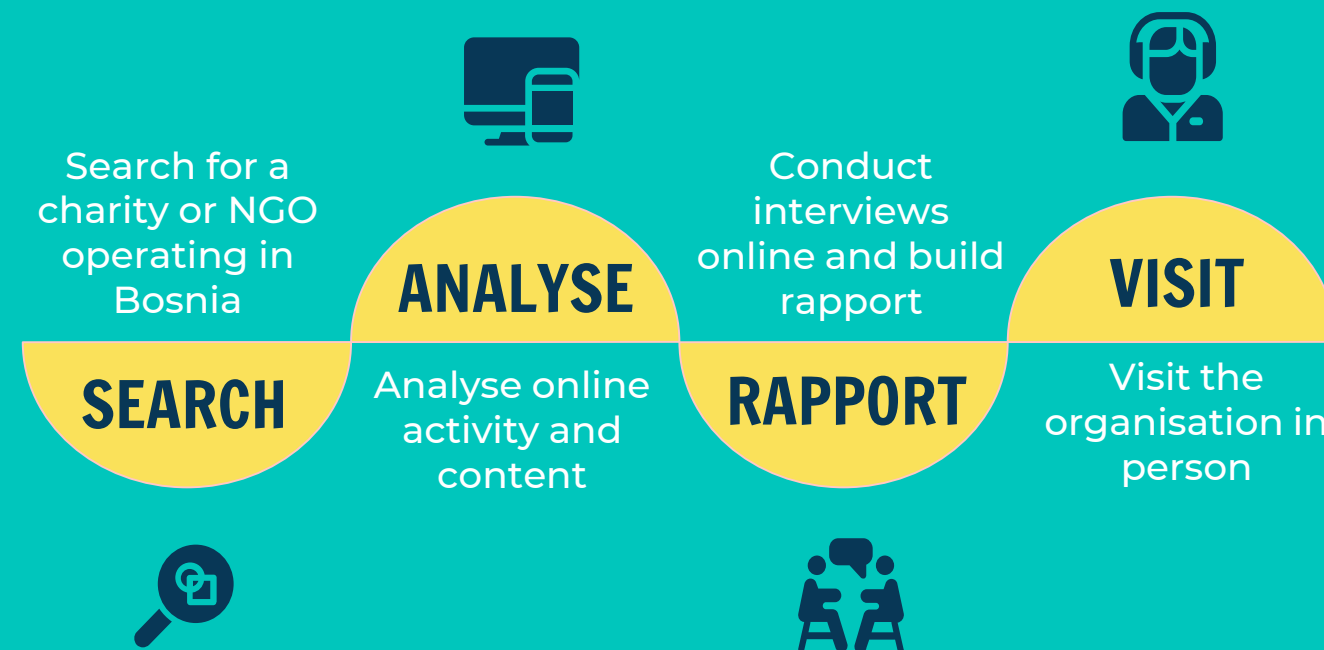
Warzone tourism has been shown to reinforce narratives produced by the victors, erasing the possibility of alternative conceptions (Perera, 2016). The Bosnian war ended through a ceasefire arrangement mediated by international actors on neutral soil in Dayton, Ohio in 1995 that while sanctioning peace, resulted in a fragmented sovereign state. In this study, I analyse how the vestiges of war are presented and interpreted through tourism in a nation that is divided by ethnic, spatial, and political confines.

### WAR CHILDHOOD MUSEUM

The focus of this research is the War Childhood Museum (WCM) in Sarajevo, which won the European Museum of the Year Award in 2018 for its innovative approach that is sensitive to local needs but appeals to an international audience (O'Neill et al., 2020). The primary objective of the museum is to collect and present testimonies of childhood during armed conflict. The permanent exhibition displays short stories and objects, such as toys and photographs that were donated to the museum. The stories and objects were chosen by participants to represent their experience and memory of war childhood. The permanent exhibition offers a nuanced and varied account of what life was like during wartime, and creates a platform for diverse voices.

### METHODOLOGY

- Newspaper articles, news video clips, Al Jazeera Documentary, WCM website and social media profiles (WCM, 2021).
- Online conference "Architecture. Sculpture. Memory." about the preservation of Former-Yugoslavian memorials (Architectuur, 2020).
- Formal semi-structured interviews with two WCM members of staff.



- Participant observation in WCM temporary and permanent exhibitions as well as visits to various other tourist attractions in Sarajevo.
- Formal semi-structured interview with Lead Educator at the WCM.
- Participant observation with tourists in Sarajevo.
- Informal interview with the organisers of "Više od Manjine" (More than a Minority) temporary exhibition.

### FINDINGS AND OBSERVATION

Perhaps because "nationalist parties and media continue to dominate public discourse" (Sivac-Bryant, 2008 p. 107) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the WCM strives to create a platform for diverse voices whilst steering away from nationalist politics. Visitors to the museum learn about the experiences of children during armed conflict, without being confronted with the causes or outcomes of war outside of the experiences of childhood. The curators hope that in exhibiting participant's stories of war childhood, this memorialisation project provides a safe space for dialogue and collective healing. The narrative(s) present in the museum are the culmination of a collaborative process, in which participants have as much say as curators in what is displayed.

### REFLECTION

Building rapport online was much more challenging than expected and as much as online tools such as email and Zoom enabled me to connect with interlocutors, I felt that the lack of eye contact and physical presence created barriers. My Bosnian diasporan positionality, whilst affording me the status of "insider" in both local and tourist contexts, sat uneasily with interlocutors since this blurry in-between identity is not easy to decipher. Moreover, the degree to which I am perceived as a local or tourist depends in large part on who I am "seen" with and under which circumstances.

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