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# **Sport and Peace Building in Post-conflict Societies: The role of Open Fun Football Schools in Kosovo**

**by**

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## Abstract

The use of sports for purposes of development has been increasingly important topic particularly in post-conflict societies. However, there is a gap in the literature on how the sport can be used more productively as a peace building device in post conflict countries. This is because there is non-agreement in the literature on the role of sports in peace building. First, sport was viewed as mechanism to increase antagonism between rivalry groups and may reinforce division of ethnicities and second the sport could facilitate social inclusion and integration.

This thesis uses qualitative research techniques mainly in-depth interviews with trainers, instructors and children in order to investigate how football sport in Kosovo contributed to peace building. In addition, the reflective practice technique was used because the author of the thesis has been involved in implementing Open Fan Football Schools (OFFS) in Kosovo. Based on findings the thesis argues that OFFS has played a vital role in peace building in Kosovo by bringing together and integrating different ethnicities in Kosovo. Findings also suggest that OFFS offer a hope for peace building and if adequately implemented can contribute to peace building in post-conflict societies similar to Kosovo. The study urges the need for more proactive policies and donor support to fund similar sport activities in order to promote peace building.

Keywords: football, peace building, gender, post conflict countries, multi ethnicity.

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## 1. Introduction

The use of sports for purposes of development has been increasingly important topic particularly in post-conflict societies. The research on role of sports and particularly football in building peace is becoming even more important for sport organizations, donors as well as policy makers in variety of countries in the world. However, the empirical findings in this regard are not conclusive as in some situations in some countries football contributes to social harmony while in some others it feeds conflict (Gasser and Levinsen, 2004; Giulianotti, 2011). This is because there is non-agreement in the literature on the role of sports in peace building. First, sport was viewed as mechanism to increase antagonism between rivalry groups and may reinforce division if not properly controlled (Majaro-Majesty,2011)of ethnicities and second the sport could facilitate social inclusion and integration (Gasser and Levinsen, 2004). In particular, there is a gap in the literature on how the sport can be used more productively as a peace building device in post conflict countries.

In line with this research further evidence is needed to shed more light on the contribution of sport in relaxation of social tension, building bridges between divided communities in post conflict countries. This line of research is important as there is an increasing role of governments, international organizations in providing funds and support to design and implement football programs aimed at fostering peace between nations. These stakeholders are interested in new evidence to search what have worked in such programs in different parts of the world (Dyck,2011). In the case of football in Kosovo there is no research or no knowledge about this field. Still there is a lack of systematic studies in the field of football or is difficult to find any research connected to the football at all.

Therefore aim of this study is to contribute in reducing this deficit in our knowledge by providing evidence from the most post conflict society of Kosovo. It offers new research insights on the role of OFFS, to create a better knowledge on how OFFS influenced peace building the context of Kosovo.

Drawing on gender based perspective and theory of institutions and peace building the study uses qualitative research techniques mainly in-depth interviews with trainers, instructors and children in order to investigate how Open Fan Football Schools (OFFS) in Kosovo contributed to peace building through integration of different ethnicities that were in the conflict as well as gender. Thesis also uses official statistical data of OFFS to complement the qualitative interviews.

The reminder of the thesis is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses literature review and previous studies in the area of sport and peace building. Section 3 explains methodology used in the study. Section 4 presents results based on empirical evidence from statistical analysis and qualitative interviews. Section 5 discusses results. Section 6 provides some conclusions, recommendations and implications for future use of sport programs in building peace.

## 2. Background and Literature review

### 2.1. Theoretical perspective

Using sport for advancing the peace is not something very new. Based on first documents that offer information on using sport to mediate conflict dates back to 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC, in ancient Greece used for stopping the truce of Olympian Games and also stop the Peloponnesian war between the city states (International Olympic Committee,2009).<sup>1</sup> Also in recent times, sports long been used by countries in an attempt to foster development. For example countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cote D'Ivoire use football as the few successful vehicles when it comes to driving some form of integrative unity (Levermore, 2008).

Despite its importance the role of sport in post conflict context has been a neglected area of research. In particular, the peace building literature has not yet addressed the central question whether sport has a role in order to build peace within societies, emerging from conflict or war. Literature suggests that few programs have been monitored or evaluated for their effects in peace building(Dyck,2011). As a result, there is a non-agreement in the literature on the role of sports in peace building. First, sport was viewed as mechanism to increase antagonism between rivalry groups, pandering to stereotypes and may reinforce division of ethnicities by feeding conflict(see, for instance, Laity, 2006). Second, the success in sporting competitions has helped portray developing nations in a more positive light facilitating facilitate social inclusion and unifying disparate groups (Levermore, 2004).

Sugden (2006) in his study on Palestine and Israel concluded that sports project that are grounded locally and managed professionally can make modest contribution to promote conflict

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<sup>1</sup> The thesis used following definition of the Kvalsund (2007, p.2). "War and conflict can be defined as contest between groups of people based on perceived opponent needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals"

revolution and peace- building. More recently Dyck (2011) in his study in Sierra- Leone provide supporting evidence that sport programs promote reintegration, rehabilitation, training and education. In addition he argues that regiments added variation and promoted cooperation.

Using sport for peace building is also a social strategy for development and social inclusion of females that makes use of the games and sport simultaneously. The aim of using sport among others to gather all members of ethnicities in society is also to promote leisure activities. Another aspect of sport programs is gender aspect and social inclusion. Sport activities are very important and they have an impact to the society including gender equality, peace building in conflict countries (Sport For Peace International Working Group, 2008). Games, physical activities and also sports are common and present in all societies in the World. Therefore, sports and his popularity exceed many times the ideological and also the borders, and is also the most enjoyable by spectators, supporters and also from the participants on it (SDP International Working Group, 2008). As such it can contribute to relax social tension and social inclusion.

The sportsability to connect people is very strong. It is very effective tool in order to connect people and communities. Gasser and Levinsen (2004) offer evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina showing that capacity of sports (football) to encourage people for social network between the communities that they were in conflicts is very high. They argue that using grassroots football program they brought together thousands of children from different ethnicities only to play football together. Similarly, Keim (2003) finds that sport can contribute also in post –apartheid era for building the peace in both, South Africa and Northern Ireland conflict.



In this thesis a gender perspective will be used in order to explain differences between boy's/men's and girl's/women's involvement in the OFFS. Gender is one of the most important aspects in our region because of our previous tradition and also lack of female where engage in football. Ethnicity is another theoretical concept used in this essay. Male youth in post- conflict societies are seen as a main beneficiaries, while female in contrast have been perceived from males as spectators.

## **2.2. History of Football in Kosovo**

Based on the archive and also booklet of Football Federation of Kosova (FFK, 2006) still we don't have an exact year where the first football game played in Kosovo. According to the key person who has established FFK, football in Kosovo came from the Austro-Hungarian military teams in 1914. The first team in Kosova founded in 1922. After, there were more teams founded. These teams started to found in bigger cities and they played or competed between themselves in friendly matches. This continued until the Second World War and stopped until 1945.

After the World War II, the first football championship in former Yugoslavia (YU) started; as Kosova was part of former Yugoslavia at the time and therefore teams were incorporate in the league. The first Kosova Football Federation was founded in 1946. In the same year they were found all federations of all states of former Yugoslavia, all of them created the Football Federation of Yugoslavia. Kosovo's best teams Trepça and Pristina become part of this league too. Also during '80s Kosova had a female team in the First league of Yugoslavia. This team was Pristina.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia has started during 90s and resulted in war between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This situation has had a big impact in Kosova sociopolitical situation which had consequences in sports too. During 90s former Yugoslav republics were separated and with them also football federations of these countries. In the beginning of 90s Kosova announced its own independence (not internationally recognized at the time) which influenced the development of independent sport and football in Kosova. During this time the sport and football in Kosova has been developed under occupation and difficult conditions, within so-called Parallel System of Kosova. During that time more than 150,000 employees from socially owned enterprises and state administration has been dismissed from their jobs in. Also, teachers, pupils, medical doctors, policemen as were dismissed from their school and hospitals for ethnically motivated reasons. Athletes were not an exception, too. They were dismissed from their jobs from stadiums from the Serbian authorities.

During this occupation period, Kosovan football players continued to play in open fields adopted for the games. This beginning 1991 marked the basement of a something very important in order to keep alive football game and its spirit and human recourses according to the UEFA and FIFA standards excluding the infrastructure (stadiums) which were at the minimum. During this period the FFK organized independent competition for the young group ages and also for the adults. Because of extremely difficult political situation the female football stopped operating. Unfortunately, the high potential of young talents and potentially successful players for the future were as a hostage of Serbian politics. In the period 1997-98, and 1998-1999 the football league was stopped because of war in Kosova. Unfortunately during this period we lost a lot of football players, coaches, referees, club leaders who were beaten, massacred, killed. This has had consequences in building the football league.

In 1999 the NATO and KLA (Kosova Liberation Army) liberated Kosova from Serbia. Because of a decade of occupation and the war the quality standards were very low. In June 1999, freedom of Kosova brought us not only freedom but also the freedom of playing, quality in football, increasing the number of players and clubs also increasing both genders in football. Also the female football league started to regain its momentum and also with the first female referee. This period marked the beginning of gender quality in football, leading to the first female league in Kosova 2010.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2000, the FFK worked on the way how to engage other ethnic communities to be part of competitions including Serbian community. In the Football Kosova league we have a variety of football teams in terms of ethnicities, but still there is no Serbian team in Kosova League. In February 2013 FIFA approved Kosova's request to play friendly matches but without national symbols (national anthem, flag, etc).

### **2.3. Open Fun Football Schools (OFFS)**

OFFS Programme was first initiated by Anders Levinsen, who also founded the non-governmental organization called Cross Culture Project Association (Gasser&Levinsen,2006:461).The OFFS first schools started for the first time after the war 1998 in Bosnia and Herzegovina where was the war between Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia. After that the OFFS has become more popular than was initially thought, it was widespread in other post-conflict regions and states and also in countries with low socio-economic development and with multiethnic populations such as Balkans, Trans Caucasus, Central&EastEurope,Mena(MiddleEast&North Africa),Gulf(Arab states), Central Asia. It has

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<sup>2</sup> The author of this thesis had experience in referring the game since 2000, in all categories of competitions of male football until super league.

been organized in many countries in Balkans such as Bosnia & Herzegovina (1998-), FYR Macedonia (2001-), Serbia (2001-), Croatia (2003-), Kosovo (2005-) and Montenegro (2001-2009),

Open Fun Football Schools in Kosovo are organized from CCPA-OFFS from 2005, Team Clubs, and Municipalities. OFFS are organized in the summer time when children are not in school. The OFFS schools are five day of grassroots program. The OFFS are organized in many regions of Kosovo, usually they are organized in the area where we have many of the ethnicity groups. In Kosovo, we have different ethnicities (Bosnian, Serbs, Montenegrins, Roma, and Turkish). Every school in Kosovo is multiethnic school in which they enrolled more than 200 children. The school has a leader and leader of trainers. In OFFS, children get the joy of playing, knowing and for first time meeting the different children from the different ethnicities. They became part of OFFS community of football. The field of OFFS are separated in twelve part, in each field is one trainer and one assisted with the group of sixteen children or more. They enjoy playing different game: different passes and drills.

All the time children at schools listen to music. Also the children get food and drinks during the OFFS. The OFFS schools gathers children from the different ethnicities, groups, gender, age or religion, children with different skills and abilities. They play together in the same field and teams. All the children are accepted. Also in the schools we have twelve coaches and also 12 assistants. All of them (ladders, coaches and assistant coaches are from different ethnicities). Also in the schools are engaged the parents, some are sponsors and some joint schools only to enjoy time with their and other children.

### 3. Methodology

This thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to address research questions.

**Quantitative method** is used based on official data official OFFS in Kosovo. OFFS statistics have information about the ethnic background of the involved leaders, trainers and children for 2012-2013. The OFFS data provides also socioeconomic background the professional background of the leaders, including their knowledge, education and working experience with children in schools and team clubs. The total number of children that were part of active teams in OFFS is 662 for 2012 and 2013. For the rest of children, 2689 (2012-2013) both male and female, the OFFS was their first experience in sport program - OFFS. Other statistical cross tabulations were conducted to show the share of particular group of children in OFFS. From the official statistics of OFFS in Kosovo, the children who joined the OFFS schools were from different social backgrounds such as social class (34, 1%), internally displaced families (5,6%), returned families (3,0%)refugee families (2.9%), children with special needs (0.8%), orphans (19,6%).

#### ***Qualitative method: Mixed between semi-structured unstructured interviews***

We use qualitative method of the collection of qualitative data that is the way ‘why’ and ‘how’ a phenomenon is constructed from the perspective of the respondent (Gratton and Jones, 2010). According to them, this interviewing is adequate method when the concept is inappropriate or difficult to measure. In the context of the thesis, we have to investigate the impact of OFFS in peace building which is very difficult to measure. The interviewing method used in this thesis is mixed between semi- structured and unstructured interviews and explores questions of ‘why’ and

'how' the OFFS contributed to peace building leaving respondents with much freedom in terms of their answers. Moreover, the research in this area is not very well established and therefore interviews can provide information that could be used to refine and develop further investigation making this approach more exploratory in nature (Veal, 2006; Gasser and Levinsen, 2004).

The author of the thesis had a general idea about the topics covered in interviewing and left respondent to take a lead the direction of interview. During the interview further questions were posed for respondents by interviewer as interview progressed. This allowed the respondent to provide information based on his/her personal experience and develop discussion into the areas that were important for them (see, Gratton and Jones, 2010). Because of the unstructured approach of interviewing as well as inclusion of children respondents to our interviews, the questions were open and adoptable to the interviewer background and their age. Special attention has been paid to interview children by using an informal, friendly interview which seemed to work best (Homes, 1998).

### ***The sample of mixed semi- structured unstructured interviews***

A qualitative sampling method has been applied in order to gather as much information from our semi- structured and unstructured interviews. Because of the nature of the investigation which involves leaders, trainers and children as well as different ethnicities and different gender .the sample consisted of 2 leaders, 3 trainers and 3 children. In order to ensure representativity 1 leader was Albanian and 1 was Serbian. Also, out of three children 1 is Albanian, 1 Serbian and 1 Roma. Also, 2 trainers were female and 1 male. All three types of interviewees were familiar with topics for interview which made interviewing answers where simple, short and easy and

understand and apply. The interviews were 30-45 minutes long and were recorded by the interviewer.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Location of the OFFS

In this first section presents the geographical location of the OFFS in Kosovo (Figure 1). The location of the OFFS is interesting because the OFFS schools are located in the regions that with different ethnicities. Here is shown the map and also the tables from the regions covered by OFFS.



*Figure 1. Ethnic breakdown of Kosovo*

## 4.2. Statistical analysis

This section provides overview of official statistical data produced by OFFS representative in Kosovo. Data presented in the Table 1 demonstrates that OFFS in Kosovo were located to Pristine, Peja, Prizreni, Decan, Mitrovica, Gracanica, Leposavic, Uglare. These areas covered in OFFS are usually largest municipalities in Kosovo. Particular consideration has been given to include also all ethnicities and therefore included municipalities such as Prizren which included Turkish ethnicity, Mitrovica with Bosnjak and Serbian ethnicity, in Gracanica Serbian community taken is close to the capital Pristina. There are several reasons for this location. One reason is that is in a Municipality with majority of the population is Serbian, children from Gracanica never met before other ethnicities so this was an opportunity to bridge the youth of these divided communities.

*Table 1: The geographical location of the OFFS in Kosovo 2012*

<b>OFFS</b>	<b>Name of Municipalities/Towns involved</b>	<b>Name of Local clubs involved</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>PRISHTINA</b>	5
<b>2</b>	<b>PEJA</b>	3
<b>3</b>	<b>PRIZREN</b>	3
<b>4</b>	<b>DECAN</b>	2
<b>5</b>	<b>MITROVICA</b>	4
<b>6</b>	<b>GRACANICA</b>	2
<b>7</b>	<b>LEPOSAVIQ</b>	3
<b>8</b>	<b>UGLARE</b>	1

Source: OFFS Official data 2012

The municipalities involved in 2013 are the municipalities that in their region they have different ethnicities located in their region. The clubs involved are from different ethnicities,



Albanian, Serb, Bosnian Muslims, and Turkish. In total the 25 football teams have been involved in OFFS project.

**Table 2: Table 1: The geographical location of the OFFS in Kosovo 2013 and the football teams involved in project**

	Name of Municipalities/Towns involved	Name of Local clubs involved
1	PRISHTINA	RAMIZ SADIKU, 2 KORRIKU, LIPJANI, FLAMURTARI, LLUKARI
2	PEJA	BESA, SHQIPONJA, BEHAR
3	PRIZREN	GETOAR, LIRIJA, DUSHANOVA, DRAGASH
4	DECAN	VLLAZNIMI, DECANI, SHQIPONJA
5	MITROVICA	KOSOVA, BERTO, BIRLIK, RUDARE
6	GRACANICA	GRACANICA, VIDOVDAN
7	PLEMETIN	RADNICKI, NAPREDAK, PLEMETIN
8	UGLARE	UGLARE

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

#### 4.2.1. Ethnic Background of participants in the OFFS in Kosovo

In this section the participants in the OFFS in Kosovo will be analyzed. Involvement of different ethnicities was among top priorities of OFFS. The idea of the OFFS is to reach as more as possible children involved, both genders and also different ethnicities involving in OFFS. Still is difficult to say whether this goal is reached in Kosovo. Table 3 shows the number of participants and their ethnicity in 2012 and 2013. The percentage share of different ethnicities in OFFS in 2012 and 2013 has remained quite stable. The largest share in the total number of participant has Albanians (around 50%) and Serbian (around 36%). These two communities have been in conflict which resulted in the War.

**Table 3: 2012 and 2013 Ethnic Background of children participants in OFFS**

Year		ETHNIC BACKGROUND					TOTAL
		Bosnjak	Serb	Albanian	Roma	Others	
2012	N	90	601	823	135	51	1669
	%	5.4	36.0	49.3	8.1	3.1	100.0
2013	N	83	597	833	151	20	1682
	%	4.9	35.5	49.5	9.0	1.2	100.0

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

#### 4.2.2. Children participant in OFFS in Kosovo

In total there were 1682 children involved 2013. Out of total number of participants 61% were male and 39% female. The children come from 8 geographical locations. These locations range from bigger municipalities (e.g. Capital city of Kosovo - Prishtina) to small localities (e.g. Uglare) and have different ethnic origins, but the biggest group is Albanian and Serbian. The main reason for including these geographical locations was their ethnical composition. This selection of geographical locations ensured the participation of all ethnicities in Kosovo.

One of the interviewed persons of Serbian ethnicity said “*OFFS has an huge impact that Serbian community started to work and cooperate together with Albanian community for the first time After the Kosovo War*”. This illustrates the importance of OFFS in Kosovo in building peace in post conflict Kosovo.

There were two age groups in OFFS: under 10 and 10 to 12 years. These age groups are supposed to be more prone in building cross culture cooperation because as stated by Levinson and Gasser (2004) these children can use their imagination and play freely, to teach them to take responsibility and make positive contribution. Although Kosovo was not a country where

children were recruited to part in the armed conflict like in Sierra Leone (see Dyck, 2011 for Sierra Leone) for example they were often victims of the War or they have some memories of the war effect on their families. From the peace building perspective, the inclusion of children of this age is important because they can get more involved in sports and activities and also forget their unpleasant history of their family and their relatives.

OFFS are dominated by boys because the football is a sport that is more favorite by boys compared to female. In Kosovo, for decades since its roots football was considered as a man's sport as a result of a traditional and conservative society. However, this situation has changed drastically after the War where more and more women being involved in female football. OFFS in Kosovo has given particular attention to promote this gender aspect as well. As mentioned by representative of the Department of Sports in Kosovo's government the OFFS in Kosovo has played significant role or directly influenced establishment of the Female Football League of Kosovo in 2010.

#### **4.2.3. Leaders working for OFFS**

There are many adults involved in the organization of the OFFS. All of leaders, trainers and assistants are volunteers. The initiative of the project comes from CCPA –OFFS, but over the years local leaders have been involved to an increasing extent. Table 4 demonstrate the number of volunteers male and female involved as leaders is 208 out of which 79 % were male and 21% were female in 2012. The small progress has been observed in 2013 as compared to 2012 concerning females as leaders (72% male and 28% female).

**Table 4: Leaders (volunteers and men/women) working for OFFS in Kosovo, 2012 and 2013**

OFFS	Leaders		Trainers		Assistants		Total			
	Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total
<b>2012</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>208</b>
2013		13	3	70	26	66	30	149	59	208

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

Majority of them are men because there all OFFS were organized in male football clubs. The reason for this is that in Kosovo we had male teams from the children to the seniors. First time the female coaches in Kosovo where part of OFFS, also OFFS had a biggest impact creating the female league. In the interviews one of the persons explained this saying that most of the little girls, trainers male a female became part of female league in 2010. There were many differences because of our tradition, occupation, war and also very difficult economic situation after the war.

#### 4.2.4. Profession of the leaders working in OFFS Kosova

The leaders come from different socioeconomic and professional backgrounds (Table 5). Most of them are pre-primary and primary school teachers (37%), sport coaches (18%). The rest of them are School related job (not teacher), social workers students.

**Table 5: The professional background of the leaders working for OFFS in Kosovo, 2012 and 2013.**

Year	Indicator	Profession							TOTAL
		Work with pre-school children	Teacher in primary School	School related job (not teacher)	Sport coach	Other sport related job (not coach)	Social worker	Police or similar	
2012	N	41	36	18	38	12	43	19	208
	%	20	17	9	18	6	21	9	100
2013	N	41	34	18	38	14	43	20	208
	%	20	16	9	18	7	21	10	100

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

The leaders involved in OFFS are usually youth aged under 30 years (Table 6). This trend has been increasing in 2013 compared to 2012.

**Table 6: Age group of the Leaders, trainers and assistant coaches in OFFS**

Year	Indicator	Age groups				TOTAL
		Under 20	21-30	31-50	Over 50	
2012	N	81	106	16	5	208
	%	39	51	8	2	100
2013	N	89	110	8	0	208
	%	43	53	4	-	100

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

In addition the OFFS made sure to include not only children participants from different ethnic backgrounds but also leaders. Table 7 reports that majority of leaders were Albanians (49 % in 2012) and Serbians (33%) which is linked with the largest share of children participants from these communities.

**Table 7: The ethnical background of the leaders working for OFFS in Kosovo, 2012 and 2013**

Year	Indicator	Ethnic origin					TOTAL
		Bosnian	Serb	Montenegrians	Albanian	Roma	
2012	N	11	69	2	101	25	208
	%	5	33	1	49	12	100
2013	N	15	62	4	98	28	208
	%	7	30	2	47	13	100

Source: OFFS Official data 2013

## 4.3. Results and analysis

### 4.3.1. Ethnicity and sports

The last war in Kosovo has affected ethnic inter relations. In some particular places like Mitrovica it is more pronounced and still continues to be problematic zones which are often associated with protests and violence. As discussed in literature review section the sports activity can be as good as a tool to minimize problems amongst variety of ethnicities around the world as well as in post – conflict countries Kosovo case. Immediately after the war 1999 – between the Albanian and Serb community was very poor cooperation and, the development was almost in the zero level. There were a lot of difficulties to start the cooperation with Albanian community deepened in what kind of field. The primary aim of OFFS has the same aim to improve interethnic relations. This was illustrated by the by leader from Serbian ethnicity in Kosovo:

After the war from June '99 we lived in Kosovo but only in our areas, we didn't cooperate with Albanian people in Kosova. When I started with first meetings in 2005, I started to think if it is possible to do CCPA with Albanians together. This was not particular problem for me because I got involved in various works with Albanians, but I was afraid that other people and children from my community may hesitate. However, they (Albanians) accepted me in very good way, but I had a hard time with my people because firstly they didn't want to cooperate. I had meetings all the time with Municipality members, parents, coaches, primary schools. After the meeting it was very tough mission to make a multi ethnic camp in Uglare (village populated 95% with Serbs). But, during the camp we involved all the children from different groups, ethnicities, gender and also religion. They played together and they (Serbian Trainer)

As explained by Serbian trainer OFFS bringing together Albanians and Serbians was a difficult task. More problematic was to make them play together. However, as discussed in our literature review section the OFFS can contribute to relax inter-ethnic relations. This is stated by OFFS Albanian leader in Mitrovica:

The OFFS – CCPA is the biggest project that happened after the war to make a peace and relax between the people, coaches and specialty between children from different ethnicities. In Mitrovica region that still in 2014 the city has is with very big problems between Serb

sand Albanians, the city is still divided in two parts South – Albanians and North are Serbs. Also still the villages are divided in many enclaves. It was very difficult in 2006 that the first time we organized the OFFS School in Mitrovica because of the last war (1999) in Kosovo. Firstly we organized camps (both of ethnicities). The camp was very successful because we all (coaches, children and also parents) enjoyed the camp and we broke a lot of communication barriers about the different ethnicities. In camps we involved the coaches and assistants of both genders and also different ethnicities (Interview A. Albanian leader in OFFS)

Some of the different community use OFFS that for the first time became part of sports and also part of the biggest society with different ethnicities in sport. Sport programs can contribute to social inclusion of marginalized groups as well. As result sport can also enhance social cohesion by eliminating prejudice for other communities. Explained by Roma Community trainer:

Is the good activity from my part, connecting people with each other? In my opinion the OFFS had a big impact on me because I never before was part of any sport or camp because we were not well educated or didn't go to the schools. It was the first experience for girls and boys for Roma community that they were part of sport activity connected to the sports.

Another dimension of OFFS is gender aspect. It was very difficult to integrate female in sport with males and particularly in football. The OFFS had impact in many aspects on female sport participation and that including both female as trainers and participants making everybody within the group equal.

I think that OFFS is very good project that Kosova needed in a way that everyone will be integrated regardless their ethnicity, gender, age, religion. In my case OFFS changed my personality in a good way, I became closer to people of different ethnicities. I also learned a lot during the seminars and also for taking care for the children. I must say that OFFS made a biggest step in Kosovo to connect people from all ethnicities around our country and also removal of prejudices that our people had before and also immediately after the war.

Making activities with different ethnicities in post –conflict country is something very strange, confused and also challenge. This was mention by Albanian girl:

I remember that we had trainers from Serbian and Roma community. Firstly when I saw the Serbian trainer I didn't know how to behave, I know that Kosovo was in War ( I don't remember that I'm 13 years old) with Serbia so for me was something new, I was confused and also strange. But the trainer was very friendly with us, we didn't understand language but he demonstrate for us some drills. Also we had a children from different ethnicities in our group didn't understand each other , but when trainer made a teams in the group we just wanted to became the winners in the game .

The OFFS that we mention before are multietnicity schools and also there children and trainers talk with different language. Sometimes it could be difficult but sometime new challenge. But sometimes you need only to use sport language: the Serb boy sad that:

First time I met children that they have different language, it was strange for me. I went to trainer and ask him for the other children. He said to me that they are Albanians and Roma children. He also said that we should play together and enjoy the play, because for that we are here.

OFFS are always open for everyone, depend from which community they came. Also the trainers should have the same treatment for all. The experience from Roma child in OFFS

There where the trainer who sad to me that I can join the school, I immediately started to be part of it .Trainers were very good with me and with other children. Also they were children from everywhere, some I understood some partially but I enjoyed playing football and other games.

#### **4.3.2. Gender and football**

The aim of OFFS schools are to enroll in their family female trainers and also girls. The promotion of football is also the tool OFFS. The Kosovo still are facing the gender differences in female football. By using OFFS tool the mention gender differences are becoming every day minimized. . A stated by Mitrovica Leader:

Usually we involve about 30-40% of little girls in camps for five days. The age is from 9-12 so many of them the came in the stadium for the first time. The impact of the OFFS was that after three years from first cam we founded the first female team "Trepca 89" and 90% of the girls where in OFFS camps also the coaches where part of it.



The gender is very important part of OFFS. The schools use to have many little girls in camps. Involvement of girls in sport and particularly in football is something needed in this region because of traditions and also last conflict. A stated by leader from Serb Community:

Now we have a girl steam that club is impact of OFFS, the girls are doing only trainings not competition. Still Is not time to be part of Female Super League Of Kosovo. We should use OFFS for next steps in female football.

A stated by female trainer A in OFFS: It is still maybe something unknown or unacceptable that female play football. It's more that important that using OFFS to promote girls doing sports. The opinion of female trainer in OFFS:

Is very important that the both genders are accepted during the camps, also during the camp we promote also female soccer to the parents, trainers and also everyone who is participating. Thank to OFFS we have our Female football league in Kosovo. In the OFFS many of children came for the first time in the field, also the role of trainers is to minimize difference between ethnicities, genders and also ages. After the OFFS the club organizer get new members of children that they join team clubs to train.

This view was supported by Albanian girl participant who stated:

For the first time I was in the field with all of field with children. I was happy about that. Five days playing with boys and girls in different games, with different male and female coaches. Trainers where very good with us, in every station of field they were with us. Sometimes boys made differences with us, they say to us that you don't know to play or different thing, but trainer made equal teams that for them was difficult to win or dominate the games, that we played. After OFFS schools I register in female football team club and from that time I train football. OFFS was the reason that I started to play football I the club that for the first time founded in 2009.

The view that there is gender biased perception about the female football has been acknowledged by many scholars as we discussed in the literature review. Our interviews confirmed this and also suggested that there are no differences with regard to these perceptions based on ethnicities. For example a Serbian boy's perception about the female football was similar to Albanian boys.

However, the participation in OFFS has changed their attitude towards female football. This is illustrated by Serbian boy participant who declared:

The gender difference in sport exists and is known. However, the OFFS is the best part of sport and society that is used to change the way of thinking about the gender differences, especially that also girls could be very good on sports. Only thing that was difficult for me was playing with girls. I didn't like that. But during the days in OFFS I was surprised from some of the girls, they played better than us. I changed my mind for that. I think that also girls can play football and do sports too.

The trainers during the OFFS has played a significant role in educating youth to change the perception about the female football. In OFFS usually the trainers during their work they educate others about coaching and also how to behave with trainers, leaders, parents, and children and also with diversity in the field with different ethnicities, age, genders and groups. The experience shown by female trainer points out this role clearly:

I started in OFFS like assistant trainer for me was life experience and chance to be part of football, and I didn't know anything about coaching but during the OFFS summer schools I learned a lot of thing following the coach how he work and behave with children, and also with children from others ethnicities.

#### **4.3.3. Post- Conflict, football and Peace building**

The OFFS had a huge impact in peace building in Kosovo. I eight regions with more than 23 clubs for one year involved its very strong tool for the peace building I Kosovo. In this process, CCPA, municipalities, trainers, parents has been involved making the stakeholders become the active part of the project. As stated by Mitrovica leader:

The OFFS seminars organized from the CCPA (Cross Culture Project Association) with the help of the Managers Director A.Levinsen, and there we made an agreement for developing the multiethnicities camps in Kosovo. We did a meeting with parents and also coaches of both ethnicities also we involved other ethnicities (Turkish and Roma, Egyptians).

The problem was also that the people from the different ethnicities firstly were not willing to cooperate with other ethnicities. After these meeting where trainers and leaders tried to advise them and inspired them to forget the past conflict and look to the future. Of course, this was not an easy task in a post-conflict society. The Serbian leader explained:

I had a hard time with my people because firstly they didn't want to cooperate. I had meetings all the time with Municipality members ,parents, coaches, primary schools. After the meeting s it was very tough mission to make a multienticity camp in Uglare (village populated 95% with Serbs).Now we have a girl team, the club is result of OFFS. Girls are doing only trainings not competition because of the impact of the post –conflict in Kosovo. But we should use OFFS network in Kosovo to involve the Serbian team in Kosovo League in next season.

## **5. Discussion**

The thesis found that OFFS in Kosova has played a significant role not only when it comes peace building but also in integrating female and minorities making substantial contribution in social inclusions of marginalized groups. The statistical analysis pointed out that OFFS project has been a great achievement. This is illustrated by promising statistics starting with number of schools, trainers, children and parents from different communities, ages, genders and religion engaged in OFFS.

In line with previous literature (Gasser and Levinsen, 2004) the research interviews showed that the OFFS created an enjoyable atmosphere for children, trainers, parents and all other direct or indirect participants. The thesis adds to the exiting body of literature knowing that the schools have organized in post –conflict countries with different communities that they were in war conflict can be used as a successful device for alleviating conflict.

The interviews concluded also that the leaders can have a critical role in promoting the values of inclusion helping children to overcome the communication barriers as well as prejudice about

other ethnicities. This was the case for both, Albanian and Serbian participants, but also for Roma communities. Six years after the Kosovo war, OFFS gather together the different ethnicities. The participant norm was high remind, and also respected from the ethnicities depend that the emotions where in highest range. The importance of OFFS in Kosovo is that the schools are linked with the fun and enjoyment that children, trainers, parent share together.

Another accomplishment of OFFS Kosovo is the both gender where enrolled. The girls for the first time together with the boys where part of football organizations. Also mostly of participants that they were part of OFFS schools before, they worked to make a Kosovo Female Football League, that was reached in 2010 thanks to the OFFS. But still one club from Serbian community is not part of the league, but using the OFFS that will make happen. Also is important that in the OFFS school they were children that they never been in school or where part of team clubs.

Gender aspect of the finding is that the OFFS contributed to changing perception and attitude of boy participants of all ethnicities about their female counterparts. This was confirmed by all boy participants that the initially had negative perception about the female but over time when played together the female football was seen as a normal thing.

## **6. Conclusions and implications**

This aim of the thesis was to investigate the role of OFFS in peace building in Kosova. The thesis uses qualitative and quantitative research techniques mainly in-depth interviews with trainers, leaders and children in order to investigate how football sport in Kosovo contributed to peace building. The main conclusion of the thesis is that OFFS in Kosova has contributed to peace building and female involvement in sports. By bring together different ethnicities, humanitarian aspect of helping clubs, thousands of children involved, many volunteers worked. The thesis finds that general perceptions and attitudes regarding ethnicity and gender has changed positively over the course of OFFS. As a result of OFFS the Kosovo Female League has been established.

Based on research findings the study encourages the use of sports for purposes of development in post-conflict societies and that for improving the inter-ethnic communication and female participation in football. Findings also suggest that OFFS offer a hope for peace building and if adequately implemented can contribute to peace building in post-conflict societies similar to Kosovo.

The study urges the need for more proactive government policies and donor support to fund similar sport activities in order to promote peace building, communication and cooperation between divided communities and particularly in relaxation of social tension, building bridges between divided communities in post conflict countries. Because of an increasing role of governments, international organizations in providing funds and support to design and implement not only football programs but other programs aimed at fostering peace between

nations further research is needed how these successfully stories of OFFS can be used to design other projects for similar purposes.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1

Topics for discussions for personal interviews

- 1) What do you think about OFFS(open fun football schools)?
- 2) How was the impact of OFFS in your personality?
- 3) What was the impact of OFFS for removal of barriers, that female can do play football?
- 4) What was the impact offs for promoting female football?
- 5) What the impact was of OFFS in integrating minorities and contributed to the peace building?
- 6) What was the percentage of participants of the two gender?
- 7) During the OFFS camps, did the children had another activities?

## Appendix 2

1. How did you felt during OFFS?
2. What was your best experience?
3. How was the relation between trainers and you?
4. What do you thing about children from different ethnicities in OFFS?