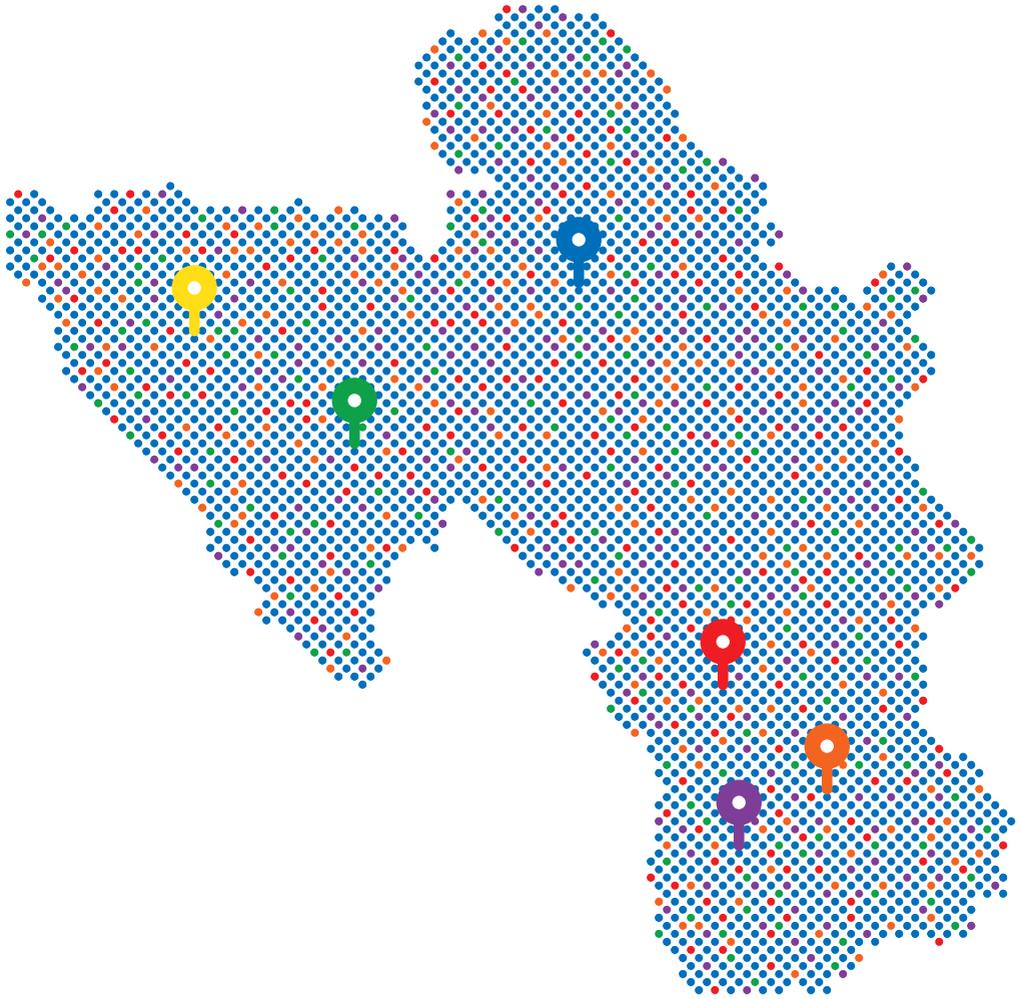# FROM INCLUSIVE IDENTITIES TO INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Exploring complex social identity in the Western Balkans

About The Project

A great deal of recent social–psychological research repeatedly confirms a strong connection between the inclusiveness of individuals' identities with their support for inclusiveness of the society as a whole. People with more inclusive and complex social identities show higher inter–group tolerance, are more ready to volunteer and be socially active and also, are more likely to endorse social policies relevant to out–groups. In post–conflict societies, however, identity is perceived as primordial (given by birth), rigid and exclusive. To enhance regional and in–country cohesion, more inclusive religious and ethnic identities, as well as alternative identities (European, regional, gender, sub–cultural), need to be cultivated. For this project, we developed a complex research design intended to deeply explore antecedents and consequences of social identity inclusiveness in a large sample of young people from the selected Western Balkan countries.

A regional, multidisciplinary team of researchers
was put together for that purposes:

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From Inclusive Identities To Inclusive Societies: Exploring Complex Social Identity In The Western Balkans – Results Digest

Context

In post–conflict Western Balkans societies (Serbia, Kosovo, BIH and Macedonia) ethnic and religious identities are still dominant group identities and major source of tension in the region. People, however, belong to a host of social groups: national (citizens of a country), regional (Balkans), European, family, subculture etc. These identities are not independent, but they partially overlap – if someone is aware that a person can share his or her identities in some groups, but not in other, that someone is more likely to have a more complex and inclusive identity, to accept the other and be more tolerant. A host of recent social–psychological research repeatedly confirms a strong connection between complexity and inclusiveness of individuals' identities to their support to inclusiveness of society as a whole. They demonstrate that people with more complex social identities show higher inter–group tolerance, are more ready to volunteer and also more likely to endorse social policies relevant to out–groups. The focus of our study is on young people as they represent one of this region's most important resources for driving social change. These generations did not take part in the past conflicts, but they were socialized in ethnically segregated societies or societies with high ethnical tensions. We aimed to investigate their social identities and their acceptance of "others" (ethnic and religious out–groups).

Main Goal Of Our Research

We developed a complex research design intended to deeply explore the level of social identity complexity and inclusiveness in the region, as well as their antecedents and consequences. Our respondents were young people from four countries belonging to ethnic major-

ity group and an ethnic minority group with the history of conflict.

Research Design

We surveyed 840 people aged 20 to 30, from Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Kosovo[1]. We chose two towns in each country: one in which ethnic majority on state level has majority status, and the other in which it has local minority status – Belgrade and Novi Pazar in Serbia, Prishtina and North Mitrovica in Kosovo, Skopje and Tetovo in Macedonia, Sarajevo and Banja Luka in BiH. We also employed quotas by gender and education level. To explore the issues of identities in a more qualitative way, we conducted eight focus groups (with 7–10 respondents) and eight case studies – one per town.
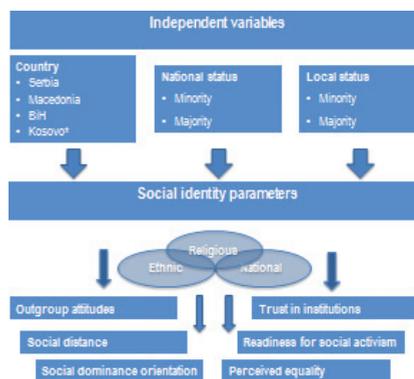
Intergroup Relations: Social Identities, Attitudes Towards Other Groups And Intergroup Contact

Social Identities

Ethnic and religious identifications are generally stronger than alternative identifications (local, Balkans or European) in all the countries in the region (Figure 1). Majorities identify more strongly with the country than with ethnicity and religion, while minorities identify more strongly with ethnicity and religion, rather than with the country (Figure 2).
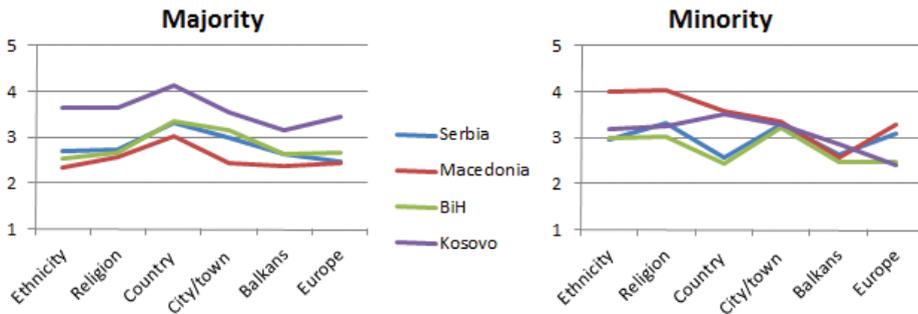

Figure 1. Strength of different identifications by country and majority/minority status (1 = of no importance; 5 = highly important)
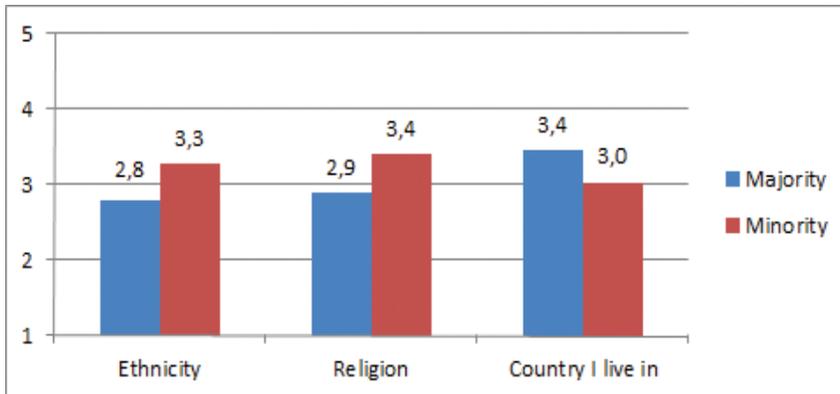

Figure 2. Strength of identification with ethnicity, religion and nationality, by majority/minority status (1 = of no importance; 5 = highly important)

Ethnic majorities in all countries demonstrate surprisingly similar pattern of identifications with different groups – their countries seem to be the most important frame of their social identifications; ethnic minorities are similar with regard to their lower identification with the country they live in, with the exception of Serbs from Kosovo, probably due to its unresolved status. Young Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia and young Serbs from Kosovo are most strongly attached to their ethnic and religious groups (Figure 1).

In all the countries, for both majorities and minorities, the relationship between ethnic and religious identity is stronger than the relationship of these identities with national identity. In other words, the national identifications of the youth seem to stand out from their religious and ethnic identities that are more mutually intertwined. Majorities generally show stronger association between national, and ethnic and religious identity in comparison to minorities. This holds for all countries except Kosovo, where this association is stronger for the minority members (Kosovo Serbs). The pattern of identifications in ethnic minority groups as well as their attitudes towards citizens of their own country goes to show that national identity is not inclusive for the minority groups and that they do not perceive it to be representative of them. At the same time, it seems that majority members are more likely to equate their national with their ethnic identity, and they probably identify more strongly with their countries as they see their ethnic group representative for their country.

The Importance Of Social Identity For Young People

The young mostly describe themselves with personal traits or characteristics. However, social identities, particularly ethnic and religious ones, are easily made salient, e.g. in contexts of:

– competitive events (e.g. football matches, Eurosong competition)
– events in which symbols related to ethnic/religious/national groups are emphasized (e.g. religious or national holidays, visiting national monuments, sharing historical narratives about groups…)
– in diverse contexts, where members of out–groups are dominant (e.g. visiting other countries, attending multiethnic seminars…)
– perceived threats to the own group (e.g. when the own group is presented in negative light)

"The thing that makes me identify with it primarily is the war. So whenever I need to identify with being Kosovar, or the context brings that out in me, I have the war as my primary point of reference. Reflecting about it, sharing my experiences with others on this period, etc." *(Female, 21, Prishtina)*

"When I see that someone attacks my ethnic community, when I see that citizens of my ethnic community are treated unjustly, when… you know, someone stigmatizes them, when someone in personal contact or through the institutions will treat me differently in comparison to other citizens, only because of my ethnicity, then I feel that… that specialness. Otherwise, not at all." *(Male, 32, Skopje)*

Although universal identities, as human being or global citizen, emerged as important for the young and were associated with a set of pro–social values, (e.g. valuing diversity, social justice), a need for identifying with a more particular group was also recognized.

"I said the most important thing to me is to be Human because I think that is the basic category by which you identify yourself. It becomes the umbrella of your identification. I have been in the past a Muslim, a Kosovar, an Albanian, and many other things, maybe even a patriot, but they have often led me to make flawed decisions. We now know that these categorizations are also means of separating people." *(Male, 21, Prishtina)*

"You said you feel Human, but we still need to identify with some more particular groups. French are French, German and German, etc. I am Albanian." *(Male ,24, Prishtina)*

The youth perceive that social identities provide distinctiveness and security, and regulate everyday behaviour and values.

"Muslim identity is not just to declare to be a Muslim, it is a whole system of social, educational and, of course, religious values, that manifest through behavior, speech and many other aspects, not just through declaring as Muslim." *(Female, 24, Novi Pazar)*

"Because it is the backbone of our thinking; everything we do or think comes from that perspective, it includes all of what you believe in and all of your values." *(Male, 20 community activist, Prishtina)*

Social Identity Complexity And Inclusiveness

Social Identity Complexity[2] (SIC) is the perceived overlap between the national, ethnic and religious groups a person belongs to. Low complexity implies that multiple identities are subjectively embedded in a single highly exclusive in–group representation (e.g. a person perceives that all citizens of Serbia are Orthodox Christians and cannot imagine a Serbian of different religion), while high complexity means differentiation between in–group categories and their inclusion (e.g. a person believes that there are citizens of Serbia who are Muslims, as well as Serbs who are not Orthodox).

Social identity inclusiveness[3] (SII) is a number of people person identifies with. SII refers to how inclu- sively or exclusively one defines the in–group from the combination of multiple cross–cutting categories. A person with a highly inclusive identity will consider almost all other people as their in–groups (will mark them as "US") regardless of their religion, ethnicity or nationality. On the other hand, a person who has

How do I perceive my social identity?
Collage of a girl from Sarajevo.

low inclusiveness of their identity might consider only people of the same religion, nationality and ethnicity as their in–groupers (mark them as "THEM"). While SIC is a perceived overlap between the groups and therefore more cognitive in nature, SII speaks to the readiness to include members of other groups with some shared identities in one's own group.
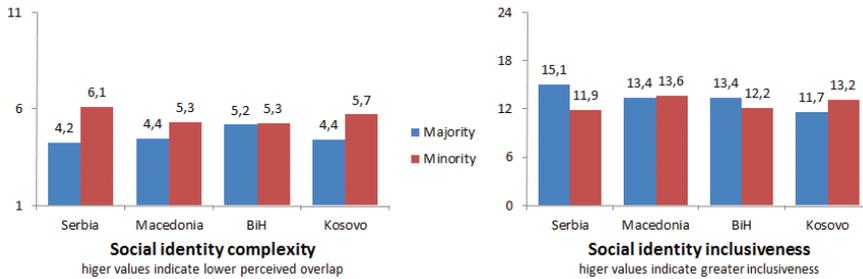
Figure 3. Social identity complexity and inclusiveness, by country and majority/minority status

Compared to majorities, minorities have more complex social identities, but their identities are not more inclusive (Figure 3).

In the most of the countries, the minorities demonstrated more complex social identities (Figure 3). This might at least partially result from their minority position, which implies lower objective overlap of the identities – more precisely, low overlap of their national with other identities. Being cognitive in nature this measure of complexity shows us how young people perceive diversities around them. It makes sense that minority members, as ones that are treated very often as outgroups from the majority perspective, are more likely to be aware of these diversities. Similarly, majority members, surrounded mostly by people similar to themselves, are less likely to become aware of these diversities. It is important to note that although minorities demonstrated more complex identities, the level of complexity is only moderate and there is room for increasing the complexity of social identities for both minority and majority members.

The minority members from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina show less inclusive identities than respective majority members. In other words,

although they are more aware of social diversities, they are less willing to include members of other groups with some shared identities in their own group. This might come as a result of the recent history of conflicts between Bosniaks and Serbs and the minorities perceiving assimilation threat. The minority might therefore be more likely to struggle to maintain their identity by excluding others who do not share their ethnicity and religion. However, in Kosovo the majority demonstrates less inclusive identity than minority. In other words, young Albanians are less willing to accept others who do not share all of their identities as their in–groupers. This might be due to efforts of Albanian majority living in Kosovo to establish new country of Kosovo and a new respective identity. Again, excluding others who do not share all of their identities might be seen as a way of confirming and reinforcing the borders of their own group. In addition, Serbs from Kosovo perceive both Serbia and Kosovo (still seen as Serbian province) as their in–countries, which results in more inclusiveness. In Macedonia, where the proportion of majority and minority members is more balanced, we did not register differences with regard to inclusiveness between them.

[2] SIC is a originally developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002). In this research, SIC was measured with a scale from Miller (2009) adapted to the three main identities we focus on. The respondents were asked to assess perceived overlap between all pairs of the participant's set of three in–groups (national, ethnic and religious) – a total of 6 possible combinations. The question used for SIC had a following form: When you think about people who are [Serbs], how many are [Ortodox]? When you think about people who are [Orthodox], how many are [Serbs]?

[3] To measure SII we used the Triple Crossed–Categorization Task (TCCT, van Dommelen, 2014). In this task, respondents were asked to assess whether the person from the Identity card (presented on the screen), belongs to US or THEM. The identity card includes a shadowed profile (head and shoulders) on the left, together with the name of the person, his/her ethnicity, citizenship and religion affiliation written on the right side of the card.

How Does Low Social Identity Inclusiveness Look Like?

"To be honest, there is no circumstance in which I would consider a Serb to be part of my group. I cannot think of any." *(Male, 22, Prishtina)*

"… I wouldn't put such barriers as I cannot judge all Serbs as one! For example during the war, me and my Dad we slept at our Serb neighbor whom the Serbian Army had forcefully made him an active soldier. At night, he protected us and said that whatever happens I will not have anyone do anything to you when you're in my home. So, I cannot say to him that I cannot hang around with him just because he's a Serb. But, still, I wouldn't put them in my group. My group would include only Albanians." *(Male, 24, Prishtina)*

The results of our research show that people who demonstrate weaker identifications with different social groups (especially ethnic and religious groups) tend to show greater social identity inclusiveness. Inclusiveness of social identities is also connected to low social distance and positive feelings toward ethnic and religious outgroups. It appears that those who have better quality of contact with outgroups tend to develop more inclusive identities. Finally, people with inclusive identities are generally more likely to engage in and support activism and to beleive that all people and groups should be treated equally.

Macedonians march against ethnic violence. Source: Balkan Insight

People with high social identity complexity are more prone to positive attitudes toward antidiscrimination policies, awareness of group inequalities, and likely to hold egalitarian values and to support group equality. They also tend to have more frequent contacts with outgroups. In other words, frequent and positive contact with outgroups might be factors that could contribute to inclusive and complex identities.

Social identity inclusiveness styles. In addition to different level of inclusiveness, there are differences in particular content of a person's construed in–group that we refer to as styles of social identity inclusiveness (SIS). There are four possible styles: (1) Intersection: Only people who share membership on all relevant in–groups are perceived to be in–group members (e.g. only Macedonian AND Orthodox); (2) Dominance: In–group identity
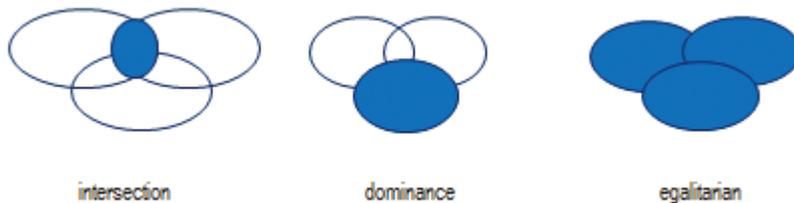

Figure 4. Styles of social identity inclusiveness

is derived from belonging to a single salient in–group, whereas all other social dimensions remain subordinate or irrelevant (e.g. Albanian, no matter of religion or citizenship); (3) Merger: All others that share membership on at least one salient dimension are considered ingroup members (e.g. If you are Bosniak OR if you are Muslim); (4) Egalitarianism: In this case one endorses all other humans as fellow ingroup members, and no distinction between others based on group membership is made.

"Serbs are only Orthodox. Even atheists are Orthodox if they claim they're Serbs." *(Male, 30, North Mitrovica,)*

"For me, honestly, Bosniak and Muslim are the same, I am a part of certain people who live in this area, and we call ourselves, I mean we declare ourselves as Bosniaks, as our ancestors did." *(Male, 27, Novi Pazar)*

"I have created a very big circle which I identify myself with and that is being human." *(male, 20, Prishtina, atypical)*

"All three groups make an union in my case. I would define my in–groupers as good persons, no matter of his/her religion, ethnicity or nationality. *(Female, 22, Belgrade, atypical)*

Ethnic majorities, on average, show a high share of more inclusive styles, such as egalitarian, national dominance and merger types that include national identity. In other words, ethnic majorities are more ready to accept all other humans as their fellow in–group members and all citizens of their country regardless of their religion and ethnicity. The only exception are Albanians in Kosovo, whose identities are less inclusive, the most frequent in this group are: ethnic dominance, triple intersection, but also a more inclusive NE merger (see Table 1). This means that they are accepting other Albanians (regardless of their country of origin) and others Kosovars who are Muslims and of Albanian ethnicity as their group members. Some of them also show readiness to identify with other Kosovars regardless of their religion. On the other hand, in all the countries, the national minority's inclusiveness styles are mainly based on the ethnicity and religion, as most frequent are ethnic–religious intersection, and ethnic and religious dominance.

Table 1: Most frequent SII styles, depending on the local majority/minority status

	Serbia	BiH	Kosovo	Macedonia
National majority	– egalitarian – ER merger – N dominance	– N dominance – egalitarian – preovlađivanje R dominance	– E dominance – NER intersection – NE merger	– egalitarian – N dominance – ER intersection
National minority	– ER intersection – R dominance – egalitarian	– ER intersection – egalitarian – N & R dominance	– E dominance – ER intersection – egalitarian	– E dominance – ER intersection, – R dominance, ER emerger

One of the factors affecting perceptions of permeability of inter–ethnic borders is an essentialization of identity. Particularly ethnicity was dominantly perceived as primordial, meaning as something given, ascribed at birth, deriving from strong "primordial" attachment to a group, and hence fixed and unchangeable part of one's identity. At the same time, ethnicity is seen as based on historical and cultural memory/heritage of ethnic group to which we belong.

"The fact that I am a Serbian, I cannot change, even if I want to. I am born as Serbian and that's it." *(Female, 23, North Mitrovica)*

"It is important. Can you genetically change yourself? No, you can't because you can't genetically change that you are an Albanian." *(Male, 24, Prishtina)*

Conversely, national identity is perceived as the one most susceptible to change. There are two factors contributing to this: a perceived negligence of the states towards the youth and poor living conditions (lack of employment opportunities, material resources etc.).

"Since this is our homeland there will always be emotional attachment to it, but citizenship is actually just a piece of paper. If we look closer, this country does not provide us with adequate protection, nor with adequate living conditions, nor anything else that should be ensured by citizenship." *(Female, 24, Novi Pazar)*

2. Attitudes

The overall picture shows that general feelings toward ethnic and religious outgroups of both minority and majority members are relatively indifferent or cold, while the social distance is moderate (Figure 5). Minorities, due to the fact that they feel more threatened, have less positive and inclusive attitudes toward ethnic and religious outgroups.

These differences are more pronounced in the attitudes towards religious than for the ethnic out–groups (Figure 5). By countries, the differences in the attitudes between the majority and minority are the largest in Macedonia, while they are least pronounced in Kosovo, due to the fact that both Albanian majority and Serbian minority have large social distance and negative feelings (Figure 6). Interestingly, minorities in all four countries demonstrate an inverted preference pattern: they have a neutral or negative attitude towards the citizens of the country they live in, although they are, formally the members of the same group. On the other hand, minorities show a positive attitude towards
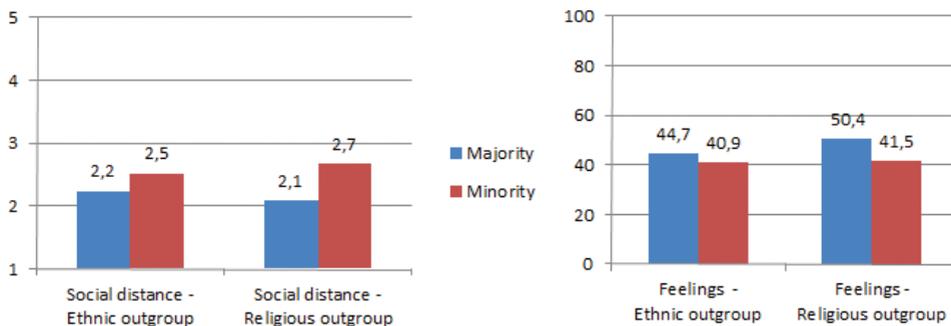

*Figure 5. Social distance and feelings towards ethnic and religious outgroups, by majority/minority status
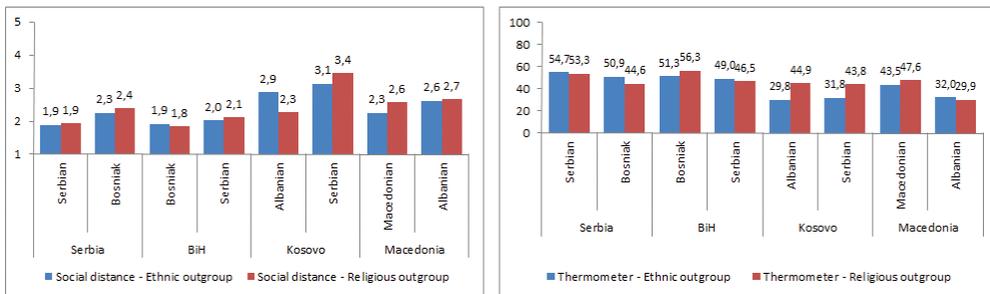(1 = low distance; 5 = high distance; 0 – extremely cold feelings; 100 = extremely warm feelings)*

Figure 6. Social distance and feelings towards ethnic and religious outgroups, by country and status (1 = low distance; 5 = high distance; 0 – extremely cold feelings; 100 = extremely warm feelings)

the citizens of out–countries, countries where their ethnic group is in majority status (e.g. Albania for Albanians from Macedonia, or Bosnia for Bosniaks from Serbia).

Views On Marriage And Gender Roles

Acceptance of inter–ethnic marriages is a good indicator of the quality of inter–ethnic relations. Inter–ethnic marriages are for the most part perceived as not acceptable for the young, primarily due to the anticipated opposition of the family and the threats to the integrity of one's social identities.

"I was thinking about this, and I believe that I couldn't be in relationship with a Muslim, not because of me, but because of the wider social context in which I live in. I believe that my parents couldn't agree with that, it would cause a major problem in the family, my social environment would react to it, and it wouldn't be easy for me to deal with it." *(Female, 22, Belgrade)*

"I think my parents would say "OK, this is your choice, but you have raised a very big problem for us". So, for them, they wouldn't mind, but living in this society, they would mind dealing with this problem with the rest of people." *(Male, 20, Prishtina)*

"For me personally it is not so important that my children practice Orthodox Christianity, but, also, I wouldn't like to have a husband who would teach them about his tradition, Muslim religion and customs." *(Female, 22, Belgrade)*

There are pronounced gender differences with regards to the perceived threats – women are expected to accept the ethnic–religious identity of their future husband.

"It is different for male and female. For example, if I would marry Orthodox Christian girl, my only condition would be for her to convert to Islam." *(Male, 27, Novi Pazar)*

"I believe that it is more true for females than for males. It is more probable that a Bosniak woman would become Serbian by entering into marriage with Serbian male, than for Bosniak male to become Serbian if married to Serbian female. That is based on my experience, since both societies are highly patriarchal." *(Female, 22, Belgrade)*

3. Intergroup Contact

Average frequency of contact is relatively low; in countries where minorities are significantly outnumbered (Serbia, Kosovo) it is higher for the minority group, whilst in the countries with numerous minorities (Macedonia, BIH) there is no asymmetry – majorities are exposed to minorities as much as vice versa (Figure 7). Quality of contact, when it occurs – is relatively high (the average ranges from three to four on a five point scale). In contrast, it is lower for the groups in regions with more unresolved political issues (Kosovo and Macedonia), and with groups with language barriers (Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo; Albanians and Macedonians in Macedonia) (Figure 7).

There is a high share of people (especially in Kosovo) who did not report having any contact in any context with members of ethnic out–groups (Figure 8). Having in mind the importance of contact for intergroup relations this finding should draw special attention. Contact is most frequent in formal contexts (at university / at work) throughout
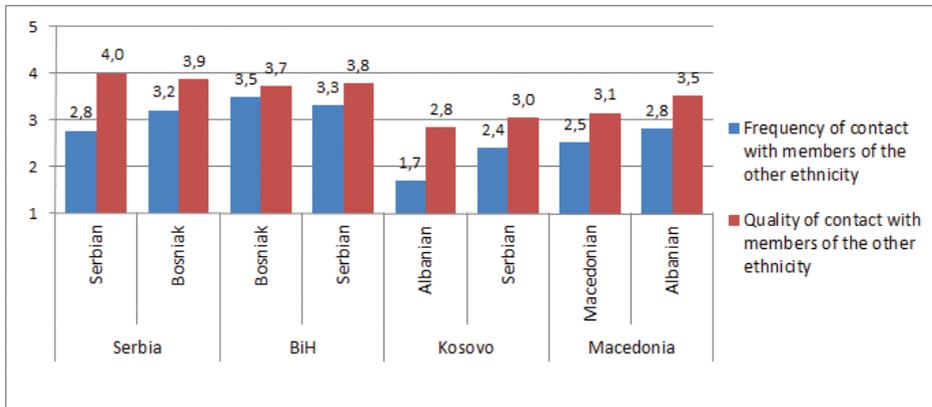

Figure 7. Frequency and quality of contact with ethnic out–groups by country and ethnicity
(1 = lack of contact / non positive experience; 5 = high frequency of contact / positive experience)

the region, with the exception of Kosovo, where institutional divisions are also pronounced. Since this can be the only opportunity for contact the young have, it is of utmost importance to ensure that the institutions reflect the ethnic composition of the respective societies and that they provide supportive environment for inter–group contact to occur.

"We are together in classroom. We spend time together, so we have friendly relationship with them.

We are hanging out together, drinking coffee. *(Female, 18, Novi Pazar)*

"I have regular contact with Albanians at work. The relations are fine, since we do not talk about politics. However, these relations are not close, but rather formal." *(Male, 30, Mitrovica)*

Two types of barriers can be recognized with regards to inter–ethnic relations: physical and psychological. In both cases these barriers are perceived as some-
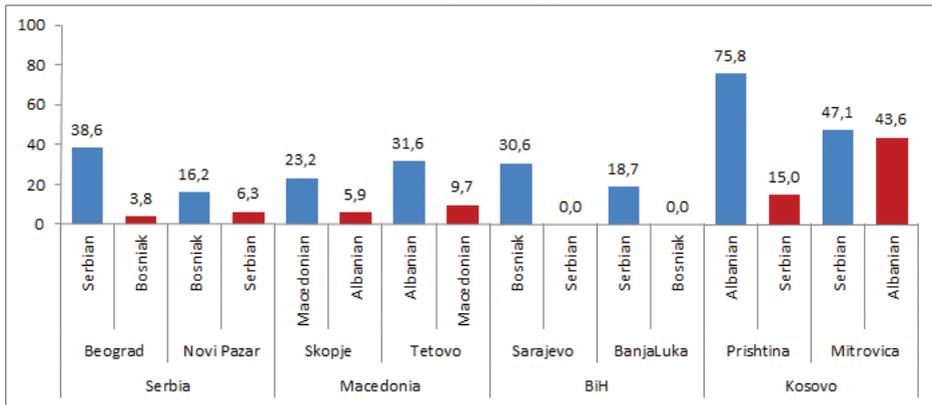
Figure 8. Share of people that had rare or no contact with the ethnic out–group by country, town and ethnicity

thing restrictive, impeding our own or development of the society in which we live in.

"I think that divisions make us miss a lot. You miss new friendships, communication and everyday interaction – everything that makes us who we are and that enriches us." *(Female, 19, Sarajevo)*

Despite that, the psychological borders are universally present and they appear to serve an essentially defensive function.

"[Moderator: What is the function of these borders?] Belonging. If there are no borders, everything will be erased, we will all blend with each other." *(Female, 21, Belgrade)*

"… it is some kind of defense mechanism – DO NOT ATTACK ME AND MINE… My tradition, my religion, my family…" *(Female, 30, Belgrade)*

Physical barriers are also present in segregated contexts (e.g. Kosovo or BiH) where they are perceived as a doubleedged sword: as both protective, giving the sense of security and at the same time perpetuating divisions between groups. Physical barriers that are presently being created (e.g. in

A mosk and an orthodox church sharing the same space, Ferizaj/Uroševac

Macedonia) are perceived as politically motivated.

"It is not an ideal situation, there is no communication between these groups. However, it is more fair to keep them on the distance, than to provide them opportunity to interact with each other and destroy each other… It is necessary evil…" *(Male, 20, Banja Luka)*

"It is a huge disappointment to see that the river and the bridge, two important means that were historically used to connect people, in this city they divide people." *(Male, 24, Mitrovica)*

Socio–Psychological Resources Of The Young People In The Western Balkans And The Threats They Face

Threats On The Road Towards Developing Inclusive Societies

1. General equality of the groups in the countries is assessed as higher by majorities then by minorities (Figure 9). In other words, there are differences in the terms of how ethnic minorities perceive their position and the views of the majority on the minority status – ethnic minority members do not feel equal with majority, while majority members do not agree on this matter.
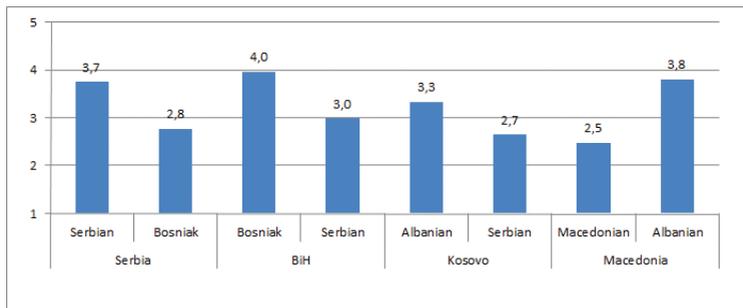
Figure 9. Perceived group equality by country and ethnicity (low scores = completely disagree that minority members have the same rights and resources as majorities; high scores = completely agree that minority members have the same rights and resources as majorities)

2. For both majorities and minorities, trust in institutions is relatively low (Figure 10). Young people especially doubt political and state institutions (e.g. political parties, government, parliament, the justice system), while more traditional authorities (e.g. religious institutions, arm forces and educational system) are given some more credit (it should be noted though that the trust given to these intuitions is still relatively low).
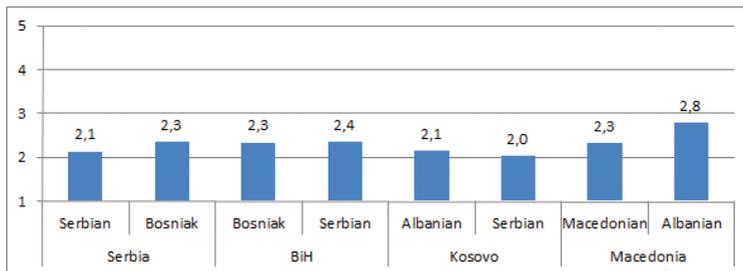

Figure 10. General trust in institutions by majority/minority status and country (1 = total lack of trust; 5 = complete trust)

One of the factors contributing to the intergroup distance is politics. Namely, youth in the Western Balkans perceive that their identities are politicized – exclusive identities and inter–ethnic divisions are being reinforced and perpetuated by means of political instrumentalization, as well as the media and the educational system.

"Whenever I have met some Serbs or Croats, we have always talked normally, and the differences weren't visible between us. But when we started talking about history and some divisions, immediately the differences came up. History sets us back the most on this road." *(Female, 22, Sarajevo)*

"I'd never try their red eggs they colour for Easter. On the other side, they accept baklava for our Bayrams… We exchange best wishes for our holidays… but, there are some nationalistic policies, maybe not only from their side but ours too, making us holding back…" *(Male, 22, Tetovo)*

"I think religion is more politics than belief. I see it as a tool that people use to manipulate other people… because the most important thing that you can get from a person is trust, belief. And once you gain that trust, or that belief, then you can easily manipulate it." *(Male, 24, Prishtina)*

3. Youth in Western Balkans perceive strong opposition of the social environment towards building more complex social identities. It seems that negative attitudes of family members and peers toward ethnic and religious outgroups represent a major obstacle for the contact and development of tolerance between youth.

"… I don't identify with any ethnicity, but this does not mean that they were not given to me at times… for example, in the latest population census my parents were saying that they had to enlist myself as 'something'… so at times, I am somehow forced to categorize myself and identify with a group… these are hard to do when I have to justify to others that I don't belong to any ethnic or religious groups." *(Female, 28, Prishtina)*

"So, the society I think has a tendency to always try to put you in a box, because it is easier for them to deal with others that are different and fall outside of certain societal frames." *(Female, 28, Prishtina)*

"There were problems at first because I don't attend religious education, so they provoked me. Then some boys called me 'balinkuša' (a derogatory term for a person of Bosniak ethnicity). Once I was harassed by the kids because I had a green necklace with a pacifier… It looks silly now, but it wasn't then… Sometimes I used to cry because of such things, it was hard… But not any more, I've grown stronger." *(Female, 31, Banjaluka)*

Groups with low and high capacity for inclusion

Our data helped us identify the groups within these age brackets who are most likely to oppose building stronger intergroup ties, accepting the "others", be it ethnic or religious outgroups.

1. Minority groups who identify more with the countries where their ethnic group is majority than with the country they live in (e.g. Bosniaks in Serbia who identify with BiH more: Albanians in Macedonia who identify with Macedonia more), proving that national

identity is not inclusive enough and it does not offer these groups psychological security.

2. Young people who have no contact with ethnic and religious out–groups, especially those living in segregated contexts, or contexts with an intergroup language barrier.

3. Young people who perceive an extreme lack of equality in the society, i.e. members of minority groups who do not recognize any opportunities to get a share of social resources.

4. Majority members with low social identity com-plexity – those who do not even recognize the pos-sibilities of their group being comprised of anything else but majority (e.g. Serbians saying all Serbians are Orthodox and all citizens of Serbia are Serbians).

5. Minority members with low level of social identity inclusiveness – even though minorities are more likely to recognize there are atypical members of their group (e.g. Bosniaks not being BiH citizens, Albanians not being Muslim), it might be due to the fact they constitute such a group. However, minorities tend to be more restrictive then
majorities when it comes to including others in their own groups.

On the other hand, group at risk of social exclusion and discrimination are youngsters with com-plex social identities (e.g. children from mixed marriages, social or media activists, those working in out–group contexts) who can be stigmatized by their immediate social surroundings and may need support to main-tain their complex identities.

Opportunities

1. Young people from both majority and mino-rity are aware that in their countries there are discriminatory practices (Figure 11). This common understanding can be a resource for improving intergroup relations between majorities and mino-rities – they can work together towards a common goal of fighting discrimination in their society.
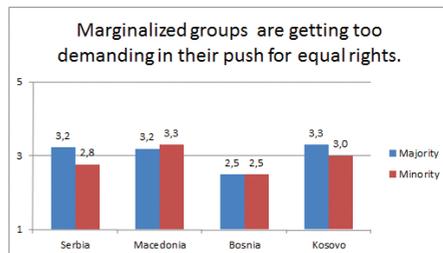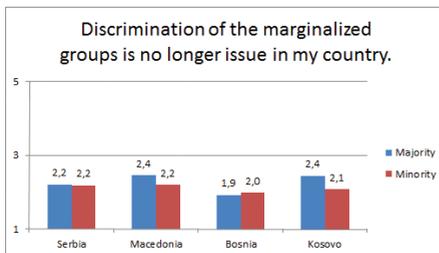

Figure 11. Majority and minority views on discrimination and struggle for the equal rights in different countries
(1 = completely disagree; 5 – completely agree)

2. In general, equality is highly valued in both majority and minority groups (social dominance is low) (Figure 12). Social dominance orientation represents a measure of an individual's preferen-ce for hierarchy within any social system and the domination over lower–status groups. People who score high on this measure desire to maintain and, in many cases, increase the differences betwe-en social statuses of different groups, as well as individual group members. Those who score low endorse egalitarian values and believe in group equality.
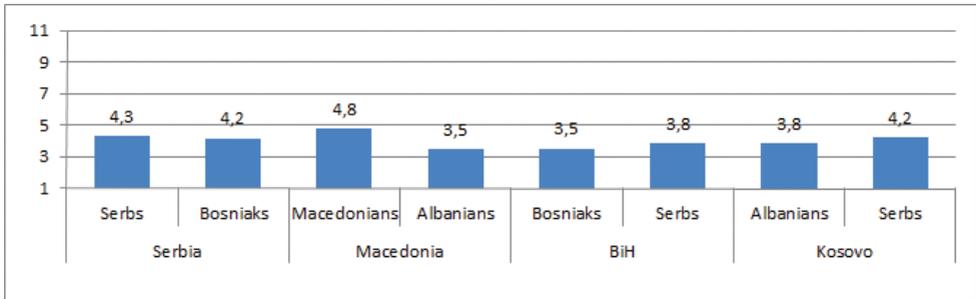
Figure 12. Level of social dominance orientation by majority/minority status and country (low values = egalitarian values and beliefs in group equality; high values = preference for hierarchy and domination over lower status groups)

3. New media provide opportunities for crossing physical barriers. Online contact between majorities and minorities via social networks is higher than direct contact, indicating that young people try to overcome physical barriers. Minorities report more majority friends than vice versa – this is expected having in mind the ratio in the population. In Bosnia, online friendship is especially common, whilst in Kosovo it is relatively rare.
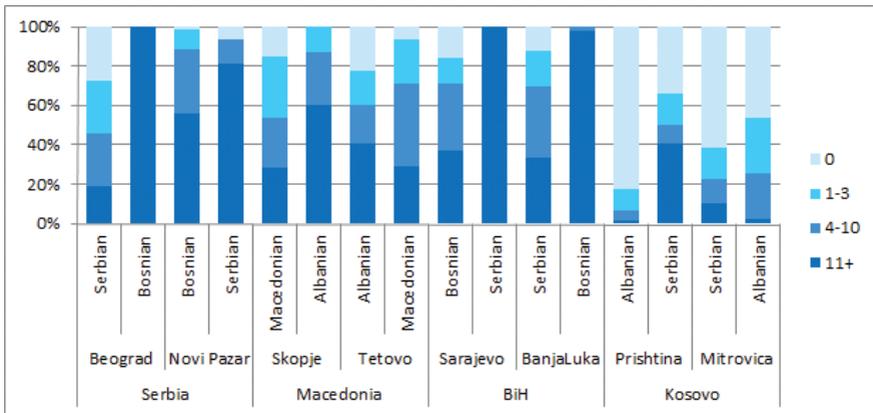

Figure 13. Number of ethnic out-group friends on social networks by country, town and ethnicity

4. The youth are aware that their perceptions of self and others are socially constructed and recognize the different sources of these perceptions. The finding is of particular importance since it suggests that the youth espouse a critical stance towards information coming through different agents of socialization (e.g. family, school, media).

"Another problem is that there is also a big propaganda being done both in Kosovo and in Serbia about each of these people. For example, I was born and raised in Germany and I had heard a lot of languages and met people from different backgrounds. I never minded anyone in those terms. But when I came to Kosovo and heard how in educational settings Serbs are described as barbarians, referred to as inhumane, etc. I was astonished and started creating an image about them in those terms. Same is done in Serbia's propaganda too, depicting Albanians as such but at an even more extreme level I think, with ideas like 'Albanians were never here', 'Albanians came from elsewhere', etc. Then, I met a Serb from Serbia and he was referring to Kosovo as part of Serbia, but he had no idea of what that meant. It was all ideologies that you get brainwashed with. I think education and propaganda just add fuel to that." *(Male, 20, Prishtina)*

"There is a lot of hate, which I think is built with years primarily by political elites' approach, then educational system, literature, even in the science. So, we witnessed how big problem aroused with the encyclopedia that has to be scientific book but was used and misused to introduce again the evil blood in interethnic relations." *(Male, 32, Skopje)*

Voice Of Youth

We asked our young focus group and case study participants how the relations between different ethnic and religious groups in the region could be improved. So, what did they suggest?

The educational system is perceived as the primary tool for building a complex understanding of oneself and others. Education system should tend to become more inclusive in terms of content and attitudes of teachers. Textbook contents largely differ within ethnic groups and if the youth grow familiar with terms that instill blame and division, then there is less hope for better relations and a brighter future within and between these societies.

"Education, books and being open helped me become who I am today… It is important for human beings to evolve…. To try to find answers to their questions… Not be rigid and strict…" *(Male, 24, North Mitrovica)*

"In primary school we had religious classes and on one of the excursions with these classes we went on a tour to visit monasteries. In the bus, someone asked: 'What would you do to Muslims, in the sense how would you torture them, if you ruled over them?' And kids started saying most awful atrocities. I couldn't believe it. I think I was traumatized by it. When it was my turn to say what I would do to them, I just uttered: 'Thank you for that you would do all that to my mother.' That was the end for the religious classes for me." *(Male, 21, Novi Pazar)*

The youth recognize strong societal pressures towards conforming to group norms of exclusivity and distance towards the other. Since the upbringing and family pressures are particularly strong, education of parents regarding topics of otherness was proposed.

[A participant who converted to Christianity comments on the reactions of family] "My father still rejects this fact. Unfortunately, he continuously tries to convince me to change my mind. When I visit him in Mitrovica on weekends, he still shows me some video recordings of Muslim preachers, hoping that I come back to that …" *(Male, 24, North Mitrovica)*

Youth show high awareness regarding sources of stereotypes and the role of politics in maintaining barriers between groups. Therefore, advancement

of critical thinking in youth was also recognized as an important protective factor against developing prejudice toward outgroups.

"Every nationalist will say that he/she loves his/her country and does not hate the others. But, when you start analyzing your attitudes, you realize that you cannot make the clear distinction, since you are observing the others through your own country's binoculars, through what others have done to your countries." *(Male, 22, Belgrade)*

"It burdens me. Simply, you have to decide are you this or that. If you are this than you hate that, if you are that you hate this. I do not agree with that, but that is the way things function around here." *(Male, 19, Novi Pazar)*

Long–term contact and diversity of experiences are also perceived as instrumental to reducing prejudice. Since the opportunities for the contact are perceived as rare, the youth suggested providing more such opportunities, as organizing student exhchanges, various joint activities as well as shaping open public spaces which could be meeting places for different groups. Recognizing common goals, common interests or even common enemies were also mentioned as suggestions.

"Youth is still heavily affected by what they are told and [these] exchange programs would offer the opportunity for youth to see for themselves how things stand… and I'm not talking about exchange outside, in Amsterdam or whatever… I mean exchange with our neighbors here in Kosovo."
(Female, 28, Prishtina)

"I could sit in a cafe, and have a warm chat, with everyone, just enjoying the conversation, the good spirit and for having some fun." *(Female, 21, Tetovo)*

"People should engage in civic activities. We should get know each other better, speak our languages so we can understand each other. We need to search

A Graffiti in Novi Pazar made with joint forces and talents of Muslim and Orthodox artists

for a common ground, for things that we have in common and in which we have mutual interest and benefits, for things that connect us. We should invest in our educational system, not only in paper, but in reality." *(Male, 32, Skopje)*

Dealing with the past should be carefully tackled. Providing opportunities to talk about and understand different perspectives on the past would facilitate integrating the memories and images into experience and would help alleviate tensions permeating inter–ethnic relations in the countries. Young people also recognize the importance of individualizing responsibility for the crimes commited by a group member, and feel the burden of group blaming.

"Today is hard to be a Serb. You know, when you are genocidal, when you are guilty for this or that… I think we need to get together as people and work on that issue in every community, be it school, family." *(Female, 24, Banjaluka)*

"I think the biggest barrier is asking for forgiveness. For example, if Kosovo would conquer Germany, then I personally would not have to ask Germans to forgive me. So, for as long as we expect individual Serbs, especially young, to seek our forgiveness, it will remain a barrier of communication and interethnic contact. They would not know how to ask for forgiveness even if they wanted to." *(Female, 21, Prishtina)*