

## Bosnian Organizations in Germany: Orientations and Activities in Transnational Social Spaces

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Arbeitspapier / working paper

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Paul, J. (2016). *Bosnian Organizations in Germany: Orientations and Activities in Transnational Social Spaces*. (COMCAD Working Papers, 149). Bielefeld: Universität Bielefeld, Fak. für Soziologie, Centre on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-51670-8>

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## Bosnian Organizations in Germany: Orientations and Activities in Transnational Social Spaces

COMCAD Arbeitspapiere - Working Papers

No. 149, 2016

2016

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Paul, Johanna: *Bosnian Organizations in Germany: Orientations and Activities in Transnational Social Spaces*, Bielefeld: COMCAD, 2016 (Working Papers – Centre on Migration, Citizenship and Development; 149)

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## Abstract

This paper explores how migrants from Bosnia-Herzegovina organize in Germany and the types of transnational activities oriented toward the settlement country and the origin country they pursue. It is particularly interested in activities that aim to contribute to recovery processes in post-war Bosnia. Although there has been an increased interest in migrant organizations in Germany and their transnational activities, as well as in Bosnian diaspora formation, the case of Bosnians and their organizations in Germany did not receive much attention so far. This is interesting because the Bosnian population in Germany still is one of the largest compared to Bosnians in other host countries. The empirical data are based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with representatives of Bosnian organizations throughout Germany. The paper first introduces a transnational perspective on migrant organizations. Second, it deals with how the Bosnian population in Germany has been constituted through several migration waves. The third section discusses the institutional and structural conditions in Germany as the settlement country and how they may influence Bosnian organizations' transnational activities. Following the fourth section on the methods and main features of the sample, the remainder of the paper presents the findings of the empirical inquiry. It analyzes the main features of the landscape of Bosnian organizations in Germany, the way how they perceive the German context, and the transnational activities oriented toward the settlement country and the origin country. The findings show that today the Bosnian population in Germany is highly fragmented and disorganized. Their activities are rather oriented toward the settlement context and less toward transnational contributions to the recovery of post-war Bosnia, which may be explained by the discouraging effects of the structural contexts in both countries.

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## Introduction

The devastating war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) caused not only massive human losses and destruction, but also large-scale refugee migration and internal displacement. Around 2.2 million people – half of the then nearly 4.4 million inhabitants (Bieber 2006: 2) – have been displaced, and until today only a small number have returned to their pre-war places of residence (Halilovich 2012: 162). Two decades after the war, Bosnia-Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia or BiH), after Albania, ranks second in Europe with regard to the share of emigrants in relation to its population: today, Bosnians living outside the Western Balkan country constitute more than a third of the total population (Tihic-Kadric 2011: 6; Valenta and Strabac 2013: 1). Of these, people forcefully displaced during the war constitute the largest share with an estimated 1.6 million (Halilovich 2012).

As one of the main receiving countries, Germany hosted 320,000 Bosnian refugees under a temporary protection regime – the largest number received in a Western European country (Valenta and Strabac 2013). However, as soon as the war ended, Germany implemented a coercive return policy (id., 13). Still, a large number of Bosnians reside in Germany today. And estimated 228,000 Bosnian born in Bosnia live in Germany, and meanwhile, more than 75,000 of them acquired German citizenship (as of 2011; Ministry for Security 2014: 67f).

Generated as a result of conflict displacement, the large groups of Bosnians living in many European countries, North America and Australia are considered to constitute one of the most widely dispersed diasporic communities originating from the Balkans today. They maintain ties to their families and others in their country of residence, other host states and in their country of origin. These ties facilitate the maintenance of their distinct identities and form the basis of a worldwide network of Bosnians abroad and in the region of origin. (Halilovich 2012: 163)

Through the maintenance of a multiplicity of dense and continuous cross-border ties – be they emotional, social, cultural, political or economic – migrants and those with whom they associate create *transnational social spaces* (Faist and Fauser 2011: 1). Irrespective of where they settle, migrants can engage in origin-country development through a multiplicity of sustained and continuous trans-border practices (Faist 2008: 26). Within emerging transnational social formations (such as transnational families, hometown associations, ethnic or national communities) they can mobilize diverse forms of resources, ranging from financial capital (remittances and investments), to knowledge and professional experience, and political ideas (e.g., human rights and democracy) that can unfold dynamics conducive to social, economic and political transformations in the origin country (id., 27).

Hereby, the establishment of networks and organizations is a crucial element, especially in the processes of diaspora formation (Sheffer 2003: 79). In places where Bosnian refugees sought protection in the 1990s, including Germany, many organizations emerged. This article explores *how migrants from Bosnia organize in Germany and what types of activities oriented toward the settlement country and origin country they pursue. It concentrates particularly on those transnational activities through which they aim to engage in recovery processes in post-war Bosnia.*

By addressing these specific aspects of collectively organized activities, this paper contributes to the generally limited knowledge on Bosnians in Germany. This knowledge gap is especially noticeable when comparing the body of literature on Bosnian community formation in other countries of settlement that deals with aspects of integration, everyday life in exile, and transnational practices of Bosnian refugees in receiving countries.<sup>1</sup> The absence of research on Bosnian organizations in Germany comes as a surprise for two reasons: 1) the simple fact that Germany has been one of the most important destination countries of Bosnian refugees and still has a considerable Bosnian population, and 2) the growing interest in migrant organizations and their transnational activities in German migration research (e.g., Pries and Sezgin 2010). Only some articles that shed light on specific aspects of Bosnians in Germany are known to the author: Jäger and Rezo (2000) provide a comprehensive overview of the social structure of the Bosnian (refugee) population at the end of the 1990s. Dimova (2006) pays attention to the experience of living in 'Duldung' status and how a state of constant fear of deportation caused new traumas. Graafland (2012) explores the contribution environment of Bosnian migrants in Germany through an analysis of the Bosnian-German migration and development context. Duranović (2014) sheds a historical perspective on the organization of religious life of Yugoslav and later Bosnian Muslims in Germany.

The paper proceeds in the following way: It first introduces a transnational perspective on migrant organizations. Second, it gives a brief overview on migration waves from Bosnia to Germany and the resulting constitution of the Bosnian population in Germany. It then discusses in the third section the German refugee reception and migrant incorporation

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see the edited volume by Valenta and Ramet (2011); Halilovich (2013), and contributions in Emir-hafizović et al (2013). Further case studies and comparisons, for example: Al-Ali (2002a; 2002b) for the UK and Netherlands, Korać (2003) for Italy and the Netherlands, Franz (2005) for Austria and the USA, Koinova (2014) compares groups from former Yugoslavia in the Netherlands, Kelly (2003) questions Bosnian community formation in Britain, Coughlan and Owens-Manley (2006) address experiences in the USA, Eastmond (1998; 2006) in Sweden.

policies and opportunity structures for migrant organizations, including migration and development policies, and how they may influence Bosnian organizations' transnational activities. Following the forth section on the methods and main features of the researched organizations and their representatives, the core of the paper presents the findings of the empirical inquiry, including how Bosnians organize in Germany, the way how they perceive the German context, and the transnational activities oriented toward the settlement country and the origin country. The concluding section summarizes the main findings.

## 1 Migrant organizations through a transnational lens

Migrant organizations are organizations that are mainly constituted of migrants (not only of the first generation) and whose interests, objectives, and functions are related to the migration experience, the common origin, and questions concerning participation in both the origin and receiving society (Fauser 2010: 268; Pries 2013: 2). Previous research dealt with the question whether migrant organizations enhance or hamper integration into 'mainstream society' or reinforce segregation of migrant groups through integration into origin-oriented social relations and preservation of migrants' identity (Pries 2013: 3; 2010: 17). In contrast, transnational approaches are interested in how migrant organizations structure social and symbolic networks in(between) multiple nation-state contexts (Amelina and Faist 2008: 93). Migrant organizations typically are transnational in the sense that they maintain contacts to, and are positioned between, the origin society of their members and the country of settlement (Pries 2013: 6). This does not mean that their members necessarily circulate between the two countries, but that the strategies they employ depend on their knowledge about these two institutional settings and the questions they are confronted with in these (Amelina and Faist 2008: 92). Transnational approaches reveal how migrant organizations are typically exposed to cross-border influences with regard to their interests, the mobilization of members and resources, and their orientation toward the origin and settlement context (Pries 2010: 42f). Both contexts influence the organizations' opportunities to act by either facilitating or hampering their activities, and in turn influence the organizations' orientations toward the settlement and/or origin context<sup>2</sup>. For instance, in host

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<sup>2</sup> This work is cautious about the researcher's usage of the term 'homeland', and rather uses the more neutral term 'country of origin', as it is an emotional decision of the individual migrant which country or location to perceive as 'home'; this notion reflects the subjectively lived reality and may change over time. Drawing analytical



countries, migrants usually first have to overcome legal and bureaucratic obstacles regarding their legal status before they are able to engage in migrant organizations (Sheffer 2003: 113). In the settlement country, opportunity structures that enable participation in the receiving context (integration policies) and involvement in the origin country (diaspora and development policies) (Fauser 2010: 173) can stimulate the mobilization of resources that can be used for contributions in the origin context. In the country of origin, attitudes and policies can be more or less welcoming toward external influence from their population abroad, especially when it is composed of conflict-generated migrants (Brinkerhoff 2012). Hence, it is necessary to include into the analysis the institutional environment and opportunity structures in both contexts and how they are perceived by the organized actors as either motivating or discouraging their transnational agenda (e.g., Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a: 262f; Fauser 2010: 272ff; Valenta and Strabac 2013: 2).

## 2 Migration Waves – Bosnians in Germany

The heterogeneous composition of the Bosnian population abroad is the result of several migration waves to Germany. Out-migration from the territory of Bosnia started long before the outbreak of the conflict. Three major migration waves since World War II can be distinguished: After World War II, migration has been for the purpose of employment abroad; during the 1990s the war-related violence led a large share of the population to flee; in recent years migration is mainly driven by the unfavorable domestic economic situation (Ministry for Security 2010: 61).

During the time when Bosnia was integrated in the *Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslav*, large-scale labor migration of tens of thousands of Bosnians to Western Europe took place within the *guest-worker system* of the post-World War II economic boom (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 2). The Federal Republic of Germany was one of the main destination countries for Yugoslav 'Gastarbeiter' (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 7). From 1968, when the German-Yugoslav agreement on the recruitment of Yugoslav workers was signed, until the recruitment ban in 1973, 535,000 Yugoslavs entered Germany with a regulated legal status

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binaries between 'home' as opposed to 'host' country presumes a linearity in the migration process; while in reality, 'home' is not a pre-fixed place to which feelings of belonging are unalterably connected, and the 'host' country in many cases is not a transitory place, even if an identification with the 'homeland' prevails (Haider 2014: 209f). The term is used here usually when referring to statements of the interview partners.

on a temporary basis (Novinščak 2009: 123f).<sup>3</sup> Both sides had an interest in emphasizing the temporary nature of their presence: They “were expected to work hard and leave when their work was no longer needed” (id., 128). Germany had an urgent demand for labor, but did not conceive of itself as an immigration country (ibid.). Yugoslavia, under pressure of its weak economy, emphasized the belonging of its citizens to socialist Yugoslavia, sent abroad for domestic interests such as sending remittances (id., 140f). However, for most of them, migration to Germany turned out to be permanent (id., 143), so that in 1990, 662,700 Yugoslav citizens lived in Germany (Dimova 2006: 3). Like in several European countries, they established Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian communities (Novinščak 2009: 128).

During the violent disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, Germany accepted the largest number of Bosnian refugees (320,000) under a temporary protection regime, which was a European collective approach to the reception of Bosnian refugees without long-term state commitments (Dimova 2006: 2; Koser and Black 1999). The large number of Bosnian refugees in Germany is partially explained by logic of chain migration (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 10) based on already established migrant communities. These played an indispensable role in the reception of refugees and influenced the migration destination, integration, and the relations between ‘newcomers’ and ‘mainstream society’ (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 7; Al-Ali 2002a: 86f).

However, the German policy toward Bosnian refugees was exceptional (Koser and Black 1999: 528), because it did not gradually transform temporary protection into a more inclusive and permanent protection as most of the European receiving states did, but expected them to return as soon as the war came to an end (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 11). Its coercive return policy did not respect that the preconditions for a sustained return were not in place (Dimova 2006: 4; Valenta and Strabac 2013: 11) and hardly respected particular vulnerabilities and problems of minority return (Jäger and Rezo 2000: 103). Of approximately 350,000 people that have been returned to Bosnia by the end of 1999, the largest share (up to 250,000) came from Germany alone (id., 65; excluding assisted repatriation).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, around 50,000 Bosnian refugees without a perspective to find permanent

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<sup>3</sup> Already before the agreement illegal labor emigration was a means to find labor abroad. For these migrants, the economic pressure or incentive to migrate was higher than the fear of being expelled from Yugoslav society (Novinščak 2009: 125f). The Yugoslav government had to respond to the deteriorating economic situation in the country and the fact that already by the end of 1963 about 140,000 migrants, mainly from Croatia and Bosnia, have been in Western Europe, 80,000 of them in Germany (id., 129).

<sup>4</sup> A majority of the returned refugees could not return to their pre-war homes and became (often once again) internally displaced within Bosnia (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 10f), where return and sustainable solutions for refugees and IDPs still are an unresolved issue (Walicki 2014).

protection in Germany migrated to countries that offered more generous reception policies (e.g., USA, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Sweden) (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 13). By the end of 1999, around 170,000 Bosnian citizens resided in Germany, among them nearly 50,000 in so-called ‘Duldung’ status (Jäger and Rezo 2000: 15).

Migration processes became more complex in the post-war period: Besides (forced) return movements, onward migration of refugees threatened by deportation in the country of first refuge to third countries and family reunification in the period immediately following the end of the war the post-war period has been characterized by continued large-scale emigration from Bosnia (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 2; BiH Ministry of Security 2012: 68). Due to the continued difficult post-war situation – political tensions, discrimination against minority returnees, corruption, and extremely high levels of unemployment – emigration did not come to a halt until today (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 10f; BiH Ministry of Security 2012: 68).

Striving for economic betterment still is a main motive for migration. A significant number of the economically most active population and especially the young and educated people leave for neighboring and EU countries, rendering emigration one of the most pressing post-war socio-economic and demographic challenges Bosnia is faced with (Ministry for Security 2011: 68f). Today, the number of emigrants born on the territory of BiH and living in Germany is estimated to be 228,000, of which more than 75,000 acquired German citizenship (id., 67f, based on data by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany for 2011). The large majority arrived as refugees in the early 1990s (Graafland 2012: 14). Over the last decade, there have been only few refugee returns to Bosnia, and there are also no signs that those holding a secure legal status will return (Valenta and Strabac 2013: 17; Ministry for Security 2014: 67).

### **3 Conditions for Bosnian migrants and their organizations in Germany**

Since the Bosnian population in Germany is mostly composed of refugees, policies toward Bosnian refugees crucially influenced the opportunities of Bosnian migrants (Graafland 2012: 14; Baser 2015: 30). Germany’s very restrictive policy toward Bosnian refugees centered not only on return, but also severely limited their options during the time of stay (ibid.). Thus, “of all the Bosnians who tried to find refuge in the (...) Western world, probably the most unfortunate were those who migrated to Germany (...).” (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 10). Most of them were neither granted official refugee status according to the Geneva Convention, nor were they considered to be threatened by individual political persecution, which would have

qualified them for protection under Article 16a of the German Constitution (Dimova 2006). Instead, they were usually given a so-called ‘Duldung’ (‘tolerated’) status, which is not a legal status, but only denotes that authorities choose not to implement deportation, while this option remains open (ibid.). This meant an unprecedented length of time for which Bosnian refugees were held in uncertainty about their future protection (ibid.); for some it took up to ten years until they were eventually refused a residence permit and had to leave the country (Graafland 2012: 14). Dimova (2006: 3) argues that for many refugees this experience was a major source of new traumatization resulting from constant fear of deportation, which often was as powerful as traumas deriving from the war experiences. Furthermore, as long as they were held in this status, Bosnian refugees were usually denied access to the labor market and education (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 9f). Those who acquired a work permit faced further difficulties in finding employment as they were allowed to take up an advertised job only if no German or EU citizen was able to do so; and after many years spending out of the labor market they have hardly been competitive (Dimova 2006: 10). Dependent on social assistance it was difficult to secure an independent livelihood (Graafland 2012: 14). Accordingly, these problems led to precarious conditions that hampered the socio-economic integration process once they had been accorded the right to settle permanently (Valenta and Ramet 2011: 3f; 9f).<sup>5</sup>

Based on the assumption of a positive relationship between integration and transnationalism, it can be expected that the unfavorable legal and socio-economic situation of Bosnian refugees in the German reception context hampered their integration into the host community and consequently also limited their opportunities to accumulate resources that enable transnational practices (Valent and Ramet 2011: 16; Fauser 2010: 273ff, 266; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a: 263). Struggling to survive, many Bosnians did not have much money left to send home. Those who eventually acquired a residence permit were often faced with the challenges of finding a job due to discrimination on the labor market, difficulties in language acquisition and traumatization. Hence, it was difficult to achieve personal economic security that would have allowed them to engage in such practices (Graafland 2012: 14f). According to Al-Ali and Koser (2002: 9), a certain political and economic security in the host country can foster the confidence needed to create and maintain transnational links, but as long as they do not have certainty about their legal status, refugees tend to avoid actions that may

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<sup>5</sup> Comparing experiences of Bosnian refugees in host countries, it has been noted that those who arrived in a country where they were given access to employment, housing, education, and language training immediately upon arrival got a head start through entering the integration process at an early stage (e.g., Norway) (Valenta and Ramet 2011).

jeopardize their protection. A case in point is mobility: Bosnians with a 'Duldung' status were not allowed to leave Germany without losing their status, and those with permanent residence status that do not hold German citizenship lose their permit when they stay outside of Germany for more than six consecutive months (Musekamp 2008: 51). Such regulations form obstacles to paying longer visits or to pursuing economic activities in Bosnia, and thus represent a threat for the maintenance of transnational practices, or even for the feeling of connectedness to the place of origin (Graafland 2012: 13). Consequently, they obstruct positive contributions to (economic and social) reconstruction (Al-Ali 2002a: 83). In turn, those who aim to circumvent this obstacle through taking up German citizenship are obliged to renounce their Bosnian citizenship, as Germany principally does not allow for dual citizenship (*ibid.*) and never concluded a bilateral agreement on dual citizenship with Bosnia (Štikš 2011: 259). Hence, the German naturalization regime decreases options for political transnational activities, particularly to participate in elections in the origin country (Haider 2014: 223). Taken together, the German reception context can be considered to discourage Bosnians' transnational practices (Graafland 2012: 13).

Likewise, the migrant incorporation policies and opportunity structures are not favorable for migrants' organization and claims-making and cannot be characterized as integrative. The German migration regime retains certain skepticism toward migrant organizations that maintain a distinct cultural identity and toward "divided loyalties", and for a long time viewed transnational organizations as an obstacle to integration (Sezgin 2010: 204). It therefore offers very limited ways for the integration of migrants and their organizations into the political processes (Pries 2013: 6f): Only in 2000 the German Citizenship Law, before characterized by the principle of *jus sanguinis*, eventually included generous elements of *jus soli* (Baser 2015: 111; Gerdes and Faist 2006). The law allows applying for German citizenship after eight years of permanent residence (insofar further conditions are met), conditioned on the renunciation of the previous citizenship (exceptions exist for EU-citizens and those whose origin country does not allow renouncing the original citizenship); children of the second generation born after 1 January 2000 automatically obtain German citizenship at birth if at least one of the child's parents has been living in Germany for at least eight years and holds a permanent residence permit, but they have to choose between the foreign and the German citizenship between age 18 and 23.<sup>6</sup> Germany's citizenship regime does not allow for local voting rights for non-citizens, which excludes them from formal political participation (Odmalm 2009: 150). Migrant organizations have only limited access to decision-making

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<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/EinreiseUndAufenthalt/Staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht\\_node.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/EinreiseUndAufenthalt/Staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht_node.html).

processes due to a lack of collective representation opportunities and weak formal links of federal institutions to migrant organizations (id., 153f). Thus, they hardly have any chances to act as interest groups, especially when it comes to lobbying for origin country issues, as the focus on these is perceived as a lack of and counterproductive for integration (Baser 2015: 30, 25f). Opportunities for collective representation of interests (e.g., improvement of their situation in the host society) are rather located on the local level where they find institutionalized representation in powerless foreigners' or integration councils ('Ausländerbeiräte' or 'Integrationsräte'). In result, representation of their interests differs strongly, depending on the attitude of local authorities toward migrant organizations (Odmalm 2009: 154f). In recent years, there has been a trend toward perceiving them as mediators between German authorities and migrant groups (Baser 2015: 123).

Furthermore, Germany's migration and development policies do not offer much support for migrant organizations to engage in origin country development processes. A migration-development strategy has not been implemented so far (Frankenhaeuser et al 2013: 98) and efforts to involve diasporas in development policy remained inconsistent (Musekamp 2008: 51). But German development institutions (e.g., Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, German Society for International Cooperation) besides a focus on return of professionals to their origin country increasingly included diaspora mobilization since the mid-2000s (de Haas 2006: 85). While it is argued that including them in development strategies can motivate diasporas' engagement, because, for instance, financial support for their organizations provides active migrants with necessary economic resources for implementing development projects and close cooperation with authorities strengthens their networks and influence, the effectiveness of such strategies still needs to be proven (Graafland 2012: 10). So far, initiatives for diaspora mobilization do not address organizations of migrants from Bosnia (in contrast to various programs fostering cooperation with the 'Serbian diaspora') (ibid.).<sup>7</sup>

#### 4 Notes on methods and features of the sample

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<sup>7</sup> Besides diaspora mobilization, the development potential of labor migration has been recognized (Frankenhaeuser et al 2013: 100). As the single bilateral program on migration and development under the auspices of GIZ that has migrants from BiH among its target groups, the "Triple Win Project" sends nurses from BiH and other countries for a pre-agreed time period to Germany (GIZ 2013: 24; Heuel-Rolf 2014: 20; GIZ 2016).

Semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted with representatives of six Bosnian organizations throughout Germany between May and June 2015. While this small sample size obviously cannot give systematic insights in trends, it nevertheless allowed producing relevant insights with regard to the research questions.

There is no statistical data on Bosnians involved in organizations because of the rather informal character of such networks and their fluctuating size (Graafland 2013: 7). For the sample, those organizations have been considered that either self-define as 'Bosnian' or have been founded mainly by and still involve many people that self-identify as Bosnians. In this way, this research attempted to avoid essentializing notions of organizations of Bosnian migrants – described by Brubaker (2005) as 'groupism' - and to learn on what grounds the organizations act and mobilize. Attention to internal heterogeneities challenges the assumption of a homogeneous dispersed population with historically fixed identities and practices (Vanore et al 2015: 6). Many associations of people originating in Bosnia are organized along ethnic or religious lines; thus, many Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs tend to identify as and be involved in the national 'Croatian', respectively 'Serbian' associations in Germany (MHRR 2011; Graafland 2013: 7). Bosniaks, who have been the main group that fled to Germany in the 1990s, make up the largest share of the Bosnian population in Germany (Jäger and Rezo 2000) and organizations that refer to themselves as 'Bosnian' predominantly consist of Bosniaks. All interviewed representatives have been 'Bosniaks'/'Bosnian Muslims', but the meaning they gave to this ethno-religious identity differed significantly.

The sample has been composed of different types of organizations.<sup>8</sup> Among them have been two mosque associations, a humanitarian NGO, a cultural association, a refugee and migrant association and an association of Bosniak academics. All of them are registered associations ('eingetragene Vereine', e.V.) with a non-profit orientation. Among them have been long-existing, well-established organizations as well as more recently founded ones. Some have been mixed in their ethnic composition, and some exclusively Bosniak, either due to religious or ethnic affiliation. The size of the researched organizations varied considerably. Some have been small and consisted of a rather loose network of members. By contrast, local mosque communities usually have around 300 official members (plus relating families) and are integrated in a Germany-wide umbrella organization. Usually, the work of the organizations is based on voluntary commitment. Only the migrant and refugee organization as well as the humanitarian NGO employed staff; others lacked financial resources for that. Their

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview on features and types of migrant organizations, see Pries (2013) and Hunger (2004: 8-12)

networking differed significantly; while some did not have many connections to Bosnian or other organizations in the settlement context, others did so on a local as well as Germany-wide level (hardly to other countries) and (rather occasionally) with partners in Bosnia. Even within the small sample of organizations and interviewed representatives, networks have been identified. This indicates that their engagement takes place within a rather small circle of actively organized Bosnians in Germany and that the scope of activities and the strength of networks very much depend on the willingness of individual and resourced actors. This finding confirms the observation that only a low number of migrants from Bosnia are active in 'Bosnian' organizations (Tihic-Kadric 2011: 7; Graafland 2013: 7), while many more may not be interested to engage in organizations revolving around issues related to their origin.

The interviewed representatives reflected the heterogeneity in the socio-demographic composition of the Bosnian population in Germany. The sample was mixed with regard to the 'type of migrant', time of arrival, and personal or parents' migration experience: Among them have been refugees, with some of them having been very young when they arrived, and children of former guest workers, but no persons that migrated in the post-war period. Out of seven interviewed representatives, three were female, four male. All have been well educated, with many of them holding a university degree. The youngest was below thirty, while the others were at least at the end of their thirties.

Also, their citizenship and voting behavior differed significantly: Among seven representatives, five still held Bosnian citizenship. Only two - children of guest workers that grew up and spend most of their life in Germany - acquired German citizenship. Of those holding Bosnian citizenship, only two still participated in Bosnian elections from abroad. The underlying motivations to retain their Bosnian or to acquire German citizenship (if possible) and the varying attitudes toward voting in Bosnian elections reflected differing identity constructions and feelings of belonging.

Stated reasons to retain the Bosnian citizenship were: to express belonging and loyalty to the country of origin (in some cases even despite all criticism of the Bosnian government) and its population (or a particular national group); not to lose inheritance or property claims in Bosnia, the feeling of having no disadvantages in private and professional life when living in Germany without a German passport. For others, to eventually acquire a secure and permanent residence permit ('Niederlassungserlaubnis') was such a long and painstaking struggle that they would only consider acquiring German citizenship once conditions would finally turn out to be more favorable and practicable.

For some, voting in Bosnian elections was an important civic duty that allows to express disagreement with a political status quo that consolidates the results of ethnic cleansing. Others did not see a sense in voting either because they did not know whom to vote in a situation of apparent political deadlock or because they had the impression that decisions



made in Bosnia would not affect them anyway since they considered Germany as the center of their life. The latter did not observe Bosnian politics much and did not know what programs the candidates represent. They considered Bosnian politicians to be irresponsible.

Especially the children of former guest workers, who have acquired German citizenship, expressed the wish for dual citizenship: Perceive Germany as a 'chosen home country' ("Wahlheimat"), they also felt very connected to Bosnia and were still interested in developments there. To have two passports would be a tangible expression of this emotional attachment to the (parents') origin country. One of them explained that giving up the Bosnian citizenship was not only a bureaucratic, but also an emotional process. While initially it felt like losing part of one's identity, it actually opened up new rights and opportunities while not obstructing activities personally considered important (e.g., to lobby on behalf of developments in Bosnian).

Furthermore, notions of belonging differed among the interviewees. One may argue that even among the small number of interviewees, there have been as many articulations of identity and belonging as interviewed persons. Generally, two understandings of 'being Bosnian' have been identified in the sample, reflecting a distinction described by Halilovich (2013: 2): a broader conception including all people that originate from the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina and regard ethnicity or religion as a lesser part of their identity – a civic-inclusive stance; and a narrow conception ethnically and religiously confined to Bosnian Muslims – a Bosniak stance (understanding 'Bosnian' as rather synonymous with Bosnian Muslims/Bosniaks).

Not all of the interviewed representatives considered their commitment as being guided by a notion of belonging to a 'Bosnian diaspora' and a motivation to exert influence on the origin country by mobilizing for a national or ethnic cause. Therefore, as suggested by Baser (2015) in line with Brubaker (2005), an essentialist notion that considers all members of the migrant group as part of a diaspora is avoided here and rather associates it with collective mobilization and concerted efforts by elites. Indeed, it has been pointed out elsewhere that many Bosnians abroad are skeptical toward activities of organizations that claim to represent 'the diaspora' (Halilovich 2012). Often, a rather critical stance and rejection to describe their activities in these terms has been voiced by the interviewed representatives. For instance, some considered it to have a rather excluding and segregating effect. For them, it was more important to work toward improving the situation of all migrants in the place of settlement, rather than being engaged on behalf of a particular group identity. A notion of living 'in diaspora' – of living and acting in-between and emotionally belonging to both 'worlds' – was expressed by representatives of mosque associations. They emphasized their belonging to an ethno-religious group dispersed outside the home country and underlined that they

respect members of all groups originating from the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina as long as they respect the country within its national borders.

## 5 The organizational landscape of Bosnians in Germany

The remainder of the paper presents the findings of the empirical investigation, beginning with an outline of central features of how Bosnians in Germany organize.

Regarding the *spatial distribution of the Bosnian population and thus of their organizations across Germany*, areas with higher concentrations can be identified,<sup>9</sup> such as the former industrial centers of the Ruhr area, Frankfurt/Main, Stuttgart, and Munich (see also Jäger and Rezo 2000: 15). The guest worker era is part of the explanation for this geographical distribution, since guest workers have been concentrated in areas with higher labor demand. By contrast, refugees have been distributed across Germany according to quotas defined by the German asylum law. Since many of them had familial or other links to Bosnians already living in Germany prior to the war, the distribution changed again when former refugees acquired a legal status that allowed them to choose where to settle. In sum, this spatial distribution is a result of several migration waves.

*Different types of organizations* can be distinguished, ranging from religious communities and folklore organizations to organizations with a cultural, psycho-social, humanitarian, academic, or political focus. Sports and leisure clubs (most commonly football clubs) are usually linked to religious communities. Furthermore, efforts to establish business networks are evident, but informal business connections also exist on the local level. This variety is comparable to Bosnian community life in other countries (see e.g., Halilovich 2013, Eastmond 1998).

Central features of the organizational landscape of Bosnian organizations in Germany today are the *low degree of organization and the relatively weak networking structures*. While it is a common phenomenon that within a migrant group only a minority of persons are interested in being active in a migrant organization, the interviewed representatives commented on that in the following way: They described Bosnians in Germany as very disorganized, and that existing associations are not well connected. For instance:

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<sup>9</sup> The spatial distribution of the Bosnian (Bosniak) population is illustrated in a map of Bosnian Muslim communities (and thus higher Bosniak populations) in Germany provided by IGBD (2015).

“No, there are not really any associations or organizations. And when we do have them, then they are not well connected to each other in a way that we know what the other one is doing.”<sup>10</sup>

The interlocutors deliberated over reasons for this situation. Thereby, they often described ‘their own people’ as being hard to organize; as ‘sociable’ and willing to donate, but less motivated to actively engage in an organization or project. Other reasons may be that those who eventually managed to stay in Germany have too many responsibilities in private and work life and limited time resources, a lack of interest to act together with co-nationals, or the feeling of being weary after all the inconveniences in the years following their flight and arrival in Germany. Another notion is that former guest workers are less interested to organize than those who came as refugees.

An important organizational difference to other popular destination countries of Bosnians is that in these countries *umbrella organizations* exist on the national level – for instance, the Australian Council of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Organizations (Halilovich 2013), North American Congress of Bosniaks in the USA (Kent 2006), BH Community UK (ibid.), National Association of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sweden (Eastmond 1998), or BiH Platform in the Netherlands (Koinova 2014). This is not the case for Germany (attempts to establish one are considered *below*). Furthermore, transnational networks and cooperation across host countries and to the origin country are not common.

However, the organizational structures have not always been as weak as they are today. As some of the interlocutors explained, ‘Bosnian life’ in Germany has once been vivid: During the war and shortly afterward, in the 1990s, community life and different organized activities have been widespread in many places in Germany. Back then, many groups delivered humanitarian aid to Bosnia and supported Bosnian refugees and addressed their needs in Germany, often irrespective of ethno-national belonging. For instance, one interview partner that became active shortly after arrival as a refugee in the early 1990s described the important role their support played:

“These have been diverse Bosnian organizations that have been established during the war from 1992 to 1995 or later because of the return of the refugees to Bosnia, in order to help refugees in Germany... . We gave advice to refugees, our Bosnian families, that they together with German families ..., we mediated between schools and children, we organized aid transports. (...) In this way, we tried in parallel to help all the families from all over Bosnia that came to Germany. Regarding accommodation, employment, school, and counseling. At that time there was no legal counseling [Asylsozialberatung], no immigration counseling [Migrationsberatung]. Wasn't as structured as it is today after the implementation of the Immigration Act 2005 [Zuwanderungsgesetz], but very chaotic. (...) And then, in this situation

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<sup>10</sup> All citations from the interviews have been translated from German into English by the researcher.

the authorities have been very much overstrained. It was important that we Bosnians became organized very quickly and established various organizations.”

As soon as this kind of support was not necessary anymore, a commonly shared focus point, around which organizational life of Bosnians in Germany revolved, disappeared. At the end of the 1990s, when many Bosnians (have been) returned or migrated to other countries while others continued to live in uncertainty about their future legal status, established structures and networks dissolved and activities declined. Many Bosnians resigned from their involvement or turned their focus toward other aspects. Today, primarily religious organizations bear witness to past periods of organizational life. While some organizations continued their humanitarian and cultural work throughout the years, also a few new organizations emerged after the turn of the century. Recently, it appears that collective activities very much *depend on the motivation and commitment of individual persons* to maintain informal networks locally or throughout Germany.

The development of organizational structures of Bosnians in Germany involves two trends, which reflect the political situation in Bosnia: First, in the course of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, state-controlled Yugoslav clubs that before brought together guest workers from all over Yugoslavia (Dahinder 2009) dissolved in the early 1990s. They have been replaced by *ethno-religious associational structures*. Today, the *organizational landscape of Bosnians in Germany is highly fragmented*. This is most evident in the case of the religious communities (Bosniak mosque, Croatian Catholic and Serb Orthodox communities) or folklore associations. The divide was also apparent among the interviewees: The interviewed persons primarily referred to organizations and networks in which predominantly Bosniaks organize. They only pointed out in passing that Croats and Serbs likewise have their church communities, without any reference to existing connections to them. But there are also groups that come together on the foundation of a common origin in the territory of Bosnia and the Balkan region. Often, these persons are very critical about the circumstance that mosque associations constitute the strongest still existing structures, as they consider collective organization based on religion or ethnicity likely to manifesting the divisions among the Bosnian population abroad.

Second, the *remaining community life predominantly circulates around religious organizations*. *Bosnian mosque associations remained the most persistent and most common organizational structure* throughout the years. With more than 70 communities throughout Germany, they have the largest numbers of members. Given their significance, it is worthwhile spending some words on the structures and historical development of Islamic religious and cultural communities in Germany. These *džemats* exist in most major cities with a Bosnian population. The majority of these religious-cultural associations (recently 71

registered, IGBD 2015) are united in the *Islamic Community of Bosniaks in Germany (Islamische Gemeinde der Bosniaken in Deutschland e.V. - IGBD, Islamska Zajednica Bošnjaka u Njemačkoj)*, seated in Wiesbaden (founded in 1994 under the initial name Federation of Islamic Communities of Bosniaks in Germany). Claiming representative functions for Bosnian Muslims in Germany, IGBD is a member of the German Islamic Council and the Central Council of Muslims, and is represented at the so-called German Islam Conference, a forum dealing with the relations between the German state and Muslim communities (Deutsche Islamkonferenz 2015; Ghamin 2010).

IGBD is a member of the Islamic Community in BiH (*Islamska Zajednica*, seated in Sarajevo), the highest religious and administrative authority of Bosniaks, by which all Imams that perform their duties abroad are designated at the request of the respective mosque association.<sup>11</sup> In accordance with the Islamic Community in BiH, the communities in Germany aim to maintain and promote the religious life among Muslims, to encourage its members to engage freely in humanitarian causes, and to make a contribution to constructive coexistence with other religious communities. (Behloul 2011: 312)

First attempts to organize an Islamic community life in Germany have been made by guest workers from all over socialist Yugoslavia from the late 1970s onward. The desire to establish a space where religious needs can be satisfied, for instance during Ramadan, accrue from private contacts between Yugoslav guest workers of Muslim faith. Having only limited resources, they either used existing structures, such as premises of Turkish religious communities, or held their gatherings and prayers in private dwellings, most commonly so-called 'Heime' (*hajmovi*) – barracks in which guest workers were accommodated collectively. Beyond religious practices, these communities also created spaces that allowed its members to express a particular group belonging, and to pursue cultural, sport, and humanitarian activities outside of Yugoslav clubs. While at the end of the 1980s around 20 communities existed, their number grew rapidly in the early 1990s, with the arrival of refugees from dissolving Yugoslavia. (Duranović 2014: 69f)

Changes in the organizational mode of Yugoslav associations and clubs have been a key factor in the evolution of mosque associations during the late 1980s: While before they were commonly labeled "Yugoslav", new possibilities of organizing along ethno-religious lines emerged that coincided with the looming disintegration and societal changes within

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<sup>11</sup> In 1996, the Islamic Community founded the Bosniak Diaspora Office, which maintains connections with more than 200 džemats throughout Europe (except for the countries of former Yugoslavia), North America and Australia (Islamic Community BiH 2012). The office launches and coordinates regular fundraising activities for the restoration of mosques in BiH, aid programs for people returning to their pre-war homes, and studentships.

Yugoslavia and introduced a new phase of associational life abroad (id., 71). While Yugoslavia went through a severe crisis, an increased interest among Bosnian migrants to organize around religious life became evident and created the preconditions for the establishment of ethnically-based associations and for future homogenization and cleavages along ethnic lines (Duranović 2014: 74ff).

## 5.1 Getting organized in Germany

Above it has been outlined that the German immigration policies are less favorable for the formation of organizations and their involvement in the settlement context, thus possibly discouraging the exercise of Bosnian migrants' transnational practices. This section deals with the question how the German institutional and societal context is perceived by the interviewed representatives in terms of motivating or discouraging their engagement and how it affects their strategies. It is interesting to begin with the note that when asked what kinds of difficulties they see regarding collective organization in Germany, most of the interlocutors did not directly address or identify structural problems in the first place and even considered conditions for association work in Germany to be favorable. Some of them declared that the problem of organizing Bosnians and recruiting new members for their organization primarily derives from a limited willingness of Bosnians to become active. However, their narrations revealed several problematic aspects of the structural conditions in the (local) institutional environment that have been outlined above.

The representatives of mosque communities, for instance, are concerned that they find their interests less represented in the public sphere because of the disorganization of Bosnians in Germany. They think that small, local associations that seek support by local institutions have less chances to be heard when they do not find representation through a strong and visible umbrella organization. This is considered by the informants as a problem of internal organization and as such can be solved by means of strengthened organization and connectedness that facilitate better self-representation of Bosnian Muslims – otherwise, the concern is expressed, the threat of becoming assimilated in mainstream society and thus less visible as a Bosnian community with particular needs and interests will become more severe. Achieving recognition in the public or political sphere would allow to preventing this. Referring to the 'struggle for recognition' and the apparent lack of interest among (local) political actors in Germany to cooperate with Bosnian associations, another issue was addressed by a representative of a mosque association: The community finds itself in a situation of competition with other migrant groups for attention from municipal institutions. They would have difficulties to be heard in local bodies such as the local integration council

due to the strong presence of Turkish organizations. While considering the size of the Turkish population, the informant pointed out that the reasonable stronger focus on this migrant group by German authorities eventually results in a lack of attention to the needs of other migrant groups - a failure on the side of German authorities. The representative mentioned two examples in which this missing recognition results in a lack of opportunities to call on local authorities and thus to realize their objectives. First, there is no support for finding sufficient and affordable premises that serve community needs and fulfill representative functions. Second, their demand for the introduction of Bosnian language lessons as a complementary school subject does not meet comprehension, and thus no support from local authorities.

Deriving from the interviews, satisfaction with the local institutional environment for the realization of the organizations' objectives appears to depend largely on the given opportunity structures in the municipality. Generally, interlocutors expressed the wish for the provision of premises for the organizations' meetings, and the wish to have the right to vote as non-citizens in local elections, as they have lived in the municipality for many years and are familiar with the local political context. For instance: "... we want to be part of the society, we want to be involved in decision making, because it affects us here". Furthermore, some criticize the lack of financial support for their projects, even if they are oriented at the settlement context.

Among the researched organizations two have been founded after the mid of the last decade. Based on what has been outlined above, the assumption may be formulated that for those organizations that have been founded lately, legal and institutional problems of its members and for collective action may have been the reason for the delayed foundation. Apparently, for them, this was not the primary explanation. For instance, the representatives of one organization did not consider founding an organization earlier simply because they realized projects through other networks in Germany and Bosnia and did not see the necessity. Thus, the late decision to found an organization was driven by pragmatic considerations. However, they now see the advantages as it opened up new opportunities: more public recognition on the local level, entitlement to (financial) assistance from the local administration, and more cooperation with other local migrant associations. Nevertheless, recalled personal memories of previous difficulties to settle in Germany reveal another part of the story, for instance, what it felt like not to be allowed to move freely due to the spatial restriction of movement related to the 'Duldung' status. The long struggle for a secure legal status and the difficulties to move as freely as they would have liked to exacerbated the realization of their projects and brought with it embarrassing feelings and the fear of being perceived in a negative light by German project partners. Despite this severe obstacle, they did not give up, but followed their objectives.

Those organizations that have been founded during the war and that have succeeded in institutionalizing themselves permanently reflect that not all organizations that existed back then found the same preconditions. As interlocutors described, when they arrived as refugees, the German reception environment in the early 1990s was characterized by an overstrained bureaucracy and the lack of a fully established and institutionalized structure capable of receiving large numbers of refugees and providing basic services and assistance (legal aid, language courses etc.) as it exists today. In this situation, not all Bosnian initiatives of that time found favorable support structures within the civil society and public life for the mobilization of humanitarian aid transports to war-affected areas, such as an open climate toward refugees from former Yugoslavia, support by the local population, connections to journalists, as well as certain concessions on side of the authorities in situations where legal regulations or guidelines were missing. In this regard, interlocutors emphasized the importance of networking and cooperating with other parts of the population from the scratch instead of segregating from German society through organizing ‘their own people’.

## 5.2 Prospects for an umbrella organization of Bosnian organizations in Germany

Another aspect pertaining to Bosnians’ organizing in Germany are the endeavors for the foundation of an umbrella organization. Within the Bosnian population in Germany, no overarching institutionalized structure exist, as mentioned before. According to interlocutors, ethno-national divisions make a Bosnian-Herzegovinian diaspora in Germany an “unfortunate endeavor”, because the Bosnian population is internally fragmented and not working together. “At the moment, the situation in Bosnia is such hopelessness, total disappointment, and this is reflected in the diaspora.”

“German Bosnian diaspora does not exist. With the end of the war this diaspora is dead. Has never been connected, too. This is because through the war this fragmentation between Serbs, Croats and Muslims emerged. And this echo of the war is still there.”

From the beginning, starting in 2000, the interviewed representatives of those researched organizations with a civic understanding as Bosnian-Herzegovinians have been involved in attempts to establish an umbrella organization that brings together Bosnian-Herzegovinian initiatives in Germany. But these attempts for an overarching body have failed in 2004, stable structures have never been established – despite or because of, the fact that Germany has a large Bosnian population compared to other host countries in which it was easier to organize a moderate number of Bosnian immigrants:



“(...) it was always difficult to reach all Bosnian-Herzegovinian associations, or those that recognize themselves as such. Because, it is always difficult, one has to consider that there are also Bosnian-Herzegovinian religious communities, but they already have an umbrella organization in Germany... And then they should also be united under such an umbrella organization, if they like to take part. That's always difficult to organize.”

These representatives identify two reasons why the establishment of an umbrella organization has failed: First, they consider some groups of Bosnians in Germany to be even more conservative and segregated, and less reconciliatory than people in Bosnia. To them, this segregation is reinforced by the predominant organization through religious communities. This perspective confirms an often-stated view (which lacks systematic empirical evidence) that diaspora populations are diverse and can involve groups that are less compromising and reconciliatory than the population in a post-conflict origin country (see e.g. Hall 2014).<sup>12</sup> Secondly, because there is no interest on side of the Bosnian or the German government to support the emergence of a strong diaspora, although it could be a contact partner for the German government and German companies and could open up new ways for contributions to Bosnia's development.

For the moment, they hardly see any chances for an organized network. Still, one interviewee aims to make renewed efforts. While recently not much is left of the Bosnian organizational structures that have once been initiated, the interviewee argues that there may be new potential for an umbrella organization in the future, since many young and educated people are emigrating from Bosnia today, who still have a strong connection to their country of origin.

### 5.3 Orientations between the place of settlement and the origin country

As the case under scrutiny confirms, migrant organizations can differ significantly regarding the direction of their activities (Pries 2013: 2) and the intensity and form these activities take (Fauser 2010: 281). Deriving from the activities, reported motivations and further comments, the following dominating themes in the orientations of the researched organizations and their representatives can be identified: First, a *strong orientation toward the context of settlement – (local) life in Germany – and integration* is evident among most of them. Without having

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<sup>12</sup> Considerations why they can be more conflictive are: the geographical distance to the region where violent conflict took place and a higher security in the host country; the experience of marginalization in the host country, which can reinforce ethnic identities and more segregating opinions; and the fact that they do not have to pay the costs for prolonged conflict directly, in contrast to the population directly exposed to the conflict, that can become less polarized and more compromising as they seek to rebuild their lives (Hall 2014).

been asked about aspects of *integration* during the interviews (this issue was not touched by the interviewer), this topic has often been addressed by the interlocutors. Equally important and interlinked with integration is the second theme, *maintenance of cultural or religious identity in the country of settlement*, and striving for recognition as Bosnians or Bosnian Muslims in Germany. Commitment for migrants' rights, recognition by mainstream society and public institutions, and intercultural dialog are clear expressions of their feeling of belonging 'here' with all that belongs to their identity, including their Bosnian origin. Third, the expression of *loyalty to both countries* in formulations such as: "I am both [sowohl als auch].", "I am both. (...) And for me, this is not a contradiction. It compliments each other well." or "And I decide I am Bosnian and German. I am a germanized Bosnian.". "I say, I am very much obliged to Germany, has saved my life, gave my children a chance. I love Germany. Germany is my new 'Heimat', it makes me cry ... but I am a Bosnian!" As one interviewee states with regard to the organization's contributions to society: "And for us it's good, as Germans. I say that, even though I am Bosnian." Finally, the *desire to 'give something back'*, driven by a (often strong) feeling of attachment to Bosnia. Even those interview partners who grew up in Germany and have been save during the time of the war, are ambitious to make positive contributions to their original 'homelands'.

#### 5.4 Transnational activities of Bosnian organizations

This final section presents the broad scope of activities pursued by the researched organizations. The overview of activities directed toward the country of origin and the country of settlement are summarized in *Table 1* (this is not an extensive list).

**Table 1 Overview: Transnational Activities of Bosnian organizations in Germany**

	<i>Activities oriented toward the settlement country (Germany)</i>	<i>Activities oriented toward the origin country (Bosnia-Herzegovina)</i>
<i>Humanitarian and development-oriented</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humanitarian support for Bosnian refugees arriving in Germany</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humanitarian relief during and after the war</li> <li>Humanitarian relief during the floods 2014</li> <li>Support for reconstruction</li> <li>Support for returnees to Bosnia</li> <li>Charity/fundraising in Germany for people in need in BiH (e.g., for medical treatment or education)</li> </ul>
<i>Cultural</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Religious activities (Friday prayers, religious holidays, religious instruction)</li> <li>Cultural and educational events (themed events, exhibitions, lectures, theater, concerts, discussions) on culture and history of Bosnia and former Yugoslavia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange programs promoting dialog</li> </ul>
<i>Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support in arrival and integration processes</li> <li>Counseling (language classes, help to find work, bureaucratic matters)</li> <li>Charity: support for community members in need</li> </ul>	
<i>Political</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation in local institutions concerned with integration issues and migrants' rights</li> <li>Awareness raising about the legacies of the war in mainstream society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commemoration (e.g., Srebrenica genocide)</li> <li>(Mobilization in Germany for participation in Bosnian elections through informal networks, not the researched organizations)</li> </ul>

#### 5.4.1 *Activities directed toward the settlement context*

Many activities are directed toward Germany as the country of residence, usually the place of residence. Typically, the organizations arrange gatherings and events that serve the religious, social and cultural needs of their members in the settlement context, thus fulfilling a *bonding function* among community members (Pries 2013). In this regard, particularly mosque associations play an important role for the social cohesion among the members of the local community. Bosnian mosque associations conceive of their primary task to meet religious needs of their members – such as Friday prayers, the celebration of religious holidays, and religious instructions. At the same time, they play an indispensable role in fulfilling socio-cultural needs of the community. Community members come together in social gatherings before and after prayers or on religious holidays, discussions or concerts with invited musicians from Bosnia. Furthermore, mosque associations arrange sports and leisure activities, as well as youth work, private lessons for students after school and women's groups. As the interviewed representatives report, even though their capacities are low,

based on voluntary work and limited financial means, they feel responsible for the organization of social and cultural events, because otherwise such activities would not take place due to a lack of organized groups that organize them. One reason why the communities fulfill this dual function is that not all its members and associates are strongly religious – the number people attending the Friday prayers is much lower than the number of factual members. For them, the Bosnian community is perceived in its role as a ‘social glue’ in everyday life. It is a space where latest information is spread, where they and their children come together with other community members, and find help in everyday life. Thus, mosque associations are typical migrant organizations, and the functions and the fields in which they work often overlap (Pries 2013: 3, 5). In the course of time, reflecting the historical context, the composition of their members changed from early Bosnian guest workers and their families to refugee families and the descendants of the guest workers as well as more recent migrants. In this way, also the distribution regarding members’ educational level and gender changed (from mainly male workers to more families and persons with higher educational degrees). Meanwhile, also the orientation shifted from a sole inward focus on the well-being and needs of its members toward a broader focus on the settlement context and integration. The Bosnian organizations, including Bosnian mosque associations, play a mediating role between their members on the one hand and the mainstream society and its institutions on the other, thus fulfilling a *bridging function* (Pries 2013): they support in arrival and social integration processes and political integration (representation in local institutions concerned with integration issues and migrants’ rights, organization of public discussions). These are forms of *immigrant politics* with the goal of improving the situation of migrants in the settlement context (e.g., political, social or economic rights, fighting against discrimination) (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001b: 5). An example that has been mentioned before is the claim for Bosnian language classes in school.

Further bridging activities are events representing Bosnian-Herzegovinian culture and history and promoting exchange between German and Bosnian culture and arts, such as themed evenings, exhibitions, lectures, theater, concerts, or discussions. Interlocutors explained that they aim to promote a positive image of Bosnia and the Balkan region with its cultural diversity and beyond its conflicts and wars, and to create dialog between people of different origin and fight prejudices. To this end, they also arrange educational projects that particularly address young people and where a space is create in which young migrants or young persons whose parents migrated to Germany can discuss about migration and identity and express their experiences of discrimination and feelings of being perceived as ‘others’.

Through charitable activities and fundraising campaigns in Germany, they mobilize resources to support individual persons in need in Germany as well as Bosnia (see *below*). Furthermore, support to community members in need of assistance in Germany is ensured,

for instance, through counseling, help to find orientation and work and with bureaucratic matters, or help for elderly migrants requiring help in everyday life.

The scope of activities indicates that the focus of these organizations tends to center on the life of their members in Germany and is connected with identity and cultural maintenance as 'Bosnians' or 'Bosnian Muslims'. They also show how the context of the origin country and the context of settlement are concatenated through their transnational practices (Fauser 2010: 266). Many activities are clearly influenced by the wish to inform the society in the settlement context – of which they consider themselves a part of – about their origin culture and history, and to raise awareness about what happened during the war in former Yugoslavia (see also *below*). Further activities focus at origin country issues, even though they are not necessarily exercised in Bosnia. They are outlined in the following subsection.

#### *5.4.2 Common transnational activities directed toward the origin context*

Coming to a particular interest followed in this paper in how the researched organizations contribute to the recovery processes in Bosnia, this subsection draws attention to some important example activities of (social) reconstruction which are issues of concern for most of the researched organizations and which appear to be widespread among Bosnians in Germany. All three examples represent forms of transnational practices oriented toward the origin country for which organizational networks and resources are mobilized in the settlement context. They indicate that dynamics and practices among the Bosnian population in Germany are influenced by processes in Bosnia.

##### *Mobilization of humanitarian relief in Germany for the war-affected population in BiH*

During and shortly after the war in Bosnia, many Bosnians in Germany organized humanitarian aid for the war-affected population in Bosnia. To this end many organizations have been founded by Bosnians and other people from former Yugoslavia during this time (Hunger 2004: 11). Also, the interviewed representatives report about their involvement in the collective provision of relief, either through the organizations they represent today or through other networks in which they have been active back then. Sometimes together with broad support structures in the German population (local citizens, church communities, firms and journalists), during and shortly after the war they sent many aid transports with humanitarian supplies, such as food and hygiene products to people in need in Bosnia (but also to war-affected populations in other parts of former Yugoslavia), in many cases irrespective of national belonging. As another form of support, assistance for people fleeing

from the war-affected regions has been of importance. Often organized through social networks, people travelled from Germany to the region, in order to facilitate a safe passage of their or other community members' family members and others.

*Mobilization of humanitarian relief in Germany for people affected by the floods in 2014*

While many initiatives that delivered aid during the war had dissolved in the post-war years, still, nearly 20 years later, spontaneous mobilization is possible among Bosnians in Germany. The willingness to provide aid for people in the region of origin was evident during the natural catastrophe caused by strong floods following heavy rain fall in May 2014, which led to an emergency situation in parts of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia. Within the shortest period of time, many initiatives organized humanitarian aid. Most of the researched organizations report about their involvement in helping people in need - irrespective of national or religious belonging.

On the one hand, they mobilized for the collection of aid supplies and transported them to affected regions in Bosnia and Croatia; or they collected money in Germany in order to buy and transport products to the places where they were needed in Bosnia, together with local partner organizations and in coordination with the crisis committee in Bosnia. On the other hand, they took action to assist affected populations protect against the floods and reconstruct destroyed or damaged houses, including the provision of basic materials (stove, fridge, tiles, windows etc.).

According to the interview partners the remarkable about this particular incidence has been the uniting effect of this emergency situation: A situation that affects all population groups, irrespective of ethno-national belonging, seems to have the positive effect of overcoming divisions and helping each other. Furthermore, even those who have not been organized during the past years were mobilized immediately.

“(...) and nobody asked whether Moslem, Christian, Orthodox, Bosnian, Serb, Croatian. It worked, because they saw that for the first time also the people down there have been helping each other, since everyone was affected by the misery.”

“Yes, there has been everyone, not only associations, suddenly we have all been there. And not only from Bosnia-Herzegovina, but all that have been in this part of Croatia, where it happened as well, they have been collecting, too. (...) So, this was interesting. I think (...), hardship connects us. Maybe this is not true. But in need we are suddenly all there, everyone shows up. (...) Sometimes this helps.”

However, while praising the strength of the population abroad in such an emergency situation, at the same time they use this incidence to criticize the weak state structures in Bosnia for apparent unwillingness to cooperate with the population abroad in order to solve such a crisis:

“Once again the whole Bosnian diaspora has shown a big heart and great organization. Within a couple of weeks, the entire diaspora from all over Germany has been in Bosnia. (...) And everything failed in Bosnia itself, as usual. After a couple of weeks, we have been hampered by all means. We had to pay customs for humanitarian aid, our doors and windows were not led through.”

### *20 years after the genocide in Srebrenica*

A recent crucial date for Bosnians worldwide was 11 July 2015, the commemoration day that marks the genocide of Srebrenica. As 2015 was the 20<sup>th</sup> year after the genocide, it was of particular interest to find out how Bosnians living in Germany remember this tragic event either in Germany or in Bosnia. Because the date falls within a period when many Bosnians spend their summer holidays in Bosnia, according to informants it is rather difficult to commemorate this date through events in Germany. Nevertheless, for instance, peace marches and ceremonies to commemorate the victims of the genocide and panel discussions with Bosnian and German guests ahead of this date have been organized by several organizations, often in cooperation with other local Bosnian organizations. Besides commemorating past war events, they aimed to raise awareness about them and their aftermaths in the German society.

Besides these, further activities oriented toward the origin country can be mentioned. Today, development and reconstruction activities appear to be less pressing issues for Bosnian organizations in Germany.<sup>13</sup> The researched organizations irregularly arranged humanitarian short-term emergency response and assisted in reconstruction after the war and the floods. Not much long-term commitment for development-oriented or economic reconstruction has been identified: The humanitarian NGO provides long-term support for orphans and micro-credit grants for small businesses, and facilitates free consultation and care services to people with post-traumatic stress disorder caused by traumatizing war experiences or family losses or socio-economic problems in the aftermath of the war. Other organizations, for instance, implemented projects with the objective to ensure a sustained return to Bosnia in safety and dignity. At the end of the 1990s, a Germany-wide coordination structure (predominantly of volunteers) was created to assist the repatriation of refugees, together with local and international organizations in Bosnia. Returnees have also been financially supported during the first one or two years upon return, for instance, for renting an

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<sup>13</sup> Individually many Bosnians, also the interviewed persons, still send financial remittances and other material support to their family members in Bosnia, travel to Bosnia and spend money there. Both practices have economic impacts on the development in Bosnia.

apartment, schooling or reconstructing damaged houses. These activities have been motivated by the deportation regime and lack of sustainable return policies in Germany, which did not allow for the securing of a livelihood upon return.

On a small scale, humanitarian assistance in Bosnia is also arranged support individuals in need, such as poor households, people in need of medical treatment or through stipends for school children of socially disadvantaged families. Such forms of assistance aim to improve the well-being of individuals and households and may have poverty mitigating effects for the beneficiaries. The revenues of fundraising events organized in Germany have also been used for reconstruction processes in local Bosnian communities.

Most of the researched organizations do not want to engage in political processes and day-to-day politics in Bosnia; they do not understand their origin-country oriented activities in political terms. In informal networks outside of the researched organizations, some Bosnians mobilize for elections or the census in Bosnia among the Bosnian population in Germany - a direct form to exert of influence on the origin country through border-crossing participation (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a: 262).<sup>14</sup> For instance, religious communities tried to motivate people to declare themselves as Bosniaks in their origin communities in the census 2013. The number and distribution of the Bosniak population has an influence on political majorities in the municipalities (especially in Republika Srpska), so that this mobilization is a strategy to demonstrate disagreement with the results of ethnic cleansing. One interviewee states: "When it concerns the nationality and the people as such, that is threatened, in such cases we step in."

Only one organization of Bosniak academics engages regularly in political processes in Bosnia in order to advocate national interests of Bosniaks, e.g. through protest letters to Bosnian authorities. An interesting example is a letter sent to the German chancellor as a means to indirectly put pressure on authorities in Republika Srpska. They tried to exert influence in the origin country by formulating claims toward institutions in the settlement country to intervene in the origin country (Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a: 262). Feeling that attempts to directly address responsible authorities in Bosnia would not succeed, they used opportunity structures in Germany to put forward the claim that discrimination against school children of Bosniak returnee families in Serb-dominated Republika Srpska needs to be abolished. They supported the protests of the parents against the Serbian curriculum, according to which students have a right to study subjects (e.g., history, language) according

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<sup>14</sup> As mentioned, some of those that still hold Bosnian citizenship vote in Bosnian elections – a direct influence on Bosnian politics.



to curricula of their own national group only from year six onward, whereas in the first years classes are taught following the Serbian curriculum in Cyrillic.

#### 5.4.3 *Promoting peace and dialog in transnational social spaces*

This section reflects on activities that contribute to peacebuilding processes, understood here broadly as “(...) those initiatives which *foster and support sustainable structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence, or continuation of violent conflict.*” (Bush 2007: 16f, italics in original). In a post-war situation, it describes “a transformative process whereby a society moves away from conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships” (Haider 2014: 210, based on Lederach 1997). It aims to overcome deep structural injustices (Berghof Foundation 2012: 62) and closely goes together with processes of reconciliation through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future: “From a peacebuilding perspective, reconciliation may be seen as the process of repairing relationships at all levels of society (including personal relationships, intergroup relationships and relationships that allow for collective civic action) and confronting dominant narratives of the past (...)” (Haider 2014: 210).

The research revealed that activities with an explicit aim to overcome divides between the groups formerly at war with each other are not common among Bosnian organizations in Germany. The objective of peace promotion has been identified for those organizations that expressed a civic-inclusive understanding of their Bosnian identity and the wish for a culture of tolerance - not only in Bosnia, but also in their place of settlement. The rejection of ethno-national group divisions and the idea of restoring ‘friendly’ relations (Esterhuizen 2005: 47) can be seen as cross-cutting objectives that guide their projects. Their projects focus on education, dialog and exchange between people of different backgrounds, in order to challenge the manifestation of ethno-national polarization. They emphasize that it is not only a matter in the origin country, but also among the population abroad, which is likewise affected by these segregations. Spanning between the region of origin and the place of settlement, they create a space that facilitates face-to-face inter-ethnic contact and challenges divisions and polarizations that prevail among the population in the origin country as well as abroad. At the same time, it is not only about post-war Bosnia, but also about mutual learning and understanding between the Bosnian migrant population in Germany and mainstream society. Therefore, the scope of their projects is not limited to the Balkan region and Bosnia in particular, but takes place between ‘down there’ and ‘here’ in Germany and

connects people from both regions. Thus, their projects truly create transnational social spaces that open up opportunities to change perspectives and learn from other people's experiences and historical legacies.

Furthermore, their particular focus on young people from Bosnia (and neighboring countries) offers a valuable contribution to social reconstruction since many young people in Bosnia grow up without much interethnic contact to peers that belong to another group due to the ethnically divided educational system (Perry 2013). For instance, they conduct school exchange programs, so that young students from Bosnia can see and experience what it can mean to live without the prerequisites of ethno-national divisions:

“... it is important for me that the people from down there, especially the young ones, that come here, that they see what another life, without borders, without religious prerequisites - I am Serb, I am Muslim... But how all the people from all over the world live here, that they really see this with their own eyes. That at least they once experience this. Such a week here (...) and they are totally changed persons. (...) that the people that live down there have the chance to experience democracy. See how it works in a highly democratic country, that people on the streets or in the class room sit all together normally and do not have a problem with that.”

Other activities that underline the aim of restoring social relations and trust are events that aim to present Bosnia in its cultural diversity, from a non-ethnocentric perspective, as well as commemorative events, such as those for the Srebrenica genocide. Furthermore, they invite human rights groups and organizations for discussion rounds in order to express their solidarity and strengthen civil society engagement in the Balkans.

All these activities have the goal to bring about social change. The organizations have the feeling that they can hardly intervene in Bosnia directly, because Bosnian authorities do not welcome these kinds of interests and activities. Therefore, they locate their commitment on a grassroots level and in a socio-cultural sphere, and avoid collaboration and confrontation with the Bosnian authorities and instead seek partners on a civil society level. They understand their own commitment in broader terms of making a positive contribution to Bosnia through promoting a culture of peaceful co-existence. In their eyes, a future peace in Bosnia is only realizable within a peaceful Europe. Thus, every project in Germany and in the Balkan countries, even if it does not directly target Bosnia, promotes social change in Bosnia by transmitting ideas of a society in which people are working together toward a shared future with economic and societal development.

## 6 Concluding remarks

This paper has shown that the Bosnian population in Germany is very heterogeneous in its composition. The empirical findings indicate that today the landscape of Bosnian

organizations in Germany is characterized by disorganization and fragmentation, especially along ethno-national lines. Organizational structures are dominated by mosque associations, which have been the most persistent structure in Bosnian community formation throughout the years. Among the researched organizations, a differentiation in those taking a Bosniak stance and those promoting a civic-inclusive identity as Bosnian-Herzegovinians has been identified. The difficulties to speak with a unified voice are highlighted by the failed attempts to establish an umbrella organization of Bosnian initiatives in Germany.

The institutional conditions in the German context are rather discouraging Bosnian migrants' transnational practices. The years-long unfavorable legal and socio-economic situation of Bosnian refugees hampered the integration process into the host community and thus limited opportunities for them to accumulate resources that may have enhanced the willingness for collective transnational practices (Fauser 2010: 273ff, 266; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001: 263) that allow to make contributions to Bosnia beyond immediate support of significant others.

It has been shown that today the researched organizations have a strong focus on the settlement context, in which they do not only seek to satisfy the needs of their community members but also engage in the representation of their interests, usually on the level of the municipality. This orientation may not only be the result of many years of residence in Germany. At the same time, while still retaining a strong emotional attachment to Bosnia, the perception that the Bosnian government is not welcoming their activities and not willing to involve them in post-war recovery processes, may have made them focus more on the settlement context (The Bosnian context and how it is perceived to constrain the organizations' activities is discussed in another paper). As it has been pointed out, they criticized the reactions of Bosnian authorities to their humanitarian assistance and support in reconstruction during the floods.

Still, some transnational activities oriented toward the origin country and conducive for infrastructure and social reconstruction have been identified. Common examples include collective provision of relief and help for reconstruction during the war and in the immediate post-war situation and assistance during the repatriation of refugees; emergency support during the floods in 2014; commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide and other human rights violations committed during the war, for instance through silent marches and discussions to raise awareness in Germany. Among most organizations, there is less long-term commitment in development projects and more irregular, short-term campaigns. None of the researched organizations stated willingness for stronger immediate involvement in the political and economic development (except for private remittances), even though some of their members informally mobilize Bosnians abroad to vote in Bosnian elections.

Ethnonational segregations significantly impact on the contributions to promote dialog and peace from abroad, since such activities are not very widespread. Activities that aim to

promote reconciliatory attitudes and challenge divisions have been identified among organizations that adopt a more inclusive understanding of their identity as Bosnian-Herzegovinians. They aim to challenge the manifestation of ethno-national polarization in post-war Bosnia and in diaspora on a grass-roots level and have a strong focus on education, dialog and exchange. Often, they specifically target adolescents from Bosnia (or the Balkans more broadly) and Germany. Through these activities, transnational social spaces are created that open up opportunities to exchange perspectives and experiences.

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