PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title

Bridging ‘Post-Brexit’ Societal Divisions – Learning from Civil Society Initiatives in the Case of Bosnia & Herzegovina or Kosovo

Project Summary

Aim: This project investigates the transferability of educationally innovative tools for recognising and bridging societal divides and counteracting hate speech which have been developed and applied in Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo after the wars in the 1990s. Focusing on civil society initiatives which created tools of conflict transformation that foster the recognition, appreciation and humanisation of ethnic and social differences, the project explores whether these can, and should, be made available in a ‘post-Brexit’ UK.

Rationale: This project addresses a highly topical and important need in contemporary society. According to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2016), the UK referendum campaign concerning membership of the EU ‘was marked by divisive, anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric’. Since the referendum, critical observers have noticed a consolidation of ‘post-truth’ politics seemingly contributing to the normalisation of exclusionary discourses in the media, aimed at ethno-religious minorities, immigrants from and beyond the EU, asylum-seekers and refugees. Simultaneously, British society has emerged as politically deeply divided over the issues and an increase in hate crimes has been reported. Following the triggering of Article 50, the probable protracted duration of hard or soft Brexit negotiations is likely to make these divisions in society more pronounced. Politicians seeking to gain a political edge from radical negotiation positions (as seen in the US election campaigns) may resort back to divisive rhetoric employed during the referendum campaigns.

Novelty: The project is original in reversing the usual West-East knowledge transfer. It benefits from the fact that selected civil society initiatives in the region of interest have more than 20 years of experience in promoting conflict transformation between antagonist groups at local level. It will take both historical, contextual differences and similarities between the selected regional case study and the UK into account, including the correlations between economic deterioration, globalisation, right wing populism and the role of the state.

Project Stages and Method:

The project will be completed in four stages using a mix of methods for comparative research and evaluation:

1. It will identify a successful case study (civil society partner with a consolidated portfolio of educational, conflict-transformation tools) in BiH or Kosovo. Documentary analysis and qualitative interviews will be used to complete an in-depth analysis of (historical) context-dependency, reach and impact.

2. In the UK, a base-line survey of existing policies, tools and practices for counteracting xenophobia and hate speech will be conducted followed by a gap/needs analysis. The latter will also comprise of participant observation by partnering with community-based civil society or educational NGO with implementation potential such as the Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC; support confirmed).

3. Comparison and analysis of the BiH/Kosovo case study and UK scenarios will be conducted. This will include due consideration of context specificity, tool efficiency, tool transferability, development and implementation in the UK.

4. Formulation of policy recommendations based on the comparative findings.

Academic Impact

This project will deliver accelerated impact through the ways it aligns with the ongoing international dissemination,
networking and project activities of the cross-faculty ‘Conflict Transformation Studies’ group, led by Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers of the FHSS (for details, see [https://research.bournemouth.ac.uk/2015/09/conflict-transformation-studies/](https://research.bournemouth.ac.uk/2015/09/conflict-transformation-studies/)). Beyond its roots in sociology, social anthropology and social policy (community) studies, it will have both an interdisciplinary and international appeal, given its unusual and novel reversal of the established West-East transfer of knowledge to divided societies in peace-building and conflict transformation policies and practices. While there are obvious synergies with disciplines such as International Relations, Political Sciences, history, conflict, mediation, justice, peace and European studies, there are also possibilities for cutting-edge collaborations with the arts, design and online technologies (depending on the selected candidate’s experience and the ‘tools’ to be selected for comparison).

The project lends itself to the production of high-quality conference presentations and academic articles with high impact factor (in consultation with project and REF-leaders). It hopes to attract candidates with excellent international academic credentials, relevant language knowledge and practice experience in either BiH or Kosovo, who might otherwise not consider research and study in the UK.

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<th>Societal Impact</th>
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<td>This project will identify and explore the feasibility and transferability of educational tools aimed at bridging societal divisions and promoting empathy and learning of any socio-politically constructed ‘other’s’ humanity, where such divisions have become normalised in the UK. Its direct societal and policy impact lies in addressing a pertinent, contemporary problem in innovative ways. To that effect the project will</td>
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<td>• Identify transferable tools from the BiH or Kosovo case to be utilised in particular, local UK contexts thus informing current practice.</td>
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<td>• Promote cross-cultural, international networking and knowledge exchange among all involved stakeholders (activists, academics, beneficiaries).</td>
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<td>• Foster co-creative involvement of activists, stakeholders and beneficiaries (schools, youth centres, BU students, citizen associations) in furthering and shaping the adaptation of tools designed to bridge societal divides.</td>
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<td>• Formulate recommendations, possibly in matrix form, outlining which type of tools are best suited for what particular context, including transferability potentials and adaptation requirements, thus aiding policy, decision-making processes and educational investments.</td>
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<td>• Ensure a lasting legacy by devising a follow-up research agenda to further refine and disseminate understanding of best practice in applying educational tools for promoting societal cohesion; and a clear strategy to continue the established dialogue across stakeholders to maximise future impact and evaluation.</td>
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<th>Training Opportunities</th>
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<td>The PhD student will have a unique opportunity to harness the expertise of a cross-disciplinary supervision team specialised in area studies, social anthropology, sociology, social policy, criminology and social work, conflict transformation studies, philosophy and justice.</td>
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The student will be offered training to develop their personal skills around data management, interviewing skills, qualitative research, presentation and publishing through enrolment in the Graduate School. There will be a strong focus throughout the project on literature synthesis, historical sociology and context analysis, critical discourse analysis, interview techniques and data analysis (including software packages such as NVIVO).

The student will benefit from attachment to the Centre of Qualitative Research at FHSS and the Centre for Conflict, Rule of Law and Society at FMC in further developing the study design and methods, including statistical evaluation needs as appropriate. Ethics support will be offered at departmental level.

There will be opportunities to contribute to teaching and bid development - within appropriate time limits - providing essential academic experience.

As part of the PhD programme the student will be encouraged to publish their research findings, with support from supervisors, in peer-reviewed journals and he/she might benefit from academic writing workshops as previously offered at the FHSS.
### SUPERVISORY TEAM

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<th>First Supervisor</th>
<th>Dr Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers</th>
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<td>Additional Supervisors</td>
<td>Dr Melanie Klinkner</td>
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<td>Professor Jonathan Parker</td>
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### Recent publications by supervisors relevant to this project


### INFORMAL ENQUIRIES

To discuss this opportunity further, please contact Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers via email: sssievers@bournemouth.ac.uk
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Studentship candidates must demonstrate outstanding academic potential with preferably a 1st class honours degree and/or a Master’s degree with distinction or equivalent Grade Point Average. An IELTS (Academic) score of 6.5 minimum (with a minimum 5.5 in each component) is essential for candidates for whom English is not their first language. In addition to satisfying basic entry criteria, BU will look closely at the qualities, skills and background of each candidate and what they can bring to their chosen research project in order to ensure successful completion.

Additional Eligibility

Candidates should be able to demonstrate experience in civil society initiatives aimed at developing and/or applying educationally innovative tools for recognising and bridging societal divisions in either BiH or Kosovo. Furthermore, relevant language knowledge, as pertaining to the selected comparative case study, is essential.

HOW TO APPLY

Please complete the online application form by 18th April, 2017. Further information on the application process can be found at: www.bournemouth.ac.uk/studentships