

A hand is shown holding a white rectangular sign. The sign has the text "WHERE IS MY VOICE HEARD?" written in a bold, black, hand-drawn font. The background features a warm, orange and yellow sunset sky with dark silhouettes of industrial buildings and chimneys. The overall style is that of a political cartoon or protest graphic.

WHERE IS
MY VOICE HEARD?

Youth participation in decision-making processes

Research report



Author of the research:

Zlatan Jovanović, proMENTE social research

Co-authors of the research:

Eldar Ramić, Lejla Ćehić, Merjem Alić i Sara Ninković, training participants

Publisher

Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina

For the publisher:

Admir Mehićić

Project coordinator:

Faruk Topuz

Design:

Almedina Išerić

Illustration:

Ajla Ademović

Report creation date:

December 2020, Sarajevo

Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Mula Mustafe Bašeskije 7, 71 000 Sarajevo, BiH

www.asubih.ba

This publication was created with the financial support of the Schüler Helfen Leben BiH Foundation. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the SHL Foundation.



THANK YOU

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to this report:

- » to Jovana Jotanović and Azra Sorguč who worked hard on the organization and implementation of the entire research;
- » secondary school students researchers who conducted surveys in their local communities;
- » all secondary school students involved in the research;
- » to all external collaborators who have contributed to this report being done in a quality manner.

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Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ASuBiH) is a non-governmental, non-partisan, and non-political organization whose main goal is to improve the status of secondary school students in the country and bring together all young people attending secondary schools in BiH.

ASuBiH was founded on November 4, 2007. at the Founding General Assembly in Sarajevo, with the support of over 250 secondary school students, representatives of their local communities from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The initiative for the establishment of this organization, in addition to the secondary school students themselves, was initiated by the German Schüler Helfen Leben Foundation (SHL), which is also the general donor of ASuBiH.

So far, ASuBiH has completed many projects and activities that have managed to gather and activate over 10,000 secondary school students from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. ASuBiH deals with the education of secondary school students, the involvement of secondary school students in the decision-making processes, work on changes, amendments, and adoption of legal and political solutions related to secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, representation of secondary school students in BiH, and cooperation with other organizations and secondary school students in BiH.

ASuBiH has been a full member of OBESSU (Organizing Bureau of European School Student Unions) since 2009. ASuBiH has so far participated in numerous OBESSU events throughout Europe.

Mission

Increase the degree of involvement of secondary school students in the decision-making processes that improve their status in society by introducing the rights of secondary school students and advocating the ideas of all secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina that contribute to improving their life in the community.



proMENTE social research

proMENTE provides social research solutions for companies and non-profit organizations. Everything we do - research, evaluation training - is based on scientific postulates.

Since its establishment in 2002, proMENTE Social Research has implemented over 200 research projects, of which about 80 are project evaluations, which makes us the leading research and evaluation agency in the region. In the realization of most of our previous research, we used a multi-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. We have many years of experience in designing research and statistical analyzes from various social fields.

We successfully use a variety of instruments from a wider range, from standard instruments such as key source interviews or literature reviews to more innovative techniques. We were the first in the Balkans to systematically apply Outcome Mapping and Most Significant Changes techniques, and we published and presented the results at international conferences. Many of our projects involved focus groups with different groups of participants and on different topics. The application of techniques varies, from surveying public opinion to gathering the views of specific groups such as school principals.



About the training

This research was conducted as part of the training organized by the Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ASuBiH) and proMENTE social research, which aimed to teach students the basics of scientific research through the "Youth participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina". The training, which lasted from April to December 2020, was attended by 25 secondary school students from Banja Luka, Bihać, Brčko, Bugojno, Foča, Goražde, Gradačac, Jablanica, Modriča, Orašje, Rogatica, Sarajevo, and Zenica.

„The research gave me the opportunity to primarily learn what research is and what the basic elements of research are. Then, it gave me the opportunity to engage in discussions on very sensitive topics and learn how to behave during the discussion. Also, I had the opportunity to investigate in more detail how much young people participate in decision-making processes in our country and elsewhere, and how much importance is attached to it. I know I could do it before, but since I now had it as a mandatory task to do it - I did it. As for training and meetings in general, it was super organized, taking into account the situation with the pandemic.“, AmilaDuraković, training participant and member of the team of youth researchers from Brčko.

A total of 7 training modules were conducted, of which 6 one-day meetings were held online and one four-day live meeting. Between each meeting, participants had assignments related to research work that they conducted under the supervision of the training organizers. Through interactive work, discussions, lectures, and accompanying materials, participants had the opportunity to develop critical thinking and acquire knowledge about the basics of scientific research. Great emphasis was placed on participation, and participants had the opportunity to give their ideas for changes to the research design.

“I was honored to be part of the first live training for Research on the topic of “Youth participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, as one of the researchers. Although I was not able to be there the first day, the second day I got involved in the work and all the activities and started spreading my knowledge on this topic. Through practical exercises and interesting workshops, our coach Zlatan taught us a lot of things and motivated us to continue working on this project. At the moment, I have a strong expectation towards the completion of the Research and publication of the results, to be used for good purposes and to improve the status of young people in BiH.”, Ismar Ajkunić, research participant from Gradačac.

During the four days of live training, the participants had the opportunity to deepen the topic of youth participation in decision-making processes through current issues concerning young people, but also the entire Bosnian society. The role of individual and social factors in decision-making processes and psychological processes and styles behind decision-making were discussed. Then we talked about logical reasoning, which is the foundation of the scientific method, and we repeated the basic concepts and stages of the research process that participants had the opportunity to discuss in previous online pieces of training, this time on the example of experimental research on the judgment. The knowledge was practically applied for the first time. Participants designed, conducted, and presented two types of research, one on the topic of the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the other about the selection of faculties.

We deepened the topic of immigration by practicing qualitative techniques, through an interview with a guest psychologist who works in a reception center for migrants, and through a debate on whether immigration is good for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The intensive four-day training ended with the distribution of tasks for the next phases of our research on the youth participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“This education was for me a wonderful experience that I would love to repeat. I entered the research uninformed and came out with great knowledge. I learned so much, and at the same time, I got closer and met secondary school students all over BiH. I would like us to continue discussing and analyzing similar topics because the future, which we are building together, remains with us. I am looking forward to our reunion!”, Kiara Kurešević, a research participant from Modriča.

Finally, training to write a research report was conducted, and four interested participants participated in writing the study in front of you. Besides, other participants in the training participated in the preparation of each segment of this report, under the mentorship of proMENTE, to a greater or lesser extent, which was emphasized throughout the text in appropriate places.

01. INTRODUCTION

Young people in every society are social capital for the future. They should be bearers of positive change who recognize the mistakes of older generations, work to improve all the bad, and maintain all the good left to them in the legacy. The paradox hidden in this seemingly simple formula for the functioning of social progress is obvious - how can the younger generation correct the mistakes of those who raised them, if the same mistakes are inscribed in that upbringing? It seems obvious that the state should invest in its youth and that this youth should be active participants in positive social change. But if both parts of this mechanism fail, how can interested individuals and organizations act to get it started? Should they focus their activities on the state or young people?

Bosnia and Herzegovina's numerous functioning problems are visible in the state's attitude towards young people or in the absence of that attitude. Although more than ten years ago, laws on youth were adopted that oblige all levels of government to create and adopt youth strategies, to date, these strategies have been adopted in only 29 local communities in the Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska. Strategies for young people at the local level are particularly important because they address issues and problems that directly affect them and that have a visible, immediate impact, such as formal and non-formal education, employment, and health. Even when strategies are adopted, the question of their implementation arises¹. The problem of youth strategies is just one of many indicators of state neglect for this population. Unemployment of over 60% of young people², the inadequacy of the education system visible in poor PISA test results³, overall political climate and living conditions, create an environment in which young people seem to mostly choose one of two options: stay and be passive or leave Bosnia and Herzegovina. Previous youth surveys in Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown that more than half of young people have never participated or want to participate in some form of protest, gathering, or demonstration, while close to half of the young people are not interested in politics⁴.

Increasing the participation of young people in decision-making processes is one of the ways for young people to become more active and to influence the government's attitude towards young people. The meaning of civic participation is in two-way communication from citizens to authorities and from the government to citizens. In this way, democratic culture is built in which those in power, even outside the elections, call for responsibility and making those decisions that are in the interest of all citizens. Whether it is participation in the creation and adoption of strategies for young people or other problems of the local community, participation in decision-making processes is one of the foundations for building a fundamental democratic functioning at

1 Young people without perspective because they are competent without strategic solutions. Mreža mira <https://www.mreza-mira.net/vijesti/aktivnosti-mreze/mladi-bez-perspektive-jer-su-nadlezni-bez-strateskih-rjesenja/?fbclid=IwAR3uHJ0YOOB-hJfJa6F7d8rFYXxEx1MTejwRI3Y0tI9XL3ykXkiZzgA727RA>

2 Youth Study Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018/2019. Friedrich-Ebert Foundation.

3 PISA 2018 Report for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education

4 Political culture of youth in BiH. Mreža mira <https://www.mreza-mira.net/vijesti/kutak-za-aktivistice-i-aktiviste/politicka-kultura-mladih-u-bih/>

the local level.

The first obstacle to participation in decision-making is psychological and refers to broader political attitudes, as well as those related to specific issues, which are governed by our behaviors, ie our (in) activity. This is one of the most challenging problems to overcome because it is strongly influenced by the unfavorable climate for young people we described at the beginning. Then it is important to be aware of what specific problems need to be addressed. That is, young people who want to participate must first of all be informed about the problems of that local community and how they can be solved. You need to know how to get relevant information and whom to contact.

The specific way of direct participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina also depends on which part of the country young people come from. At the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is no law on local self-government, but these laws have been enacted at the entity level. Furthermore, participation in direct decision-making at the local level is regulated by the statutes of municipalities, which state the levels and forms of citizen participation. If the problems of the local community have already been addressed by the local authorities, citizens should be informed about what decisions related to these problems are made, and only then to get involved in the process through various mechanisms.

If these problems of the local community have not yet been recognized by the local authorities, then the task of young people is to work on bringing them to the agenda. Participation in decision-making and highlighting important issues of the local community can take place through various mechanisms such as participation in public debates and forums, organizing various protests, launching petitions, or through targeted action of various formal and informal groups such as NGOs, movements, sections, sports, and cultural associations.

The study on youth participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina addressed all these specific elements of this issue. We seek identify the important aspects that future initiatives aimed at empowering young people to participate in positive change in their local communities through participation in decision-making processes should focus on.

02. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research design

The entire research process that resulted from this study was complex and was conducted in very specific circumstances. The research was realized as part of the training of a group of secondary school students who aimed to teach students the basics of scientific research through dealing with the topic of youth participation in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The period in which the research and training were realized (April-December 2020) was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying measures taken by the authorities to combat the spread of this disease. This global event significantly affected the entire socio-political life, and thus conditioned the way our study was realized. Taking into account the circumstances in which the research was conducted, but also the subject of the research, we were conditioned to be guided from the beginning by four basic principles that complement each other.

1. *Participatory research:* The research involved the participation of young people from ASuBiH in its implementation. Therefore, our research project is of the participatory type. This type of research brings with it certain challenges, given that it includes people who are not trained researchers (in our case, secondary school students), and who are directly related to the subject of research. For example, common research encounters the problem of dropping respondents between two measurement points, while in participatory research there may be dropping out of researchers which greatly complicates the process.
2. *Learning by doing:* All participants in the training have undergone training based on alternating theoretical teaching and practical work. The learning sequences followed the sequences of the research process. Participants adopted and applied new knowledge in the order in which the research was conducted. The first two principles are very good for the training itself, but all phases of the research process are significantly extended due to this. Besides, the fact that the training participants had the opportunity to participate in all these phases, conditioned us to introduce the third principle.
3. *Responsive design:* This type of design involves constantly revising and adapting the methodology during the process. The constant in the whole process was the subject of our research (participation of youth in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina), while revisions were made in the research draft. These changes are mostly the result of participatory work with participants who through the training had the opportunity to express their ideas and views on each segment of research, while the mentioned pandemic had a certain impact.

4. *Combining methods: convergently parallel design*: A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for triangulation of data from multiple sources⁵ was used in the research process. This approach describes and interprets the phenomenon to gain a holistic insight and deeper understanding of the subject matter of the research⁶. Our design is convergently parallel, which means that in our approach, quantitative and qualitative elements are of equal importance and take place independently and simultaneously, and are combined during the interpretation of the data⁷.

2.2 Research goal and research questions

The general goal of our research was to examine the participation of secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in decision-making processes in their local communities. The specific research questions we started from are:

1. *Do secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes?*
2. *If secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes, to what extent?*
3. *If secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes, how do they do so?*

Respecting the participatory principle, our research questions were expanded as part of the training:

4. *What are the possible psychological determinants of (non) participation of secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in decision-making processes?*

2.3 Research tools

Quantitative part

In the quantitative part of the research, we used a questionnaire consisting of seven parts. Participants participated in the creation and piloting of this questionnaire. All parts of the questionnaire had two gender-sensitive versions that differed only in the forms of certain words.

1. Demographic data

The first part of the questionnaire referred to the demographic data of the respondents such as gender, age, place of residence, then school grades, and which year they attend.

⁵ Olsen, Wendy. "Triangulation in social research: qualitative and quantitative methods can really be mixed" *Developments in sociology* 20 (2004): 103-118.

⁶ Milas, Goran. "Research methods in psychology and other social sciences." *Naklada Slap*, 2005.

⁷ Sekol, Ivana, i Ivana Maurović. "Mixing quantitative and qualitative research approach in the social sciences-mixing methods or methodologies?" *Annual of Social Work* 24.1 (2017).

2. Membership in organizations

The respondents then answered questions related to membership in sports, cultural, non-governmental, and school organizations. The questions were closed and the respondents answered one of the 5 offered answers (*Yes; No, I am not interested in such organizations; No, I do not know if there are such organizations in my place; No, there are no such organizations in my place; No, there are no such organizations that deal with what interests me*).

3. Problems of local communities

We asked an open-ended question that read "*In your opinion, what is the biggest problem of your local community*", to which the respondents answered freely with a limit of 50 words.

4. Socio-political attitudes

A set of statements related to socio-political attitudes was created for this research with the help of training participants. Respondents rated the degree of their agreement with claims on a Lickert-type scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). The claims are designed to examine various aspects of participation in decision-making processes, and some of them are "*I know whom to turn to for a solution if I see a problem in the local community*", "*I think petitions (signature collection) are a good way to meet citizens' demands*" and "*I trust local politicians*".

5. Socio-political behaviors

To examine socio-political behaviors related to participation in decision-making processes, we created a set of statements that aim to examine whether respondents have practiced different political behaviors in the past two years. The instruction reads "*I have been in the past two years:*", and for a period of two years instead of one (as would usually be the case in a set of questions of this type), we decided because of the period in which the research was conducted. Due to the measures taken by the authorities to combat the consequences of the pandemic (for example, restriction of movement and public assembly), some of the behaviors we examined (for example, participation in protests and public tribunals, visiting municipal or local community premises) were not possible in the current year.

6. Personal need for structure

After socio-political behaviors, respondents met the Personal Needs Structure Scale. The scale consists of 12 particles that are evaluated on a Lickert-type scale with possible answers from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*). The scale contains particles like "*It upsets me when I find myself in a situation I don't know what to expect in*" and "*Having a constant routine allows me to enjoy life more.*" After recoding the inversely scored negative statements, a higher overall score on the scale indicates a greater need for structure⁸. The Cronbach-alpha type reliability coefficient for this instrument is satisfactory and amounts to $\alpha = 0.71$.

7. Right-wing Authoritarianism

After the Personal Need for Structure, the last scale that the respondents filled in are the Right-wing Authoritarianism Scale⁹, which consists of 12 particles assessed on a Likert-type scale with

⁸ Neuberg, Steven L., and Jason T. Newsom. "Personal need for structure: Individual differences in the desire for simpler structure." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 65.1 (1993): 113.

⁹ Bob Altemeyer. "The Authoritarians" *Winnipeg, Canada: Autor*. (2006)

answers of 1 (*I completely disagree*) to 5 (*I agree*). The scale contains particles such as “*Obedience and respect for authorities are the most important values that children should learn*” and “*What our country needs, instead of more “civil rights” is a good solid dose of law and order*”. After recoding inversely scored negative claims, a higher overall score on the scale indicates more pronounced right-wing authoritarianism. The Cronbach-alpha type reliability coefficient for this instrument is satisfactory and amounts to $\alpha = 0.72$.

At the end of the entire questionnaire, respondents were left room to comment. The collected quantitative data were processed using the statistical computer program IBM SPSS Statistics v25.

Qualitative part

In the qualitative part of the research, guides for a semi-structured interview with questions created to conduct this research were used. The questions referred to the problems faced by local communities, and to the involvement of young people in socio-political activities and their participation in decision-making processes.

2.4 Research process

Data collection was the responsibility of the trainees who were previously educated for that. Participation in the quantitative and qualitative part of the research was voluntary. Data collection was conducted in late October 2020.

Questionnaires as part of the quantitative part of the research were applied via the Internet with the help of the Lime Survey platform. Participation in this part of the research was anonymous. The dissemination of the questionnaire was in charge of 15 trainees who used snowball¹⁰ to collect respondents. Primarily, it was their classmates from their class and their school, and then it was their friends from those respondents. Given that the participants are from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have provided a sample that also covers the entire territory of the country.

Respondents were given a URL link through which they could access the questionnaire where they were greeted on the first page by the following instruction:

“Dear students, Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research entitled “Youth participation in decision-making processes” conducted by the Association of Secondary School Students in Bosnia and Herzegovina and proMENTE social research. Your answers will help us get a complete picture of this very important topic. It takes about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire in front of you. All your answers are anonymous and will not be considered individually but at the group level. Please read the instructions and answer the questions carefully. There are no correct or incorrect answers, only your honest opinion is important to us”.

After collecting the questionnaires, as part of the qualitative part of the research, the participants conducted semi-structured interviews with four people who are familiar with the problems of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An audio recording of the interview was made and then

¹⁰ The snowball sampling method begins with a targeted selection of respondents, who then spread the sample by selecting other respondents

transcribed.

2.5 Respondents

A total of 539 respondents from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the quantitative part of the research. Of these, 150 were male (27.8%) and 389 were female (72.2%). The average age was 16.73 years (SD = 0.97), and the youngest person was 14 and the oldest 19 years old. A detailed overview of the age structure is shown in Table 1.

Age	N	Percentage
14	2	0.4%
15	55	10.2%
16	160	29.7%
17	201	37.3%
18	112	20.8%
19	9	1.7%
Total	539	100%

Table 1. Sample structure by age

When it comes to the class attended by the respondents, the number is fairly uniform in the second, third, and fourth grades, while the smallest number is those in the first grade (N=75). Since our research is focused on secondary school students, 17 respondents who answered that they finished secondary school was excluded from the sample. A detailed overview is shown in Table 2.

Age	N	Percentage
First	75	13.9%
Second	175	32.5%
Third	163	30.2%
Fourth	126	23.4%
Total	539	100%

Table 2. Sample structure according to the class that the respondents attend

The largest number of respondents in the sample in the previous school year had an excellent grade, as many as 56.8%, while those who repeat the class in our sample are not. The detailed presentation is in Table 3.

School Success	N	Percentage
Insufficient (repeats class)	0	0%
Sufficient (2)	1	0.2%
Good (3)	38	7.1%
Very good (4)	194	36.0%
Excellent (5)	306	56.8%
Total	539	100%

Table 3. Sample structure according to school achievement

In the qualitative part of the research, the trainees conducted interviews with four respondents who are employees of organizations and institutions that directly or indirectly deal with youth issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- » Abazović Lejla: Expert associate for youth issues of the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth of Sarajevo Canton
- » Čaušević Adis: Director of the Youth Center Bugojno
- » Novaković Miloš: Municipal councilor in the assembly of the municipality of Rogatica
- » Uzunović Kenan: Youth Officer, City Administration of the City of Zenica - Sector for Social Activities

03. RESULTS

In accordance with the convergently parallel design of the research, we will combine quantitative and qualitative data in combination to get a clearer picture of the phenomenon of (non) participation of secondary school students in decision-making processes in local communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We will first consider the superior psychological constructs that may underlie the decision to act socially or not (Personal Need for Structure and Right-Wing Authoritarianism) and then the specific attitudes related to participation in research processes. Then we will see what it is that secondary school students see as the biggest problems in their local communities. In the end, we will see what behaviors are being undertaken related to participation in decision-making processes. Here we will pay special attention to membership in various organizations as one of the important opportunities for planning future interventions aimed at increasing the participation of young people in decision-making processes.

3.1 Psychological aspects of (in)action

The personal need for structure has very important links with socio-political behaviors. We introduced this measure in our research to shed more light on the psychological functioning in the background of socio-political (in) action. A personal need for structure tells us about a person's propensity for rigid, inflexible, black-and-white attitudes and behaviors. A person with a high need for the structure will look for some kind of framework that provides unambiguous answers about the world. For example, policies based on the friend-enemy paradigm, xenophobic policies, and policies directed against minorities provide such a simplistic view of things.

The average score on the **Personal Needs for Structure scale** is medium to high and is 3.98 (SD=0.63) out of a maximum of 6. The lowest average score is 1.82 and the highest 5.64. Particularly high results are on the particles "I hate to change my plans at the last minute" (M=4.66; 82% of respondents agree with this statement at some level) and "I am not comfortable when the rules of the situation are not clear" (M=4, 61, 87.1% of respondents agree with this statement to some extent). Gender, age, grade attended by respondents, and their success showed no effect on the overall level of personal need for structure.

We can see that the respondents in our sample tend to think a little more rigidly and function. This finding is very important to us because it shows how much it is necessary to work in initiatives focused on social actions (such as participation in decision-making processes) and on those aspects that do not seem directly related, such as divergent thinking, critical thinking, or even.

We found a statistically significant medium-strong¹¹ positive correlation between the overall results on the scales of Personal Need for Structure and Right-Wing Authoritarianism and it is 0.31 ($p < 0.01$). This result is in line with previous research on the relationship of these constructs. The correlation does not imply causality, but this result indicates the connection between these two variables, and that an increase in one can mean an increase in the other. The greater the need for structure, the greater the right-wing authoritarianism. That is, as we have explained, rigid patterns of thinking and behavior lead to rigid ideologies.

The average score on the scale of **Right-Wing Authoritarianism** is medium and amounts to 3.1 (SD=0.43) out of a maximum of 5. The lowest average score is 1.33 and the highest 4.25. It is important to pay attention to which attitudes within this scale make up this overall score. The results are especially high on the following articles:

- » “What our country needs is a strong, determined Prime Minister who will destroy evil and get us back on our right path” where the average score is 4.32 (81.5% of respondents agree with this statement);
- » “What our country needs, instead of more “civil rights” is a good solid dose of law and order”, 3.96 (73% of respondents agree with this statement);
- » “Obedience and respect for authorities are the most important values that children should learn” 3.68 (64.2% of respondents agree with this statement);
- » “The real keys to a “ good life “are obedience, discipline, and virtue” 3.64 (65% of respondents agree with this statement).

The age, the class that the respondents attend and their success did not show any effect on the overall level of Right-Wing Authoritarianism. In **gender**, we found a statistically significant difference in mean scores. We performed a t-test that proved to be significant ($p < 0.01$) with an effect of 0.17. Female subjects achieved significantly lower results (M=3.06) compared to male subjects (M=3.21). This result is consistent with previous research on this construct and indicates to us that male respondents have a higher level of right-wing authoritarianism.

We see that respondents largely support very rigid authoritarian attitudes that focus on simplified, black-and-white solutions to socio-political issues. If we return to the story of potential initiatives aimed at increasing the socio-political activism of young people, we see that it is useful to think and plan work on more general political considerations such as those examined by the scale of Right-wing authoritarianism. We will offer an additional argument for such a recommendation through the analysis of attitudes directly related to participation in decision-making processes.

11 Small correlation $r = 0.1$ to 0.29 ; Medium correlation $r = 0.3$ to 0.49 ; High correlation $r = 0.5$ to 1.0

3.2 Socio-political attitudes about participation in decision-making processes

Attitudes partly govern our behaviors, so it was important in our research to consider what are the attitudes of respondents that can be directly or indirectly related to participation in decision-making processes.

One of the preconditions for participation in decision-making processes is an interest in current issues in socio-political events, as well as the ability to find information. We see that only 23.9% of respondents are somewhat interested in politics (*Mostly agree + Strongly agree*), while more than half (56.7%; *Strongly disagree + Mostly disagree*) are not interested in politics. When this attitude is questioned narrowly through the problems of the local community, we see that interest is growing almost three times, to 67.5% (*I mostly agree + I completely agree*).

Assertion	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Not sure	Mostly agree	Strongly agree
I am interested in politics.	38.0%	18.7%	19.3%	15.4%	8.5%
I am interested in the problems in my local community	5.6%	8.5%	18.4%	39.3%	28.2%
I know whom to turn to for a solution if I notice a problem in the local community.	21.2%	16.1%	38.6%	15.8%	8.3%
I know how to get information on how to solve a problem in my local community	18.9%	16.5%	36.0%	21.9%	6.7%

Table 4. Interest in policy and information seeking

When it comes to information, we see that 37.3% of respondents do not know whom to turn to solve problems in the local community, with 38.6% of those who are unsure. It is similar to seeking information about a problem in the local community where 35.4% of respondents do not know where to get such data, with 36% of those unsure.

We can conclude that initiatives aimed at increasing youth participation in decision-making processes should be aimed at understanding the importance of policy in general. Also, such initiatives should bring politics closer to young people in a way that is understandable to them (for example, through problems in their local community). Furthermore, it would be necessary to work on information related to solving problems in the local community.

The following finding supports our earlier claims that it is necessary to work on more general political views. Statistically significant, low negative correlations were found between right-wing authoritarianism and the statements “I am interested in politics” ($r = -0.1$) and “I am interested in

problems in my local community”($r=-0.038$). Although the correlations are low, such findings lead us to assume that the higher the right-wing authoritarianism, the less interest there is in the politics and problems of the local community.

The next facet that is important for participation in decision-making processes is trust in institutions and politicians. From Table 5 we see that in all cases this trust is very low which can be discouraging for those who want to become active. This is another aspect that should address initiatives aimed at increasing youth participation in decision-making processes.

We found more links with right-wing authoritarianism. There are statistically significant, low positive correlations of Rightist Authoritarianism with all claims related to trust in institutions and politicians ($r=0.109$; $r=0.175$; $r=0.158$; $r=0.11$). This indicates to us that greater right-wing authoritarianism also implies greater trust in politicians and institutions.

Assertion	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Not sure	Mostly agree	Strongly agree
I have confidence in state institutions	20.2%	21.2%	42.7%	13.9%	2.0%
I have confidence in local politicians	42.7%	26.7%	24.3%	5.2%	1.1%
I have confidence in local institutions (municipality, local community ...)	17.3%	22.4%	38.2%	18.9%	3.2%
I have confidence in politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina	57.9%	24.5%	15.2%	1.9%	0.6%

Table 5. Trust in institutions and politicians

We also examined the attitudes related to the mechanisms of participation in decision-making processes, and we received a high agreement with all the claims. First of all, we see that for the very essence of civic participation (“Local institutions should respect the opinion of citizens”) there is a very high level of support of 93.7%. It is similar to the attitudes towards the participation mechanisms themselves, where the degree of agreement is nowhere below 50%. A detailed overview of these results can be seen in Table 6.

As with the previous views, here too we have a connection with Right-wing authoritarianism in four cases. Statistically significant, low negative correlations were found with the particles “Protests can change things” ($r = -0.094$), “Petitions (collecting signatures) can change things” ($r = -0.052$), “I support protests as a means of fulfilling citizens’ demands and citizens” ($r = -0.117$) and “I support the work of non-governmental organizations” ($r = -0.18$). All of these are indicators that greater right-wing authoritarianism results in lower support for various participation mechanisms.

Assertion	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Not sure	Mostly agree	Strongly agree
Local institutions should respect the opinion of citizens	1.3%	0.6%	4.5%	22.3%	71.4%
Protests can change things.	3.3%	4.3%	30.1%	38.8%	23.6%
Petitions (by collecting signatures) can change things	4.8%	8.5%	31.2%	42.5%	13.0%
I support the protests as a means of fulfilling the demands of the citizens	3.7%	5.0%	18.7%	35.4%	37.1%
I believe that petitions (collecting signatures) are a good means of fulfilling the demands of citizens	4.5%	8.2%	26.2%	42.1%	19.1%
I support the work of non-governmental organizations	4.1%	2.0%	28.9%	26.0%	39.0%

Table 6. Participation mechanisms

Finally, we considered attitudes about leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina as an important aspect of motivation for civic participation. The fact that a person wants to leave a country leads us to the obvious conclusion that that person does not want to be socially and politically active in that country. Only 28.9% of respondents see their future in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 39.3% unsure. On the other hand, 42.3% of respondents plan to leave the country permanently at some point in the future, with approximately the same number of those unsure (35.8%).

Assertion	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Not sure	Mostly agree	Strongly agree
I see my future in Bosnia and Herzegovina	16.9%	14.8%	39.3%	20.4%	8.5%
I plan to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina permanently at some point in the future	9.6%	12.2%	35.8%	20.2%	22.1%

Table 7. Departure from Bosnia and Herzegovina

3.3 What is the problem: perception of the local community problems

We asked young people an open-ended question in which they asked them to write to us in 50 words or less what they considered to be the biggest problem of their local community. The answers showed that young people recognize a wide range of current problems such as environmental problems, infrastructure, lack of content and opportunities for young people, problems related to the migrant crisis, unemployment, youth passivity, youth departure, poor attitude, or lack of local government attitude towards young people. corruption and many others.

Respondents' answers offer insight into their perception of the unfavorable social climate in which young people live. Their peers are socially inactive, and if you are active their voice is not heard.

"The biggest problem is that young people do not have the right to vote and that the actions taken by young people are not so much supported."

"We lack creativity, ambition, the spirit to progress."

Young people can detect problems in their local community and often do so very articulately:

"Poor cooperation with local authorities is the biggest problem of my local community. And that poor cooperation stems from the inadequate and uneducated composition of the local government body. Other problems arise from this problem, such as the problems of stray dogs, the non-existence of the House of Culture, the Youth Bank, too high transport prices, etc."

However, many responses also show that young people are dissatisfied and aware of the problem, but they articulate this very generally and concisely.

Future initiatives should allow young people to express their dissatisfaction and everything they see as a problem in their local community because they are capable of it, but at the same time, they need help to express their thoughts and observations in a precise and understandable way. Combined with the aforementioned training to find relevant information, in this way young people would already have a concrete first step in socio-political activism.

3.4 What we (don't) do about it: socio-political behaviors

After considering attitudes about socio-political action, we also examined specific behaviors. We can see that in all behaviors we have between 51.8% and 92.2% negative responses. We have the highest negative result when initiating a petition, which was not done by 92.2% of respondents, and when participating in protests, which was not done by 85.7% of respondents. When it comes to positive answers, we see that most respondents participated in signing the petition (48.2%) or were a member of an NGO (40.9%). Overall, there is a very low level of activity on the use of various mechanisms that could lead to participation in decision-making processes.

Behavior	Answer	
	Yes	No
I have participated in the protest for the past two years	14.3%	85.7%
In the past two years, I have launched a petition	7.8%	92.2%
In the past two years, I have signed a petition	48.2%	51.8%
For the past two years, I have attended a public forum	24.7%	75.3%
I have contacted a politician for the past two years	14.9%	85.1%
For the past two years, I have contacted a government official	18.6%	81.4%
For the past two years, I have posted a picture with political content on social media.	16.5%	80.5%
For the past two years, I have volunteered for an NGO	40.9%	59.1%
For the past two years, I have visited the premises of the Local Community due to some problem in the local community	17.1%	82.9%
In the past two years, I have visited the premises of the Municipality due to a problem in the local community	18.6%	81.4%

Table 8. Socio-political behaviors

This situation regarding the lack of social engagement was detected as a problem through interviews with our four interlocutors. All agree that there is a lack of more concrete articulated socio-political activity of young people and that they essentially do not participate significantly in decision-making processes. One of our interlocutors comments on this as follows:

"I don't like to say that young people are passive, but in a way, they think that they should not be active in certain segments, such as in the relationship with the authorities, because they think they can't change anything, which is not true. Of course, sometimes it is better to go for a coffee or a walk than to go to protests, but these protests concern them and are directly related to them. Young people are not only the future but also the present. No matter how long some processes take, you (young people) are the ones who change things and you should think that those who come after you will be influenced by your and our moves and decisions."

3.5 How and why we (don't) organize: Membership in organizations

Membership in organizations is important for the participation of young people in decision-making because each of these organizations through its activities can potentially be involved in such processes in their local communities. All respondents we spoke to in the interviews, a

advice for young people who want to be active participants in social change, state membership in governmental, non-governmental, formal, and informal organizations.

If you want to encourage membership in different types of organizations (and then targeted action through them), it is important to consider the individual reasons why young people choose not to join different types of organizations, and they relate to the general lack of interest in such organizations, or a lack of interest because of the content they offer. It would be interesting to examine what exactly are the reasons for the lack of interest, and what exactly are the contents of different organizations that would attract young people.

When it comes to membership in various organizations, *the largest number of respondents*, 263 of them (48.8%), is a member of a **school club**. Those who are not members of sections, in most cases, state that there are no sections that interest them (27.5% or 148 respondents) or that sections are not interested in them at all (15.4% or 83 respondents).

In sports organizations such as sports clubs and schools, 37.3% (N = 201) of the respondents are in the sample. 32.5% of them (N = 175) state that they are not interested in such organizations, and 24.3% (N = 131) that there are no such organizations that deal with what interests them.

Respondents are members of some **non-governmental organizations** in 31.2% (N = 168) cases. If they are not members, it is most often because they are not interested in such organizations (47.9% or 258 respondents) or because there are no such organizations that deal with what interests them (11.1% or 60 respondents).

There are 25.6% (N = 138) respondents in the **student council**, while 54% (N = 291) are not interested in such organizations at all. In 16% of cases (N = 86), respondents say that these organizations do not do what they are interested in.

The smallest number of respondents, 136 of them (25.2%) is a member of a **cultural organization** such as cultural and artistic societies. Those who are not members of such organizations most often state that they are not interested in them (46.8% or 252 respondents) or that there are no such organizations that deal with what interests them (17.3% or 93 respondents).

For each of these organizations, as the reason for not being a member, respondents in the least number of cases state that it is because they do not know whether there are such organizations in their place (at least 3.3% at most 7.1%) or not at all such organizations in their place (minimum 0.7% and maximum 4.5%). Based on these data, we cannot conclude that there are a sufficient number of opportunities for young people to join various organizations, but an important conclusion we can draw is that the perception of secondary school students is that there are enough opportunities for that.

When we compare the share of respondents who state that the reason for membership is that they are not interested in such organizations, we can see that the least interest is in NGOs (47.9% or 258 respondents are not interested in NGOs) and cultural organizations (46.8% or 252 respondents). not interested in cultural organizations). In contrast, if we assume that the answer *"I am not a member because there are no such organizations that deal with what interests me"* means that respondents would be members if they were offered the desired content, then the greatest interest in school sections (27.5% or 148 respondents state that they are not members because there are no sections that interest them) and sports organizations (24.3% or 131 respondents state that there are no sports organizations that deal with what interests them).

04. CONCLUSION

Our study pointed to some aspects of youth participation in decision-making processes. Instead of the usual focus on mapping legislation and legislation, we decided to try to tackle the problem of youth passivity in Bosnia and Herzegovina that is so often attributed to them. We set a broad general goal of the research, which included examining the participation of secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in decision-making processes in their local communities. We developed this goal through specific research questions to which we offered answers through research.

» *Do secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes?*
Secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina exhibit certain behaviors (participating in protests, signing and initiating petitions, attending public forums, contacting politicians and government officials, sharing political content on social networks, volunteering in NGOs, visiting municipalities and local communities) that refer to social-political engagement and participation in decision-making processes.

» *If secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes, to what extent?*
These behaviors are expressed to a very small extent, and in most cases, they are manifested by less than a fifth of young people. The exception is the high percentage of signing petitions (48.2%) and volunteering in non-governmental organizations (40.9%).

» *If secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina participate in decision-making processes, how do they do so?*
If we focus on the two most common behaviors, we see that one of them is a rather passive and marginal type of participation through signing petitions (as opposed to initiating petitions, which was only 7.8% of respondents), while the other behavior is a very proactive form of participation through volunteering in NGOs. organizations. Additional research would be needed to examine the activities of NGOs in which young people are involved, and to determine how they operate and whether their participation in decision-making processes is direct or indirect.

» *What are the possible psychological determinants of (non) participation of secondary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina in decision-making processes?*
We have shown that political attitudes and cognitive processes in a broader sense (personal need for structure and right-wing authoritarianism) are very important, which are related to specific attitudes related to participation in decision-making processes. Secondary school students show somewhat rigid patterns of thinking that lead to authoritarian, anti-democratic political attitudes, which are then negatively associated with attitudes about participation in decision-making processes.

4.1 Guidelines for future initiatives

Initiatives aimed at empowering young people and increasing their participation in decision-making processes should be comprehensive in their approach. Through our research, nine guidelines have been singled out that can serve the creators of future initiatives to achieve just such an approach.

Our research has provided insight into the somewhat more rigid thinking and functioning of young people, which lies behind the adoption of authoritarian and anti-democratic views. In line with this, although on the surface it may not seem that it is important for socio-political action, **(1) future initiatives should have an approach that promotes flexibility in thinking and acting.**

The presence of authoritarian, anti-democratic attitudes among young people is one of the obstacles to socio-political action aimed at positive change. It turned out that such attitudes are also related to specific attitudes about participation in decision-making processes. **(2) For future initiatives, it would be important to work precisely on problematizing broader political attitudes that on the surface do not seem to be directly related to decision-making processes.** It is important to emphasize that this is a general tendency in young people and that it would be a mistake to view them as a monolithic group in which each individual has the same characteristics because it is heterogeneous in many other parameters. For example, in our study, we found gender differences in authoritarian attitudes, and previous research has shown that political attitudes are also related to several other factors such as a residence (rural-urban difference) or socio-economic status. Awareness of the complexity and ambiguity of socio-political problems should indicate that they require the same solutions.

At first glance, young people have a lack of interest in politics, but as soon as such attitudes are questioned in a language close to them, that is, when “politics” is replaced by “local community problems”, we get significantly higher results. **(3) Future initiatives on participation in decision-making processes should communicate with young people through “tangible” problems that are understandable to them and whose consequences can be more easily understood.** So, from broader political views, we should go to the more specific ones, but neither of those two should be left out.

Young people are able to detect problems in their local communities, but sometimes they do so in a general and imprecise way. **(4) Future initiatives should enable them to express these problems and help them to do so accurately and in an informed manner.**

It turned out that young people do not know whom to turn to solve local problems or where they could find information that would help them. **(5) Future initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of young people in decision-making processes should work on educating young people about their rights and opportunities in the local community, but also on adopting a framework strategy for action that can be applied to various problems.** Creating tools like a timeline for local action could benefit young people who want to get involved in problem-solving but don't know where to start.

Confidence in politicians and state institutions is very low among young people. Such attitudes can be an obstacle to encouraging socio-political action and **(6) future initiatives should take into account the general distrust of politicians and state institutions.** Although the political climate and the (non) functioning of state institutions largely justify this mistrust, it is important to think about how to act strategically without being an obstacle.

Young people believe that local institutions should respect the views of citizens, and have mostly positive attitudes towards participation mechanisms (protests, petitions, the work of NGOs) and believe that their use can make a difference. Such attitudes encourage and represent a kind of precondition for the use of such mechanisms, which could be relied on **(7) future initiatives through which young people should be taught how specific mechanisms work that can be used to achieve their socio-political goals.**

Related to the previous guideline, it was shown that young people currently show little behavior related to participation in decision-making processes, ie that they use a small number of mechanisms available to them. An exception, which is also an opportunity, are non-governmental organizations in which almost half of the young people volunteered. In addition to non-governmental organizations, young people are also members of various school, sports and cultural organizations. All this indicates that **(8) future initiatives should examine the contents of existing organizations (non-governmental, sports, cultural ...) in which young people are members, and cooperate with them in order to raise awareness of the socio-political dimension of their activities and to work on directing their activities towards participation in decision-making processes.**

Our research has shown that a large number of respondents do not see their future in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that they plan to leave it permanently at some point. This is just another in a series of similar indicators of this trend. In the context of our research, the departure of young people is a serious obstacle to motivating participation in decision-making processes, but **(9) any future initiative that deals with young people, more or less directly deals with the problem of their leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina, the problem must be properly addressed.**



*Art by Adamovici
2013*