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SKIN IN THE GAME

Inter-ethnic cooperation despite political havoc?

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Abstract

Kosovo has throughout history been inhabited by several different minorities and its status as a sovereign country is still contested, despite its declaration of independence in 2008. The country has struggled with conflicts which culminated in armed warfare in 1999. However, despite its conflicted past, inter-ethnic relations between the two biggest ethnic groups, Albanians, and Serbs, have seen rather peaceful periods with well-functioning cooperation.

In academia, it is often argued that ethnically divided settings such as Kosovo are predestined for ethnic conflict. The hypothesis of this research is that the role of ethnicity in these conflicts is exaggerated. Studies have shown that ethnically divided settings can survive, or even be strengthened, despite surrounding conflicts and violence; as was the case in several parts of former Yugoslavia. In other words, the citizens of these ethnically divided settings find a way of life together despite surrounding conflicts. This phenomenon is often referred to as peace culture.

By using theories on cooperation, in combination with the concept of peace culture, this study aims to showcase functioning inter-ethnic cooperation in ethnically divided societies in Kosovo. Through interviews with local Albanians and Serbs, mostly from north Kosovo, this study shows that inter-ethnic cooperation is very much present and rather well-functioning. The findings of this research also show that elites can negatively affect inter-ethnic relations, sometimes even more than ethnical differences, which are oftentimes seen as the root of conflict. Respondents argued that local politicians rarely act for the interest of the people, and oftentimes even fuel conflicts along ethnic lines in order to stay in power. In contrast to elites, local citizens have *skin in the game* and are therefore directly affected by their everyday encounters with the other ethnic group. Thus, despite ethnic differences, they take part in inter-ethnic cooperation as it is in their best interest to have functioning relations for a brighter future.

Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
Background	2
2. Specified aim and research questions	5
3. Previous research and theoretical framework	6
Cooperation	6
Inter-ethnic cooperation	7
Theoretical framework	9
Axelrod & Keohane's Theory of Cooperation	9
Peace culture	14
Indicators/operationalization	16
4. Method and material	18
Method	18
Semi-structured interviews	19
Sampling	19
Overview of respondents	20
Validity and reliability	22
Limitations and delimitations	22
5. Results	24
Perceptions of "the other" and the role of elites	24
Relationship and cooperation with "the other"	28
Generalization and scalability	32
6. Conclusions	34
References	37
Appendix	40
Appendix 1 – Interview guide (English)	40
Appendix 2 – Interview guide (Albanian)	42

1. Introduction

“Ethnic conflict and violence, on the one hand, and ethnic peace and tolerance on the other [...] Nevertheless, they often emerge and continue to exist within a broader and common setting of multi-ethnic societies”

(Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, p. 181).

The Balkan peninsula has throughout history witnessed several different conflicts and wars; many times due to tensions between ethnic groups. The historical and contemporary tensions between ethnic Albanians and Serbs are no exception. In 1999, clashes between these groups led to a full-scale war in Kosovo. Today, the region is relatively peaceful in the sense that there is an absence of violent conflicts, although tensions are still present. Occasionally, these tensions rise to the surface, often resulting in protests and riots. The national politics and rhetoric together with the lack of international cooperation between Kosovo and Serbia clearly illustrates the complex situation. However, Katunaric & Banovac (2004) argue that ethnically divided settings can survive, or even be strengthened, despite being surrounded by ethnic conflicts and violence. Many times, the perceptions, or definitions of “the other” play a vital role. In other words, it is crucial how much “we” perceive that “they” differ from “us” as these differences can be used as reasons to enter conflict (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, pp. 181-183). In certain conflict contexts, these differences are perceived to be small and/or irrelevant, thus, they are not perceived as reasons to enter conflict. Consequently, cooperation may occur and survive despite other parts of the region being struck by ethnic conflicts. In other words, the citizens of these ethnically divided areas/cities/regions find a way of life together despite the surrounding conflicts. Some researchers refer to this phenomenon as *peace culture*. However, the feeling of belongingness is not a sufficient condition for cooperation to survive or for peace culture to emerge. Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze whether reciprocal cooperation between ethnic groups can be or is being used locally in the ethnically divided communities of Kosovo despite tense relations between the ethnic groups and the complex political situation – and what it is that enables inter-ethnic cooperation. It is of interest to examine whether this type of cooperation can, through self-interest and self-gains, simultaneously have a positive effect on the long-term relations between the ethnic groups.

The situation in Kosovo is an interesting case. The country has seen many conflicts and a recent war. While many foreign actors support Kosovo's independence, its status as a sovereign country is still contested. Several European countries do not recognize Kosovo's declaration of independence; however, the EU has stated that this would not hinder Kosovo's accession process and its chances to become a full worthy member of the union. Nonetheless, the country faces many challenges which have to be addressed. Kosovo struggles in several areas such as weak rule of law, corruption and as mentioned, conflicted relations with its neighbours, including Serbia. Improving inter-ethnic relations domestically could potentially lead to better rights for minorities, strengthened rule of law and improved regional cooperation. Consequently, this could improve Kosovo's chances to become a member of the EU. In order to examine the inter-ethnic cooperation in Kosovo, this research will make use of interviews which will act as method of primary data collection.

Background

Following the death of Josip Broz Tito, the Yugoslavian leader who to an extent managed to unite the ethnic groups/entities constituting Yugoslavia, independence movements grew stronger throughout the region. This was also the case in Kosovo where the quest for independence became the main goal as nationalist movements gained momentum. These independence movements did not sit well with Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian ruler who wished to see a Yugoslavia highly influenced by Serbia. Milosevic did not appreciate Kosovo's efforts to become independent and clashes emerged. Instability throughout the region together with oppression and violent conflicts followed (Morelli, 2018, pp. 1-17). Tensions were very high through late 1990s and these events eventually sparked the Kosovo war in 1999, which led to the NATO-bombings of Serbia, as the international arena failed to mediate between the parties (Naumann, 2002, pp. 13-17). As a part of the agreement to end the war and as Kosovo lacked sovereign status, the United Nations implemented UNMIK (The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), a provisional government designed to assist the transition to a functioning local government. UNMIK became one of the UN's most extensive peacekeeping missions to date and is still active (UNMIK, 2021).

In 2008, Kosovo adopted a new constitution and declared the country independent from Serbian rule. This unilateral declaration of independence became a highly debated topic and Serbia together with other European countries refused to recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state. For example, Russia, Greece, and Spain opposed the decision while the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy swiftly recognized Kosovo's sovereignty (Palokaj & Tuhina, 2016, pp. 20-22). Initially, there was no official dialogue or cooperation with Serbia following Kosovo's declaration of independence. However, following the Brussels Agreement of 2013, the two countries promised to normalize relations and take part in negotiations facilitated by the EU. Breaking the status quo was an important milestone, however, underlying tension often rise to the surface and the parties still fail to find common ground in most issues (European Commission, 2013).

Throughout history, Kosovo has been populated by several different ethnic groups. Amongst them are Albanians, Serbs, Ashkali, Romani, Turks, Bosniaks and more. According to the latest census, which was held in 2011, the total population in Kosovo was (1,61 million) with Albanians constituting (92.9%) of that number, and Serbs (1.5%). However, Serbs may be underrepresented in these figures. The figures are only estimates since Serbs living in southern Kosovo boycotted the census and the northernmost parts of Kosovo were excluded (largely Serb-inhabited region) (Kosovo Agency for Statistics, 2013).

Both Serbs and Albanians have made claims about history and ethno-demography to justify their claimed rights to this ethnically mixed territory. Thus, inter-ethnic violence in Kosovo has been primarily over its territory. As a result, inter-ethnic relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo have been tense throughout much of the twentieth century with Albanians in Kosovo having faced discrimination, intimidation by Yugoslav/Serb authorities during this period. Relations between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo deteriorated gradually in the late 1990s, culminating in armed conflict with violence escalating even further in 1998-1999. Serbs in Kosovo were often subjected to acts of inter-ethnic and retaliatory violence following the war. However, it is important to note that there have been periods and/or instances of relatively good cooperation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. As an example, Josip Broz Tito was well-received in Prishtina during the early 1970's where he was perceived as a strong and competent leader.

Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, relations between the groups remained rather strained and fragile. Due to the dramatic changes in ethnic composition, crimes, and a large number of refugees following the war, the newly formed nation left a legacy of mistrust and resentment between Albanians and Serbs. As a result, Serbs in Kosovo have refused governance by the Kosovar authorities and refused to acknowledge Kosovo's independence (Demjaha, 2017, p. 1).

2. Specified aim and research questions

Many political scientists argue that ethnic conflicts are almost a certainty in complex ethnically divided settings. However, the hypothesis of this research is that this is an exaggeration, and that inter-ethnic cooperation is very much possible without violent conflict even in constrained ethnically divided settings. Research related to the concept of peace culture show that inter-ethnic cooperation survived (or even increased) in parts of Yugoslavia despite surrounding violent conflicts. As Kosovo is a complex ethnically divided setting with a history of conflicts and wars, it becomes interesting to analyse whether inter-ethnic cooperation has survived between the two largest ethnic groups in the country, namely, Albanians and Serbs. Thus, the aim of this research is, through interviews with local Albanian and Serbs (mostly) in north Kosovo, try to identify inter-ethnic cooperation at the subnational level and what benefits it brings according to the respondents. In order to test this hypothesis, the following research question will be used:

How does inter-ethnic cooperation between Albanians and Serbs take shape in ethnically divided settings in Kosovo and what challenges and opportunities are there for it?

3. Previous research and theoretical framework

For this research, theories on cooperation will be used in order to define and explain inter-ethnic cooperation in Kosovo. First, different perspectives will be presented through previous research to provide a more robust theoretical framework and to identify a research gap, followed by a discussion on the theories of choice for this research. The theories chosen for this research is the highly influential Theory of Cooperation by Robert Axelrod (1984), further developed by Robert Keohane, together with the concept of *peace culture* (discussed in detail later on).

Cooperation

There is a satisfactory amount of previous research done on cooperation in many different research fields, each with different perspectives. Related to philosophy and human nature, Leakey & Lewin (1978) argue that reciprocal cooperation could be a distinctive characteristic of our human nature. This unique human attribute was a key issue for the survival of our ancestors as they learned to share product and services and work together in a mutual manner. The sense of obligation once one received a favour created the readiness and perceived need to repay that favour. These transactions created a complicated system of exchange of aid and trade which brought beneficial results for all actors. As the benefits of mutual reciprocal behaviour became apparent, the behaviour persisted throughout the history of human nature, behaviour, and cognition (Leakey & Lewin, 1978).

Social psychologists describe reciprocity as an expectation of mutual deviation from purely self-interested behaviour. Actors will temporarily put their own self-interest aside and benefit the other party with the expectation that the favour will be returned, thus benefitting both parties in the long run. In other words, positive behaviour is expected to be reciprocally returned, similar to the saying, “*tit for tat*”, which is a commonly reoccurring theme in game theory (Myerson, 1991, p. 1). Reciprocity should not be confused with altruism, where actors do not expect any reciprocal behaviour in return but act in a purely altruistic manner. The notion of reciprocity argues that actors are actually willing to cooperate in a beneficial manner, in contrast to self-interest models where actors are considered to be selfish and thus only work for their own gains (Fehr & Gächter, 2000, pp. 159-160) (Gouldner, 1960, pp. 161-163).

Within economics, reciprocal cooperation is regarded to be the behavioural norm, and is a key component of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Research related to this field tends to focus on reciprocity as an instrument for lowering transaction costs instead of focusing on reciprocity as a normatively driven force for building relations (Keohane, 1986) (Rathbun & Kertzer, 2015).

Arend Lijphart (2004) argues that scholars can aid constitutional writers in countries where there might be deep ethnic cleavages by providing them with specific recommendations and guidelines. Lijphart states that, in order to satisfy the demands and interests of the different groups in an ethnically divided setting, power sharing mechanisms have to be established. According to Lijphart, the principle of power sharing has been the only proven democratic model which holds a chance to successfully be adopted in ethnically divided societies. Furthermore, similar to other scholars, Lijphart argues that it is generally more difficult to establish democratic principles in countries where there are societal divisions than in homogeneous countries - and these challenges oppose a threat to the democratization of the country. Lijphart presents several concrete recommendations for ethnically divided countries on how to improve their situation by changes in their constitutions, executive power and political decision making in general (Lijphart, 2004, pp. 96-109). While Lijphart's contribution is certainly interesting and relevant, he does not consider the role of the people and inter-ethnic cooperation at the grassroot level.

Inter-ethnic cooperation

When hearing about ethnically divided communities on the news or reading academic literature on ethnic conflicts, it gives the impression that there is a strong presence of hatred and violence. For example, Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic violence has taken more than ten million lives since the second world war, with claims that the problem has become all more ubiquitous the last two decades (Horowitz, 1985, p. xi). In political science, it is often suggested that violence between ethnic groups is common, or as Moynihan (1993) puts it: "*nation states no longer seem inclined to go to war with one another, but ethnic groups fight all the time*" (Moynihan, 1993, p. 5). Scholars adhering to rationalist theories claim that ethnic groups form coalitions in order to maximise their chances to defend possessions and gain material benefits. When one group threatens another's access to material benefits, such as state patronage, education, or dominance of labour markets, violence may result (Horowitz, 1985, pp. 105-110). Furthermore, according

to psychological theories, ethnic groups fulfil an inner drive to belong to a group and help group members preserve or enhance their self. When these psychological satisfactions are endangered by another group or by members of one's own group, conflict and violence arises (Tajfel, 1982, pp. 72-73).

Fearon & Laitin (1996) claim that when there is a large amount of transactions and interactions between groups, the possibility of opportunism arises. That is, exploitative behaviour by individuals which brings socially harmful consequences for many. Therefore, the authors argue that in ethnically divided societies, it is the individual opportunist “culprit” who exploits the system and hurt inter-ethnic relations, rather than the actions of whole groups. These culprits are often sanctioned by their own group as; “[...] *decentralized, nonstate institutional mechanisms may often arise to mitigate problems of opportunism in interactions between individuals from different ethnic groups*” (Fearon & Laitin, 1996, p. 715). The state apparatus may be weak, therefore, there is a need of mutual trust that opportunists will be sanctioned for groups to cooperate properly. Because of the state's limited reach, more local and decentralized (informal) mechanisms for resolving these challenges can emerge. These mechanisms often evolved long before the current state apparatus and continue to exist after it arises. However, if these actions are not sanctioned by formal or informal institutions, the other group will lose trust and avoid interaction with the group of the culprit, thus deepening the divisions and creating a society of fear and disorder.

In relationships with reoccurring transactions, reputation is an efficient tool for combating opportunists. As in many economic/financial relationships, the prospect of reoccurring and beneficial future transactions helps to maintain cooperation and trust among communities; similar to cooperation between two players in a repeated prisoner's dilemma (tying to the shadow of the future). Even in the absence of a third-party enforcer like the state, methods like tit-for-tat (reciprocal cooperation), which threaten to switch to non-cooperation if the other player defects, can sustain cooperation provided the participants are patient enough and anticipate a high enough possibility of future exchanges (Fearon & Laitin, 1996, pp. 717-718).

Focusing more on role of ethnicity in the Kosovo conflict, Mike Medeiros (2021) argues that “*inter-state confrontations between groups divided by ethnicity are often labelled by scholars and the media as essentially ethnic*” (Medeiros, 2021, p. 260). However, such conflicts are rarely actual ethnic conflicts, and other factors are most likely the cause. Furthermore,

information about *how* ethnicity fuels a conflict is rarely provided by this approach. In his research, Medeiros did not find any evidence which supports the argument that historic hatred and grievances (primordialism) caused the conflicts in Kosovo. The author argues that the role of elites from both sides played a far bigger role than ethnicity, where elites politicized collective discontent. Also, the brutal violence carried out by both the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the forces led by Milosevic caused a spiral of violence which went out of control. In conclusion, Medeiros argues that ethnicity plays an underwhelming role when trying to explain the conflict in Kosovo, however, it should not be disregarded completely, as even a small ethnic division could be used as an opportunity for elites to mobilize a conflict through those lines (Medeiros, 2021, p. 271).

With this backdrop in mind, a research gap is identified where there is a need for a theory on inter-ethnic cooperation that also considers outcomes that do not result in violence. Peaceful and relatively well-functioning inter-ethnic relations are much more common than wide-spread violence (Fearon & Laitin, 1996, p. 730). As the typical outcome of inter-ethnic relations are peaceful and cooperative (despite tensions), theories on inter-ethnic conflicts or relations should be able to, or at least aim to, explain the phenomenon, and not just assume that violence will occur. Existing theories of ethnic conflicts often consider path-dependence as a determining factor, however, past experiences that are memorized among groups are often put out of context and the narrative tends to exaggerate and overpredict the use/occurrence of violence (Posen, 1993). Even in ethnically divided societies where authorities are absent or weak, for example, in the republics formerly ruled by Soviet, relations between ethnic groups tend to remain rather cooperative (Fearon & Laitin, 1996, p. 715). Thus, there is need to combine theories on cooperation with a theory on inter-ethnic cooperation that also considers peaceful outcomes. Therefore, Axelrod's evolution of cooperation will be combined with the concept of peace culture.

Theoretical framework

Axelrod & Keohane's Theory of Cooperation

In his influential book, Robert Axelrod presents the *Evolution of Cooperation* (1990) where he develops a theory of cooperation which is mostly built on the concept of specific reciprocity. By using the game of Prisoner's dilemma, Axelrod shows that cooperation can bring long-term benefits for all involved actors. He finds that in situations/games where the number of

interactions is not known or unlimited, both players benefit more from cooperation than defecting.

Keohane (1986) illustrates Axelrod's theory of cooperation in practice by applying it to international relations, which aids our understanding of the theory. The theory argues that reciprocity can be used to foster cooperation and shape politics in the world. Reciprocity in international relations would constitute, for example, two states mirroring actions in a reciprocal manner. As an example, If "State A" chooses to remove a certain trade barrier towards "State B", "State B" should mirror this action by removing a (similar) trade barrier from their side as well. Repeated exchanges of this nature may build trust and confidence, which sets a ground for long-term cooperation.

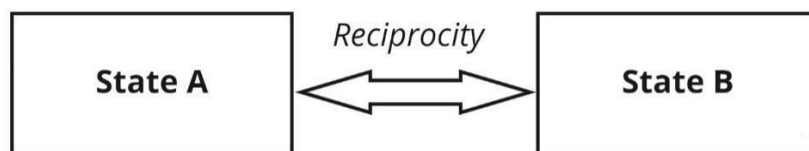


Figure 1: Reciprocity between two states

These exchanges between states can take on a variety of forms – it could be a single policy or a pattern of behaviour or action toward another state. To encourage these types of exchanges, elected officials, leaders, and governments should employ and teach reciprocity to their constituents. However, when used as a tool for conflict resolution or de-escalation, we should exercise caution while applying this principle; since it is coined in several schools of thought, each of which uses it in a different way. This ambiguity must be resolved before applying the concept and careful consideration of the concept is required before it may be put to good use. In order to effectively employ reciprocal behaviour and have a fruitful exchange, all parties in a bilateral scenario or relationship must be aware of the standard of behaviour and comprehend the expectations from both sides (Keohane, 1986, pp. 6-8) (Axelrod, 1984, pp. 147-149).

Important pre-conditions and indicators for reciprocity are trust and confidence that the other side will repay favours in a reciprocal manner. By examining the trust and confidence between the two parties it becomes possible to acquire an overview of the existing relations and what is needed in order to move forward. Here, external actors can play an important role as they can take on the role as mediators/mitigators and provide objective information to both parties, enabling fair exchanges while keeping track of obligations. These mediators may also reduce

the costs of transaction as they can take on the responsibility to guarantee certain behaviours or results (Keohane, 1986, pp. 24-25). In other words, external actors can provide credibility that the involved parties will fulfil their part of the exchange.

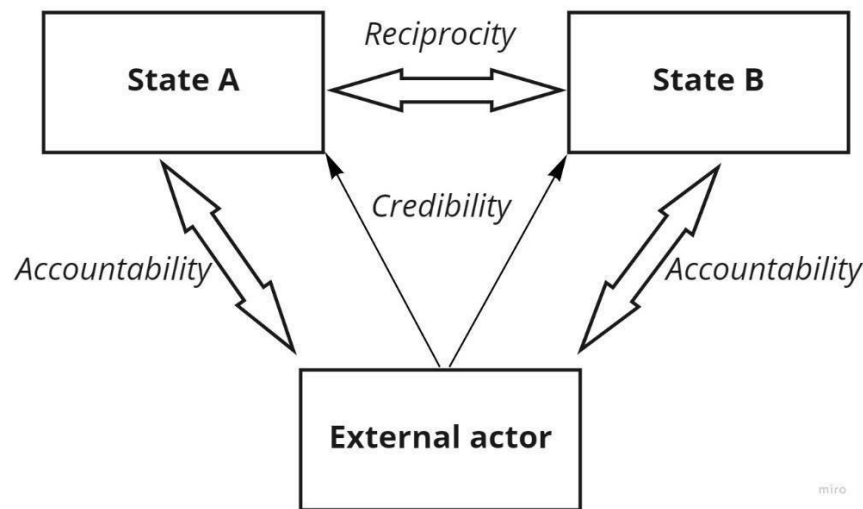


Figure 2: Illustration of reciprocity between states and the role of external actors

In the figure, states are used as example. However, it is important to note that the actors (A) and (B) in the figure could be replaced by two businesses, two locals in an ethnically divided setting or any other reciprocal exchange/interaction. Although states/international relations are not the target group for this research, the model becomes useful since it is also applicable to the local and ethnically divided context in Kosovo. The international relations between Kosovo and Serbia certainly affect the ethnic relations between Serbs and Albanians, however, analysing the international relations and how they affect the relations among the people becomes an interesting future research topic in itself. Thus, state-actors are not of interest for this particular study, rather, the study will focus on actors who take part in inter-ethnic exchanges in their everyday lives at a subnational level. Examples are: “normal” citizens, businesses, organisations, inter-ethnic projects etc. The ethnic-groups that are of interest for this paper are Albanians and Serbs as they constitute over 95% of the population and have been the main actors in the conflicts and war. Therefore, these two groups are mostly relevant for this paper. Nonetheless, as mentioned, it is important to note that there are more ethnic groups living in the region with representatives at the governmental level.

In order to further conceptualize the theory and better understand reciprocal cooperation, a more in depth definition will be provided by splitting the concept in two quite different meanings,

namely, *specific*, and *diffuse* reciprocity. In doing so, it becomes possible to scrutinize the concept and apply it to the case of interest. As mentioned, the case of interest will be the ethnically divided communities of Kosovo. The case of Kosovo will therefore act as an example showcasing the use of inter-ethnic reciprocal cooperation despite tense relations. It is of interest to examine whether this type of cooperation can, through self-interest and self-gains, simultaneously have a positive effect on the long-term relations between ethnic groups in these areas.

Specific reciprocity

Specific reciprocity constitutes a transaction between two parties where the terms, expectations and obligations are clear and pre-determined. Axelrod uses *The Prisoner's Dilemma* as an example. In most cases, cooperating with the opponent is preferable to defecting for both players. However, if one player defected and the other player cooperated, the player who defected will benefit the most. In one-off games, it is common to defect and not take any risk by trying to cooperate. As far as inter-ethnic relations are concerned, this isn't very noteworthy because these encounters are seldom one-time occurrences, and it is in the rational interest of both actors to build a more long-term beneficial connection/relation. People living in ethnically divided communities would most likely be met with several encounters in their everyday lives. The more “games” actors take part in, the more likely cooperation becomes, as it becomes clear that cooperating pays out more than defecting. Those who have the ability to make sensible decisions based on what they believe will be most advantageous to them in the long term are the ones who encourage cooperation and benefit the most. Axelrod describes this as *the shadow of the future* (Axelrod, 1984, p. 132). The stronger the shadow of the future is, the more likely cooperation becomes. In other words, the more important the future goals are for the actors, the more willing they are to put short-term benefits aside (Keohane, 1986, pp. 4, 9-10) (Axelrod, 1984, pp. 125-130). According to the theory, having “skin in the game”, i.e. actually being affected by everyday encounters with other ethnic groups, (as in the ethnically divided communities in Kosovo) increases the incentives for cooperation.

While specific reciprocity can facilitate cooperation, it is not a sufficient precondition for it. For instance, actors might become entangled in a vicious cycle of retaliation against one another, continuously defecting from cooperation because of repeated (negative) reciprocal behaviour. As long as actors are unable to break out of this cycle, cooperation becomes

impossible. Axelrod refers to this as "echo effects" (Axelrod, 1984, p. 138). Therefore, considering the conflicted history between Serbs and Albanians, they must first break out from any negative cycles for cooperation to become possible.

Diffuse reciprocity

Continuous use of specific reciprocity can lead to diffuse reciprocity. Because specific reciprocity is primarily motivated by self-interest and is conducted under a specified setting and context, it cannot consider voluntary and "natural" reciprocal cooperation. Thus, the theory presents the idea of diffuse reciprocity, which is voluntary cooperation that may not yield immediate benefits, but rather an "investment" for the future and intended as a contribution to the relations as a whole – or as Keohane puts it:

"To expand the range of cooperation, [...] it may be necessary to go beyond the practice of specific reciprocity and to engage in diffuse reciprocity: that is, to contribute one's share, or behave well toward others, not because of ensuing rewards from specific actors, but in the interests of continuing satisfactory overall results for the group of which one is a part, as a whole" (Keohane, 1986, p. 20).

Actors who practice diffuse reciprocity do not receive rewards or advantages immediately as a consequence of their cooperative behaviour, instead, this type of behaviour is propelled onward by a sense of obligation. Actors trust that the favour will be repaid and beneficial in the long term. Trust and sense of obligation may be built over time through repeated specific reciprocal transactions. In other words, actors might provide the groundwork for a more widespread reciprocity by repeatedly "playing the game" (as in the Prisoner's Dilemma) and engaging with the other actor. Furthermore, it is important to not take part in too many exchanges/interactions simultaneously in order for these relationships to work properly. In order to maintain a balanced exchange and ensure credibility, it is essential to maintain a clear system of "debt" and "credit". Indebtedness and repaying the debt creates confidence and trust, and actors should even "*find mechanisms in society which not only promote repayment of obligations but which induce people to remain socially indebted to each other and which inhibit their complete repayment*" (Keohane, 1986, pp. 19-22). This goes hand in hand with the hypothesis in The Prisoner's Dilemma, that cooperation is unlikely if the number of "games" (i.e. transactions) are known to be limited. Then, it does not matter if actors are indebted. As the games will end, they have

no incitement to repay the debt. As for actors within ethnically divided communities, there is rarely an “end-date” for cooperation. Ethnic groups in Kosovo have and are co-existing and will probably do so for an unforeseeable future.

In conclusion, Axelrod and Keohane’s contribution becomes highly relevant for this research where it is applied to a local context. By looking at inter-ethnic cooperation through the lens of reciprocal cooperation, it becomes possible to identify incentives for cooperation despite the complex ethnic and political conflicts. As inter-ethnic cooperation in these settings is not a one-off game but an investment for the future, cooperation can be explained or motivated by the shadow of the future. Furthermore, by using the definitions of specific and diffuse reciprocity, we can identify different types of cooperation which makes it possible to analyse what types of cooperation are present, how they function and how they contribute to the relations as a whole. However, to better be able to explain cooperation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, inter-ethnic cooperation will be discussed in more detail below. Different perspectives will be presented together with the concept of peace culture, which is chosen as the most relevant for this study.

Peace culture

It is true that the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia would probably not have been resolved without the engagement of the international community. However, some ethnically divided communities, such as those populated by Croats and Serbs, and Serbs and Albanians, maintained peace and tolerance without external, i.e. national, or international, aid, despite the fact that ethnic violence was on the rise in their immediate surroundings (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, pp. 181-182). In 2002, Vjeran Katunaric launched a study where he analysed the phenomenon of so called peace enclaves; communities where relative peace and stability was preserved among major ethnic groups while violence and conflicts spread throughout the rest of the respective country. The research was carried out in Bosnia & Herzegovina (Tuzla and Sarajevo) in Croatia (Pula and Osijek), and in Kosovo (Kamenicë, Mitrovicë). Katunaric categorized these cities in peace enclaves (PE) and conflict areas (CA). The relative peaceful cities of Pula, Tuzla and Kamenicë were selected as PE:s. Osijek, Sarajevo and Mitrovicë struggled with ethnic conflicts and violence and were therefore considered as CA:s. The study aimed to explain how the preserving of relative peace and stability was possible in the PE:s amid “*extremely unfavourable conditions*” (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, p. 181). In the PE:s, a

culture of peace was the dominant way of life, and locals went on with their lives despite the ethnic and political conflicts that struck large parts of their respective country. This phenomenon is what Katunaric (and other scholars) refer to as *peace culture* or *culture of peace*. Peace culture, which began as a normative and holistic idea, strives to bridge the gap between the micro- and macro-levels of peace. It encompasses both personal characteristics such as respect for life and the promotion of nonviolence in everyday life, as well as national ideals like sovereignty, territorial integrity, and state independence. Elise Boulding, another pioneer in the study of peace culture, explains that we can point at isolated societies where the circumstances and ways of life are very similar among the citizens and argue that they are indeed peace cultures. However, these societies are quite homogenous and are therefore not very complex in the sense that there is a coherent feeling of belongingness – which is not the case in societies such as those of former Yugoslavia. These societies are complex, often consisting of several ethnic and national groups with different histories, languages, and ways of life. It is in these societies, in cities like Pula, Tuzla and Kamenicë (where peace was preserved) that we can identify “true” indicators or elements of peace culture (Boulding, 2000, p. 1).

In the study, Katunaric contended that gender equality is more present in the PE:s, together with a tendency for consensus rather than conflict (which dissolves communities). He argues that these values are “*usually associated with values of cultural ‘femininity’, including the principle of non-dominance and sensitivity for the weak*” (Katunaric, 2010, pp. 3-4). Women are to a higher degree motivated to preserve peace, since it enhances the chances for the well-being of their husbands, children, and relatives. This higher interest for peace goes beyond the divisions among citizens often seen in ethnically divided areas, therefore cutting through “*hardened lines of impenetrable divisions*”. This is one of the reasons why Katunaric argues that a higher degree of gender equality is present in the ethnically divided areas that preserved peace than in those which suffered violent conflicts (Katunaric, 2010, pp. 4-5).

Furthermore, Katunaric found that *path dependence* was highly relevant for the preserving of peace in ethnically divided areas. The path dependence approach contends that contemporary collective actions are determined by collective choices in the past. For instance, if Croats and Serbs living in a community have previously had a reciprocal approach to cooperation, it is more likely that they would not turn on each other by joining the surrounding ethnic conflicts when/if these arise (Katunaric, 2010, p. 4).

In conclusion, Katunaric contends that the preserving of peace in the PE:s was a result of active choices by that particular community, who's ways of lives were more influenced by gender-equality, path dependence and a principle of non-dominance. These characteristics disturbed the sharp divisions between citizens which were often used to legitimise inter-ethnic violence. Thus, these communities were able to preserve peace despite surrounding ethnic conflicts and national politics which promoted hatred (Katunaric, 2010, pp. 4, 9-10). Furthermore, the patterns of behaviour and ethnic relations that existed before the major wars/conflicts were preserved in the PE:s (path dependence). In contrast, these patterns undertook fundamental changes in the CA:s, often followed by a higher degree of nationalism and nationalisation of public institutions and policies (including the military and police). In these areas, nationalism became both politics and a "profession". Following in this pattern, the leaders in the PE:s were more distanced from their national political leaders/centres, which oftentimes were ruled by nationalistic ideologies and parties (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, pp. 193-194).

In his important contribution, Katunaric made use of quantitative data to explain the peace culture phenomena and inter-ethnic cooperation in different parts of former Yugoslavia. This data provides the reader an important overview of the matter, but it cannot not consider personal and individual experiences. In this research, the aim is instead to make deeper observations based on personal interviews with relevant respondents who are directly involved and/or affected by inter-ethnic exchanges on a daily basis. Thus, the aim will be to apply the concept of peace culture in a local and qualitative manner, combined with Axelrod's theory of cooperation. Consequently, it becomes possible to analyse whether reciprocal cooperation can lead to rather peaceful environments (where we can identify peace culture) even in a constrained ethnically divided setting as in Kosovo. Furthermore, it becomes possible to identify what it is that enables inter-ethnic cooperation, how it takes shape and what it is that hinders it from being scaled up. The indicators in the table below will be used to help operationalize and apply the theory when analysing the material.

Indicators/operationalization

To easier identify different types of cooperation, incentives, and challenges, following indicators will be used when analysing the material.

Indicator	Definition
Specific reciprocity	Specific cooperation in a specified setting with clear terms, motivated by self-interest and self-gains. Repeated interactions create groundwork for cooperation.
Diffuse reciprocity	Voluntary cooperation that may not yield immediate benefits, an “investment” for the future and a contribution to the relations as a whole. Creates feeling of indebtedness. Strengthens trust and confidence.
Shadow of the future	Perceived importance of future interactions and possibility of long-term gains.
Echo effects	Cycles of negative behaviour which actors may be stuck in
Peace culture	Ethnically divided communities with peace and cooperation as dominant way of life, despite surrounding (historic) conflicts.
Path-dependence	Contemporary collective actions are determined by collective choices in the past (can be negative or positive).
“Feminine” values	Values of cultural ‘femininity’, including the principle of non-dominance and sensitivity for the weak.

Table 1: Indicators for analysing data

These indicators also help with operationalizing the theory, making it more measurable and applicable to the case of interest. The indicators for specific and diffuse reciprocity helps understand what kind of cooperation there is. Shadow of the future shows how much the respondents feel that there is a possibility for long-term gains through cooperation, in other words, how prone they are to put aside short-term wins for a broader relationship in the long run. If respondents have a very negative approach to inter-ethnic cooperation and are still “held up” by previous conflicts etc, they could be stuck in a loop of negative behaviour which can cause echo effects. If it is possible to identify cooperation, respondents have a positive attitude towards it and there are peaceful ways of life, we can conclude that there is a presence of a peace culture. The material will consist of semi-structured interviews with both Serbian and Albanian representatives (further motivated in the methods section). These interviews will be the primary data for this study.

4. Method and material

Method

Quantitative data is not always useful when trying to explain historical processes and/or discovering social mechanisms. Instead, qualitative data provides the researcher with the tools that allow the interpretation, exploration, and explanation of real world social phenomena (Bryman, 2016, pp. 374-375). Qualitative research design provides an in-depth analysis, not through quantification, but rather through actual real-life experiences, thoughts, and concepts from an individual perspective – material which can be gathered through the use of, for example, interviews (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015, p. 12). The quantitative research conducted by Katunaric is an important contribution to the field. However, as mentioned, while this type of research provides the reader an important overview of the matter, it cannot not consider personal and individual experiences. Consequently, this research aims instead to, through a qualitative approach, provide in-depth exploration of the individual experiences from both Serbs and Albanians who take part in inter-ethnic exchanges/cooperation, rather than a quantitative generalization. Thus, this research uses a qualitative approach to explore inter-ethnic cooperation between Serbs and Albanians in various sub-national forms.

Serbian-Albanian relations can still be a sensitive topic. Hostility still exists and working/living etc with the “other” may be considered as taboo. Hence, there are both formal and informal barriers for inter-ethnic cooperation, including discrimination. Therefore, with regard to the sensitive nature of the research topic, a qualitative method is more suitable as it better provides respondents the opportunity to express their own individual experiences while provided the guarantee that they will remain anonymous (Bryman, 2016, pp. 403-405).

This research will adopt a case study design to analyse the individual experiences Serbs and Albanians may have from inter-ethnic cooperation. Case study design is appropriate for investigating and explaining a real-world phenomenon related to a contemporary event. This design allows researchers to empirically investigate a case and perform an in-depth analysis. This becomes possible by gathering thorough information to analyse the phenomena extensively, as the phenomena may have numerous explanations. In result, a qualitative case study provides a comprehensive, extensive, and rigorous methodological framework that

generates greater insights and allows researchers to investigate phenomena and contexts in greater depth (Bryman, 2016, pp. 60-61) (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 92, 214).

Semi-structured interviews

The primary data collection for this research will be interviews – a method widely used by scholars in qualitative studies. Interviews allow the researcher to examine complex real-world problems and gather personal in-depth experiences, thus enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomena of interest. This method is also capable of producing knowledge (Bryman, 2016, p. 466) (Halperin & Heath, 2017, pp. 285-286). More specifically, this study will make use of semi-structured interviews, which allows researchers to interview a small number of individuals and collect extensive and comprehensive data for analysis. The interviews will be informant interviews, as they will provide qualitative data, however, henceforth, the interviewees will be referred to as respondents for practical reasons. These kind of interviews enables researchers to dig deeply into the respondents' experiences, feelings, opinions, and perspectives on the research problem, as well as the concerns, causes, and reasons that shaped their encounters (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, pp. 3-5, 149). Since the aim of this research is to learn more about people's everyday encounters with the “other” ethnic group, semi-structured becomes a highly relevant method for collecting data. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to make use of open-ended questions that are far more detailed in nature and go beyond the boundaries of “Yes/No”-questions. As semi-structured interviews allow open-ended questions, the questions also become far more versatile, allowing the researcher to acquire more information in order to cover all aspects of the study issue, thus contributing to the research questions (Bryman, 2016, pp. 468-469) (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 289).

Sampling

The two ethnic groups Albanians and Serbs are the target groups for this study. As mentioned, the two ethnic groups constitute a large majority of the population in Kosovo. They have historical (some argue primordial) negative relations and are both subject to oppression and discrimination from one another. Furthermore, as (potential) candidate countries for a full-worthy membership in the European Union, both Kosovo and Serbia have to resolve any conflicts as the EU have made it clear that they will not “import” any conflicts into the union (EESC, 2021). Hence, learning more about the situation at the “grassroot” level can be

beneficial for a bottom-up approach and gain a deeper understanding of what is needed to strengthen the European integration.

More specifically, representatives from each ethnic group that have or are taking part in some form of sub-national inter-ethnic cooperation, project, work, business etc are of highest interest. These representatives are best fitted to answer this study's research questions, which is important to consider when choosing the sample of respondents (Creswell, 2003). Since these representatives are exposed to inter-ethnic exchanges and cooperation (and potentially conflicts) on a daily basis, they can provide an in-depth and personal perspective on the matter. To quickly gain access to relevant participants for the study, the first respondent interviews will be conducted in Kosovo. As it is quite hard to randomly gain access to participants, snowball sampling will be used as a sampling method. Snowball sampling is a convenient method for finding more relevant respondents. The researcher initiates the study with a small sample of relevant people, then, this sample introduces the researcher to other potential respondents who might be relevant for the study. This approach saves time, gives access to relevant participants who otherwise might have been hard to find and, as the research has been introduced by someone familiar, they are more likely to trust the researcher (Naderifar, et al., 2017, p. 2) (Bryman, 2016, p. 415). As mentioned, Serb-Albanian relations might still be a sensitive topic, therefore, participants may hesitate to join the study. However, through this method, it becomes possible to mitigate these challenges as the research and researcher is introduced through a trusted social link, which may increase the willingness to participate.

Overview of respondents

Respondent number	Ethnicity	Age	Sex	Occupation	Education	City/Town
#1	Albanian	32	F	Public sector	University degree	Prishtinë
#2	Albanian	62	M	Self-employed	No higher education	Mitrovicë
#3	Albanian	55	M	Taxi driver	No higher education	N.Mitrovicë
#4	Albanian	25	F	Student	University degree	Vushtrri
#5	Albanian	29	F	Self-employed	No higher education	Mitrovicë
#6	Serbian	39	M	Public sector	University degree	N.Mitrovicë
#7	Serbian	42	M	Self-employed	No higher education	Zveqan
#8	Serbian	53	M	Store-owner	No higher education	N.Mitrovicë & Leposaviq
#9	Serbian/Albanian	28	F	Student	University degree	Prishtinë

Table 2: Overview of respondents

As shown in the table above, the respondents are mainly from north Kosovo, with the exceptions of R1, R4 and R9. Thus, this research is mostly focused on the northern parts of the country. It would have been beneficial for the research to include more respondents from other regions; however, this was not possible considering the time-frame (further discussed in the limitations section). In order to better understand these regions/cities, a brief presentation is provided below.

The northern part of Kosovo is mostly inhabited by ethnic Serbs. As mentioned, Kosovo became independent from Serbia on 17 February 2008, however, this territory has renounced its right to participate in the Kosovo Parliament and boycotted the Kosovo parliamentary elections, considering it illegal and only recognising the Serbian government. Parallel structures were formed, including the formation of the so called *Community of Serb Municipalities*. However, the Kosovar government would not accept any parallel governance by Serbs in the region and following the Brussels Agreement, these parallel structures were abolished; but the region is still strongly influenced by Serbian rule (van Willigen, 2013, pp. 177-182). The area consists of Kosovo's three northernmost municipalities: Leposaviq, Zveqan and Zubin Potok, as well as the northernmost part of the municipality of Mitrovicë. The area covers about 1 000 km² (about one tenth of the total area of Kosovo) and is home to about 50 000 people, not including the Kosovar side of Mitrovicë as the city is divided in two along the Ibar river. The southern part is mainly populated by Albanians and the north part by Serbs (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2020). Historically, many clashes and conflicts have taken place in the middle of this division. The southern part of Mitrovicë is de facto not included in the north Kosovo region but is included here for the sake of simplicity. The majority of respondents reside in this region.

Vushtrri is a small city located between the northern parts of Kosovo and the capital Prishtinë. The city used to be an important hub for trade during the Ottoman Empire. Today, it is mainly populated by Albanians, however, there is a small minority of Serbs residing in the area. Turkish is still widely spoken in the city as a result of Ottoman rule (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2020). Respondent R4 resides in this area.

Prishtinë is the capital of Kosovo and acts as an economic, financial, and political centre. It is also the seat of the Kosovar government. According to the latest census, the municipality is home to around 200.000 inhabitants. The region is mainly inhabited by ethnic Albanians,

however, as mentioned, this census has its limitations and the figures are mostly estimates (Kosovo Agency for Statistics, 2013). Respondents R1 and R9 reside in this area.



Figure 3: North Kosovo



Figure 1: Prishtinë municipality



Figure 2: Vushtrri Municipality

Validity and reliability

All interviews conducted in this study have been interviewed and transcribed with the purpose of increasing validity and increase the chances of achieving a proper interpretation of the information provided by the respondents. Moreover, as this work is a case study, generalizability has not been prioritized, therefore, the external validity is not very relevant (Bryman, 2016, pp. 383-384) (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 149). However, the findings of this study can be used to better understand somewhat similar contexts in other regions.

Limitations and delimitations

This study aimed to interview “ordinary” civilians, therefore, there was a need to travel to Kosovo and, through snowball sampling, find relevant respondents. For obvious reasons, finding these respondents would have been impossible without actually spending time in the country. Furthermore, the respondent’s presence online (e-mail, social media etc) is only for private reasons with no official ways of contact, thus, first contact had to be made in person. It would have been beneficial for the study to spend even more time in Kosovo and conduct more interviews, preferably with respondents from other cities which unfortunately was not possible considering the time-frame and resources.

Another limitation (or challenge) was the language barrier. As I am fluent in Albanian, Albanian-speaking respondents were comfortable speaking in their own language and could express their thoughts and emotions in a natural and nuanced way. However, I do not speak

Serbian. For the sake of the study, it would have been beneficial to use an interpreter when interviewing native Serbian-speakers so that they could be as comfortable when expressing their thoughts and emotions. Fortunately, many Serbs who live in Kosovo have a sufficient knowledge of Albanian and it was therefore possible to conduct the interviews without an interpreter.

Furthermore, as I speak Albanian, respondents would say for example, “*you know how it is*”, or “*you know how things work around here*”. In other words, respondents felt that I understood their situation without them having to explain it to me. In a way, this is positive since respondents felt comfortable and that I could really understand them. However, there is a risk that I have a different understanding of the matter than they do. Therefore, I tried to avoid these assumptions and have respondents actually describe their feelings and thoughts.

5. Results

The data gathered from the nine semi-structured interviews with the local respondents will be presented and analysed in this chapter. The data will be divided into different themes based on the themes presented in the interview guide. The respondents are coded with (R) and their corresponding number from Table 2. Answers from the respondents are analysed individually and compared to other answers from the same ethnic group. However, the answers are also compared to those from the other group, in order to detect any differences or similarities within, but also between the two groups. For the respect and integrity of the respondents, all of the information provided during the interviews could not be presented in the research.

Perceptions of “the other” and the role of elites

In this theme, findings that relate to perceptions of the other ethnic group will be presented, together with the respondents views on the role of elites. The role of elites was not a specified theme during the interviews. However, a lot of emphasis was put on it by the respondents who repeatedly argued that politics and politicians do not represent the will of the people and oftentimes even enable/fuel conflicts along ethnic lines using their rhetoric and policies. Hence, the need for including this theme arose and is therefore included below.

Katunaric argues that perceptions of “the other” play an important role for potential cooperation between ethnic groups in ethnically divided societies, such as in Kosovo. Within the framework of his study based on the concept of peace culture, Katunaric argues that the perceived differences from one’s own ethnic group and the other group constitute the core discourse about how different “they” are from “us”. In turn, this discourse can be used as pretext to enter conflict. However, this also works the other way as *“perceived similarities and common interests of the ethnic groups can be taken as a pretext for deciding to accept actions contributing to peace and tolerance between ethnic groups in the area.”* (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, p. 184). When respondents were asked *“How would you describe a person from the other ethnic group?”* most respondents felt it was difficult to generalize. However, they also felt that they could understand people who had a general negative perception of the other considering past conflicts and experiences. For example, as R1(Albanian) argued:

“I understand it is hard for people not to generalize, especially for older people. They most probably lost someone to the war. We have been through a lot and it is not so strange

to blame everyone for what happened, but it is important to distinguish between who was involved and not.” (R1).

In similar notes, R6 (Serb) felt that he could not blame people for being cautious or hesitant when it comes to dealing with the other ethnic group: *“Of course people are cautious. We have seen many conflicts here, just go to the Ibar bridge and you will see the division. It is unfortunate, but not surprising.”* (R6).

Despite some differences, R6 felt that Albanians and Serbs are similar in many ways. R6 argued that there are some obvious differences like language and religion, however, many Albanians speak Serbian and vice versa, therefore communication is not a big issue. Regarding religion, R6 argued that even though it is present and visible, it does not constitute an important role for the identity of the people: *“You have catholic Albanians, Muslim Albanians, orthodox Serbs. But here, only nationality and ethnicity matters.”* (R6). To a large extent, respondents felt that there are no major noticeable differences between the ethnic groups. As mentioned, they felt that it was hard to provide a “description” of a person from the other group, as it was hard to generalize in that way. However, this was not the view of all respondents. For instance, R3 (Albanian) argued that despite many similarities, there are indeed big differences, which he could not explain. He argued that Serbs are not to be trusted and that they will always look down on Albanians. Moreover, R3 argued that: *“They don’t want us here, they think it is their land. They would do anything to get rid of us. It has always been like this”* (R3). However, R3 also stated that this is a mutual and accepted attitude among both groups: *“We do not like them, they do not like us, we all know this. But it is our life and we have to live together despite this. We have no choice.”* (R3). Comparably, R8 (Serb) felt that there is mutual hostility and a general disliking between the groups. He argued that both groups are aware of this, but they are also aware of the need to cooperate in ways which enables profits for both.

A reoccurring argument among the respondents was the blaming of politicians and leaders from both groups. Respondents felt that these elites did not represent the views of ordinary citizens, nor did they understand their situation. Respondents argued that politicians and leaders are too distanced from the reality in ethnically divided settings such as in northern Kosovo. R6 argued that politicians are profiting from conflicts and therefore fuel them. They exaggerate differences and highlight incidents, which makes people believe that incidents are far more common than they actually are. As in the study of Katunaric, people and local leaders/politicians in peace

enclaves tended to be more distanced from the centralised politics, which often were and are nationalistic. Peace enclaves reached a higher degree of political flexibility than conflict areas in relation to national centres and their elites. In an ethnically divided environment, this allowed peace enclaves to better manage their strategic interests and local policy. Instead of following the nationalistic ways often imposed by central authorities, the actions and policies in peace enclaves were instead centred on mitigating escalating inter-ethnic tensions and preserving peace at all costs (Katunaric & Banovac, 2004, pp. 192-195). Departing from Katunaric categorisation of Mitrovicë as a conflict area, it would make sense that the local politics are largely affected by central authorities, failing to enable peace at the local level through local politics, policies, and strategies. These already constrained settings are fragile and can be triggered by politicians who mobilize conflicts through ethnic lines, going against the actual will of the people, as R6 explained:

“I feel like there are two parallel worlds, one where actual people just go on with their days and do not pay too much attention to ethnic differences, and then we have people who stresses these things and try to use them for political gains. If these politicians actually lived here and cared for us, I don’t think their rhetoric would be the same. They create policies and decide what people should think and feel, but they are not here in the real world, seeing how it actually is and what people actually need.” (R6)

In a similar fashion, R2 asserted that politicians aim to focus on the negative parts, painting a picture that is worse than reality: *“They take all these decisions and think that they represent us, the people who are actually here, breathing, working. It’s easy for Kurti or Vucic or any other puppet to tell us what to do, what we should think, but they are not us – they profit from the fighting” (R2)*. These views and attitudes towards politicians were reoccurring in both groups, but mostly present among respondents who were already quite positive or neutral towards inter-ethnic cooperation.

When asked *“Have these views changed over the years? For example, since the war?”*, the respondents provided a mixture of answers. However, a reoccurring argument was that things certainly have changed around them, which has affected their views and perceptions. Respondents R2 and R8 stated that there was more trust before the war, as the war forced people to turn on each other. More specifically, R8 argued that people were forced to distance themselves from Albanians, otherwise they would be seen as traitors and risked punishment:

“When the war broke out, of course we were scared. People turned against each other, not because they wanted to, but if you didn’t you would be seen as an enemy or a traitor, and you risked them hurting your family.” (R8). In similar notes, R2 argued that people lived even closer together before the war: *“Today it’s more like, ‘I do this for you, you do this for me’, because we need to. Before the war, I think we enjoyed each other’s company more, it was not as tense” (R2).* Younger respondents argued that the more interactions they had, oftentimes as a result of being a student or travelling abroad, the more they understood the need of cooperation and also made them realise that there are more similarities than they thought: *“I was only five when the war broke out, so I only have some weak memories, but I think my views opened up more when I started my university studies. I had more encounters with international organisations, Serbian students and such, I guess it opened up my eyes a bit more.” (R4).* In contrast, R3 was convinced that the war only exposed the reality of the underlying tensions and that: *“It showed their true faces. They stole our homes and everything we had. I could not keep my family safe. But when I was younger, I went to school with these people. It was different. Tensions were there, but completely different. The war did not surprise us” (R3).*

To conclude, regarding this theme, there are some different views amongst the respondents. Although the respondents feel that there are indeed some differences between the two ethnic groups, these are perceived to be rather insignificant when dealing with cooperation. Respondents R3 and R8 were less inclined to cooperate, had a more pessimistic/negative view of the other and expressed a lack of trust. However, despite a more negative stance, they also understood the importance of cooperation and that it is inevitable, therefore, they would not necessarily opt out from cooperation. In other words, the perceived differences are not sufficient enough to stop people from cooperating. However, for the sake of the research, it is important to note that all of the respondents already (prior to the interviews) have taken or repeatedly take part in some form of inter-ethnic cooperation. These findings show that it would be beneficial to also interview people who do not or even refuse to cooperate with people from another ethnic group. Unfortunately, as mentioned in the limitations, this has not been possible considering the resources and time-frame of this research.

Moreover, almost every respondent mentioned politics, politicians, or leaders. Every respondent who brought up these topics expressed frustration and discontent towards politics, claiming that their leaders do not act for the best of the people. Politicians are not aware of how

reality works, act for their own gains and oftentimes even fuel conflicts as divisions and social unrest are what keeps them in office, respondents argued. As mentioned, Katunaric argues that the more distanced local politicians are from their oftentimes nationalistic centres, the more likely they are to promote inter-ethnic cooperation and peace culture in general, however, this does not seem to be the case among the local elite; considering that respondents argued that they fuel conflicts instead of mitigating them. In conclusion, these findings show that people are more frustrated with politicians of which they have a negative view of, rather than the other ethnic group.

Relationship and cooperation with “the other”

This theme aims to analyse the cooperation in which respondents take part in and connect it to the theoretical framework. It is of interest to try and identify what kind of cooperation that is present with the help of the indicators provided in Table 1.

Although there were some differences in attitudes, incentives, and future ambitions, all the respondents answered that they take part in some type of cooperation with the other ethnic group. On this theme, the first question that was asked during the interviews was “*What type of contact, exchanges or transactions do you have with the other ethnic group?*”. Naturally, the occupation of the respondents together with age and education are all factors which have to be considered, since these factors affect everyday life and encounters with the other ethnic group. R1 (Albanian) explained that through her work in the public sector, she has several encounters with Serbs on a daily basis. The respondent explained that she works in the municipality and when people need her help, she treats everybody the same, regardless of ethnicity. Furthermore, the official processes are the same for everyone and her work should not be affected by external factors: “*I meet these people daily, I handle their matters just the same. Also, I have Serb colleagues. I help them with what they need, it’s not any different, you see?*” (R1). Moreover, she explained that there sometimes is a language barrier: “*I don’t speak Serbian, sometimes they don’t speak so much Albanian, but we make it work anyway, sometimes with help, sometimes without. We just want to deliver and do what is required from us*” (R1). The respondent also explained that it is by law required that every official matter should be accessible in both Serbian and Albanian. This setting and type of cooperation is very much what Axelrod would argue is specific reciprocity (indicator); a specified setting where there is a mutual understanding of the standard of behaviour and expectations. In other words, a

transaction between two parties where the terms, expectations and obligations are clear and pre-determined (Axelrod, 1984, pp. 147-149). In such, two parties can have a fruitful exchange with reciprocal gains. In addition, R1 explained that outside of her work, encounters with Serbs are quite rare, and she does not see any specific opportunities for it either. Therefore, in this case, it is not possible to identify any diffuse reciprocity.

In the case of R2 (Albanian), it was possible to identify both specific and diffuse reciprocity. The respondent owns a construction company which also sells tools and materials. He explained that they have been doing this for many years and long before the war. They do business throughout the region, including north Kosovo which, as mentioned, is a region heavily populated by Serbs. When it comes to business, R2 does not see any obstacles to cooperation and argues that “business is business”. He also mentioned that Mitrovicë is a divided city: “*You have a lot of Serbs on the other side of the river. Yes, they are Serbs, but they also build houses and they pay for the services*” (R2), and continued explaining the importance of reputation and trust:

“They know of us, we have a good reputation, they come here to my office, they present themselves and they tell me we are trying to build this or that or whatever. They are my customers, they pay for the services and we provide what they pay for, it’s business as usual. It’s not like I am going to turn down business because you are a Serb, why would I do that? I am a businessman, I provide for my family, and customers are customers. And, they come here, they show respect and I respect them. It takes courage and trust to leave our differences aside and work together, you know?” (R2).

According to R2, not everyone is capable of leaving their differences aside and work together. He explained that feelings of nationalism and pride often get in the way of peoples sensible judgement. Furthermore, the respondent stated that one has to consider the future: “*If I treat this customer well, he is going to tell his neighbour, and his neighbour tells his friend or whatever, word goes around, they get good services, we get more business and everybody is satisfied.*” (R2). Emphasis is put on future mutual gains, which indicates a presence of the shadow of the future. Naturally, this type of exchange is strongly related to specific reciprocity, however, it is also possible to identify diffuse reciprocity. R2 explained that they treat Serb customers with respect, offering them coffee and have informal meetings and dinners even outside working hours. Thus, they also cooperate outside a specific setting and in ways which

may not yield immediate benefits but rather as an investment for the future and intended as a contribution to the relations as a whole. The respondent did not care about how other Albanians would perceive him, as he felt that this type of cooperation is quite common and continued emphasising the importance of having good business relations.

R3 (Albanian) stated that he has a more cautious approach to cooperation. According to the respondent, he only does what is necessary to get him through the day. In his opinion, one should not get too involved with Serbs, as he feels that there is a chance of being used or exploited. He feels that there is a deeply rooted mistrust towards Serbs and that it is quite normal to stay distanced and avoid any unnecessary exchanges or interactions. However, he argued that there are no expectations for deeper cooperation from either ethnic group, therefore, he sees it as a mutual understanding of their relationship: *“I think that we do not expect much more from each other. There might be people out there who do less or more, but this is how it works here for us. So yes, I would say it’s a mutual relationship.”* (R3). According to Katunaric, path dependence maintains that collective choices or events in the past can determine subsequent actions or attitudes in the future (Katunaric, 2010, p. 4). The respondent explained that he had negative encounters with Serbs long before the war, which could explain his more negative stance.

Similar to R1, R6 (Serb) also works in the public sector in the Mitrovicë region. The respondent also mentioned the division of the city; however, people work and live together despite this. The respondent felt that people do not pay so much attention to previous and contemporary conflicts. He argued that there is *“an elephant in the room”* which people ignore and do what is necessary to get them through the day. Furthermore, he argued that he does not mind cooperating with the other, as long as the other person does not show any negative attitude: *“I don’t mind if you don’t mind. But in the cases where you have one part who is not ok with it, then it becomes a problem very quickly”* (R6). The respondent stated that problems arise at the individual level, and not at the societal level, thus, whether cooperation becomes possible or not depends on each individual. On the same note, the respondent believed that even small interactions such as going to the local store and meeting someone from the other ethnic group can help normalise relations and increase tolerance.

On the same theme, R8 (Serb) explained that he would rather avoid interaction with Albanians, except for those which benefits him. As a store owner, he would not refuse anyone from coming

into his store and he oftentimes buys good of Albanians who work in wholesales. The respondent explained that they do business just as he would anywhere else or with anyone else, despite both parties being aware of the underlying tensions. However, he would rather not get involved in any voluntary cooperation outside of a specified context. In other words, R8 believed that cooperation is possible in a specified setting or context which benefits both parties, however, he argued that it cannot go further than that. Again, even when the respondent has a more cautious or even negative approach to inter-ethnic cooperation, there is still a willingness to cooperate as the benefits of it outweigh those of non-cooperation.

R5 (Albanian) runs a small event-planning company. She explained that she has customers from both sides of Mitrovicë; Albanians and Serbs. According to her, it can sometimes be a bit difficult to communicate due to the language barrier, however, they still manage as both parties use Serbian and Albanian to their best extent. Similar to R2, the respondent argued that they do business just as usual, regardless of ethnicity: *“They pay me to do the job and I do it as well as I can. It does not matter where you are from or who you are. It only depends on if you are nice or not”* (R5). However, she also stated that outside of her work, it is not so common for her to interact with Serbs. It is hard to form a deeper relationship, mainly because she feels that it is not in the interest of either party.

The respondent R9 has a parent that is Albanian and one that is Serb. During her childhood, she had to endure negative comments from both ethnic groups, teasing her for her mixed background and her parents have been seen as traitors for forming a relationship with the other. However, she felt that it has become much better during the last couple of years. As generations shift, people are more inclined to open up and start accepting others, she argued. The respondent believes that increased interdependence for services and goods result in more everyday encounters and thus, tolerance and acceptance grow. Moreover, an interesting finding is that, according to R9, people in the capital pay less attention to ethnic belonging than in the areas which are more “mixed”, such as the northern parts of the country. The respondent believed that this is a consequence of people in the capital being more educated. This arguments stands in contrast to those of previous respondents who believe that people who live in more divided cities such as Mitrovicë pay less attention to ethnic differences as they have more everyday encounters with the other ethnic group.

The willingness or readiness to cooperate is strongly present amongst all of the respondents, however, these findings show that the formation of deeper relations is quite rare, thus, the chances of achieving diffuse reciprocity become rather weak in this context. However, there seems to be a mutual understanding of the expectations as neither group expressed any interest in forming deeper relations outside a specified setting. However, all of the respondents take part in some form of cooperation as the benefits of cooperation are perceived to be more attractive than opting out. Based on these findings, it is possible to identify a strong presence of the shadow of the future as all of the respondents expressed that they have to consider their own future and what is mostly beneficial for them. In business relations, ethnicity seems to be irrelevant; even respondents who have a more cautious approach to inter-ethnic cooperation and a more negative view of the other (such as R3 and R8) understand the importance of cooperation and choose to cooperate despite their views.

Generalization and scalability

This theme aims to analyse whether these results can be generalized in Kosovo and what challenges and opportunities there are for scaling up cooperation.

All of the respondents argued that inter-ethnic cooperation is not a rare thing. When asked *“Do you think that cooperation between Serbs and Albanians is a rare thing?”* All of the respondents stated that most people they knew in the area where they live, take part in some type of inter-ethnic cooperation. However, respondents were also aware that this may differ throughout the country. Respondents believed that there is less cooperation in cities further south and west. For example, R2 argued that it is far less common in cities like Skenderaj and Gjakovë: *“I think that in Skenderaj and Gjakovë, it’s different. These cities struggled a lot during the war as they were hit very hard. Many people who fought came from these areas. There are far less Serbs there as well.”* (R2). Furthermore, the respondent believed that it is not uncommon to cooperate in the capital, however, cooperation there is mostly connected to official matters (governance and administration) and business, he argued. Similarly, R4 argues that deeper cooperation is hard to find: *“I think that everyday exchanges are not rare, we don’t make a thing out of it. But it is rare to find deeper cooperation unfortunately.”* (R4). However, the situation is getting better with newer generations, which is a common attitude amongst young students like herself, she argued. It is important for Kosovo’s development to open up more and work for the future: *“We have to move forward if we want to get anywhere, hopefully*

one day in the EU. That way, we could travel and see more than what we have here. People need more perspective” (R4). Kosovo’s isolation due to the visa requirements for travelling abroad is restricting young people and thus, people become more ignorant and narrow-minded, she added. R4 also believed that cooperation differs depending on where you are in the country as some cities *“are really against Serbs”* (R4). In similar notes, R7 stated that relations between Serbs and Albanians are very different depending on where you live. He believes that in cities or areas where there is a mixture of both ethnic groups, relations are rather well-functioning. In Prishtinë, relations are rather calm despite the very low number of Serbs residing in the area. However, in cities where KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) had a strong presence, relations are far worse, he argued. R6 shares many of these views as he argued that *“I would probably not want to live in a city in Kosovo where there are no Serbs, the attitude is not the same there. But it is the same thing in Serbia, the more people interact the more normalised it is for us to deal with Albanians”* (R6). He also stated that the majority of the people he knows share his views.

In terms of scaling up cooperation, respondents had low hopes/expectations. A reoccurring argument was that one of the main challenges for scaling up cooperation is politics. As in the first theme, respondents felt that politicians are not willing to cooperate and want to keep “old” structures in place. R1 argued that: *“If its up to citizens, maybe. Not to say that it will be without struggles, but maybe it could work. With politicians, no. Many people higher up benefit from problems. They get money from abroad, NGOs get money to solve problems, but where are these used? If we would get along, they would not be there!”* (R1). Similarly, R2 argued that politicians consciously create a narrative which they use to remain in power. She explained that the government does not understand or listens to what *“normal people”* need, however, there is a need for cooperation higher up since it is believed that if relations between Serbs and Albanians were better on a higher level, Kosovo would progress and eventually join the EU, which is highly sought after: *“[...] we are trapped like monkeys in cages, it is so sad, we are Europeans but we are not allowed in Europe”* (R2). Another factor which hinders cooperation at a higher level is the lack of real interest to do so, some respondents argued. The respondents R3 and R8 believed that people do not want to get too entangled, and thus, they cannot make it work at higher “official” levels. Most of the times, the discussions regarding the matter are just to keep the narrative alive and attract foreign investments, but there is not any *real* interest in actually solving these problems, the respondents argued.

6. Conclusions

The situation in Kosovo is complex and requires an even deeper analysis. Serb-Albanian relations are still a sensitive topic and there are mixed feelings regarding the issue. However, despite the conflicted history and the contemporary political havoc, inter-ethnic cooperation is very much present. Citizens in more ethnically divided areas such as Mitrovicë have many everyday encounters with the other ethnic group and are therefore more inclined to cooperate. They depend on rather well-functioning relations and benefit from the absence of conflict. The perceptions of the other ethnic group are not always positive; however, they are not sufficient for entering conflict. Rather, citizens seem to understand the importance of cooperation and prioritize the benefits what come with it (short-term and long-term). This is also the case when respondents show a more cautious approach to the other ethnic group. Despite the more negative stance, they would not opt out from cooperation. These negative views of the other can be explained through a path-dependence approach since these respondents have had negative encounters with the other in the past.

While perceptions of the other do not inhibit cooperation, the respondents views on politicians (elites) certainly pose a big problem. The respondents showed no trust in politicians and argued that they do not act for the people. It is believed that politicians tend to highlight negative incidents and create a narrative which aims to mobilize conflicts along ethnic lines. A reoccurring argument amongst the respondents was that politicians benefit from divisions and conflicts. One respondent even argued that as long as conflicts and divisions exist, politicians and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) receive funds to solve these problems, which are not used the way they are intended.

All nine respondents expressed that they take part in some type of cooperation with the other ethnic group. Cooperation in a specific setting where there is a mutual understanding of the expectations and which leads to reciprocal gains (specific reciprocity) was present among all the respondents. All respondents understood the importance of a fruitful exchange and expressed that they think about future gains, thus, the shadow of the future was also present among all respondents. There were signs of diffuse reciprocity, that is, voluntary cooperation that does not yield immediate benefits. However, this type of cooperation is rare and highly individual. Based on the answers from the respondents, other than basic cooperation, not much

is expected from the other ethnic group. There seems to be a mutual understanding of this among both Serbs and Albanians. Therefore, the lack of diffuse reciprocity could be explained by the fact that there is no real interest in actually achieving it. Despite low expectations and the occasional presence of mistrust (often caused by previous negative experiences), respondents are inclined to cooperate, both groups are aware of temporary and future gains, and ethnicity seems to be especially irrelevant when dealing with a specified setting such as in trade and services. None of the respondents expressed any fear of threats or violence except for the occasional fear of being labelled as a traitor (for cooperating with the other ethnic group). Respondents everyday lives continue “just as normal” despite the ethnic divisions and their ways are not affected by the other ethnic group. Thus, it is possible to argue that peace culture is present and Katunaric categorisation of Mitrovicë as a conflict area is no longer relevant. None of the respondents mentioned or expressed any values such as sensitivity for the weak or non-dominance, thus, it is not possible to clearly identify a higher presence of feminine values. Furthermore, none of the respondents felt any need of retaliation, they were not stuck in negative cycles, nor did they feel the need to opt out from cooperation. Therefore, no echo effects could be identified.

These findings show that the types of cooperation that are present in the Mitrovicë region are not necessarily generalisable to Kosovo as a whole. Several respondents argued that Serb-Albanian relations differ depending on where you are in the country. In settings which are already heavily ethnically divided, cooperation seems to function better due to an increased number of everyday encounters and a higher degree of interdependence. Furthermore, how affected cities were during the war also seems to affect relations today. It was mentioned that in areas where KLA was more present, Serb-Albanian relations are far worse or even non-existent, which is not surprising considering the path-dependence approach. Main obstacles for scaling up cooperation are, according to the respondents, politics, and the lack of *real* interest. Most people are fed up with politics, policies, and endless discussions on how to solve these issues, so they rather just go on with their lives and cooperate in ways which they need to do in their everyday encounters. In other words, there is a lack of belief and trust that politicians work to actually solve these problems, thus, motivation and morale is low amongst the people.

To conclude, citizens who have everyday encounters with the other ethnic group certainly have more skin in the game. They are directly affected by the inter-ethnic relations and thus, their

incentives for cooperation are far greater than those of the ruling elite. This study clearly shows that inter-ethnic cooperation is present and acts as an important part for the functioning of these ethnically divided societies. As mentioned, this study did not aim to achieve findings which can be generalised to other regions, however, it certainly gives us a better understanding of how important “everyday” inter-ethnic cooperation is, despite surrounding conflicts and a weak state apparatus. There is certainly more interest among locals to have well-functioning relations with the other ethnic group than one would believe when hearing about these regions on the news or listening to the rhetoric of local politicians. Lastly, these findings show that there certainly is an exaggeration of the role of conflict in ethnically divided settings in academia. Inter-ethnic cooperation is very much possible without violent conflict even in constrained ethnically divided settings.

For future contributions, it would be interesting to further examine the role of elites, including politicians and leaders, but also NGOs and other international actors. Even though this study contributes to our understanding of the role of ethnicity related to cooperation in the local context, these findings show that this complex environment requires a more thorough and systematic analysis in order to provide more nuanced and generalisable findings. In turn, this would provide an even more adequate understanding of the inter-ethnic relations in Kosovo, and how they are affected by the political turmoil. Although this study is based on inter-ethnic relations, scholars should avoid to simply label tensions or conflicts in these kinds of settings as “ethnic”. As this study shows, ethnicity is oftentimes put aside and locals are prepared to cooperate despite their differences.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview guide (English)

Semi-structured interview regarding inter-ethnic cooperation in Kosovo

The aim of this interview is to better understand the inter-ethnic cooperation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. Your anonymity and integrity are of highest priority, and you can at any time choose to not comment, move on to another question or cancel the interview altogether.

To better understand the results of this study, and to be able to categorize respondents, please answer the following questions. If you are uncomfortable providing any of the information, feel free to skip those parts.

Ethnic group:	
Age:	
Sex:	
Occupation:	
Education:	
City:	

Questions

Perceptions of the “other”

1. How would you describe a person from the other ethnic group?
2. Have these views changed over the years? For example, since the war?
 - a. If your views have changed, what triggered these changes and how was it before?
3. Do you believe that “they are all the same”?

Relationship and potential cooperation with the “other”

4. What type of contact, exchanges or transactions do you have with the other ethnic group?
5. Would you say that you cooperate with the other ethnic group?
6. If there is some form of cooperation, can you describe it in more detail? What incentives do you have for cooperation?
7. Do you care about what others from your own ethnic group would think about you?

- a. Have you maintained or would you maintain this relationship despite ongoing conflicts around you?
- 8. Do you feel that this relationship is reciprocal? In other words, do you feel that you receive as much as you give?
- 9. Do you feel that you need to do anything in particular to maintain this relationship?
- 10. Do you ever receive any benefits you did not expect? If yes, would you return the favour?
- 11. Do you ever think of this relationship as something that might be beneficial in the long run?
- 12. Have you ever gotten stuck in a bad cycle of negative behaviour towards one another?

Generalization and scaling up

- 13. Do you think that cooperation between Serbs and Albanians is a rare thing?
- 14. Does the relationship differ depending on where you live in Kosovo?
- 15. Do you know others whose situation is similar to yours?
- 16. Do you think that you can cooperate at a “higher level”? For example, at the regional or even national level, between respective country and their politicians?
- 17. If there are any challenges to this, what would you say are the main ones?

Anything you would wish to add?

Appendix 2 – Interview guide (Albanian)

Intervistë gjysmë e strukturuar lidhur me bashkëpunimin ndëretnik në Kosovë

Qëllimi i kësaj interviste është që të kuptohet më mirë bashkëpunimi ndëretnik ndërmjet serbëve dhe shqiptarëve në Kosovë. Anonimiteti dhe integriteti juaj janë prioriteti më i lartë dhe ju mund të zgjidhni në çdo kohë të mos komentoni, të kaloni në një pyetje tjetër ose ta anuloni intervistën fare.

Për të kuptuar më mirë rezultatet e këtij studimi dhe për të qenë në gjendje të kategorizoni të anketuarit, ju lutemi përgjigjuni pyetjeve të mëposhtme. Nëse nuk jeni rehat të jepni ndonjë nga informacionet, mos ngurroni t'i kaloni ato pjesë.

Grupi etnik:	
Mosha:	
Gjinia:	
Profesioni:	
Arsimi:	
Qyteti:	

Pyetjet

Pikëpamjet e "tjetrit"

1. Si do ta përshkruanit një person nga grupi tjetër etnik?
2. A kanë ndryshuar këto pikëpamje me kalimin e viteve? Për shembull, që nga lufta?
 - a. Nëse pikëpamjet tuaja kanë ndryshuar, çfarë i shkaktoi këto ndryshime dhe si ishte më parë?
3. A besoni se “janë të gjithë njësoj”?

Marrëdhënia dhe bashkëpunimi i mundshëm me "tjetrin"

4. Çfarë lloj kontakti, shkëmbimi apo transaksioni keni me grupin tjetër etnik?
5. A do të thoshit se bashkëpunoni me grupin tjetër etnik?
6. Nëse ka ndonjë formë bashkëpunimi, a mund ta përshkruani më në detaje? Çfarë stimuljsh keni për bashkëpunim?
7. A ju intereson se çfarë do të mendonin të tjerët nga grupi juaj etnik për ju?
 - a. E keni ruajtur apo do ta ruani këtë marrëdhënie pavarësisht konflikteve të vazhdueshme rreth jush?

8. A mendoni se kjo marrëdhënie është reciproke? Me fjalë të tjera, a mendoni se merrni aq sa jepni?
9. A mendoni se duhet të bëni ndonjë gjë të veçantë për të ruajtur këtë marrëdhënie?
10. A merrni ndonjëherë ndonjë përfitim që nuk e prisnit? Nëse po, a do ta kthenit favorin?
11. A e mendoni ndonjëherë këtë marrëdhënie si diçka që mund të jetë e dobishme në planin afatgjatë?
12. A keni ngecur ndonjëherë në një cikël të keq sjelljeje negative ndaj njëri-tjetrit?

Përgjithësim dhe shkallëzim

13. A mendoni se bashkëpunimi ndërmjet serbëve dhe shqiptarëve është diçka e rrallë?
14. A ndryshon marrëdhënia në varësi të vendit ku jetoni në Kosovë?
15. A njihni të tjerë, situata e të cilëve është e ngjashme me tuajën?
16. A mendoni se mund të bashkëpunoni në një “nivel më të lartë”? Për shembull, në nivel rajonal apo edhe kombëtar, ndërmjet shtetit përkatës dhe politikanëve të tyre?
17. Nëse ka ndonjë sfidë për këtë, cilat do të thoshit se janë ato kryesore?

Diçka që dëshironi të shtoni?