

LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT

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Case Study

Reconciliation Across Borders: An Experiment in Croatia

Larry Minear

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These documents do not represent a final product of the project. While these documents may be cited, they remain working documents of a collaborative learning effort. Broad generalizations about the project's findings cannot be made from a single case.

CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time, experience and insights for these reports, and for their willingness to share their experiences.

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Reconciliation across Borders: An Experiment in Croatia

Pakrac is a small town in Croatia about a hundred miles east of Zagreb. The scene of intense fighting between August and November of 1991, the town, with a prewar population of about 10,000, was then divided into Croatian and Serbian sections. Under the watchful eye of United Nations troops, soldiers from the Croatian army and the self-declared Republic of Srebska have faced off across a cease-fire line, a heavily mined strip bisecting the heart of the town.

The town was the scene of the first major intercommunal fighting accompanying the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia -- an early instance of "ethnic cleansing" before the practice had become a trademark of the conflict. But the town was also among the first to attempt to put the war behind it through conscious efforts at resettlement, rebuilding, and reconciliation.

Aided since July 1993 by the presence and support of Croatian and international volunteers, townspeople have sought to rebuild devastated structures and encourage the resumption of normal activities. The Pakrac Reconstruction Project is "unique," says its coordinator of volunteers, "with young people from all over the world going to help, working together with the UN and the local authorities on a cease-fire line running right through the town."

Due to the continuing violence of the wider war, the Pakrac effort as of late 1994 has borne only limited fruit. Yet the experience bears review both in its own right and as a microcosm of the broader tasks facing the former Yugoslavia. The challenges there are in turn akin to those faced elsewhere around the globe where armed conflicts that have rent communities and nations asunder have left behind daunting unfinished business of reconstruction and reconciliation.