

**Brigitte Klass**  
**The Four Peace Camps in Neum (Bosnia) 2006.**



About 400 young people and their facilitators from Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia met in 2006's four camps in Neum, the only Bosnian enclave on the Mediterranean. We got nearer to our aim of entrusting the responsibilities of these encounters to our local partners who encourage the participants to share the groundwork of their experiences in the Vacation from War camps with others in the places the youngsters come from.

To facilitate further contacts after the encounters, we proposed creating a homepage with a webmaster in the Bosnian Croatian Serbian language. The youngsters should exchange their experiences with their new friends, publish reports about ethnic conflicts in their towns, write articles for an Internet newspaper or communicate personally in a chatroom, as practised by a group from 2005 ([www.odmor-od-rata.com](http://www.odmor-od-rata.com)). But even in the first group, we had evidence that the social realities of our participants were very different. Only two out of 80 could get on the

Internet, the others came from isolated villages. In one of the villages there is indeed a young people's club, but no electricity at all. They don't even have the possibility of showing the video of their camp. Even some were forced by political pressure to return to their "home villages" that now are part of the "enemies land".

Soon after two of our camps, our Bosnian and Serbian facilitators organized a meeting and foresee others in the spring. Only then did many of the youngsters believe that these holidays would not only be a singular and extraordinary event, but that, in fact, lasting contacts would come from them.

Every year we feel depressed about the nearly hopeless prospects for our kind, engaged, intelligent young people from the former war regions. Unemployment is very high. Young people are stuck in villages with catastrophic infrastructures. They only can earn their living by subsistence agriculture or by going to Croatia as seasonal workers. Young girls, a mentor told us, marry very young. Most of them hope to leave their country in search of happiness abroad. Only a few will succeed.

"Vacation from War" can't change this desperate situation. But we can build the participants' self-confidence, show them that there are people helping them to overcome their mental barriers. In interviews and letters participants point out the importance of having experienced equality in the camps, that everyone is on a par with the others, that there are no differences at all, that usually they don't know who comes from where.

We are convinced that most of our participants, despite their troubles, will not be corrupted by nationalist propaganda.

Reading their thank-you letters to donors will give you an impression of the changes they experienced.