

MICRO-GEOPOLITICAL BORDERS OF DIVIDED CITIES: THE CASE STUDY OF MOSTAR

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to many scholars in the field of history and political science, the 20th century was a century of aggressive division. Along with the Great War that escalated on the European land, the map of Europe was seriously converted. Back in those days, most of the European territory was made out of only few multinational empires – the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire – along with few other states which had transoceanic and trans-Mediterranean colonies such as the Great Britain, Spain, France, Portugal, Italy and Germany. After the escalation of the First World War, serious geopolitical changes led to the collapse of old empires, rise of communism and extreme national movements in Europe.

Generally speaking, those uprising phenomena clashed at one point with the liberal ideas of free market, democracy and the legal right of self-determination. Even at that time, the newly established international organization, the League of Nations, did not do much to prevent a new world war. However, it did postpone the inevitable. After the end of the Second World War, the cleavage between ideas throughout Europe remained the main issue that was yet to be overcome. The Cold War between the East and the West is by far the best example. Finally, after the collapse of communism, a common European and Transatlantic project of cooperation was offered to all interested countries in Europe in order to overcome the post-conflict issues.

The ex-communist part of Europe at the beginning of the last decade of last century had more or less a successful democratic transition with few exceptions. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union collapsed, which led to a new wave of national self-determination, in some cases not very successful democratic transition and establishment of new nation-states. Followed by different points of view for the future organization of the country, Yugoslavia ended up in a conflict. Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence and requested international recognition, which caused serious aggression of the Yugoslav People's Army empowered by the ideology of Serbian fascists. Slovenia did not fit into their project of *Great Serbia*, but parts of Croatia and, in specific, Bosnia and Herzegovina did. As an outcome, the last conflicts of last century that happened on the European continent were the Croatian Homeland War and the Civil War in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, the recognized national borders did not prevent further divisions on local levels and micro scale geopolitics. Divided regions, cities and imagined borders are still crucial part of the geographies and geopolitical visions in this part of the world. Micro regional geopolitics and micro regional borders thus represent a key research area in this

field of studies. Micro regional borders could be defined as an upcoming phenomenon. Those borders could be geographically natural, agreed (administrative) and in case of human geography even ethnical, linguistic or religious [1] (pp. 26). In this research, cartography will be used both as a method of data collecting, as well as a method of data analysis. According to Black, mapping of boundaries is a key research issue of political cartography [2] (pp. 121). Political cartography represents an interconnection between and space and territorialisation within its nature [3] (pp. 119).

2. THE CRITERIA OF DIVISION

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended by the end of 1995. However, the post-crisis management in this country had little success. The city of Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a city where one of the worst fights took place and is still considered to be an example of a divided city. Nowadays, it is considered to be divided between Croats and Bosniaks/Muslims, since the major battles that happened in this city were after the Greater-Serbian aggression on the city, the ones between former allies – Croats and Bosniaks/Muslims. In the period between 1993 and 1994, before the ceasefire agreement, the Washington Agreement, which main purpose was to stop the conflict between Croats and Bosniaks/Muslims, Mostar was the capital of the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, a self-proclaimed Croatian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The western part of the city was under the control of the Croatian Council of Defence (CCD), the army of the entity the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, whereas the eastern part was under the control of the Army of RBiH, the official army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH). After a series of serious fights and unsuccessful negotiations, the line of division between the two parts of the city was established on *Bulevar*, the longest boulevard in Mostar. Generally speaking, the political and territorial divisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina reflect the situation that was found on the battlefields immediately after the war, in the autumn 1995 [4] (pp. 8). Since then, Mostar has had two, in many aspects, completely different parts of the same city and it is considered to be divided.

Divided cities are a subject of interest for many scholars in the field of social sciences. From a geopolitical point of view, divided cities can be considered as one of the outcomes of radical conflicts caused by deep historical divisions of ideas. It is hard to establish a general criterion when studying divided cities, but some general overview of literature [5, 6, 7, 8, and 9] led us to conclusion that there are more than few indicators that precisely define the city as divided. The first one, defined by the authors of this paper themselves, is definitely the political, cultural, religious and sport division. These criteria should be named identity criteria.

The city of Mostar, located in West Herzegovina, is by far the biggest city of Herzegovina region, a cultural and political centre situated on the Neretva River. It has a population of around 105 000 people. According to the latest census dating 2013, the national structure of Mostar indicates that 48. 41% are Croats, 44. 19% are Bosniaks, 4. 18% are Serbs and 3. 21% are members of other communities [10] (pp. 59). The Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina view Mostar as their political and cultural centre. The Croatian Lodge of Herzog Stjepan Kosača (in Croatian: Hrvatski dom herceg Stjepan Kosača) and the Croatian National Theatre of Mostar (in Croatian: Hrvatsko narodno kazalište Mostar) are located in the west part of city, as well as the office of the Croat Member of BH Presidency.

There are also most of the head offices of BH-Croatian companies, such as the Croatian Post Mostar (in Croatian: Hrvatska pošta Mostar) and the Power Company of the

Croatian Community Herzeg-Bosnia (in Croatian: Elektorprivreda Hrvatske Zajednice Herceg Bosne). On the other hand, the eastern part of the city has post offices of BH Post Sarajevo, cultural institutions that represent Bosniaks exclusively, such as the National Theatre (in Bosnian: Narodno pozorište), the Bosniaks Cultural Community Preporod (in Bosnian: Bošnjačka kulturna zajednica Preporod), etc. Moreover, each part of the city has a different city centre, restaurants, markets and even shops. Due to the strong influence of the past conflict, a lack of deliberation among politicians and a lack of principles of consociation democracy on state level, the local elections were suspended almost nine years ago. In a political sense, Mostar is a frozen city with the same mayor for nine years, without an adequate election law and without a city council.

Most of the religious objects that both nations identify with are concentrated in either dominantly Croatian or Bosniak parts of Mostar. The majority of Croats are Catholics, which means that most of the religious objects in the western part are churches, whilst Bosniaks are Muslims so most of the objects in the eastern part are mosques. While looking at the skyline of Mostar from the surrounding hills and mountains, it almost seems like there is a kind of competition between the religious communities about who is closer to the supreme deity. In both cases, belfries and minarets are so high that it almost looks like they are only few meters away of reaching either God or Allah. As an illustration, the Franciscan church situated on the former line of demarcation has a 107.2 meters high belfry [11]. When we did our research it was around Christmas – the western part of the city was completely decorated with Christmas lights and a Christmas festival was organized, while on the eastern part there was no sign of Christmas whatsoever. Even though Mostar likes to brag in tourist guides about being a multi-confessional city, it has no signs of coexistence and mutual respect. When it comes to religion, it is obvious that the city is indeed strictly divided.

Sport is also a delicate subject in Mostar. Taking into account only football, as most the important unimportant thing in the world, there are two most famous clubs, withal city rivals: the Croatian Sports Club Zrinjski (in Croatian: Hrvatski športski klub Zrinjski) and the Football Club Velež (in Bosnian: Fudbalski klub Velež). Both clubs play in the BH Premier League and both of them have their own stadiums – Zrinjski in the western part and Velež in the eastern part of the city. The majority of the players are, depending of which team they belong to, either Croats or Bosniaks. Even though cultural, religious, sport and everyday life are completely separated, there are some efforts to overcome the obvious division through cultural events, such as the music festival the Melodies of Mostar (in Croatian/Bosnian: Melodije Mostara) or Mostar Film Festival.

The second criterion of division is surely the one which is a little less connected with nationalism and a bit more with public finances, transportation and infrastructure. In other words, the administrative criterion. Although it is impossible to get an insight about income, life expectance, level of education and other economic criteria in both parts of Mostar separately, there are obvious divisions in this field as well. Just taking a simple walk through both parts of the city can be enough to easily spot this division. Streets, parks and buildings are in much better shape on the western part of the city than on the east.

Although most of the architecture along with all bridges was completely demolished during the war, the western part is almost completely rebuilt, whilst in the eastern part ruined architecture is still part of everyday life. The western part of the city is divided in parking zones and you are obliged to pay a parking fee - there is a public company for regulation of parking, while on the eastern part there are no zones or furnished parking places, except the private ones. The Mostar Bus today presents a

publicly financed company in the city which main purpose is to provide transport in Mostar. Each part of the city has its own director and bus lines that are supervised, although it is officially one company [12]. When looking at the route map of the Mostar Bus' lines, it is visible that only a few bus lines cross the former line of demarcation. The hospital in the west part of the city, the University Clinical Hospital Mostar (in Croatian: Sveučilišna klinička bolnica Mostar), is partially financed by the Croatian Government [13] and is far better equipped than the Regional Medical Centre "Dr. Safet Mujić" (in Bosnian: Kantonalni medicinski centar "Dr. Safet Mujić").

The third criterion is mental and is strongly connected with the geopolitical discourses and geopolitical culture. Simply said, it refers to education, collective memories and self-perception of Mostar's inhabitants. Mostar also has two different universities – the western part has the University of Mostar (in Croatian: Sveučilište u Mostaru) with Croatian as the official language, whilst the eastern part has the University Džemal Bijedić of Mostar (in Bosnian: Univerzitet Džemal Bijedić Mostar) has Bosnian as the official language. The elementary and high schools are also strictly divided between schools teaching Croatian curriculum and schools teaching Bosniak/Bosnian curriculum.

Even the street names show division – most of the streets in the western part of the city refer to some historical events or persons from Croatian history, whilst the streets in the eastern part refer to Bosnian history. Flags throughout the city also differ – there is various spectrum of flags – the official flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the flag of the former Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the flag of the former Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia, the official flag of Croatia, the official flag of Turkey, flags of both former armies, etc. It is easy to guess which can be found in which part of the city.

To what extent can the division defined by all these criteria in *Table 1* explore the geopolitical discourses that led to the division of Mostar in the first place? To answer this question, authors of this paper strongly suggest first to make a wider historical analysis of the pre-war, war and post-war period. Since we do not have time for this kind of analysis, we will try to provide a simpler answer. As established before, the source of division in the case of Mostar is definitely the war between the ARBiH and the CCD combined with the lack of successful post-conflict management policies that should have the capacity to restore the social capital in cities affected by war, like the case of Mostar. As an outcome, the cleavage between the two national groups in Mostar deepened even more leading to the absolute division by the criteria established in Table 1.

Table 1: The criteria of division proposed by the authors.

CRITERIA	SUB-CRITERIA (DIVISION REGARDING...)
IDENTITY	Culture, religion, sports and politics
ADMINISTRATIVE	Public finances, transportation and infrastructure
MENTAL	Education, collective memories and self-perception of inhabitants

3. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH: MOSTAR AS A DIVIDED CITY

Since the aim of this paper is to establish the perception of the local people living nowadays in Mostar, more than 20 years after the war conflict, it is purposely left to be checked as the last sub-criterion, because all the above criteria and sub-criteria help us understand all the levels of division. The final sub-criterion, self-perception of inhabitants, represents a synthesis of all the previous sub-criteria. It allows us to explore beyond the empirical image of division established here leading us into the field of geopolitical discourses and borders that can be the cause of such a strong intensity of division in

Mostar. Mental borders in people's heads show invisible divisions usually hidden from the classical geographies and spatial visions of tourists and visitors. On the one hand, these mental borders represent, as mentioned earlier, a synthesis of all the previous sub-criteria since they can be both at the same time – a cause and an effect of division. On the other hand, they are unique visions of personal reflections of the people living in the city.

The self-perception of borders between entities of all kinds is usually a reflection of stressful things and events caused previously. Mind borders established as a way of protection from the other side that did us harm are there to help us escape a possible escalation of a new stressful situation. In order to check if the city of Mostar is really as divided as it seems, this paper briefly presents a research that relies on the methodology of mental maps which main goal is to establish the depth, as well as the geopolitical patterns of division in Mostar. By doing so, the final sum up will indeed outline all sub-criteria into one that refers to the self-perception of the inhabitants.

Mental maps present a relatively new and not so dominant methodology in social sciences [14]. Nevertheless, Sebastien Caquard [15] claims that there has been an up-growth in scientific interest in combining the linkages between maps and narratives. Even more, imagining geographies has become rather popular in geopolitical analysis [16]. The main goal is to explore whether an observed entity is divided in any possible way. The city of Mostar represents a local community and the base ground of the research is, as said before, borders and elements of division that create a theoretical base for this research in micro-geopolitics. The focus group in this research encompasses 101 random inhabitants of Mostar, all over 18, from both parts of the city. Every examinee was offered a blank map of Mostar, a screenshot from Google Maps, as Figure 1 shows, and was asked to draw roughly the border(s) if he/she thinks that the city they live in has borders. They were not obliged to do so. However, the outcome was astounding.

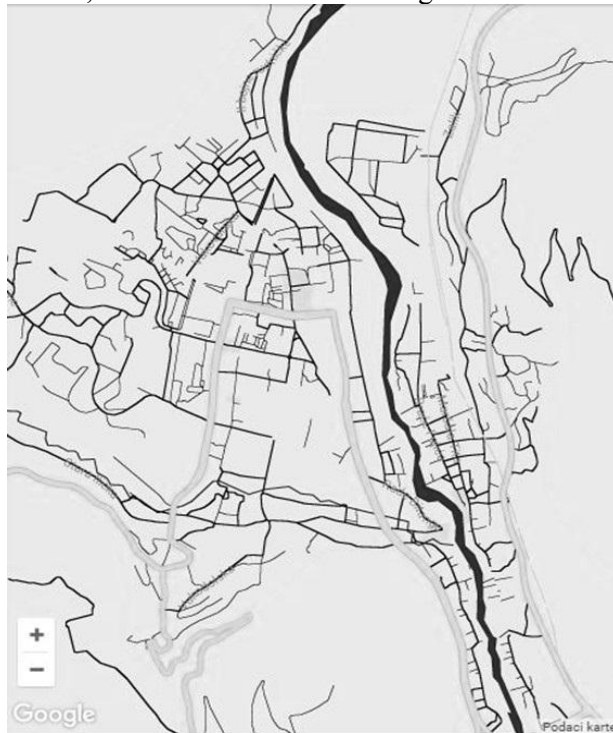


Figure 1: Blank map of Mostar used for the research questionnaire

The research took place in Mostar from the 21st until the 24th of December 2016, at various public locations throughout the city. Most of the examinees when asked to draw the possible borders were not surprised by the questions and did this as any other completely normal thing in their lives. However, there were few respondents who asked us which borders we want: the one on the Neretva River or the one established during the war conflict between the ARBiH and the CCD. In this situation, our only possible answer was to tell them to draw what they think should be drawn. One older lady told us that she does not want to draw any lines like those who fought in the war did, but that she would do it anyway since everybody in Mostar was aware that this is no longer the city it was before the war.

After the research was done, all maps were numbered and brought back to Zagreb for analysis. The simplest way to do so was to remove the white background of the maps and then stack each and every scanned map on top of each other. Combined all together, the “new” map that we got presents the true situation regarding the situation in Mostar and the borders in its inhabitants’ heads. The result of this phase of research can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Borders and divisions according to Mostar’s inhabitants

4. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Figure 2 clearly shows the more than obvious division of the city in the eyes of its inhabitants. The borders drawn by the respondents are strictly defined alongside river Neretva or along the boulevard that used to be a line of demarcation between the armies involved in the past conflict. In this case, Neretva presents the “natural” border between two nations, geographically determined by the river, whilst the boulevard presents the former military border that still remains in people’s minds. The border on Neretva shows how the geographical factor is still a very important part for the researches in the field of contemporary geopolitics, even though the logical mental border should be on the former line of demarcation since it is evident that the main cause of division in Mostar was the past war conflict and not the fact that the river flows right through it. However, since all the borders in Figure 2 show either the boulevard or +/- 150 meters west and east from it, it should be more than clear that the hard mental border between the eastern and western part of city exists indeed and shapes everyday life in Mostar.

The final sub-criterion, the self-perception of the inhabitants, indeed proves the deep discord between the two sides in one unique city and helps us synthesize all the previous sub-criteria and criteria bringing us to the conclusion that Mostar is not just a divided city by some objective standards, but also deeply connected within the geopolitical discourses of division in people’s heads. Thus, Mostar is a great example of a city which geopolitical culture which is strictly defined by means of division. This leads us to the conclusion that Mostar reached a point from which it will be even harder to remain a unique city. Unfortunately, the only way to release itself from even deeper division and political blockade is to establish two separated municipalities within one city and thus improve the social cohesion between the nations of Mostar.

The key findings are: a) Mostar is a divided city according to the mental maps of its inhabitants; b) the line of division is the frontier instead of a border; and c) the fluid division overlaps with the lines of division identified previously in the other criteria of division. The total number of respondents confirmed that the city is divided. Some of them were reluctant about dividing the city, but nevertheless they agreed that division exists. The frontier of division goes from the Neretva River to the former war line of demarcation. The Neretva River serves as a geographical line of delimitation and physical obstacle. The former demarcation line serves as geopolitical and identity delimitation of the city. Those two borders create a frontier zone and show a fluid, rather than strict, perception of the city division. The research has proven that the administrative and identity divisions are embedded in the mental perception as well. We can conclude that 20 years after the war, the divisions are still visible not just in most of the aspects of everyday life, but also in the perceptions and geopolitical visions on micro level.

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