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Assessing the Impact of Local Democracy Agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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2017

Disclaimer

The content of the report solely presents the opinions of the authors and does not reflect the views of ALDA or the European Union.

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Assessing the Impact of Local Democracy Agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Report from the research supported by the Gianfranco Martini Scholarship

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Executive summary

The aim of the study was to **evaluate the work of the Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in Mostar and Zavidovići** to provide a deeper understanding of the processes and changes instigated through their activities. The evaluation report provides accounts of the **outcomes of the engagement** of the LDAs in their communities. Based on the evaluation findings, the authors then formulate **recommendations for LDAs and for ALDA** on what actions might these actors consider undertake in order to improve their effectiveness.

The first part of the report describes the **origins and development** of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići, **envisioned objectives** for their work, **strategies** they apply, their **financial and human capacities** and **major projects** they have been implementing. The report then analyzes various stakeholders' **perceptions of the roles** the LDAs play in local communities.

The main part of the report is structured along the **outcome areas** the LDAs envisioned they would impact through their work. For each of these areas, specific activities and projects aimed at tackling the relevant areas are described and individual outcomes are identified.

Aiming at strengthening democracy on local level, **LDA Mostar** focuses mainly on activities that tackle the **following areas**: building bridges between the citizens and authorities and restoring the trust as well as the two-way communication between them; enhancing capacities of local authorities in order to improve public policy creation and delivery; building capacities and encouraging citizens from all social groups to engage as active citizens; stimulating citizens to actively create employment and make use of economic opportunities providing them with the necessary skills, connections and motivation; strengthening the processes of reconciliation and respect to human rights; as well as fostering the incentive to become part of the European society. Through long-term, persistent and collaborative working, LDA Mostar succeeded in establishing formal and informal connections with other relevant stakeholders both among citizens and civil society and also at government level. Building meaningful and lasting partnerships and networks allowed them to gain access to various domains and stimulate changes through their work. LDA Mostar strives to improve the image of the institutions and promotes institutional ways of solving problems in the community as an important and necessary part of any democratic society. In this way they managed to lay down the foundations of trust; however, they are still largely limited by the current political and legal situation (absence of elections and thus working city council) in the city of Mostar. The wider public is still quite hesitant with respect to their perception of responsiveness on behalf of the government institutions, and there needs to be a bigger focus on outreaching the people and showing them ways of how to influence things using the institutional processes. The LDA is also respected for their engaging and motivational spirit, necessary especially in relation to the general lack of belief "that anything could ever change" prevailing among citizens of Mostar. The Agency is also credited for their responsible attitude and credibility as well as for the accumulated expertise which they do not hesitate to share with different actors through technical assistance, guidance and establishing further connections. The LDA is credited with succeeding in the improvement of the image of the NGOs and civil society members in the eyes of both the authorities as well as the citizens.

Through its involvement, **LDA Zavidovići** is striving to contribute to the **following objectives**: improve the economic situation in the municipality; help to create a fair, supportive and involved community;

diversify the civil society sector; stimulate more active involvement of local authorities; create more opportunities for young people; and bring Zavidovići closer to European society. Due to its long engagement in the local community, active listening to the needs of various groups of actors and the accumulated expertise, LDA Zavidovići succeeded in building a respected position among representatives of local authorities, other civil society organizations and citizens. The organization is primarily recognized for the humanitarian assistance provided after the war, for creating a strong connection between Zavidovići and Italian municipalities and for supporting the civil society sector and youth activism. LDA Zavidovići was able to make use of the cooperation with Italian partners in almost every area of its engagement, appropriately combining exchanges with Italian partners and other activities. The most visible outcomes identified through the evaluation include: newly established civil society organizations (Sigurno Mjesto, CEKER, Youth center), improved standards and procedures in various sectors (new approach in the local kindergarten regarding early childhood education and integration of children with disabilities, creation of a protected area Park of nature Tajan, enhanced waste management system, improved urban planning processes), enhanced opportunities for young people to become more involved in the life of their community, more positive perception of the work of NGOs and civil society among a variety of actors, etc. LDA Zavidovići established good personal relationships with the representatives of local authorities; however, this potential could be used more systematically to improve the pro-activeness of the local administration and their responsiveness to the needs of the community.

Although the context in which the two organizations operate is to a certain extent different, they both face some similar **limitations** in their work: both LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići are working with limited financial and human capacities; they lack a more developed internal structure and a coherent long-term strategy for their involvement. They both work in an atmosphere of prevailing lethargy and absence of belief that things can change.

In the light of the evaluation findings we formulated the following **recommendations for the LDAs**: to perform a systematic needs assessment and develop a coherent long-term strategy for future engagement; to prioritize the areas for involvement based on the likely available financial and human resources and the needs on the ground; to build on the results of the LDAs' engagement with follow-up activities to allow for continuous and systematic work with the stakeholders; to develop the internal structure of the organization; to improve the promotion of success stories and achievements.

Given its wide network of partners, rich experience with fundraising and active presence in the EU centers, **ALDA** is in a good position to support the LDAs in the process of securing more stable funding sources. ALDA's network and the wide outreach can be used to promote the LDAs' work and achievements to potential donors. ALDA should continue to be an important source of moral support for the LDAs so that they can feel they are part of a bigger movement and that they are not left alone in their pursuits.

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We would like to thank ALDA for giving us the opportunity to inquire into the work and achievements of the Local Democracy Agencies in the specific conditions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for granting us the Gianfranco Martini Scholarship.

The representatives of the Local Democracy Agencies in Mostar and Zavidovići were very much interested in the assessment and open during the whole research process, including the discussions of the evaluation findings. We really appreciate their engaged participation without which it would not have been possible to conduct this research.

We are also very thankful for the time the respondents spent with us, sharing their ideas and opinions in the interviews and surveys.

Table of contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	6
Introduction	7
Methodology	8
1. Introducing LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići	10
1.1 Brief history and development of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići	10
1.2 Visions, goals, strategies and financial and human capacities of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići	11
1.3 Examples of the major projects the LDAs have been implementing	13
2. How do various stakeholders in Mostar and Zavidovići perceive the role of the LDAs?	18
2.1 The role of LDA Mostar in the local community.....	18
2.2 The role of LDA Zavidovići in the local community	20
3. What are the expected outcomes of the LDAs involvement? What are the activities that were meant to contribute to these outcomes?	23
3.1 Envisioned outcomes of LDA Mostar’s involvement in the local community.....	23
3.2 Envisioned outcomes of the LDA Zavidovići’s involvement in the local community	27
4. What are the outcomes of the LDAs’ work? What changes at the individual, group, community or institutional level has their work contributed to?	30
4.1 Outcomes of LDA Mostar’s work.....	30
4.2 Outcomes of LDA Zavidovići’s work	36
5. What impact has had the work of the LDAs on local democracy?	40
5.1 Impact of LDA Mostar’s work on local democracy.....	40
5.2 Impact of LDA Zavidovići’s work on local democracy	41
6. To what extent are the activities of the LDAs relevant to the given context?	43
6.1 Relevance of the work of LDA Mostar.....	43
6.2 Relevance of the work of LDA Zavidovići	43
7. What are the limitations of the LDAs’ involvement in the local communities?	44
7.1 Limitations of LDA Mostar’s work	44
7.2 Limitations of LDA Zavidovići’s work.....	45
8. Recommendations for future engagement	47
8.1 Recommendations for LDA Mostar	47
8.2 Recommendations for LDA Zavidovići.....	48
9. Conclusion	50

Abbreviations and acronyms

ADL	Associazione per l'Ambasciata della Democrazia Locale
ALDA	European Association for Local Democracy
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
EU	European Union
EC	European Commission
LDA	Local Democracy Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services

Introduction

The following report presents the main findings of the qualitative evaluation conducted for the Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in Mostar and Zavidovići, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for their umbrella organization, the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA). The research proposal named *Assessing the Impact of Local Democracy Agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina* was awarded the Gianfranco Martini Scholarship by ALDA in May 2016.

The purpose of the research was to provide a better understanding of the outcomes of the initiatives undertaken by LDAs Mostar and Zavidovići as well as an overview of the processes that led to those outcomes. Taking into account the vision of these organizations, we will also focus on their contribution to the process of democratization in their local communities.

We hope that LDAs Mostar and Zavidovići will find the outsiders' perspective on their work inspiring and the recommendations formulated at the end of the report helpful in their future engagement in supporting local democracy. We also hope that the analysis of the processes influenced by two members of the ALDA network will show the management of ALDA new ways for an effective engagement in the regions of their interest. Perhaps most importantly, the report aims to motivate all actors, particularly the respective LDAs and ALDA management, to engage in joint discussions about the future of their cooperation.

Methodology

The aim of this research study is to evaluate the work of Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in Mostar and Zavidovići to provide a deeper understanding of what processes and changes were instigated due to the activities implemented by these organizations.

The study seeks to answer following **research questions**:

- What changes, positive and negative, intended and unintended, at the individual, group, community or institutional level, have LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići contributed to?
- How can the initiatives of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići be strengthened to be more effective in achieving their objectives?

The evaluation mostly applied tools and methods used in Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting evaluation approaches. Both approaches focus on understanding a change, including a broader system-wide change. Outcomes are defined primarily as changes in the ways beneficiaries of programs think, act and behave. These approaches represent appropriate ways for evaluating projects implemented in complex contexts and for evaluations of advocacy, campaigning and policy work. In addition, we have also applied the tools of the Most Significant Change approach. This approach asks the beneficiaries to provide the accounts of the changes which they experienced due to the evaluated initiative and which they see as the most significant ones. Thanks to this approach we were able to get an idea about the outcomes the beneficiaries value the most. In the approaches applied in the research, the biggest emphasis is put on the perceptions and accounts of the beneficiaries and partners of the evaluated programs.

The research was conducted in the following phases:

1.	June 2016	First interviews with the staff of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići, discussions about the objectives of the evaluation.
2.	July–September 2016	Specification of the research design, identification of the research sample, preparation of the data collection instruments (interview guides, questionnaire).
3.	October 2016	Data collection in Mostar and Zavidovići, interviews with a wide range of stakeholders.
4.	November 2016–January 2017	Transcription and coding of the interviews.
5.	February–March 2017	A web-based questionnaire distributed to beneficiaries and partners of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići.
6.	March 2017–April 2017	Analysis of the collected data, preparation of the final report.

In both towns, we conducted semi-structured interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, beneficiaries and partners who have been involved in various activities and projects of the LDAs. Aside from the LDAs' employees, we have interviewed 19 people in Mostar and 26 people in Zavidovići. Additionally,, 20 people from Mostar and 16 people from Zavidovići participated in the web-based questionnaire. We have also received written answers from close collaborators of LDA Zavidovići from the Italian association ADL Zavidovici, Agostino Zanotti and Maria Perino.

The representatives of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići received the draft version of the report and had an opportunity to comment on the findings of the evaluation.

The evaluation was conducted by independent researchers, dr. Lenka Dušková and Eva Komlossyová, from the Department of Development & Environmental Studies at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The research was financially supported by the Gianfranco Martini Scholarship awarded by ALDA.

1. Introducing LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići

1.1 Brief history and development of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići

Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Zavidovići was created soon after the 1992-95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) on the basis of humanitarian assistance that was being provided to the population of Zavidovići by Italian activists from 1992. These two aspects, the focus on humanitarian work and post-conflict reconstruction and the Italian presence, have strongly influenced the development and current position of the organization.

In April 1997, the organization was officially registered as the Embassy of Local Democracy, following the 1993 decision of the Council of Europe's Standing Conference (now Congress) of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to promote democracy, human rights and peacebuilding in ex-Yugoslav republics through the creation of locally based delegations. The Embassy of Local Democracy Zavidovići became one of these delegations established in the Western Balkan countries associated with the Council of Europe. Despite the later change of the name to Local Democracy Agency, most of the stakeholders interviewed or surveyed during the research still refer to the organization as "ambasada" (i.e. embassy in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BHS) languages). From the very beginning, the main partners of LDA Zavidovići have been the Italian ADL Zavidovici (Associazione per l'Ambasciata della Democrazia Locale a Zavidovici Onlus - Impresa Sociale) and the municipalities of Brescia, Alba and Cremona. ADL, an organization founded by the Italian activists delivering the humanitarian assistance to Zavidovići during and after the war, played a major role in the establishment of LDA Zavidovići. During the first years, Italian staff was continually present in Zavidovići, being responsible for the identification of project ideas and fundraising. Today, the local staff of LDA Zavidovići has greater autonomy, with ADL still helping with the fundraising and technical support. Municipalities Brescia, Alba and Cremona helped the establishment and continuation of LDA Zavidovići with their financial support and by providing opportunities for the twinning and exchanges of various groups of stakeholders from Zavidovići and Italy.

Given the situation in Zavidovići after the war and the circumstances of the formation of the organization, the main focus of LDA Zavidovići in its beginnings was the humanitarian assistance and physical rebuilding of the municipality. Over the years, the work of the organization has gradually been changing, from the reconstruction of infrastructure and buildings destroyed during the war, through rebuilding of civil society, socio-economic development, support for cultural, educational and sport activities, to working with agricultural producers, women and youth, which has been the main focus especially in the past few years. Overall, the scope of LDA Zavidovići's work was rather broad, reflecting the position of the organization as the most professionalized NGO in Zavidovići with, in the given context, significant and stable financial support over the years.

Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Mostar is a younger organization than LDA Zavidovići, it was established in November 2004 as a locally registered non-governmental organization, based on an agreement between the Council of Europe and the municipality government in Mostar to open this office (after the mission of Council of Europe in Mostar was closed down). The main aim of the office was to continue supporting democratic processes and human rights in the politically difficult context of the divided city of Mostar. LDA Mostar has been cooperating with a wide range of partners, civil society organizations and municipalities, with Italian Region of Puglia as their leading partner.

However, the cooperation with and the financial support from this Italian region has not been as intense as in the case of cooperation between LDA Zavidovići and its Italian partners.

From the very beginning, LDA Mostar has been a statutory member of ALDA. Similarly to other LDAs within this network, LDA Mostar focuses on active cooperation with the local authorities and on facilitating communication between the local authorities and citizens in most of its activities. The specific topics of the activities and projects have been changing over time, ranging from tourism-related projects, inclusion of children with special needs in the pre-school education, gender equality projects, capacity building activities for representatives of local authorities and other local NGOs, preservation of the culture and tradition of the city through artistic initiatives, to projects focusing on youth. Nevertheless, LDA Mostar tried to take an institutional approach, enhancing the active cooperation with the local authorities, supporting active citizenship and initiating structural changes in most of its projects, regardless of the topic.

Before exiting the program, the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities initiated the creation of **ALDA, Association of Local Democracy Agencies** (now European Association for Local Democracy) in 1999, as an umbrella for all LDAs in ex-Yugoslav countries. Creation of ALDA provided a new impetus for the regional cooperation of LDAs. Since then, rather informal contacts among LDAs transformed into joint regional projects, with ALDA assisting in providing access to EU funding. Today, ALDA is a key stakeholder in the field of local democracy, active citizenship, and cooperation between local authorities and civil society, Coordinating and supporting the 11 Local Democracy Agencies and 3 Operational Partners in their activities.

1.2 Visions, goals, strategies and financial and human capacities of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići

To identify the areas of potential outcomes and impact of LDA Mostar's and LDA Zavidovići's work, firstly we looked at the organizations' visions and overall objectives, beyond individual project-level goals.

The vision and goals of **LDA Mostar** are stated on its website and in various documents. Based on these sources, LDA Mostar aims at supporting the process of democratization in Mostar by strengthening good governance, capacity building of local authorities and civil society and participation of citizens in public life. The activities and projects of LDA Mostar are striving to achieve the following goals:

- promote concrete initiatives stimulating democracy at the local level;
- build bridges between citizens and authorities;
- develop pluralist civil society and enhance active participation of all social groups;
- encourage the process of reconciliation and protection of human rights;
- support sustainable local development;
- strengthen the knowledge of local community about the processes of stabilization and accession.

The goals mentioned in the LDA Mostar official presentation and other relevant documents are perceived to be quite broad and general and thus difficult to be meaningfully linked with strategies

and/or activities to achieve them. At the same time, some of the goals presented are also necessary conditions, which contribute to the other goals. The first mentioned goal: to promote concrete initiatives stimulating democracy at local level seems to be rather an overall objective under which all the rest of the aims could be subsumed.

For the purpose of this evaluation, we have outlined several more concrete expected outcomes that were implicitly mentioned in the interviews with the LDA representatives in relation to the problems indicated in Mostar and/or in relation to drafting the future vision for Mostar. The highlighted **expected outcomes** are: **improved level of reconciliation and protection of human rights; local people actively creating employment and economic opportunities; bridged gap between the citizens and authorities and restored two-way communication between them; enhanced capacity of the local authority and improved public policies; engaged and actively participating citizens from all social groups; and becoming part of the European society.**

A specific characteristic that distinguishes LDA Mostar from many other local civil society organizations is the proclaimed emphasis on the involvement of the representatives of local government in the implementation of most of their projects. At the beginning, local authorities were mostly beneficiaries of various programs and capacity building seminars. Gradually, LDA Mostar established a more intensive, two-way communication and cooperation with representatives of local authorities, who are now inviting LDA Mostar to participate in various working groups and processes for the preparation of strategies and policies for the city of Mostar.

The LDA Mostar office currently employs two full-time employees, Dženana Dedić, who is the delegate of the LDA¹, and Maja Vejzović Voloder. Apart from them, youth engagement workers are involved in the coordination of the project “Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue”. In addition, they regularly cooperate with 3 to 5 people on a contract basis.

LDA Mostar is to a considerable degree dependant on project-based financing. Its projects have been supported by various donors, mostly by the European Commission, Council of Europe, Region of Puglia, Open Society Fund, USAID, Government of Sweden, Government of Norway and Youth in Action program. Apart from its own projects, LDA Mostar has also been involved in the implementation of joint projects of several ALDA member organizations from the Western Balkans, financed mostly by the European Commission.

The visions of the desired future that should result from **LDA Zavidovići’s** involvement are not articulated in any available official document. The official goals of LDA Zavidovići’s involvement, formulated as Values in their informative leaflet, are:

- promotion of the principles of representative and participatory democracy;
- support of human rights and fight against exclusion and discrimination;
- promotion of social cohesion, dialogue and cooperation among actors at all levels;
- promotion of sustainable development, economic growth and employment;
- enhancement of international cooperation, networking with European institutions and partners and transfer of good practice;

¹ “Delegate” is the term used for the executive director of a Local Democracy Agency.

- promotion of European standards and values at all levels.

When interviewed about the vision of the future and long-term objectives of their engagement, representatives of LDA Zavidovići and Italian ADL provided mostly general and, to a certain degree, varying answers. Combining the ideas of several representatives of LDA Zavidovići and the Italian ADL, the vision for the future of Zavidovići would be to have a **better economic situation in the municipality**, with a **fair, supportive and involved community, diverse civil society, more active local authorities** and **more opportunities for young people**, and **to be part of European society**. In this vision, LDA Zavidovići should serve as the facilitator of the citizens' participation in the management of the municipality, cultural and educational meeting point for active citizens and youth, and a resource in terms of accumulated knowledge, experience and network, available to the community.

The distinct aspects of the strategy of LDA Zavidovići's engagement are the Italian component present in most of the activities and the proclaimed emphasis on the cooperation with relevant local authorities. Thanks to the strong relationship with the Italian organization ADL and the municipalities of Brescia, Alba and Cremona, the cooperation with various Italian partners is included in the majority of the projects, mostly in the form of exchanges and visits of various stakeholders from Zavidovići to Italy and twinning between local authorities from Zavidovići and Italy. In this way, LDA Zavidovići wants to open the town to the outside world, provide the local community with experience, best practices and ideas from abroad.

Regarding the second point, LDA Zavidovići is trying to involve the local authorities, representatives of the municipality administration and government, in most of the projects, either as direct beneficiaries or as partners in the implementation of activities. When it is not possible to include the local authorities directly, they are at least informed about the project in a formal or informal way. The argument for this strategy is that the cooperation with the official institutions and governments can enhance the effectiveness and impact of an NGO's work, especially by institutionalizing new initiatives and proposing legislative changes.

Currently, the LDA Zavidovići office employs two people. Slađan Ilić is the head of the office and the delegate of the LDA and has been working in the organization since its official establishment. Dino Sinanović has been working in the office since 2013 as a youth engagement worker.

Throughout the years, the activities and projects of LDA Zavidovići have been financially supported by a number of donors, including Council of Europe, UNOPS/UNDP and OSCE. However, the main donors on which the work of the organization depends to a considerable degree are the Italian municipalities of Brescia, Alba and Cremona and other Italian partners. Apart from that, LDA Zavidovići, together with other LDAs from the Western Balkan countries, has been involved in the implementation of various projects administered by ALDA, funded mostly by the European Commission.

1.3 Examples of the major projects the LDAs have been implementing

To provide a better overview of the type of activities the LDAs have been implementing and of the stakeholders they have been mostly cooperating with, we will briefly list some of their major projects with a short description of the main goals of those projects. The aim of this chapter is not to present

an exhaustive list of all the projects of the LDAs, but rather to show examples of the projects which were mentioned most often during our research.

LDA Mostar

Completed activities:

- ***seminars and workshops for representatives of local authorities and CSOs:*** in the first years of its existence, LDA Mostar organized several seminars and workshops for the representatives of local government and from other civil society organizations, mostly to build their capacities in project preparation and management and to inform them about the funds provided by the EU/EC;
- ***promotion of gender equality:*** LDA Mostar participated in several activities promoting gender equality and women empowerment, for example supporting the implementation of the European charter for equality of women and men in local life and enhancing the participation of women in political processes;
- ***public debates between citizens of Mostar and city councilors:*** LDA Mostar organized a series of public debates between citizens in each area of the city of Mostar with their representatives in the city council;
- ***participation in the preparation of various strategies for the city of Mostar:*** LDA Mostar took part in the preparation of several strategies for the city of Mostar, e.g. the youth strategy, development strategy and communication strategy;
- ***speed date a politician:*** in cooperation with the Youth council of the city of Mostar, LDA Mostar organized an event where young people had the opportunity to ask young local politicians from the major political parties 36 questions from various areas important for the lives of youth in the city;
- ***local economic development activities:*** LDA Mostar implemented several projects aimed at motivating people to open their own business, providing them with necessary financial and managerial skills and offering micro credits to young entrepreneurs who are not able to obtain credits from commercial banks; a more recent initiative in this sector was participation in an international project Fronterra, aimed at empowering local communities to open new small social businesses in the fields of art, crafts, culture, tourism and agriculture;
- ***research studies:*** LDA Mostar produced several research studies, e.g. on the mobility of young people, the satisfaction of citizens of Mostar, Konjic and Jablanica with the public utilities, and on the situation with the NGO sector in various cities, producing lists of active NGOs in various fields;

Ongoing activities:

- ***Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue:*** a project implemented by several ALDA member organizations throughout the Western Balkans; aiming at enhancing the participation of young people in the life of the local community, e.g. by educating them about the work of local authorities, the possibilities young people have to influence their work, facilitating communication between young people and representatives of local authorities and motivating them to do voluntary work in their local community; examples of activities: Youth taking over day, My city – Youth city, establishment of local youth advisory group etc.;

- **Centre for Art, Dialogue and Architecture (Centar ADA):** established within LDA Mostar, trying to enhance dialogue among the citizens of Mostar about their city and the urban environment using art and architecture;
- **Preparation of the youth strategy for the Hercegovacko-neretvanski canton:** the Hercegovacko-neretvanski canton invited LDA Mostar, together with the youth advisory group LDA Mostar established as part of the Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue, to participate in the preparation of the cantonal youth strategy; however currently there is no further development, it is waiting for the next steps to be taken by canton.
- **Erasmus+ seminars:** LDA Mostar has been involved in organizing various seminars for young people financed by the Erasmus+ program and in sending young people from Mostar to Erasmus+ seminars in other cities.
- **“Elect Mostar” campaign:** in the absence of the local elections, LDA Mostar supported young people from different partner organizations to give the citizens chance to express their opinion through the “polls” in public spaces. Simulating the election procedures, young people were educated about elections as an important part of a democratic society. Moreover, they are trying to send an important message about the role of the institutional processes to other actors.

LDA Zavidovići

Completed activities:

- **humanitarian assistance:** during the first several years after the establishment of the office, LDA Zavidovići mostly focused on the physical reconstruction of the buildings and infrastructure destroyed during the war and provision of needed equipment to health centres and ambulances, kindergartens, schools etc.; humanitarian assistance was also provided to people affected by the floods in 2014;
- **Youth center:** established in the late 1990s by LDA Zavidovići, later managed by young people themselves as an independent association, organizing various cultural, educational and sports activities mainly for the youth, ceased to exist in the mid-2000s;
- **exchanges and study visits to Italy:** wide range of stakeholders, including young people, have had an opportunity to travel to Italy and visit relevant Italian institutions, schools, kindergartens, local authorities, farms, nature parks etc., to build their capacities and exchange best practices; representatives of various Italian institutions and young volunteers also visited Zavidovići on numerous occasions;
- **capacity building for civil society organizations:** primarily during the early years of its existence, LDA Zavidovići was organizing seminars, workshops and round tables for representatives of other civil society organizations in order to support their capacities;
- **school of journalism:** seminars and workshops for young people from Zavidovići, later also from neighboring municipality Žepče, organized at the beginning of the 2000s; participants created radio broadcasts, wrote articles for newspapers etc.;

- **capacity building seminars for representatives of local authorities:** in the past, LDA Zavidovići organized several capacity building seminars for representatives of local authorities, focusing e.g. on principles of project preparation and management;
- **local economic development activities:** LDA Zavidovići organized seminars and workshops to support small businesses and start-ups, providing also micro credits for a certain period of time;
- **support for agricultural producers:** LDA Zavidovići provided a group of local farmers with plastic greenhouses, training in how to produce crops in the greenhouses, consultations with an agronomist, seminars at the University of Sarajevo, visits to farms in Italy and a rented stand at the local market where they could sell their products;
- **establishment of the Nature park “Tajan”:** LDA Zavidovići, together with Sportski i naučno-istraživački klub Atom (Sports and research club Atom), and with the help of the local authorities initiated the establishment of the Nature park “Tajan” in the mountainous area of the municipality;
- **initiatives enhancing waste management and separation:** LDA Zavidovići has implemented several initiatives to improve waste management in the city, organizing field visits for representatives of local institutions to Italy to discuss various ways how the waste management can be organized, providing trash cans, organizing separation of waste with the help of Roma community, etc.;
- **research studies:** LDA Zavidovići, together with various local and Italian partners, has conducted several research studies, e.g. on the mobility of youth, the position of women in society, the needs in Zavidovići etc.

Ongoing activities:

- **Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue:** a project implemented by several ALDA member organizations throughout the Western Balkans; aiming at enhancing the participation of young people in the life of the local community, by educating them about the work of local authorities, the possibilities young people have to influence their work, facilitating communication between young people and representatives of local authorities and motivating them to do voluntary work in their local community. Examples of activities: Youth taking over day, My city – Youth city, establishment of local youth advisory group etc.;
- **Vicicitta:** traditional athletic race for peace and solidarity, attended by people from Zavidovići, other towns of BiH and from abroad;
- **Strani Vari:** one- or two-week long summer program for children from primary schools in the city of Zavidovići and in rural areas, prepared every year by local young people and Italian volunteers;
- **Igrobis/Ludobis:** after-school activities and games prepared by young animators for kids from schools in the rural areas of the municipality; the animators travel to different schools during the school year with a van donated by Italian partners; the project is implemented in cooperation with the cultural association CEKER (local association in Zavidovići);
- **“Sigurno Mjesto”:** association “Sigurno Mjesto” (Safe Place), working mostly with women from urban and rural areas, offering various workshops and seminars, assisting the victims of domestic violence, and facilitating seminars in schools as a form of prevention of violence in society was

created as a continuation of the LDA Zavidovići's project focused on fighting domestic violence; LDA Zavidovići still supports their work financially with the funding from Italian partners;

- **Orti famigliari:** in Orti famigliari (Family gardens) project, LDA Zavidovići provides women from rural areas with plastic greenhouses, seeds and education on how to grow crops for their own consumption;
- **EVS and Erasmus+ activities:** LDA Zavidovići is sending volunteers to EVS partner institutions abroad (e.g. in Turkey) and to various Erasmus+ projects;
- Erasmus+ seminars and workshops for young people;
- **No Hate Coalition "Kultura mira":** LDA Zavidovići is part of the coalition initiated by OSCE, aiming at combating prejudice and intolerance in the society.

Evaluation findings

2. How do various stakeholders in Mostar and Zavidovići perceive the role of the LDAs?

Before identifying the outcomes of the work of LDAs, we will analyze how their role in the local community is perceived by various stakeholders.

2.1 The role of LDA Mostar in the local community

LDA Mostar is generally perceived as a very active and effective NGO and thus respected among all the different groups of population in Mostar: i.e. the representatives of city administration, other NGO members, the citizens as well as participants in their activities. All these different stakeholders have agreed on various aspects of the role and value added of the LDA in the community of Mostar.

Professional, trustworthy and neutral: Despite the generally prevailing rather suspicious image of the NGOs in Bosnian society (where the NGOs are oftentimes referred to as not having a serious approach or real purpose; as having good ideas on paper while running for funding but not so much reflected in practice etc.), LDA Mostar has managed to earn the notoriety of a **professional, trustworthy and neutral organization and a reliable partner** both by the other cooperating NGOs and also by the interviewed members of city administration. The citizens and participants in the LDA activities refer to the organization as a representative of civil society who is not only publically active but also a professional civic factor in the town. The city administration has repeatedly and purposefully invited the LDA to participate in different working groups dealing with issues important for the municipality (youth strategy, creation of action plan for gender equality, internal and external communication strategy of the City of Mostar and providing help with the preparation of the Integral development plan for Mostar, etc.). Their expertise and previous long term experience in the different areas of interest have been of great value. The city of Mostar has repeatedly supported LDA Mostar confirming their fruitful partnership through project schemes when they apply for external funds because they were indicated as being trustworthy and able to perform. The partner organizations are labeling LDA Mostar as a good neighbor and a partner for projects they implement together.

While involving all the different segments of population (civil organizations as well as the representatives of the city administration) and working with them, the LDA managed to keep the reputation of being independent of the political influences and is perceived as neutral and at the same time inclusive agent in the Mostarian society, equally by all the different actors.

Visibility: The respondents from all different groups, including citizens and international organizations represented in Mostar, have repeatedly referred about the LDA that it has become very **recognizable in the town and very visible** not only through their activities that “go out to the public sphere” but also through their reputation used as an example of NGOs that “put theories into practice”.

Source of technical help, guidance and support: Both the city administration representatives as well as the partner organizations commented that they see LDA Mostar and its staff as having accumulated lots of experience throughout their long-term engagement in the city and being not only skilled and very professional in their own work but also being open to share their expertise and contacts, **provide technical help** and even devote their time to **guide and support the other actors**. The interviewed partner organizations are appreciative that the more experienced members of LDA Mostar are advising them on e.g. how to prepare project proposals to apply for funding. They have also mentioned that they feel like they can address them any time to ask for help or discuss the issues related to their own work.

The participants in the LDA projects and activities described the LDA team as very pleasant and caring for the participants, they also appreciated the “warmth” and “human touch” as well as the professional guidance while building their skills and broadening their horizons.

The interviewed municipality representatives stressed that they have appreciated the participation of the LDA in different city committees and working groups contributing with their expertise while cooperating on developing of action plans, strategies but also creating channels of communication with the creation of the “address book”, organizing the public meetings with the citizens.

The LDA is also seen as facilitating good practice sharing and exchange between the different partner towns in the region as well as in wider Europe.

The different actors have also pointed out that the LDA is **has an evidence-based approach** to their work (e.g. status report in different towns in the region, collecting the information on ideas and needs of the citizens through the polls and public hearings, collecting the feedback from the participants of their programs).

Connecting agent: LDA Mostar is perceived as a **connecting agent**. All different participants of the interviews and surveys have pointed out the role of the LDA as creating a conducive environment for networking at all different levels of society:

- a) between the citizens and the town they live in e.g. while re-creating the ownership and relations to the public spaces in the town;
- b) between the NGOs operating in the town of Mostar while involving them in the commonly planned and implemented projects and providing the contacts;
- c) between the citizens and NGOs while involving the citizens in projects as participants and experts/facilitators/workshop leaders;
- d) between the NGOs and municipality representatives/administration while facilitating their involvement in the different teams and working groups at municipal level, while creating communication platforms, meetings;
- e) between municipality representatives/administration and the citizens through public deliberations and/or “youth overtaking days”, co-creating of the municipality address book providing the citizens with concrete channels of communication with the administrative departments;
- f) and also between the different citizens that have a common interest who mentioned that they were not previously aware of one another, oftentimes feeling “alone”.

Approachable, open to suggestions, listening and responding to the needs of the community: LDA Mostar is perceived as **approachable, open to suggestions, listening and responding to the needs of the community** and doing what is missing. They have been referred to as professionals who access the public sphere, and gather feedback from the community e.g. through the research on the situation in the city of Mostar, including the involvement of the volunteers in the conduct of research which contributes to the building of their capacities, but also to learn more and to be aware of the situation; and also facilitating the public meetings between the politicians and the public where people had the chance to voice their needs and ask questions to the politicians about the perspectives of development of Mostar; through organizing the “elections”/“Elect Mostar” within which they also inter alia collected the ideas and opinions of the citizens; through creating the map of public spaces, that have the potential for change in order to better reflect the public (youth) needs, done by young people and then being presented to the municipality administration, etc.

The LDA Mostar is also seen as an organization that is approachable and open to suggestions from young people and their own initiatives, supporting them in the implementation of their ideas by providing them space, technical help, positive motivation and encouragement (such as when the young people wanted to discuss the upcoming youth policy, transparency of internships and formal recognition of the voluntary activities in their curricula, projects with farmers, organization of conferences, etc.).

All the different participants in the interviews and surveys are appreciative of the variety of activities the LDA is offering which, according to them, allows for the inclusion of people with different interests; respectively it is building on their own area-specific interest. It is also tackling different needs and creating different interventions such as organization of seminars and/or providing information about possibility to participate in seminars and training to boost the knowledge and skills in different areas, e.g. in project management, use of public spaces and architecture, democracy and human rights etc.; but also through building communication bridges between between different groups (see above); sensitization of citizens about their rights but also about their responsibility to become active if they want to change something, etc.

Positive, inspiring and motivating: Apart from implementing the individual activities and running the longer-term projects (which allow for raising awareness about the issues Mostar is facing and/or of the citizen rights, building bridges between different sectors of population etc.), the respondents felt that the LDA through its positive “can-do spirit” has inspired them to believe that the change in their lives and in Mostar is possible, provided that they be active members of the society.

2.2 The role of LDA Zavidovići in the local community

Generally, the organization is highly recognized as the most active NGO in Zavidovići, having helped in many important areas and segments of life in the municipality. Given their differing positions in society and experience with LDA Zavidovići, individual groups of stakeholders pointed different aspects of the organization’s engagement; hence, we will discuss their perceptions of the role that LDA Zavidovići plays separately.

Representatives of the local administration

Professional, trustworthy and neutral: Representatives of the local administration interviewed for this study valued the professionalism of LDA Zavidovići. They stressed that LDA Zavidovići is the most experienced and skillful NGO in the municipality, with the staff capable of providing technical help to other organizations and to local administration workers, especially when it comes to project preparation and management. LDA Zavidovići is also perceived as stable, trustworthy and reliable, with no previous scandals or cases of mismanagement of funds. Given their skills, experiences and reliability, interviewees stressed that they are always happy to cooperate with LDA Zavidovići. Nominating the employee of LDA Zavidovići to represent the civil society in the municipality committee deciding about the distribution of municipality funds for local NGOs can be seen as an indicator of the perceived neutrality and objectivity of the organization.

Dealing with important issues, providing concrete help, bringing financial resources to the municipality: Respondents from this group of stakeholders felt that LDA Zavidovići deals with concrete issues and real problems of citizens of the municipality, referencing the implemented projects focusing on physical reconstruction of buildings and infrastructure, initiatives aimed at opening the town to the world especially by exchanges with Italian municipalities and institutions, their role in establishing new local NGOs, and their work with youngsters, supporting youth activism. Some contrasted LDA Zavidovići with other associations that are focusing on issues which, according to them, are not that important or pressing in the local context, such as rights of the LGBT community. It is evident that local authorities appreciate that they are able to understand the concrete goals of the activities LDA Zavidovići is doing and to see the results of their work. One interviewee valued the concrete help the organization is providing on the ground and indicated that advocacy work or activities directed towards proposing changes in policies and laws would not be welcome from a NGO. Over the years, LDA Zavidovići has proved to be capable of attracting considerable financial resources; hence, the organization is also perceived as a source of funding that the municipality authorities would not be able to attract otherwise.

Partner organizations and associations

Source of financial and technical help: Apart from being instrumental in establishing some of the local civil society organizations, LDA Zavidovići is also perceived as a professional and reliable partner by other NGOs the organization cooperates with. They see the staff of LDA Zavidovići as being more experienced and skilled, and willing to help other organizations with project ideas, preparation of project proposals and fundraising. Some of the NGOs, e.g. "Sigurno Mjesto" and CEKER, are in some part financed by Italian municipalities through the projects of LDA Zavidovići; hence, they are partially financially dependent on LDA Zavidovići and their partners in Italy. Due to the fact that most of these organizations do not have paid employees, as opposed to LDA Zavidovići, some of the interviewees felt that it should be to a certain extent the job of LDA Zavidovići to help attract financial resources for other, voluntary NGOs, too.

Beneficiaries of LDA Zavidovići's work

Responding to the needs of people: Interviewees repeatedly stated that they see LDA Zavidovići as an organization that listens to the needs of the community and tries to solve the problems people face living in Zavidovići. Some contrasted them with the representatives of the local government

who, according to them, are not actually interested in helping its inhabitants, despite the proclamations and promises. According to the interviewees, the employees of LDA Zavidovići have always been well informed about the problems in the local community, trying to address them with their work. It became evident that the interviewees think of LDA Zavidovići as a place where they go when they are facing problems (e.g. when the heating in the kindergarten stops working during the wintertime) or when they have ideas for possible projects.

A meeting point for young people: For the young people interviewed during the research, LDA Zavidovići represents a meeting point where they can socialize with others, discuss ideas they might have and do something for their community. LDA Zavidovići is always open to any suggestions and ready to help them with their own projects. They also perceive it as an organization doing the most for the young people in Zavidovići. Interviews showed that the employee of LDA Zavidovići responsible for the work with the young people, Dino Sinanović, is successful in motivating youngsters to become involved in youth activism actions. On the other hand, it was evident that the young people, especially the high schoolers, expect him to come up with ideas for what they could do to help their community. Interviewees admitted that they are hardly ever the ones proposing ideas for their voluntary work; nevertheless, they are willing to engage themselves for the good of their community.

3. What are the expected outcomes of the LDAs involvement? What are the activities that were meant to contribute to these outcomes?

This section will discuss the goals LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići envisioned to contribute to, connecting them with the activities that have a potential to influence those expected outcomes.

3.1 Envisioned outcomes of LDA Mostar's involvement in the local community

In the absence of more concrete and structured articulation of goals and/or expected outcomes of LDA Mostar, we will go back to the more concrete outcomes expected by the representatives of LDA Mostar that were implicitly mentioned in the interviews in relation to the problems indicated in Mostar and also in relations to the vision of the future of Mostar.

Due to the complex nature of LDA Mostar's referenced overall goal (**to promote concrete initiatives stimulating democracy at the local level**) and due to the context in which they are operating, it needs to be mentioned that one concrete activity or series of activities can be intended to contribute to several different goals at the same time, i.e. LDA Mostar's projects and activities have the potential for an advanced comprehensive approach to the complex problems its society is facing, however it would be more helpful if they were able to provide more conscious and structured strategies.

The identified expected outcomes are:

A. Bridged gap between citizens and authorities and restored two-way communication between them

Bosnian and Herzegovinian, including Mostarian society, is interpreted as the "society with huge gaps and disconnections", not only in the ethno-religious sense but also with respect to the decision-making processes that lack the backup of concrete assessment of needs as seen by the people. It is, among other, due to the limited communication between the people and the local authorities. The LDA is aiming at **bridging the gap between the citizens and authorities and to restore the communication** between them through the creation of public platforms where the citizens (including the young people and NGO representatives) and politicians/representatives of the municipality could meet and ask and answer questions pertinent to their society, e.g. through the creation of the "address book" with concrete contacts and ways of approaching the different segments of the local authority in the case of need for resolving some concrete issues such as problems with electricity, roads, schools etc.; i.e. to have a concrete partner to address in the event of wanting to claim their needs and rights.

The other ways to contribute to achieving this expected outcome are e.g. the "Youth Overtaking Day(s)" providing youngsters with the opportunity for their voices to be heard by the representatives of the municipality and to learn about the concrete ideas and suggestions of how to improve the situation.

The citizen-responsive decision-making processes aimed to be further strengthened through creating public debates where the different actors could meet and exchange, such as the "Neighborhood Day"/"Upoznaj svog susjeda/komšiju".

B. Enhanced capacity of local authority and improved public policies

In the past, LDA Mostar **organized or facilitated access to a number of seminars** for the members of the city administration to increase their capacities in the field of EU funds, communication, PCM, as well as different other topics that were needed for the creation of more sound public policies. The seminars were organized not only for municipality representatives but aimed also at the participation of different civil society representatives to build positive exposure and contacts.

The LDA also **facilitated establishment of the networks** between the towns in the canton, BiH, and wider region of Balkans, and also Europe in order to allow for the exchange of ideas of how they handle the different problems related to the running of the municipality and/or related to the implementation of different charters and documents, and also to share the lessons learned, good practices (such the Ethical Commission established within the City Council) and support one another.

Later, LDA Mostar focused on **more structural changes** creating the platforms for dialogue with young people, citizens and NGOs and conducted several research studies in order to facilitate the better understating of what the needs in the local community are thus what needs to be addressed. As an example we could use the creation of communication channels such as the “address book” for people to have a practical way of knowing where and how to reach the different administration departments in case of seeking concrete solutions for the problems in the community; or organizing some public meetings with the aim to enhance the accountability of the city administration members having to respond to the citizens questions but also to learn about the needs of the people.

LDA Mostar also actively participated in different working groups at the municipality and used its previous experience and expertise to contribute to the creation of different charters, action plans, strategies etc.

The LDA representatives engaged in the informal consultations with different members of the local administration and offered their advice on different issues related to their respective expertise.

C. Engaged and actively participating citizens from all social groups

This very broad expected outcome involves e.g. the **overcoming of the outspoken lethargy** of the population as well as **restoring the missing trust that something could change** in the municipality and **that something could actually be done**.

The citizens are guided to use the opportunities to take concrete steps leading to improvement of the life in the community instead of “just complaining” and waiting for “somebody else” to make the change as well as to make them not only see but also experience that there are visible results.

LDA Mostar is open to the suggestions for initiatives by the people and supports them with advice, technical help, contacts and motivation to take an active role in implementing them.

The enhancement of active participation of all social groups also involves the re-creation of trust that things could be changed using the institutional processes actively.

The expected outcome of an enhanced active involvement of the citizens in the life of community and taking an active role in pursuing the fulfillment of their needs is approached through diverse activities focusing e.g. a) on trainings and seminars about democratic values and political institutions

for the people to be aware of how they work and also about their own rights and their roles in the society as active citizens (e.g. the training within the Balkan Regional Platform, Erasmus+ scheme); b) on actively involving people in the institutional processes (e.g. awareness about being persistent in claiming the concrete needs to be addressed by the authorities, address book, public debates, Youth Overtaking Days) and activities in the public sphere together with different stakeholders including representatives of local authority (e.g. small projects by young people co-financed by the authority) ; c) on the physical aspects of change of the urban public spaces through doing something practical to allow the people to have a positive experience of working together and achieving something through their active engagement (e.g. My City Youth City, Centre for Art, Dialogue and Architecture).

D. Improved level of reconciliation and protection of human rights

Since its beginning LDA Mostar engaged in encouraging the process of reconciliation and protection of human rights. The LDA was active in pursuing this goal in the early periods after the war, at the time when the city was facing huge divisions and mistrust among the people of different ethnicities, but also original dwellers and the incoming populations from especially rural areas of BiH and thus aiming at **re-establishing the trust and stimulating cooperation** between the people living in the “divided city”. It was done through the common activities and seminars for people from “both sides” (e.g. law students through court simulations; young journalists through training and establishment of youth radio; primary and high school students through exchanges and other activities; potential tourist guides through tourist guide school).

With the time passing LDA Mostar reflected about the fact that there was a huge concentration of projects implemented by different organizations labeled as dialogue, peace building and reconciliation and the population become tired of that, i.e. reconciliation and dialogue became empty words. At the same time the LDA perceived that there is still need to contribute to reconciliation and the protection of human rights especially in the context of prevailing structural ethnic division in the educational system, so they have encouraged the **interethnic and inter-religious cooperation** among high-school students and teachers, through exchange of good practices in education between teachers and students from different schools in the region, but also by engaging partners of the LDA with the aim to **promote the values of respect for human rights and minorities**.

The general strategy was also to **integrate the process of reconciliation and human rights as a cross-cutting goal into all different activities**. The LDA actively supported it by including different groups of people in the projects (not only on the religious and ethnic basis but also making sure that different kinds of actors are represented, i.e. youth, citizens, members of the administration, CSOs, etc.). Such approach was expected to **allow for the mindset change through being open and inviting** and allowing people to work together in different activities from training to mapping the public spaces or working together in different teams and committees at the municipality.

E. To be part of the European society

We identified that LDA Mostar understands this expected outcome in a broader sense as bringing Mostar closer to the European society which necessarily includes **strengthening of the democratic processes** both at the level of local administration but also at the level of informed, active and engaged citizens (see the other expected outcomes above) as well as **improvement of public policies**

reflecting European standards, such as gender equality, comprehensive development plan for the municipality, youth strategies, communication strategies etc.

The second dimension of bringing Mostar closer to Europe is to focus on the **physical aspects of cohesion in urban spaces** (urban planning). In this sense the LDA has been concentrating on developing the participatory mapping of needs with respect to the urban public spaces, engaging youth and also inviting experts from different European countries to provide training for the “architects” and/or “urban planners” both in the formal (administration) and informal (NGOs, individuals professionals, students) sectors. They consider this especially important for giving way to opening the city for the future joining of heritage and modern aspects of urbanism instead of the prevailing limiting nostalgias about the past.

The third dimension is the **facilitation of contacts, networking and exchanges** with partners in different European countries such as providing the young people, citizens and members of local administration (in the case of administration this is however rather a case of the past programs) with the opportunity to participate in international trainings to enhance their capacities; visits and best practice exchanges with people from other towns inside and outside the region, exchanges for teachers and students to expose them to different cultures and modes of thinking, working and studying but more importantly to ignite the spark of inspiration and motivation. This is very important especially for the Mostar society as a whole, which has been described both by the LDA and the citizens, as disconnected.

F. Local people actively creating employment and economic opportunities

LDA Mostar **expects to overcome the general feeling of powerlessness with respect to the changing economic situation** involving the destruction of big factories (e.g. for production of airplanes) during the war and/or the closing and/or re-structuring of the factories after the war; and reacting to the problem of people not seeing the perspectives and possibilities for economic development on a small and medium scale and constantly referring that “someone else should do something about the situation” (i.e. in the light of the nostalgic sentiments of the past, waiting for someone to re-create the work opportunities).

Based on the fact that lots of people do have land and do not use it or have resources and do not explore them, LDA Mostar e.g. created a platform, within a “Frontera” project, for the people from the community to empower and encourage them to plan for the change of their attitudes and approaches in order to **utilize the existing resources in an innovative way**, e.g. through creation of small businesses (going beyond the traditional tourism and exploring the further options and opportunities as exploring the fields of crafts, arts, cultural tourism, culinary, agriculture and tourism).

The LDA also engaged in organizing the intensive training for young entrepreneurs interested in starting their own economic activities on topics such as financial and managerial abilities and **the preparation of a business plan**. The idea was also to create the opportunity for them to meet with other entrepreneurs facing similar challenges or putting young entrepreneurs in contact with business people and business associations that have successfully established a business **to network and learn**. Creating platforms for exchange of ideas and inspiration is also part of the strategies reflected e.g. in the activity of group dinner at the plateau beneath the Old Bridge.

3.2 Envisioned outcomes of the LDA Zavidovići's involvement in the local community

In the absence of a more specific articulation of the expected outcomes of LDA Zavidovići's involvement, we will go back to the vision of the future of Zavidovići, as stated by the representatives of LDA Zavidovići (see chapter 1.2), and discuss the activities of the organization that can be seen as contributing to those broadly defined visions.

A. Better economic situation in the municipality

Over the years, LDA Zavidovići implemented several projects aimed at improving the economic situation in the municipality, given the gravity of the situation in the area. However, a NGO with limited capacities can only offer small contributions in easing this problem.

In the past, the organization focused on **providing support and technical assistance to people interested in opening own, small businesses**. During one period the organization was also providing **micro credits** to start-ups. More recently, LDA Zavidovići focused on **agricultural producers**, providing them with plastic greenhouses, training in how to produce crops in the greenhouses, consultations with an agronomist, seminars at the University of Sarajevo, visits to farms in Italy and a rented stand at the local market to sell their products. The organization tried to focus this assistance on individuals and families for whom agricultural production constituted the main source of income.

B. Fair, supportive and involved community

This broad objective lacks better specification of what exactly is meant by fair, supportive and involved community.

What might be linked to this objective are the activities of the **association "Sigurno Mjesto"** (Safe place) aimed at the prevention of family violence and in society as a whole through seminars in schools and occasional public campaigns. "Sigurno Mjesto" has also created a rather rare space for women from urban and rural areas (including victims of domestic violence) to meet, socialize, support and learn from each other. On several occasions, the association was also informing women about the responsibilities of "mjesne zajednice" (local communities) and how they can participate in respective commissions.

With the project called **Orti famigliari** (Family gardens), LDA Zavidovići empowers women from rural areas who are mostly unemployed by teaching them how to grow crops for their own consumption, providing them with seeds and plastic greenhouses.

The goal of more active involvement of citizens in the life of the community is approached through **support for activism, especially among young people**. LDA Zavidovići, together with partner organizations, supports the involvement of young people in two projects "Strani Vari" and "Igrobus" offering free time activities and games to kids from urban and rural areas –. Both of these projects rely on young animators. More recent projects, such as the "Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue", aim at enhancing the participation of young people in the life of the local community, e.g. by educating them about the work of local authorities, how they could influence their work, and facilitating communication between young people and representatives of local authorities.

C. Diverse civil society

Since its establishment, supporting diversity of the civil society sector in Zavidovići was one of LDA Zavidovići's major goals. Instead of providing a general scope of different services to the local community by itself, LDA Zavidovići was rather **supporting the creation and capacity building of other local organizations and associations**. This support has taken various forms, from financial help thanks to their access to funding from Italian partners and to EU supported projects, to seminars in project management and indirect capacity building through regular cooperation and implementation of joint projects. Some of the projects LDA Zavidovići implemented transformed into new civil society organizations after the projects ended. Many representatives of civil society organizations also participated in visits to Italy, meeting various partners there and exchanging experiences and best practices. It is important to note that LDA Zavidovići did not focus solely on promoting civil society in the town of Zavidovići, but supported the work of civil society organizations also in rural areas.

D. More active local authorities

This objective also lacks better specification in terms of, for example, areas in which local authorities should become more active and what kind of activities are expected of them.

The official cooperation with the local government was established together with the creation of the organization, by signing the **Protocol of cooperation between LDA Zavidovići and the municipality of Zavidovići**.

LDA Zavidovići has implemented numerous projects with direct or indirect involvement of representatives of local institutions. Most of the activities in which the representatives of local institutions participated directly were aimed at **increasing their capacities in various fields** and will be discussed in more detail in sections below. It is difficult to assess whether those initiatives had a potential to increase the pro-activeness of the local authorities, but we might assume that experiencing the work of their colleagues in Italy could have provided them with the bigger impetus for their work. Nevertheless, this was not mentioned during the interviews.

Some of LDA Zavidovići's projects were focused on **establishing new processes and procedures** which were meant to be handed over to the local institutions to sustain those processes after the project ended. In this way LDA Zavidovići aimed at motivating the local institutions to take the responsibility in more areas of public affairs. However, it proved to be rather difficult for LDA Zavidovići to achieve this goal and motivate the local institutions to continue the new processes initiated by the organization.

Another way how LDA Zavidovići might be indirectly pushing local authorities to become more active is by **motivating various groups of citizens**, right now especially young people, **to raise their voices** and require local institutions to work for the good of the society.

On the other hand, LDA Zavidovići should carefully consider whether some of its activities are not, in fact, undermining the pro-activeness of the local authorities. Based on the interviews we understood that in some situations LDA Zavidovići might be substituting the role of local authorities by providing services and assistance which should be sought from local institutions. However, citizens often choose to seek the help from an active NGO, rather than from public institutions, hence decreasing the motivation of the local authorities to actively serve the needs of citizens.

E. More opportunities for young people

Apart from creating a place which allows young people to become actively involved in the life of their community, LDA Zavidovići also offers **EVS volunteer positions** at partner institutions abroad and opportunities for young people to participate in various **Erasmus+ seminars**. In the past, LDA Zavidovići organized also regular trips for young people to Italy. **Strani Vari, Igrobus** and athletic race for peace and solidarity **Vivicitta** are the regular activities open for young people. LDA Zavidovići has also been supporting several sports clubs in town, providing financial and material help and linking them with sports clubs in Italy.

F. To be part of the European society

The last broad objective is similarly lacking better specification. Nevertheless, we identified two areas LDA Zavidovići focuses on which might be understood as bringing Zavidovići closer to the European society.

The first area is **promoting European standards in various processes**, mostly by organizing visits to and exchanges of best practices with relevant Italian institutions. In this way, LDA Zavidovići has been involved in improving the waste management in Zavidovići, enhancing the modes of work in local kindergartens, schools and local administration institutions.

The second way of bringing Zavidovići closer to Europe is by **maintaining the strong connection with Italy** and providing various groups of citizens with an opportunity to experience Europe, a different culture and different ways of thinking and doing things. This aspect is really important in the context of a geographically and socially closed environment.

Overall, it is difficult to assess the strategies LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići pursue in order to achieve their visions because of the very broad and quite vague definitions of their objectives. More specific, longer-term strategies with clearly defined and prioritized areas where LDAs Mostar and Zavidovići have the capacities and possibilities to help, with concrete goals for their engagement, are needed.

4. What are the outcomes of the LDAs' work? What changes at the individual, group, community or institutional level has their work contributed to?

In the following section specific outcomes will be analyzed represented mostly as changes in the ways partners and beneficiaries of the LDAs act, behave and think.

4.1 Outcomes of LDA Mostar's work

Since LDA Mostar was found weaker in the area of systematic long-term monitoring and documentation of the outcomes they produce, we will present the outcomes that have been identified primarily through our research. The outcomes are organized in accordance with the implicit visions outlined in the previous chapter.

When asking the different stakeholders about the outcomes of the work of LDA Mostar and the perceived changes that are apparent and evident trends to be seen, most of the time the respondents were very general, oftentimes not able to provide explicitly concrete examples. This is the indication that LDA Mostar should focus more on working with the beneficiaries in the latter stages of the projects/programs in order to help them become more aware and able to identify and verbalize the changes they experience.

A. Bridged gap between citizens and authorities and restored two-way communication between them

The LDA is generally seen by all different actors as a clearly connecting agent and/or catalyst, restoring the communication between different groups of population and/or actively building the channels for communication and platforms for exchange.

The bridging of the gaps is happening both a) through the LDA's project activities not explicitly focused on communication; b) as well as through the initiatives specifically focused on the creation of communication channels.

The example of the first case could be e.g. the "My City Youth City" project, where the different stakeholders have the opportunity to meet, exchange ideas and work together to implement the practical project goals (i.e. in this case they mapped together the public spaces that need to be adjusted in order to serve the citizens' purpose and as a follow up they created together proposals for the changes). The participants in this project were referring to the exchanging of ideas across generations and between the "beginners" and more experienced and even experts in urban architecture. Consecutively they presented their common proposals to the municipality, informing them, discussing the results and ideas for further steps, etc. which brings the citizens closer to the authorities with regards to the question of the shared domain of public spaces.

A second case, where the connections and building bridges were at the heart of the activity, could be e.g. public discussions with citizens and politicians; the creation of the "address book" facilitating the two-way communication between the citizens and authorities; the "Speed date a politician" initiative; the meeting between business people and participants of the "Frontera" project etc.

Such public platforms for discussion and exchange are highly valued by the citizens (including the young people in the case e.g. of the “Youth Overtaking Days” and “Speed Date a Politician”). They were referring to it as a momentum when they started believing in the possibility of cooperation with the “Mjesna Zajednica”; people felt they were being heard, i.e. that “someone” gave them the opportunity to express themselves and valued it as important.

However, the different actors noted that the communication with the administration got more “moody” and “cloudy” (i.e. the perceived responsiveness is lower on issues of a political character and/or in case of more complicated ones going beyond technical arrangements) after 2012 (which is associated with the period since Mostar is without a council).

LDA Mostar was also able to build access to different levels of government (city administration, cantonal government, and also at the ministerial level in Sarajevo), which helped them e.g. to facilitate the channels of communication for the engaged young people voicing their interests in changes related to the quality of their own lives and working on issues that are formulated as important to the young people (e.g. the issues of recognition of voluntarism and transparency and more open access to internships).

The LDA managed to become a facilitator of inclusion of other NGOs with relevant expertise when they worked in the different teams and commissions at the municipality (e.g. when working on the gender charter) and suggested the enlargement of the teams with such other NGOs.

B. Enhanced capacity of local authority and improved public policies

In this area, the level of more practical achievements could be very frustrating. Since this is the area where the contextual limitation represented by the non-existence of the city council led to an inability to finish the processes and thus it is not possible to see if the public policies have been actually improved. The absence of the formal institutional body (since 2012) – that could authorize the outcomes of the processes and a long-term collaborative team work performed by different stakeholders (that eventually led to the tangible results of creating a number of policy proposals, action plans, charters to be implemented etc.) – means that the processes are left open and waiting for the re-establishing of the municipal elections in Mostar. The danger is that the stakeholders often refer to this situation as that the “responsiveness [of the authorities] is questionable” which contributes to the general mistrust of the citizens towards local politics and institutions.

In the past, the municipality of Mostar had been involved in projects with the LDA. Referring to the times when there was still a city council in place and the municipality was more engaged, the interviewed representatives highlighted that they saw the cooperation between the LDA and the municipality as very good. The municipality representatives appreciated the opportunity to take part in the initial training but there were no concrete examples of the impacts or concrete ways of how they utilized the acquired knowledge or skills in their work. The interviewees were more concrete and articulate about the impacts when talking about their experience from international cooperation, networking, exchange of ideas about how to solve similar problems to those in the city of Mostar (e.g. with the city of Subotica, that is also inter-ethnic and to some extent represents a divided society); organization of study visits that allowed new-found inspiration were facilitated and/or organized by the LDA or in cooperation with the LDA. LDA Mostar was also valued for helping the municipality to establish the commission for cooperation with NGOs (An LDA Mostar staff

member became one of the three members of the commission) and the ethical commission at the city council (unfortunately now it is also not operational since the absence of the council as such).

The interviewed members of the administration (no matter whether they cooperated with the LDA directly or not) looked at the work of the LDA from a positive perspective. Especially in the light of the widespread suspicion towards the NGOs, LDA Mostar proved itself to be helpful with respect to the issues that the city administration needed to solve and considered to be important for them. The members of administration appreciated that they could rely on the expertise and professional insights of the LDA (e.g. the LDA was a member of different teams dealing with issues important for the town of Mostar such as the creation of a youth strategy, an action plan for gender equality charter, a memorandum of understanding between the municipality and the NGOs inspired by UNDP etc., a communication strategy).

The LDA was also appreciated for their involvement in many informal consultations with the members of the municipality, advising them on the issues they have accumulated experience with and/or providing the contacts for further networking. The members of city administration have shared that they did not hesitate to call people from the LDA to discuss different issues with them or ask for advice.

The example of the role of LDA Mostar in more structural change is the case when there was a commission on cooperation with civil society existing at the municipality; however, there were no representatives of the NGO sector involved and the LDA therefore suggested the need of including the relevant external members. Finally three NGOs were invited to be part of the commission.

LDA Mostar has also helped them to develop the “address book” which allowed for the two-way communication with the citizens.

Given the current context (no city council since 2012), nowadays the cooperation is comparably less intensive in many aspects. People from different relevant departments of the municipality come to the meetings (e.g. with young people) and public events when invited and support verbally the participants in their actions (e.g. the representatives of the tourist department attended the “Fronterra” meetings). The municipality is also providing spaces for the different activities and meetings as well as has and still is providing the office space to the LDA and other NGOs.

On the other hand, it needs to be noted that LDA Mostar, within the framework of the “Balkan Youth Platform”, managed to sign the Memorandum of understanding with the city of Mostar stating that the city of Mostar committed itself to co-finance the youth-led small projects in the public sphere of the city of Mostar and the prospective creation of a specific youth fund designated to continue to support the young people in their public initiatives. This could be interpreted as allowing not only for sustainability but also showing the elements of acquired ownership and transferred responsibility to the municipality.

C. Engaged and actively participating citizens from all social groups

There is a pattern visible in the interviews and surveys with the different stakeholders that the participation in LDA activities and/or hearing about their work made them start believing in the possibility of positive and meaningful cooperation within the community. They also repeatedly refer to the fact that they have realized that it is necessary to have a vision and believe in change. The

positive example is also that after participating in the LDA's activities, the people have continued to take initiative, proposing projects and becoming more involved in the public sphere. For example people that have met the like-minded professionals from the same field (youth journalists, architects) felt more empowered and encouraged to do follow-up activities when realizing that there are more people like them in Mostar which have similar problems and aspirations (i.e. that they are not alone within their own domain of interest or profession). People have positively commented not only on the importance of enhancing their capacities but they stressed the equally important teamwork invoked through the participation in the LDA activities.

The participants of the different seminars mentioned that it was not only about learning new skills (e.g. how to make projects, teamwork, institutions), but also accounted for the importance of gaining the energy and prospect that things could be changed. This gave them the inspiration to learn more and/or to actively contribute to organizing other projects (as volunteers, workshop leaders, organizers, experts, even taking the responsibility to manage some other initiatives, etc.). They have mentioned that they realized that activism is important for a better society, but you need to be persistent. However, they also shared their concern that they keep finding it difficult to attract more people to engage actively.

Being open to ideas and initiatives, the LDA created space that is conducive for self-realization and the respondents mentioned that it also helped them to be more secure when asking for help and support.

While actively cooperating with other NGOs in Mostar, supporting them with guidance and contacts, developing common projects and/or inviting them to participate in their projects, LDA Mostar shows by own example that cooperation is possible. This also symbolically helps in the overcoming of general mistrust towards civil society actors that are usually very easily discredited.

When participating in the project "My City Youth City", the respondents commented that they became more aware of themselves and their surroundings and appreciated that they could analyse public spaces from different perspectives, e.g. through the eyes of somebody else. They appreciated that they had the opportunity to come up with ideas of how to use the public spaces and then to work on proposals for new initiatives.

Projects of the LDA that bring in the international element (exchanges, invitation of experts from the same domain) are described as a supportive connection where people could hear ideas and share theirs and get inspiration from somewhere else.

Some respondents also mentioned that the LDA, with its activities, brought people back to the public sphere, when creating a platform for them to voice their needs and concerns (instead of just sitting and complaining, with no perspective).

Currently in the times of "vacuum" related to the limiting situation of non-existence of council (due to absence of local elections), i.e. in the time when no important decisions can be taken, the LDA focuses on filling the gap with educating the young people/citizens to use the institutional framework to change matters, and not to "forget" how the institutions work and also how the institutional framework could be used for their benefit and for a functioning community. Perhaps there could be

more emphasis on including also other groups of people (not only youngsters) into similar activities more actively.

Through the simulation of the council – in the belief that institutions are important part of the democracy – the LDA prepares young citizens to know what are the different institutional procedures and also shows them as well as the wider public and the municipality that there is an institutional way to get things done in the city of Mostar.

Similarly, LDA Mostar tried to fill in the gap with the organization of “Izbori se za Mostar”/“Elections” in October 2016. In the time when there were local elections going on in all parts of BiH but in Mostar, the LDA (in cooperation with other NGOs) mobilized the young volunteers to prepare the elections, and to collect the public opinion about the idea of elections and about the situation in Mostar as well as to give them the chance to cast a vote following election procedures. This too was an example which showcases that the institutional channels are an important part of a functioning society. It was also a way to send a strong message about the importance of the institutions in a democracy.

The “election” initiative was supported by the public; there were a considerable number of voters participating, especially given the constraints of the rainy weather that is normally preventing the people from being present in the streets of the city. The participants to the “elections”/“Elect Mostar” commented that they appreciate such symbolic actions because they think that there is too strong of a belief prevailing in the society that everything is a the politicians’ mistake, but people do not realize that it is also due to the passivity of the citizens that the things in Mostar are the way they are. The respondents also mentioned the importance of having the chance to express their opinion on the “ballots”. However, some of them were concerned about the “real impact” of the initiative, but at the same time mentioning that they would want to see more (young) people being active publicly to show that the citizens are not passive.

During the research we were not able to see any response on behalf of the authorities, either direct or indirect in the media sources at disposition. However, it needs to be noted that this initiative is only a very recent one, so it will need some time to reflect into any outcomes.

D. Improved level of reconciliation and protection of human rights

The explicit references to the process of reconciliation and protection of human rights are not represented in the speeches of the different interviewed and surveyed stakeholders, but they oftentimes refer to them implicitly, e.g. appreciating the fact, that the LDA is open to everyone for cooperation, participation and open dialogue. In different phases of the activities (i.e. planning, implementation, presentation of outcomes, follow-up activities) the LDA is automatically and openly attracting and involving a wide variety of actors (citizens, young people, other NGOs, members of the municipality etc.) and also people with different backgrounds and with different interests (not just those that would be primarily interested in the topics of reconciliation, human rights and democracy). They are never working with just one group of people.

Responding to the overexploitation of the terms reconciliation, human rights and dialogue, LDA Mostar chose a different strategy to overcome this limitation and to contribute to the fulfillment of this goal by making it an integral part of each of their activities. Through the implementation of

activities in a collaborative way (as repeatedly mentioned by the respondents), creating a space of openness, inclusiveness, tolerance and respect for the ideas of the other (during the activities; during the planning of the projects, during the collaboration with other partner subjects; during the times when they are approached by individuals and groups that are coming with new proposals for projects and activities), LDA Mostar is contributing to the process of reconciliation and respect to human rights.

Evaluating also the processes within the organization and the ways of collaboration with other NGOs and stakeholders, LDA Mostar is being referred to as spreading democracy and human rights also through their own example (e. g. the way they work and treat the employees, volunteers, and partners). They show that it is possible to perform when you adhere to these principles and this inspired other people to change their previously rather hesitant mindset.

The respondents also claimed that despite working with mixed groups involving the participation of representatives of different ethnic and religious groups, males and females, young people, citizens, representatives of other NGOs, etc., there are no conflicts experienced between the different people while working together. The ideas of the different participants are respected which is a commendable and rather unexpected experience (as the respondents mention). Should there be any tensions, the respondents say, that there is a conducive environment in the LDA projects where the participants to the different activities are welcome to share their uncertainties and get support.

The participants in the trainings and seminars commented that the trainings on democracy and human rights are providing them with a lot of information and ideas about the issues related to their city that they normally could not learn in the formal education (e.g. how do different political processes work and what rights there are for them and how to claim them if needed).

The respondents in this evaluation (the organized young people and representatives of the NGOs) have mentioned that they realized that there could be an institutional path to achieve their goals. At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that it hardly contributes to the wider change of the atmosphere and attitudes of the general public towards the politics. It still seems that the access to the political domain is easier for the organizations that have earned the respect than that it is a general rule or prove of change of the atmosphere.

The respondents mentioned that it was favorable and surprising to experience something they did not expect, e.g. that the representatives of the municipality actually met with them and listened to them (e.g. Youth overtaking days; public debates). However, the limit of not having the city council in place for many years plays down the effectiveness of the cooperation. The agreements and documents (action plans, charters, and policies) cannot be implemented because there is no official body that would authorize them and put them in practice.

E. To be part of the European society

Being part of the European society has been understood as the strengthening of democratic processes, enhancing the physical aspects of cohesion in the urban spaces and facilitation of contacts, networking and exchanges in the wider European space, the **outcomes related to these aspects of the LDA's work can be found in the above sections** which means that these activities

have been made an integral part of the other processes and activities supported in the Mostarian community.

F. Local people actively creating employment and economic opportunities

Since the problem with employment and the setting up of small and medium entrepreneurship is very much associated with the prevailing feeling of powerlessness and lack of belief in any change of the situation. It is important to highlight that LDA Mostar has focused on activities that integrate the building of entrepreneurial skills but also the segments of empowerment, motivation, networking and building connections between the like-minded people that can support and motivate one another.

From the materials publically available we could learn that there were some successful cases of people starting their own businesses after participating in the LDA activities. However, we have not collected enough information related to this expected outcome so we are not able to evaluate to what extent have been these initiatives contributing to the broader goal of enhancing the sustainable development of the area.

When focusing on the analysis of perceptions of role of LDA in Mostar by the different stakeholders (in the surveys and interviews) it has been repeatedly mentioned that they see LDA's role as an important connector, creating synergies, working with young people, local engagement, civil society, multiculturalism, democracy, etc., however, the reference to the LDA as a promoter of economic development was not voiced.

What needs to be pointed out is that the perceived lack of visibility of the concrete achievements in this particular area of interest of LDA Mostar, might have implications for the (not) overcoming of the "nothing can be changed" and "nostalgia of the past" general attitudes of the people with respect to their economic prospects. From the different respondents (not the participants of the concrete activities related to the entrepreneurship) you could still feel the dominant reference to the "someone shall restore the big companies to boost the employment". This was mentioned even by people that were otherwise positive about the changes with respect to the other aspects of life in Mostar that are at the focus of the LDA's work.

If LDA Mostar decides to continue focusing on this specific area, there needs to be more visibility of the opportunities and also the success stories in order to not only provide the necessary skills to the people but also to contribute to the overcoming of the lethargy and the lack of trust in the possibility of change.

4.2 Outcomes of LDA Zavidovići's work

Since LDA Zavidovići lacks systematic long-term monitoring of the outcomes they produce, we will primarily discuss the outcomes identified through our research. The identified outcomes will be structured according to the visions discussed in the previous chapter.

A. Better economic situation in the municipality

The most visible and also the most likely sustainable outcome in this area can be seen among the farmers LDA Zavidovići has been supporting. Even though not all the farmers who participated in the

project are still active, those we interviewed stressed that the assistance they received from LDA Zavidovići was crucial in providing them with new knowledge about the crop production in greenhouses. After the project, greenhouse production of crops became their main source of income. One family received additional training on how to grow seedlings in greenhouses and is now producing seedlings of various crops and selling them to other farmers. The project helped them to network with other farmers in the region who are now the customers for their seedlings. Another farmer asserted that participation in this project motivated him to think of this profession as his main employment and to officially register his company. Only a few people in the region produce crops as their main occupation, they mostly produce only for their own consumption. The farmers appreciated that the project enabled them to enlarge and professionalize their production, making their business more profitable and sustainable.

Few people who participated in the seminars focused on creating new small businesses are still successfully running their businesses, e.g. a barber who received training on how to start a business and create a business plan.

B. Fair, supportive and involved community:

Regarding the activities of the association “Sigurno Mjesto” in this area, it was evident from the interviews that women value the space “Sigurno Mjesto” provides them with very high praise, claiming that it is a rare opportunity for them to socialize with other women and to learn something new. One of the interviewed women decided to run for a position in “mjesna zajednica” after participating in the seminar about the opportunities to influence the local politics organized by “Sigurno Mjesto”. These activities, together with the project “Orti famigliari”, contributed to the women empowerment as well as raising their awareness about the roles they can have in their community and in their families. Orti famigliari also helped to raise awareness among the otherwise unemployed women about their potential to contribute to the family budget.

Apart from providing kids with entertainment during summer holidays, “Strani Vari” also motivated the children who took part in those activities to later become animators themselves. Experiencing “Strani Vari” as a child represented a strong motivation for high schoolers to get involved in the project and help with the preparation and implementation of the summer games. A number of them did not only join the “Strani Vari” project but also became involved in other youth activism activities organized by LDA Zavidovići. These activities provided them not only with the opportunity to become more active in their local communities, but also to become more responsible and to improve their communication skills.

LDA Zavidovići is showing the young people that they can also give a contribution to the society they live in. According to some interviewees, young people are now more active in public life, in the fields of culture, education, sports and others. For example, they organized a cleaning of the yard around a kindergarten and set up a Facebook page “Info point Zavidovići” where they are informing young people about various seminars, internships, volunteering and other opportunities. Some interviewees mentioned that young people who were involved in youth activities in LDA Zavidovići while studying at high school often continued doing some type of voluntary work when they moved to other cities to pursue higher education.

C. Diverse civil society:

The Association “Sigurno Mjesto” (Safe Place), working mostly with women from urban and rural areas, is a direct outcome of the work of LDA Zavidovići. “Sigurno Mjesto” was created as a continuation of their project focused on fighting domestic violence. LDA Zavidovići still supports their work financially with the funding from Italian partners and by providing them with space in their offices and informal consultations.

Another NGO created as a direct result of LDA Zavidovići’s work was the “Youth Centre”, which was gathering active young people and organizing various cultural and sports activities. This organization does not exist anymore.

The organization CEKER (“Centar za kulturu, edukaciju i kreativni razvoj” – Centre for culture, education and creative development) was established on the basis of two activities of LDA Zavidovići – “Strani Vari” and theater workshops. Later on, when the leading figures in CEKER left the organization, LDA Zavidovići helped the organization again by finding and motivating new leaders to take over the management of the organization. Today, LDA Zavidovići still implements the projects “Strani Vari” and “Igrobus” in cooperation with CEKER, thus channeling some of the funding from Italian partners through this organization.

LDA Zavidovići has been implementing joint projects with “Sportski i naučno-istraživački klub Atom” (Sports and research club Atom), also helping with the fundraising for these projects.

All these organizations are voluntary, with no major funding sources. For most of their activities, they do not need external project funding; however, when having a project idea they mostly ask LDA Zavidovići for the assistance with the project preparation and fundraising, despite the technical support in project planning and management provided by LDA Zavidovići in the past.

Overall, thanks to the work of LDA Zavidovići, the civil society in the municipality is much more diverse, professional and active. As a result, the perception of civil society organizations among the inhabitants, which is often negative in BiH, is becoming more positive in Zavidovići.

D. More active local authorities

The outcomes of LDA Zavidovići’s work in this area are not very visible. The issue will be discussed in more details in the following chapter assessing the impact of the LDAs on local democracy.

What can be mentioned as a positive outcome of LDA Zavidovići’s work when it comes to the local authorities is the changed awareness of the work of civil society organizations and NGOs among some of the representatives of local institutions. In general, NGOs in BiH are often seen as an attempt to earn money for personal profit, without providing any benefits to the society. However, from our interviews it became evident that LDA Zavidovići is broadly perceived as a NGO working for the benefit of the local community. The example LDA Zavidovići is showing motivated several of the interviewees, including the representatives of local authorities, to change their negative perception of NGOs and civil society. This could, in effect, positively influence the willingness of the local authorities to involve the representatives of civil society in their work, e.g. when preparing new strategies and policies. However, it is necessary to note that some of the municipality workers still see NGOs more as service providers. For more please refer to the following chapter.

E. More opportunities for young people:

With the activities offered by LDA Zavidovići itself or by the partner organizations supported by LDA Zavidovići (see the previous chapter), young people have the opportunity to meet, socialize and become involved in the life of their community. Such an environment would be otherwise missing in Zavidovići. Particularly after the war, when the population of Zavidovići changed considerably, the activities of LDA Zavidovići, especially the Youth Centre, helped the young people to get to know each other and create new friendships, which was very important in the given situation. The wide range of activities which included the international element (Italian volunteers in “Strani Vari” project, exchanges with Italian partners, participation in EVS internships) provided young people from the relatively closed environment with an opportunity to broaden their horizons and experience otherness.

F. To be part of the European society

We have identified two groups of outcomes contributing to this broad vision: outcomes promoting European standards in various processes, and those bringing Zavidovići closer to Europe. Both groups of outcomes were mostly achieved by connecting Zavidovići with Italian municipalities and institutions and through frequent exchanges of various groups of stakeholders from Zavidovići and Italy.

As for the first group of outcomes, we can see several areas where standards and procedures were changed based on the experiences and knowledge gained from Italian partners. A new approach to early childhood education was taken up by the director of the local kindergarten, after exchanges with Italian kindergartens. The kindergarten is now applying a different working method with children, focusing more on their needs and adjusting the daily program to their interests. They also enhanced their approach to integrating children with special needs into the early childhood education process. Another area where we can see new approaches is the protection of the environment. LDA Zavidovići, together with local organization “Atom” and with the assistance of local government, initiated the creation of the protected area “Nature park Tajan”. In that process, a number of people preparing the proposal visited Italian parks to learn how similar parks are organized and managed there. The technical and material assistance and shared experiences provided by Italian municipalities also helped the local authorities in Zavidovići to enhance their waste management system. They also improved the urban planning processes based on the knowledge gained in Italy.

Secondly, we have repeatedly been told by various interviewees that LDA Zavidovići succeeded in opening the town to the outside world, being the first organization to enable citizens of Zavidovići to travel outside BiH after the war when it was difficult for them to leave the country. Many interviewees mentioned that they felt the support from Italian partners and appreciated that they can ask them for help or advice. Some of them mentioned that they made good friends in Italy. Especially for young people, it was and still is very important to experience cultures and ways of thinking different from theirs, given the closeness of the community in Zavidovići. LDA Zavidovići also changed the awareness among the citizens of Zavidovići towards foreigners by regularly bringing Italians and other foreigners to town, thus creating a more open and international atmosphere in town. Having streets in Zavidovići named after Italian municipalities also reflects the strong connection that was created between Zavidovići and Italy.

5. What impact has had the work of the LDAs on local democracy?

Given that the term “local democracy” is present in the names of the organizations, we will try to briefly discuss the term local democracy and how has the work of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići influenced the local democratic processes in these municipalities. Additionally, the relationship between the LDAs and the local authorities will be assessed.

Based on the responses of the representatives of LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići, we can define the term **local democracy** as participation of individuals in the political space, in an open dialogue about the form and functioning of society, and as an active interaction between politicians and representatives of local authorities and the citizens they are supposed to represent and serve. We can identify several aspects of the LDAs’ work with the potential to impact these processes.

5.1 Impact of LDA Mostar’s work on local democracy

The LDA Mostar, through its **long-term collaborative and inclusive work** in the community, managed to succeed in **establishing very good connections both informal but also formal** (to the extent possible given the political and legal context of the city of Mostar) with a) the local authorities; as well as with b) the other civil society actors (including NGOs that have similar or even different interest - e.g. the associations of hunters, sport-related organizations etc.); and c) local population/the citizens of Mostar.

The employees and collaborators of the LDA Mostar are respected for their engaging and motivating spirit, responsible attitude, and credibility as well as for the accumulated expertise they are **willing to share**.

Through **building meaningful partnerships and networks** (within which they cooperate on the different issues, provide and exchange technical expertise and support) they have managed to **gain access** both to the institutions (on the local, regional and central level) as well as to the citizens that do recognize them as an effective and performing element of society which allows them to influence the stakeholders through their work. LDA Mostar has also succeeded to contribute to the **building of synergies** between the different actors in Mostar and thus contributing to an **improved image of the civil society** in a more general sense.

LDA Mostar has also strived to improve the image of institutions as useful and important elements of the democratic society, in this sense they have laid down the first bricks of trust (especially apparent from the comments of the organized groups of youth and some of the citizens) but they have been largely limited by the current political and legal situation in the municipality of Mostar. **The wider public is still quite hesitant with respect to the actual responsiveness of the institutions**. Even in the times of the absence of the local elections and thus non-existent city council, LDA Mostar could perhaps explore more options and create more windows of opportunity for contributing to the improvement of the institutional aspects of the Mostarian society (beyond the existing and valuable activities such as trainings, awareness rising, platforms for communication and/or simulations of elections and council, etc.). There is a question whether there are also other barriers apart from the non-existence of the council and the local elections that hinder the more active and responsive

engagement between the authorities and the citizens and what could be the ways of overcoming these barriers.

LDA Mostar could also be credited for its **ability to work with a wide variety of types of actors with different backgrounds and interests**, but at the same time shall continue exploring the ways of bigger outreach, to be able to attract more people to the process of active citizenship, not only through its own programs but also through encouraging them to come up with their own suggestions and initiatives (where they could support them with necessary contacts and skills and/or connect them to those that have been participating in the programs in the past so they have the potential to work as multipliers).

LDA Mostar has also proved the positive trend of sustained, long-term commitment when focusing on the **sequencing of the different activities** into different phases and building on the previous steps and achievements, leaving more evident marks of its activity. LDA Mostar should capitalize better on the achieved outcomes not only through better documentation (allowing for more widespread sharing of the motivation and re-battling of the “nothing can change” atmosphere but also for the possible spill-over effect through inspiration) through deeper and more persistent work with their involved participants.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that all identified expected outcomes (in the above chapters) and also the activities are directly connected to the overall goal of stimulating democracy on the local level.

5.2 Impact of LDA Zavidovići's work on local democracy

Firstly, the **organization succeeded in establishing very good personal and informal relationships with the representatives of local authorities**, building on the official Protocol of cooperation signed between LDA Zavidovići and the local government. The employees of LDA Zavidovići are respected for their expertise and for the benefits they provided to the local community. During our research we have observed that the representatives of local authorities, including some of the former mayors, highly value the opinion of the employees of LDA Zavidovići. Hence, the organization is in a very good position to influence, to the possible extent, the local processes and developments. LDA Zavidovići **could use this potential more effectively**, for example by developing a more structured form of cooperation with the local authorities, agreeing on a set of areas where the involvement of LDA Zavidovići is deemed beneficial, participating more actively in various working and advisory groups, in the creation of strategies and policies and in monitoring the actual implementation of the adopted strategies. This would provide LDA Zavidovići with more effective tools to influence local political processes to reflect the needs they see on the ground, thus enhancing the representation of the views and wishes of citizens in those processes. Representatives of LDA Zavidovići have been participating in some of the municipality committees and working groups, e.g. in the committee deciding about the distribution of municipality funds for local NGOs and in the committee for the preparation of EU-funded projects. However, it still proved difficult for the representatives of LDA Zavidovići to effectively influence the decisions of the municipal authorities through their presence and their proposals to the committees.

On the other hand, LDA Zavidovići **should approach this issue carefully**, given the views of some of the representatives of local authorities on what is the appropriate role of civil society. They often see

civil society organizations and NGOs as an “extended arm” of the government sector, providing goods and services in areas where the government sector is lacking capacities and/or financial resources. However, they have a rather **negative attitude towards civil society being an active advocate of any structural, policy or legislative changes**, claiming that it represents political work which is an area inappropriate for NGOs to become involved in. Such attitudes might make it difficult for LDA Zavidovići to increase their presence in the local political arena and are endangering potential impact of their work on the improvement of local democracy. Also, the extent to which municipality workers became actively involved in activities organized by LDA Zavidovići **depended heavily on the interest of the currently serving mayor** and on his perception of the importance of their involvement in such activities. Hence, it would be useful to continue working on **raising the awareness** among the representatives of local authorities about what other benefits NGOs might bring to the society, except for the easily visible goods and services.

The efforts to enhance the communication between the local authorities and citizens and the participation of citizens in local processes is most visible in the **work with young people**, especially through the activities of the “Balkan regional platform for youth participation and dialogue”, a project implemented by several ALDA member organizations throughout the Western Balkans. Young people are provided with knowledge and motivation to become involved in public affairs and put into contact with local authorities. However, many of them, especially the high schoolers, admitted that they lack their own ideas for what changes they would like to influence in their community and are rather waiting for the ideas to come from the youth engagement worker employed in LDA Zavidovići. Also, many of the activities, such as “Youth taking over day”, are **project-based activities** with no clear follow-up.

It is clear that improving local democracy, as defined above, **requires sustained, long-term commitment**, with activities based on a clear strategy, continuously building on each other. LDA Zavidovići has proved to be committed to this cause and is doing what its financial and personal capacities allow. The impact of its efforts could, however, be enhanced by having a clearer, **long-term strategy** for its involvement, allowing the project activities to follow up on each other and build on the results of the previous ones in pursuing the defined objectives.

6. To what extent are the activities of the LDAs relevant to the given context?

6.1 Relevance of the work of LDA Mostar

Reflecting the problems people in Mostar face and their respective needs, we can conclude that the issues LDA Mostar is focusing on through their projects and public initiatives are **highly relevant to the current situation in the municipality**.

The organization is also using the specific opportunities related to the relevant timing of some of the activities, such as the public discussions before the potential candidates were to run to represent the people in the council (in the past) or the “Izbori se za Mostar”/“Elections” in the time when the real local elections are performed in the rest of the municipalities around Bosnia and Herzegovina (recently), to also send an important message to the people of Mostar as well as to the local authorities.

The beneficiaries of LDA Mostar’s activities, its partners, as well as citizens appreciate the role the LDA is playing in the community because it is both tackling existing problems and also, on the more symbolic level, helping to overcome the generally prevailing “nothing can change” attitude.

Accumulating the experience and expertise over the years of continuous activity in the community and also using the professional, responsible, collaborative and inclusive approach, LDA Mostar has also become a **relevant and recognized actor in the community**, an important and valued partner and source of support and technical help to other NGOs and members of administration. This has also contributed to the improved image of the NGOs/respectively civil society in the eyes of both the citizens as well as the members of authority.

LDA Mostar is covering the broad spectra of closely interrelated issues and implementing a wide variety of activities that have the potential to contribute to the enhancement of the local democracy, however, it shall be noted that the organization should reflect more on the sustainability of such a broad and multifaceted engagement given the constraints related to the human resources currently available and the internal informal structure.

6.2 Relevance of the work of LDA Zavidovići

Looking at the problems people in Zavidovići face, we can conclude that the areas LDA Zavidovići is predominantly focusing on are **highly relevant to the current situation in the municipality**. LDA Zavidovići is covering most of the problems that were repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees, to the extent that it is possible for a NGO to influence them. Moreover, its partners and beneficiaries perceive the organization to be dealing with real, existing problems and **see their work as highly relevant and needed**. That is, in effect, positively influencing the position of LDA Zavidovići in the community and its access to various stakeholders, including the municipality officials. On the other hand, the focus on supporting local democratic processes is present only in some of the organization’s activities. It might be useful to discuss how can the activities focusing mostly on the provision of goods, services and capacities be modified to be also directly or indirectly relevant for the improvement of local democracy.

7. What are the limitations of the LDAs' involvement in the local communities?

Here we will list and discuss the factors inhibiting the effectiveness of the LDAs, as identified through our research.

7.1 Limitations of LDA Mostar's work

The **absence of local elections since 2008 and the current non-existence of a city council** (a legitimate body that could make decisions about the city's development) constitutes a considerable constraint for the local initiatives to be finished, i.e. even if the different members of the civil society, including largely also LDA Mostar in tandem with the local administration, contribute to the successful completion of the different strategies, charters and policy plans (that could contribute to the structural changes in the society), there is a missing partner/the council that could approve these documents and bring them to practice. This has an impact on the effects of the work of LDA and the other active representatives of the civil society sector and it also largely influences the attitudes of the people of Mostar with respect to their hope that things could change for the better and their motivation for further engagement in the civic life.

Another constraint related to the environment in Mostar is the perceived **low employment rate and general lack of economic opportunities** especially for young people. This is reflected not only into the lack of motivation of young people to engage generally but also more concretely into the difficulty to address higher numbers of young people to join and work for the LDA as volunteers. More people actively working for LDA Mostar could strengthen the organization's capacity to further its engagement in a wide variety of activities and to cut beyond the surface through a more persistent focus on the follow-up activities, while decreasing the burden for the two key personalities of the organization.

The wide variety of projects in the different areas of interest (but still going in line with the overall goal of LDA Mostar, i.e. to promote concrete initiatives to stimulate democracy at the local level) is generally being perceived as very positive because it is not only broadening the possibility for LDA Mostar to attract different stakeholders/professionals and/or young people with different backgrounds and with different aspirations and involve them in the process of "activation" and thus allows for more inclusion in the process and also actually contributes to more complex change of the society. However, such an approach requires a lot of energy, time, funds and human resources which could soon become an obstacle for the organization given its **restricted number of full time (and also part-time) employees**. Should they continue to pursue implementation of such a complex range of activities, there is a **need of coherent long-term vision, strategy and concrete action plan** (with respect to focus, finances and division of labor).

Such a coherent strategy and action plan would allow them to continue to go deeper and **be more persistent in the latter stages of their activities** (i.e. those that go beyond awareness rising and building skills).

The LDA has reached a certain level of professionalization with respect to the accumulated experience, collaboration with different partners, complexity of activities, etc. which **requires also a**

more developed internal structure of the organization (not only with respect to the number of employees but also regarding more structured division of labor that is currently largely dependent on two key employees – Dženana Dedić and Maja Vejzović Voloder). The highly devoted and active personalities of the **key representatives** of the organization LDA Mostar represent an enormous asset with respect to the accumulation of experience, visibility, reputation and specific “spirit” of the organization, but in the long-run it could also turn to become the significant obstacle for the continued work of the organization. The increased span of activities, their profoundness and pressure for professionalization is not only increasingly demanding for the individual representatives of the LDA, but it also carries an **inherent potential for the vulnerability** of the organization itself, should the key personalities decide to leave etc.

The wide variety of engagement in complex activities in the different specialized areas has also other implications for the **increased demands** on the organization (time, human resources), especially **in the area of fundraising; networking; education of the new part-time employees and partners; documentation; capitalization on the accumulated know-how; lessons learned, outcomes**, collection of the success stories to illustrate the outcomes in a more comprehensible and accessible manner.

LDA Mostar is trying to tackle this problem partially through diversifying the funding opportunities, looking for bigger donors; however even for this they would need more human capacities in the position of the fundraiser and also more **visibility outside of Mostar** to reach the donors that are more active in the capital and/or even in EU administrative centers.

LDA Mostar is also trying to actively partner with local NGOs, the City of Mostar and with other actors in the wider region of Balkans and also making use of the partnerships within the ALDA network and other international networks of like-minded organizations, but in order to keep the partnerships vivid, a more comprehensive approach will be necessary in the long-run which again implicitly requires more human resources. In the question of bigger visibility and greater “power”, ALDA could be a very useful agent.

7.2 Limitations of LDA Zavidovići's work

First of all, LDA Zavidovići is considerably **dependent on one major source of funding**. The organization has been implementing projects financed by several donors, including regional EC-funded projects where ALDA has been the main applicant; however, the major portion of the financial resources have been provided by the Italian municipalities and partners. These funds have been decreasing recently, negatively influencing the number of activities LDA Zavidovići has been able to implement.

Due to the **limited financial resources**, LDA Zavidovići is also working with **limited human capacities**, while trying to cover a wide range of issues. However, this situation is not sustainable over a longer period of time. Given the existing situation, LDA Zavidovići should prioritize the areas for engagement and focus on those issues where they possess the biggest capacities. Additionally, most people in Zavidovići associate LDA Zavidovići with the **leading figure**, Slađan Ilić, who is practically in charge of almost all projects, except for the activities related to youth activism. This makes LDA Zavidovići considerably vulnerable, should he ever decide to leave the organization.

As already mentioned, LDA Zavidovići **lacks coherent, longer-term vision and strategy** for its engagement in the local community and more specific objective for its work. Such a strategy would allow the organization to focus its scarce resources on clearly defined objectives, would help to prioritize areas for its work, to plan a follow up on its activities and monitor the progress of its goals. As a result, the work of LDA Zavidovići would not only be more effective in the defined areas but also more easily understandable to other partners, citizens and potential donors.

The **environment** in which LDA Zavidovići is implementing its activities to a certain extent constrains its work as well. As mentioned earlier, the current **economic situation** in town negatively influences the willingness of people to become involved in the activities of civil society organizations. We have seen that the **motivation to participate** in activities of NGOs, which are focusing on topics related to active citizens' participation in public life rather than on the direct provision of goods and services, is generally quite low among various groups of stakeholders, including young people and municipality administrators. Additionally, the **perception among the representatives of local authorities** of the roles civil society should be fulfilling – to be service providers rather than active advocates of structural changes – impacts negatively on the effectiveness of LDA Zavidovići. Last but not least, **political arrangements and lobbying forces** beyond the organization's control inevitably influence activities of LDA Zavidovići. For example, even though LDA Zavidovići and its partners succeeded in establishing the "Nature Park Tajan", the government decided to entrust the management of the park to the local wood exploitation company.

8. Recommendations for future engagement

Based on the findings of our research, we will provide LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići with recommendations for their future engagement. The following points aim at provoking a discussion among the representatives of these organizations about the extent to which are the recommendations feasible to achieve, in a short or long run, and about the steps the organizations can take to implement them.

8.1 Recommendations for LDA Mostar

- **perform a systematic needs assessment**, to have a comprehensive and evidence-based overview of the needs in the community;
- **develop a coherent, long-term strategy for the organization's engagement** (ideally in cooperation with an external facilitator), based on the results of the needs assessment, with specific long-term objectives and an action plan, that would provide LDA Mostar's work with clearer directions, targets and tools to monitor the progress;
- in the long-term strategy, **prioritize the areas for involvement** based on the likely available financial and human resources and the needs on the ground;
- **continue with the already established pattern of persistence** and build on the results of the work done so far with **follow-up activities**, to allow for continuous and systematic work with LDA Mostar's stakeholders;
- **work with the participants at the end of their engagement in projects/activities more intensively** to allow them **to internalize** more consciously what they have learned, how they are going to use it in their own lives and how could they use it more concretely **to contribute to the development of the community**
- **develop the internal structure of the organization**, with a more structured division of labor and a structured way for capitalization of the accumulated know-how, lessons learned and successful stories;
- **focus on promoting the LDAs work and achievements**, not only among citizens and representatives of local authorities, but focus also on increasing the visibility outside of Mostar to reach potential donors;
- **improve the presentation of LDA Mostar's activities and achievements on the website**, replacing the "project speech" with a language more easily understandable to a wider audience that could use this platform to learn and get inspired for their own activities;
- built on the already established approach of being open to new initiatives from the citizens (youth) **and support LDA Mostar's stakeholders more actively and in a more structured manner in developing their own vision** for the future Mostar and what should be one's own active role in achieving that vision;

8.2 Recommendations for LDA Zavidovići

- **perform a systematic needs assessment**, to have a comprehensive and evidence-based overview of the needs in the community;
- **develop a coherent, long-term strategy for LDA Zavidovići's engagement**, based on the results of the needs assessment, with specific longer-term objectives in all areas and an action plan, that would provide the organization's work with clearer directions, targets and tools to monitor the progress;
- in the long-term strategy, **prioritize the areas for LDA Zavidovići's involvement** based on the likely available financial and human resources and the needs on the ground;
- **take a sustained, long-term approach** to achieving the organization's goals and **exercise persistence** – there are no quick fixes to the issues *LDA Zavidovići* is dealing with; regular **follow-up** activities should be planned in the framework of the projects which would allow to work continuously and systematically with the same groups of stakeholders;
- **develop a more structured internal system of management of the organization** with defined responsibilities and formalized internal processes, and with a more structured way for capitalization of the accumulated know-how, lessons learned and successful stories, making the organization more sustainable in case of changes in personnel;
- **renew the connections between the local authorities in Zavidovići and the partner institutions in Italy**: the exchanges aiming at providing technical assistance were highly appreciated by the wide range of stakeholders, yielded positive results, and could still bring positive effects in various areas in a need of improvement;
- **focus more on promoting LDA Zavidovići's achievements** among the citizens of Zavidovići and among the representatives of local authorities, stressing the various roles LDA Zavidovići has played throughout the years, **to enhance their understanding of the role of civil society organizations**;
- using the respect the organization has gained in the community and the good informal relationships with the representatives of local authorities to establish a more systematic way **to regularly propose policy changes** that would address structural causes of the problems *LDA Zavidovići* is dealing with (where possible), and **to enhance the presence of civil society organizations in the decision-making processes**;
- **exercise caution when choosing the areas and strategies for involvement, not to substitute the local authorities** in the areas of their responsibilities, which might in effect undermine their motivation to actively serve the needs of citizens and increase the dependence of various groups of stakeholders in Zavidovići on the organization;
- **continued support of youth activism**, focusing more on **encouraging young people to create their own vision for the future of Zavidovići** and of changes they would like to influence in town, providing them with the necessary knowledge and tools for influencing those changes;

- in the attempt to motivate young people in becoming more involved in volunteer activities, **bring “successful examples” of previous volunteers back to Zavidovići** – those whom the experience with **LDA Zavidovići’s** activities motivated to become involved in various sectors of society or helped them to find a job, to enhance the understanding of the benefits of volunteering among young people;
- **continue supporting the capacities of other civil society organizations** in the municipality;
- focus on **encouraging citizens of Zavidovići to become more pro-active** in various aspects of their lives, from supporting entrepreneurship to the involvement of citizens in local politics;
- suggestions for strategic **areas where LDA Zavidovići’s assistance is perceived as highly relevant by the interviewees** of our research: supporting youth activism, promoting entrepreneurship, improving the waste management and separation and recycling of waste, organizing twinning and exchanges of various groups of stakeholders with Italian partners, providing environmental education and activities aimed at tackling stereotypes, promotion of tourism.

9. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to evaluate the work of the Local Democracy Agencies (LDAs) in Mostar and Zavidovići and to provide a deeper understanding of what processes and changes were instigated due to their activities. Apart from offering the LDAs an external perspective on their work and suggestions for improvements, the study also aimed at providing the management of ALDA with proposals for possible actions they can take to help the agencies be more effective in their work. We summarized the recommendations for ALDA in the following section.

As already mentioned throughout the report, both LDA Mostar and LDA Zavidovići lack a clear and coherent long-term strategy for their engagement which would allow them to use their resources and capacities in a more structured way, consistent with the clearly defined long-term goals. ALDA should **actively support the LDAs in creating such long-term strategies** and in taking a sustainable approach to their work.

Given its wide network of partners, rich experience with fundraising and active presence in the EU institutions, ALDA is in a good position to **support the LDAs in the process of securing more stable funding sources**, to enable them to consistently pursue their long-term strategies. ALDA's network and their wide outreach could be used to **promote the LDAs' work and achievements to potential donors**, to make it easier for them to attract funding for their activities.

ALDA should also **continue supporting the networking among LDAs and between LDAs and other organizations**, organizing regular formal and informal meetings aimed at sharing the best practices and approaches to tackling various issues. The vast experiences accumulated in the LDAs working in the Western Balkan countries might also be useful to the newer LDAs that ALDA has been recently helping to open in other regions, e.g. in the Caucasus. ALDA should, therefore, **find an effective model for the active sharing of experiences and lessons learned between LDAs in the Western Balkans and the newly established ones**. At the same time, ALDA should keep supporting the "older" LDAs in their further development and in the accommodation to the changing situation.

ALDA network is also **an important source of the moral support for the LDAs**. Thanks to the broader platform ALDA represents, LDAs can feel that they are part of a bigger movement and are not left alone in their struggle. ALDA should **continue providing this very much needed moral support** to all its members.

This study aimed to provide LDAs and ALDA with an external perspective on their work. We hope that the findings and recommendations of this research will resonate with the actors and motivate them to jointly find a way to utilize this information for shaping their future work.

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