Introduction

Fig. 1: Physical evidence in Mostar’s urban landscape of the violent conflict following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 90ies.

The current debate on the legitimacy and sustainability of international intervention and state-building in post-conflict countries has curiously been restricted to international relation theories and practice. So far, no detailed in-depth ethnographic research was conducted as to the consequences of such state-building enterprises for newly evolving forms of governance within the affected societies.

This PhD project aims at contributing to theoretical and practical understanding of the effects of internationally monitored public administration reforms on local structures of solidarity (or exclusion) in Bosnia-Herzegovina - a Southeastern European post-conflict society, which emerged as an independent and multi-ethnic state out of the Yugoslav conflicts of the early 1990ies.

Structures of solidarity or exclusion are intentionally chosen as a broad conceptual point of departure, in order to include formal and informal, institutionalized and spontaneous, local as well as national and international forms of community/state-building.

Scientific Approach/Methods

Empirical data collected during fieldwork is being interpreted in the light of two theoretical frameworks:

- Cultural anthropology with an emphasis on informal arrangements, the embeddedness of social actions and the importance of symbolic meanings and representations.
- Administrative sciences with a focus on administrative functions, personnel management, organizational structures, standard work procedures, and questions of “good governance”.

Fieldwork carried out from July 2005 to August/September 2006 in the City of Mostar closely followed the interactions of three groups of actors in various public sites:

- Members of international organizations (active in the field of public administration reforms)
- Local government officials (city councillors and civil servants & employees)
- Citizens of Mostar (when interacting with public local government bodies)

A mix of qualitative methods was applied: participant observation in administrative institutions, international organizations and other public settings, extensive interviewing, the study of administrative records and statistical data, and a survey of media coverage of relevant topics.

(Expected) Results

The combination of public administration research with an extended period of ethnographic fieldwork serves to fill the gap in the academic literature on state-building by probing the tension between globally designed projects of state-building and local responses in the specific case of the City of Mostar.

The cross-fertilization of disciplinary approaches should enrich both:

- an anthropology of the state which acknowledges the complexity of bureaucratic organization and scholarly theorizing thereof, and
- a comparative administrative science which draws on existing anthropological knowledge.

By examining local level state-building through the lens of the concept of solidarity rather than through such concepts as reconciliation or peace-building, attention is drawn to the fact that issues explored in Mostar are pressing questions in the context of globally changing state-society relations.

Fig. 3: The stepping stones of Mostar’s famous reconstructed “Old Bridge”, one of the most frequently used but also highly contested symbols for a past and future peaceful and multi-ethnic community in BiH.

Publications and Presentations

Publications:
Forthcoming 2008: Reflections on the Field, Local community offices in Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina) as sites for investigating state-society relations in a post-conflict country undergoing the transformation from socialism to post-socialism, in: Proceedings of the Konitsa Summer School in Anthropology, Ethnography and Comparative Folklore of the Balkans Konitsa, Greece, 2006, LIT Verlag, Münster.

Presentations: