



Course Scope & BiH Context

Unit 1: Introduction



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Course Scope

This course teaches citizen participation in post-conflict urban contexts, with the explicit aim of preventing pseudo-participation, where consultation is staged without any real transfer of power. In cities recovering from conflict, that distinction isn't academic: it determines whether public space becomes a site of renewed trust or a repeated pattern of exclusion.

Preventing pseudo-participation requires more than recognizing it in theory. It requires ethical judgment, knowing what a facilitator owes to a divided community, and where moderation crosses into manipulation. It also requires reflexive awareness: understanding your own position, biases, and power as someone facilitating participation, not just observing it.

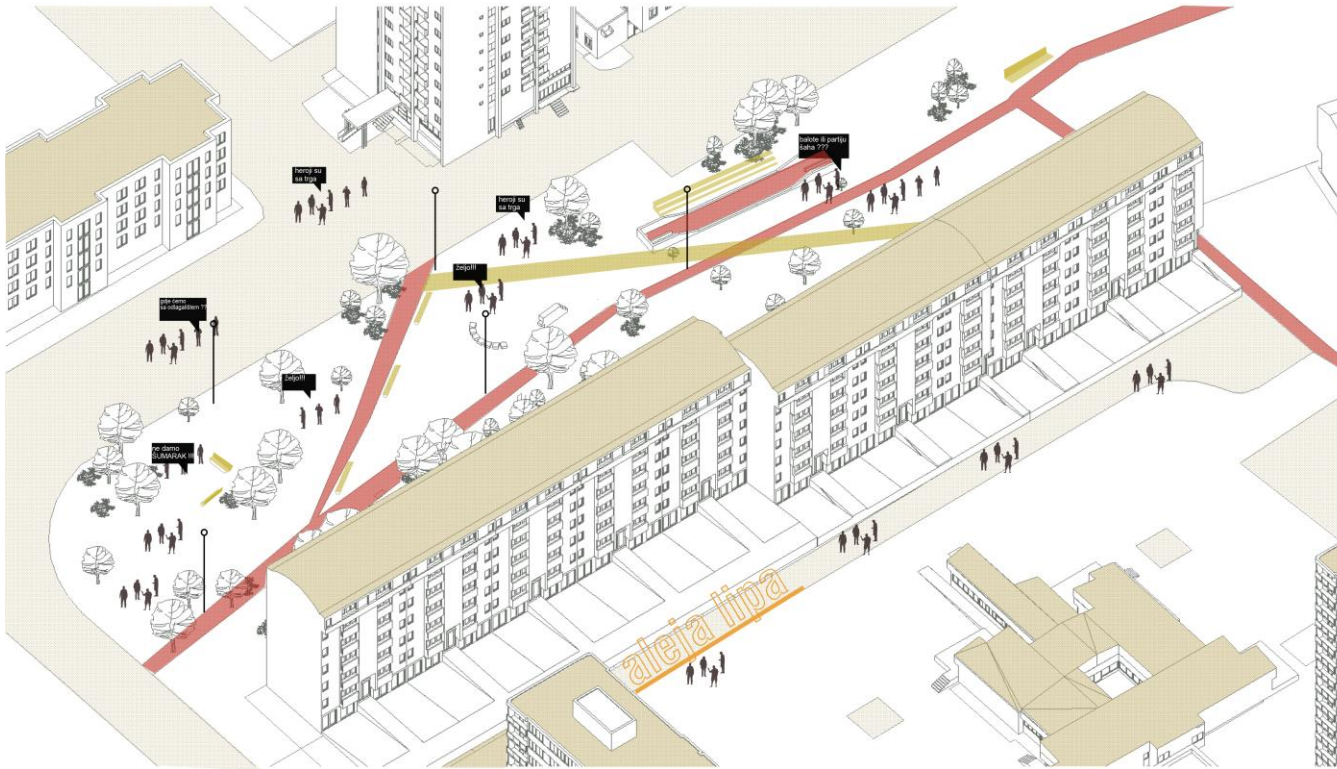
Together, these three lenses — participation theory, ethics, and positionality — form the practical toolkit this course offers for working responsibly in post-conflict urban contexts.



Why Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Bosnia and Herzegovina's governance structure is split across entities, cantons, and municipalities, itself a direct outcome of the Dayton Peace Agreement — creates exactly the fragmented landscape where participation can be staged rather than real. Neighborhoods like Trg Heroja, Grbavica, still marked by the 1992–95 front line, or Čengić Vila, with its dense, ethnically mixed post-socialist housing, aren't neutral backdrops. Decisions about their public space carry memory, and sometimes still-contested territory.





(Re)Construction of Community

(Re)Construction of Community is a research project and design studio at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo, exploring how to reconstruct and adapt existing forms of citizen participation within a spatial and organizational form—the local community. Its goal is to shift power from macro-management (the state, the market) to the community level, using social capital and inherited forms of cooperation from the socialist period as a resource for regenerating, reconstructing, and adapting space. The first studio was conducted at the Trg Heroja Local Community Center, based on the hypothesis that existing social and spatial structures from the socialist period could be transformed into newer, more open, and more accessible common spaces, while continuing earlier forms of cooperation.



One Municipality, Three Projects

All three neighborhoods share the same underlying story of Sarajevo's built environment: each was constructed as socialist-era housing — Trg Heroja (Hrasno) in the 1970s, Čengić Vila from 1965 onward — but Grbavica's history is additionally marked by physical division along the 1992–95 front line, leaving demographic transformation that neither of the other two neighborhoods experienced in the same way. Together, they represent three variations of the same underlying condition: dense, socialist-built public space, now navigating post-conflict urban life under one municipality, Novo Sarajevo.



Next: Why This Matters Specifically in Post-Conflict Contexts

1. Trust is already damaged

Post-conflict societies carry deep institutional mistrust. Pseudo-participation deepens that mistrust further every time citizens are "consulted," and their voice changes nothing; it confirms the sense that institutions don't deserve trust. This makes every future attempt at engagement harder, even a genuine one.

2. The stakes are higher — space carries symbolic weight

Decisions about public space in post-conflict cities (squares, monuments, neighborhood boundaries) are often tied to identity, territory, and memory of the conflict. When such decisions are imposed under the guise of participation, they can reopen the very divisions that led to conflict in the first place.

3. Legal frameworks create false security

Public hearings can be legally required, but they guarantee only *form*, not any real transfer of power. That legal requirement makes pseudo-participation easier to hide: an institution can say "we held consultations" and be technically correct, while nothing substantive has changed.

4. Fragmented governance opens space for manipulation

Divided authority (entities, cantons, municipalities) creates more points where participation can be used selectively, to legitimize decisions that already favor one side or group, under the appearance of "citizen inclusion."

5. Reconciliation requires a real, not simulated, voice

If the goal of rebuilding a society is for citizens to feel genuine ownership over their city and future, pseudo-participation works against that. It repeats the pattern of exclusion that helped cause the conflict in the first place.

