



Ovaj projekat financira
Europska unija

BUILDING PEACE: DISCUSSING THE TOPICS OF THE 1990S WAR, RECONCILIATION AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE WITH CROATIAN YOUTH

May - July 2019



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THE PROJECT

The **overall aim** of the project “Building peace: discussing the topics of the 1990s war, reconciliation and transitional justice with Croatian youth” **is to support the process of reconciliation among youth in Croatia and have an impact on the formal educational system**, particularly on historic and civic education curricula.

The project has the following **specific objectives**:

- Raise awareness among youth about the topics of the 1990s war, war crimes, transitional justice, and the importance of reconciliation
- Motivate young people to rethink these subjects, learn about them and be more engaged in dealing with them
- Research the perceptions and the interests of Croatian youth on this overall topic
- Start a discussion with the young people involved about dealing with controversial themes
- Strengthen the educational system with innovative teaching methods on controversial topics

In the context of the project, we organized **three workshops: the 22nd May in Zagreb, the 23rd May in Rijeka and the 24th May in Karlovac, bringing together forty participants aged from 15 to 18 years.**

Each workshop started with an introduction of the participants, the coordinators and the project objectives as well as the way the structure and the outline of the workshop. After a brief icebreaker, the participants filled in the questionnaires. Their answers are presented in this publication. The core of the workshops was a practical activity, during which the participants, working in pairs, created small dolls and discussed how to present them to the others. The last session was dedicated to the discussion and the evaluation of the workshops.



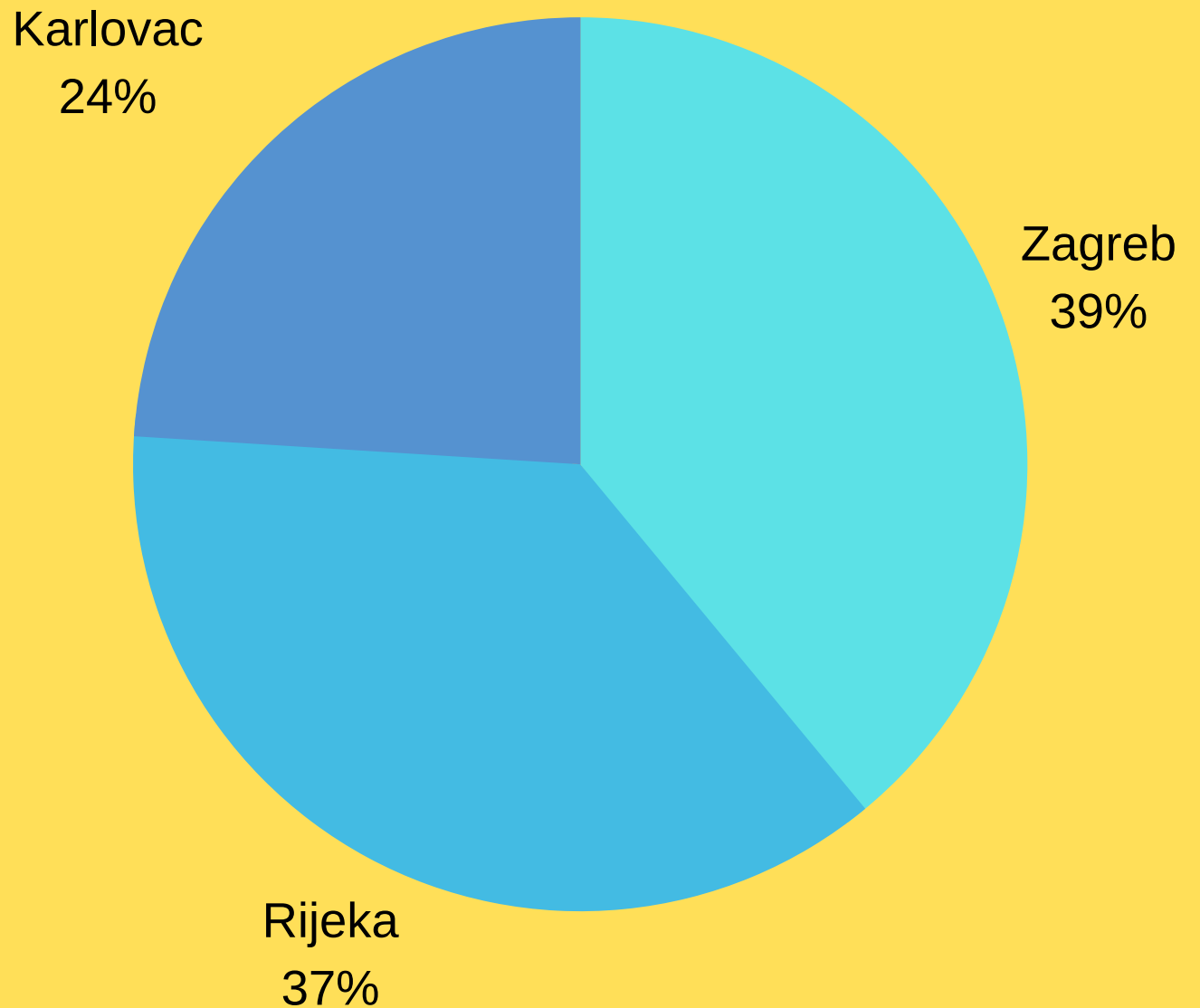
The project was organized by non-profit organization Polka based in Karlovac. **Udruga za razvoj građanske i političke kulture Karlovac Polka** was founded in 2012 with the aim of supporting the process of democratization in the local community. Its main activity is the publication of the online newspaper "**Aktiviraj Karlovac**", a local non-profit media, that gives the opportunity to its readers to become reporters and, in this way, to engage in the life of the city. Polka, as a partner, participated in two European funded projects, related to the revitalization of the city centre. This is the first project it coordinated. Polka also conducted a range of smaller projects on the themes of media education, reevaluation of the city's heritage and development of the civil society.

The project is financed by the **European Union** in the context of a broader project named: "**Activism for Regional Reconciliation in the Former Yugoslavia - In Support of RECOM**" -, coordinated by Centre for Civic Education from Podgorica (Montenegro).

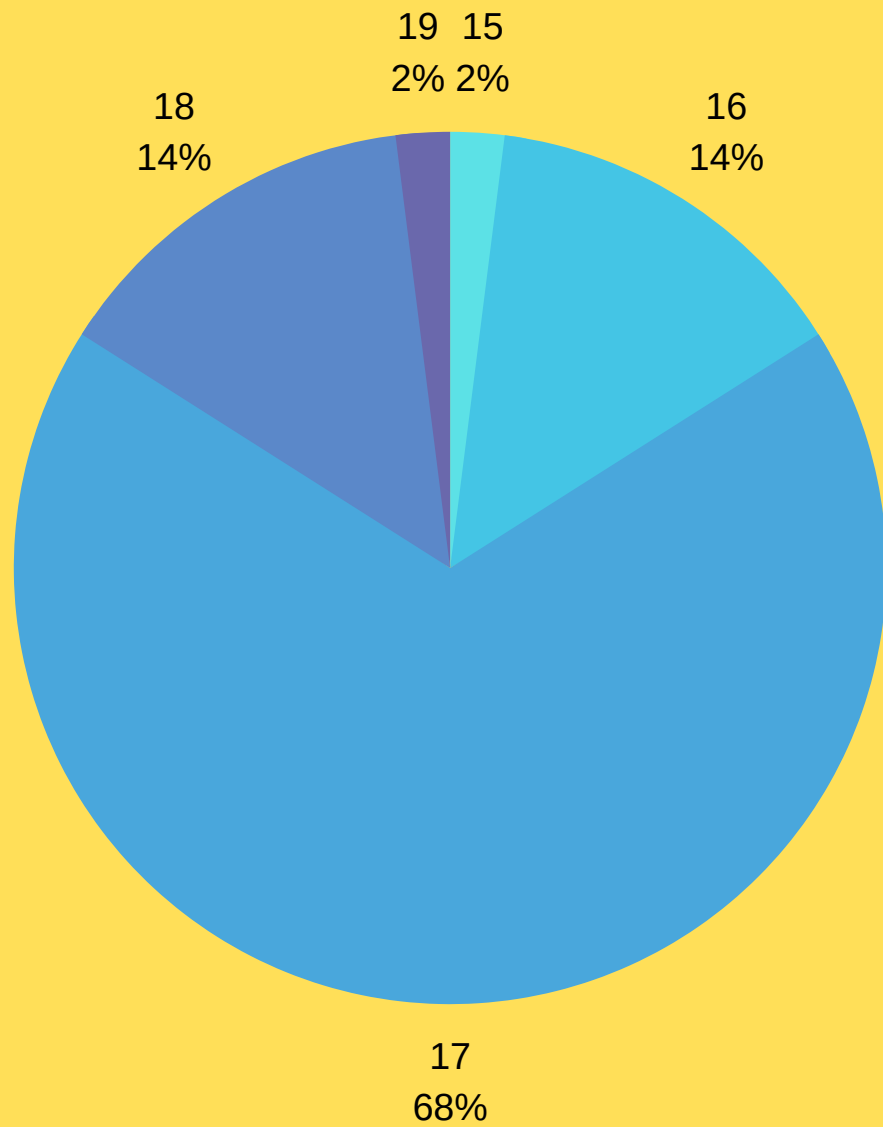


QUESTIONNAIRES' RESULTS

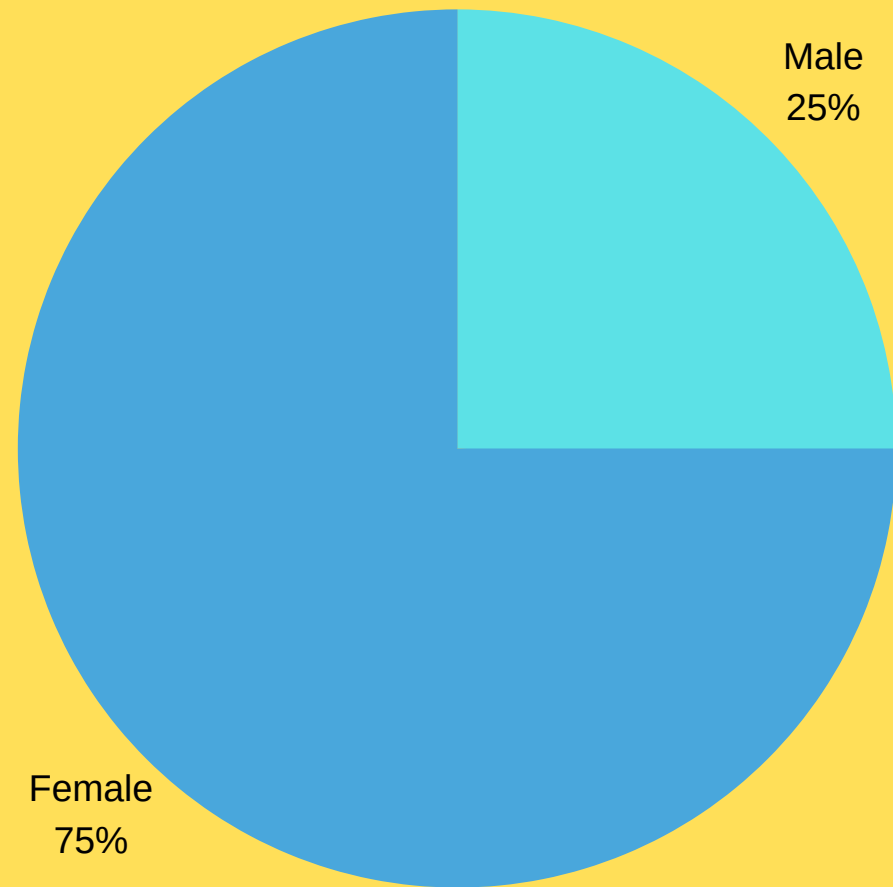
Participants per city as percentage of the total number of participants involved in this project



Age



Gender



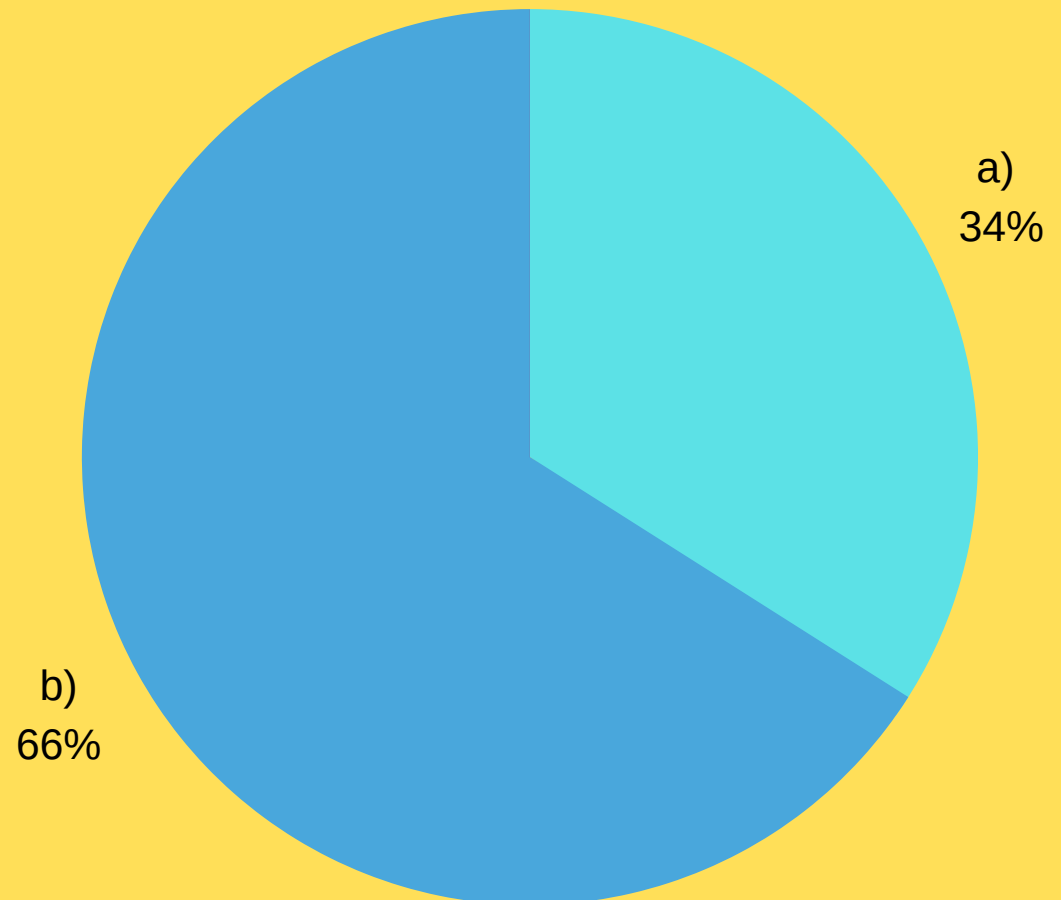
1. *When did you hear for the first time about the topic of the Homeland war?*

a) when you were younger than 6-7 years old (before school)

b) in primary school

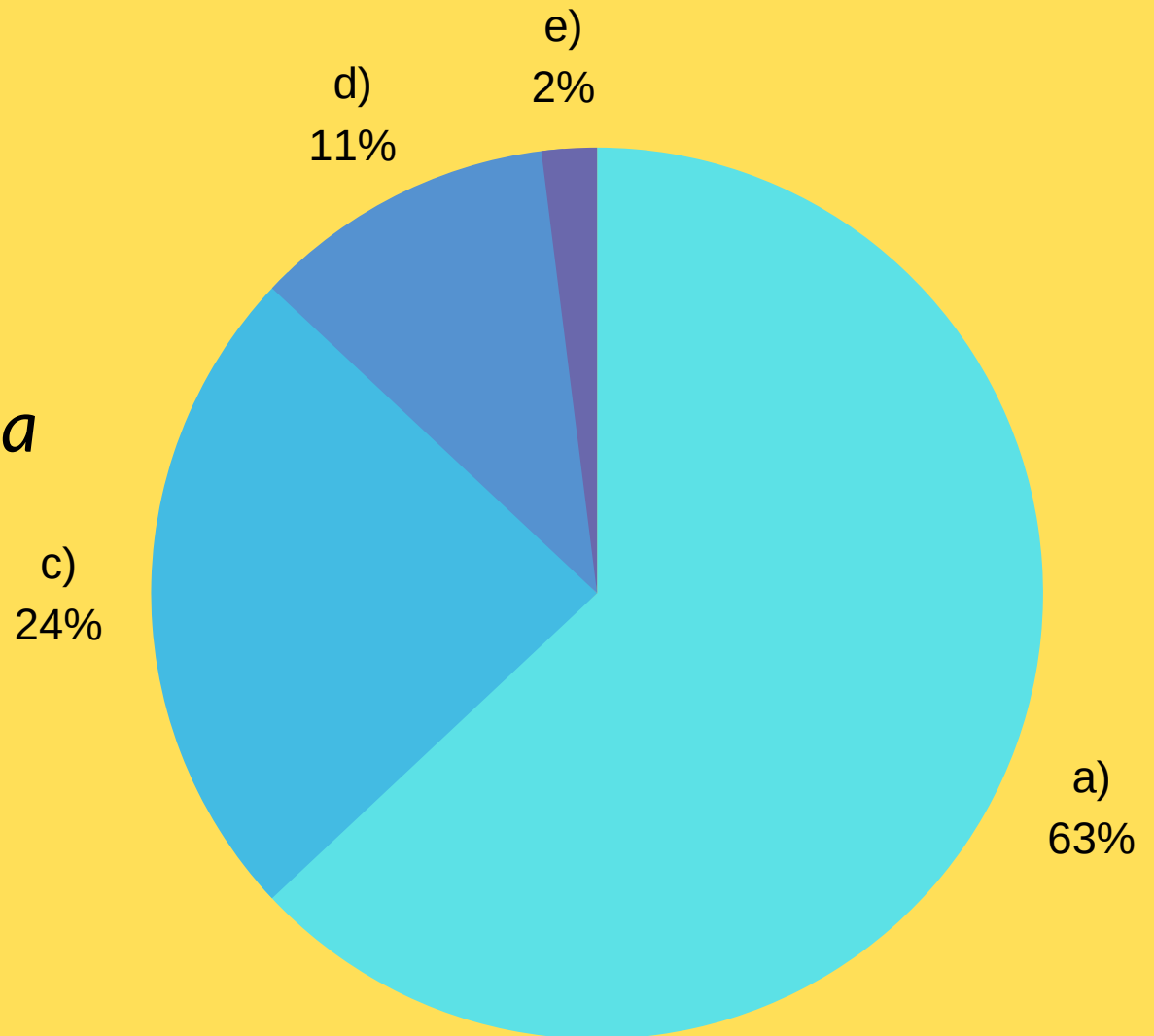
c) in secondary school

d) other



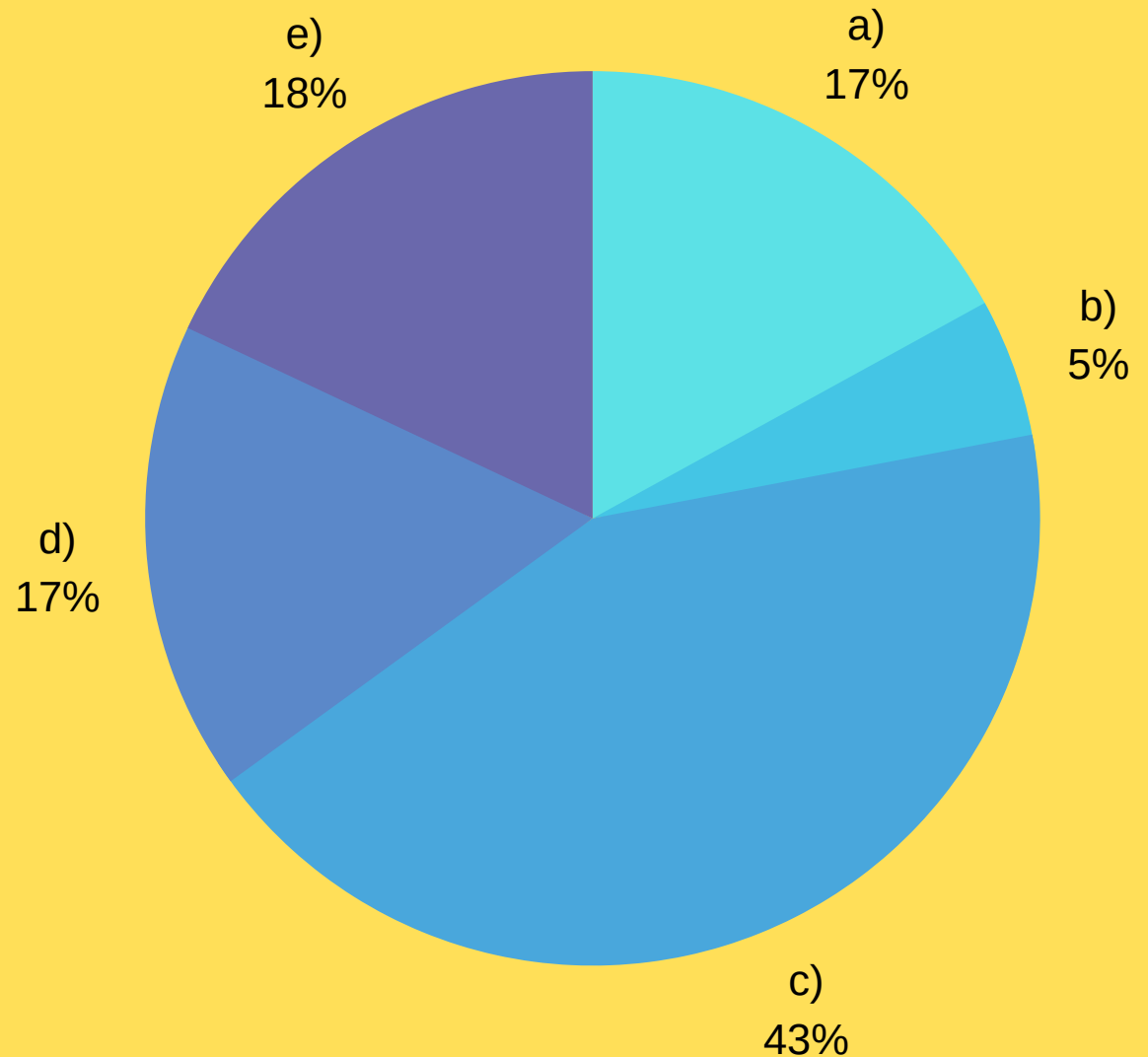
2. From whom did you hear for the first time about the topic of the Homeland war?

- a) family
- b) friends
- c) school
- d) TV and media
- e) Internet and social media
- f) other



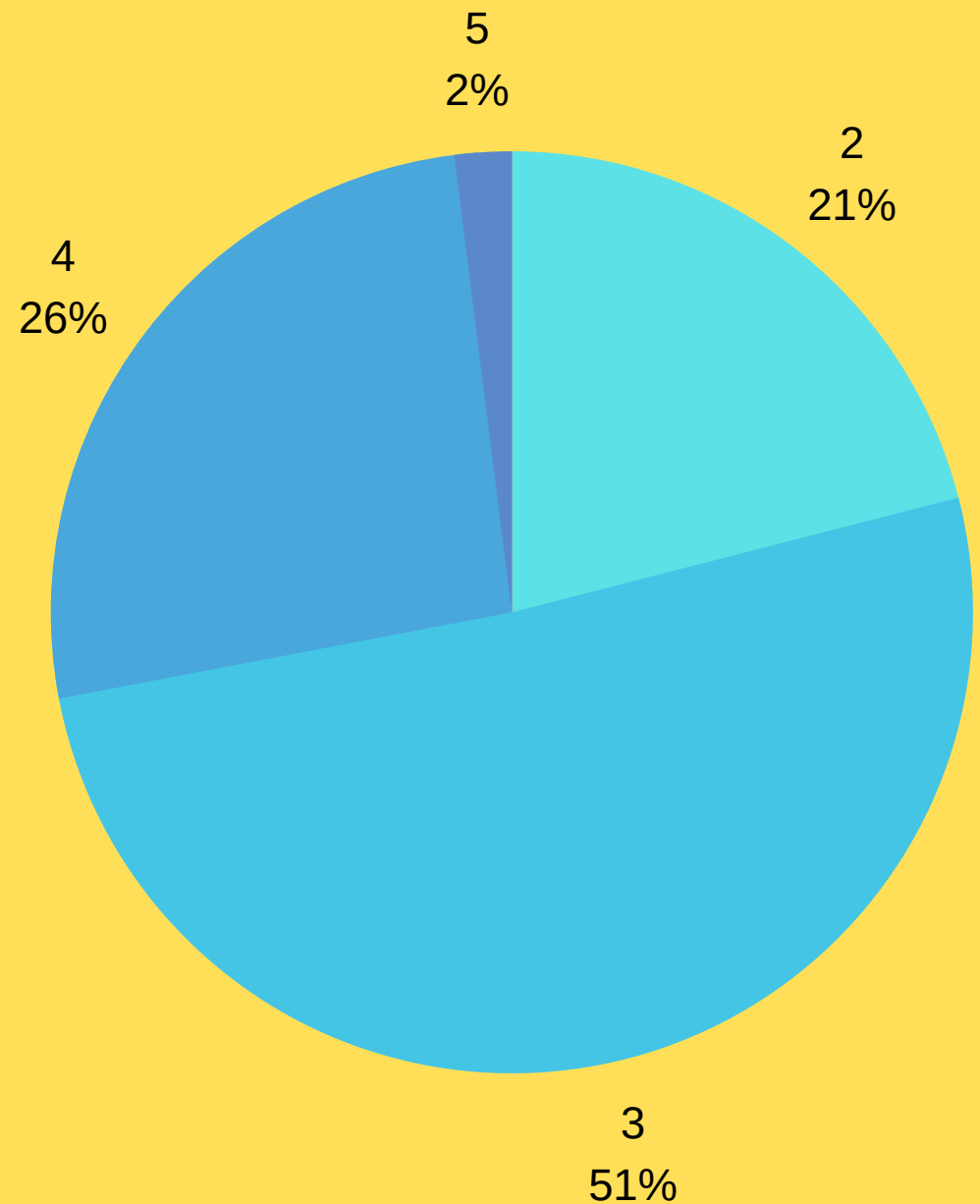
3. From whom did you get more information about the topic of the Homeland war?

- a) family
- b) friends
- c) school
- d) TV and media
- e) Internet and social media
- f) other



4. *What do you think, how much do you know about the topic?*

(Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is I don't know anything, while 5 is I know much/enough)



5. Would you like to know more about the topic?



If NO, why wouldn't you like to know more?

- the war is in the past, it should remain there, money should be invested in development, in the rebuilding of areas affected by war and in helping the veterans
- we can't make an influence on history, we have to deal with actual issues
- we need to continue living in peace, the war themes only raise tensions between nations.

If YES, who would you like to get more information from?

a) family

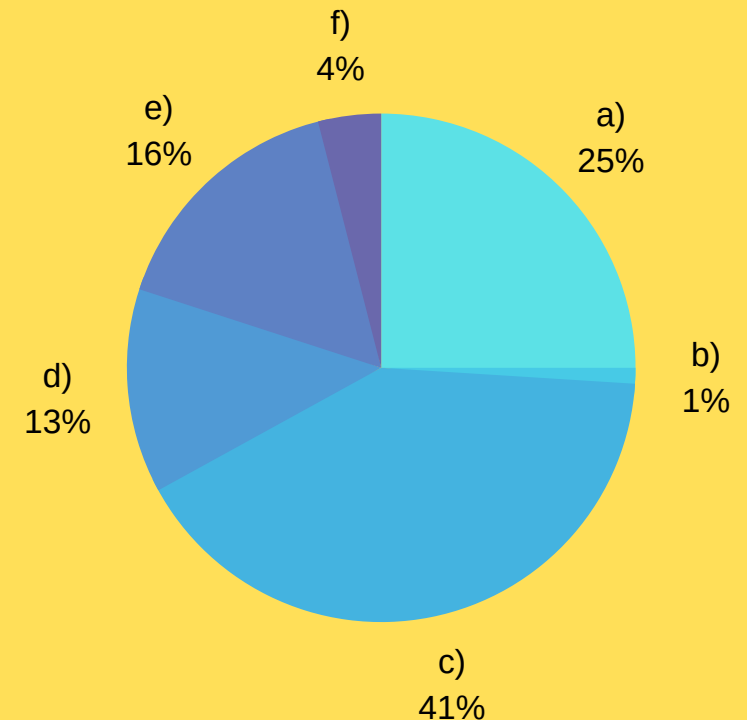
b) friends

c) school

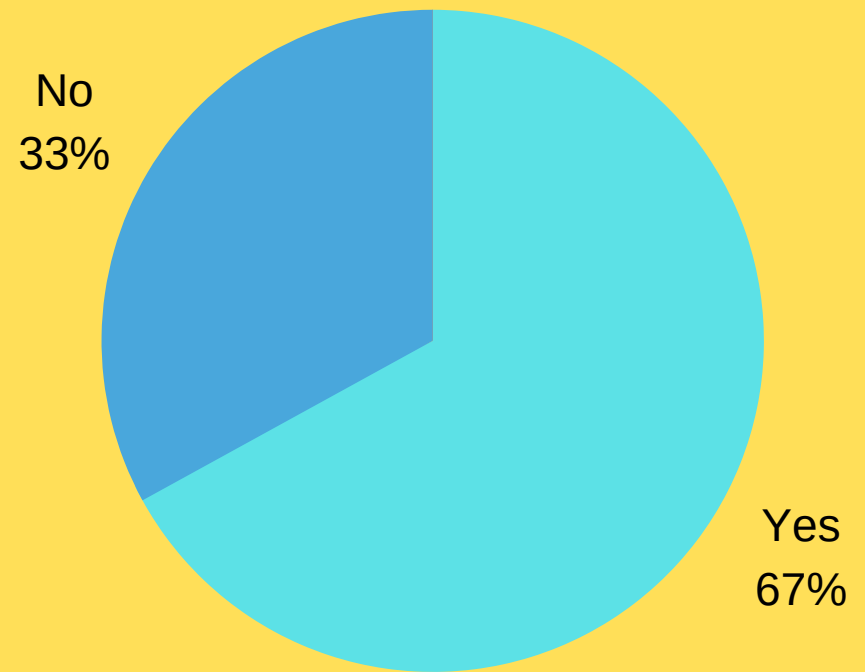
d) TV and media

e) Internet and social media

f) other (from reliable sources, from historical sources, from newspapers of that time, from documentaries)



6. Have you ever read a book/article about the topic of the Homeland war?



If YES, what motivated you?

- interest
- I wanted to know more
- family motivations
- by chance (Internet)
- school
- school (visit to Vukovar)
- discussion in the media
- I don't remember

7. Have you ever researched on your own (Internet, books,..) topics connected to the Homeland war?

If YES, what motivated you?

- I wanted to know more
- school
- experience of older people
- boredom
- present situation of the country
- war and Croatia
- interest
- family stories
- I don't know



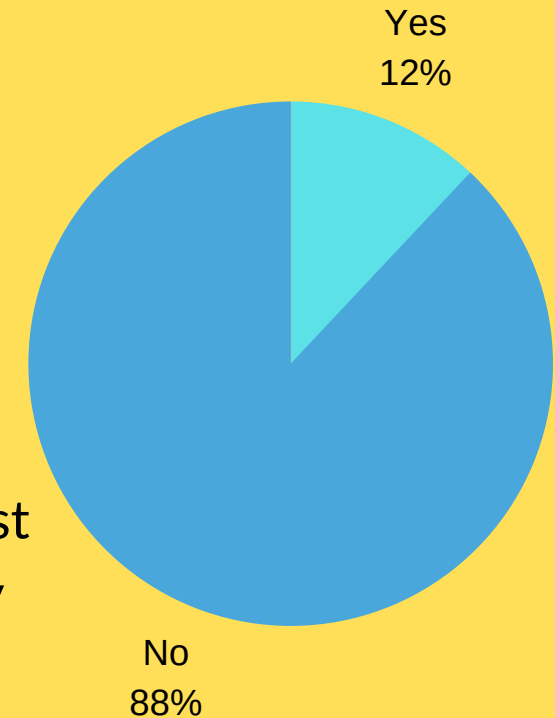
8. *Do you think that only historians, and not the whole society, should deal with historical topics?*

If YES, why?

- they know better what happened, the others could "make it up"
- the society is in majority uneducated on these themes
- the war is a historical thing, and we shouldn't look back in the past
- they are not important, what is important is known by everybody

If NO, who else should deal with these topics?

- everybody who is interested and want to research them
- all Croats
- it is important for the present and the future that everybody knows and is educated; so it won't happen again
- people who participated to the war or that have lost someone in the war
- it's a shame not knowing history, especially related to our nation
- it raises national consciousness and motivates to research your own culture
- as much people as possible, because we learn from history
- everybody, we should never forget



9. Do you think that in our society (politics, media, friends, family, school, general public) we speak too much about the topics connected to the Homeland war?



If YES, write which themes would you like to deal more with, instead of the war related ones.

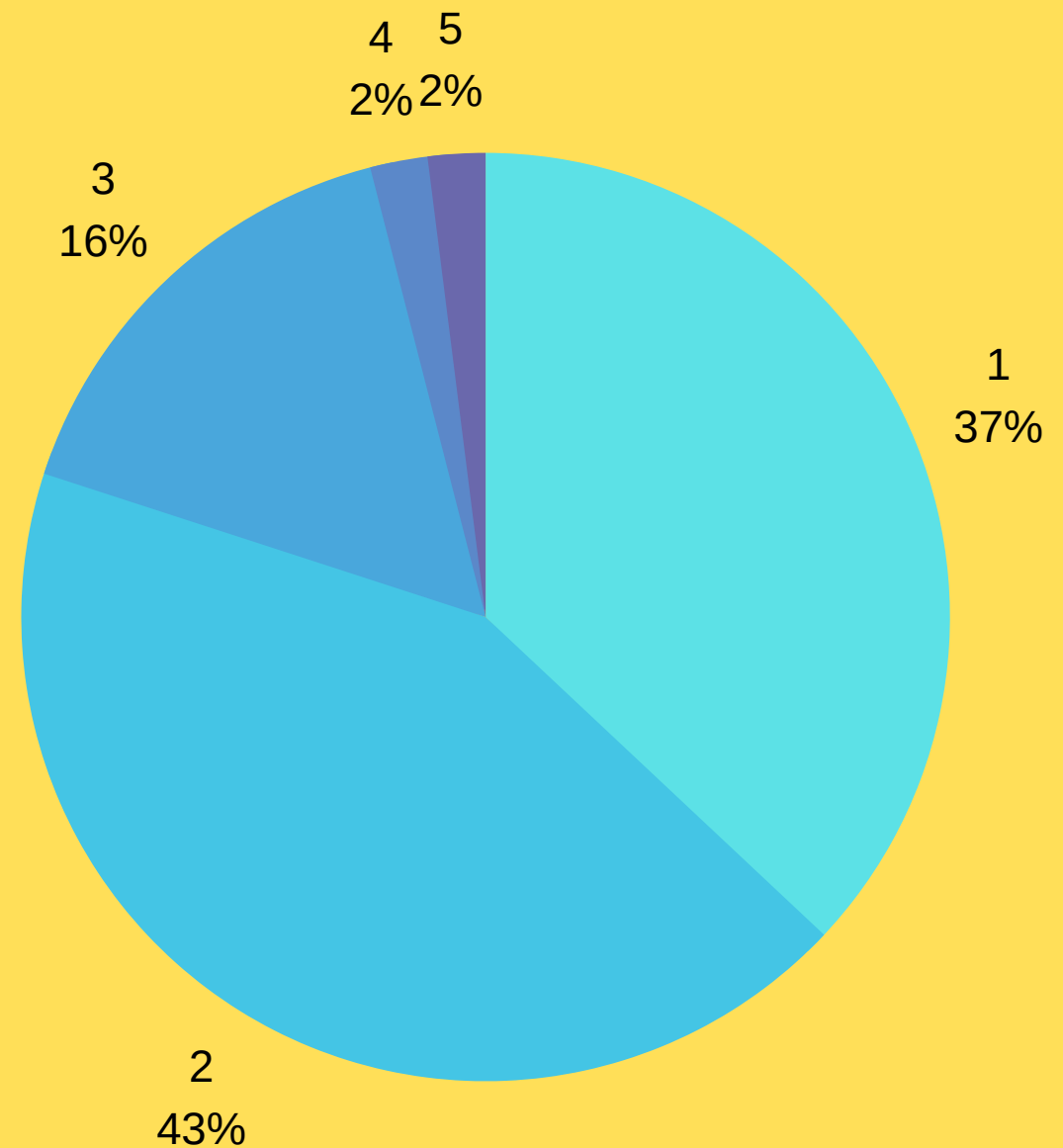
- future and actual topics
- science
- education
- nowadays situation in Croatia: economy and cities, ecology, scientific discoveries, sport successes
- we can talk about the war, but not misusing it
- II World War
- we shouldn't look back to the past
- focus on the country development
- I don't know

If NO, which themes inside the broader topics of the Homeland war would you like to deal with more?

- causes, consequences and personal experiences
- themes connected to the victims and the conflict, the war damages
- generally about the Homeland war
- the camps and the suffering of the civilians, the crimes, the missing people
- speak more objectively
- the beginning and the possibilities that we could have had, so that war could have not happened
- I don't know

10. In my family, we often speak about the topics related to the Homeland war.

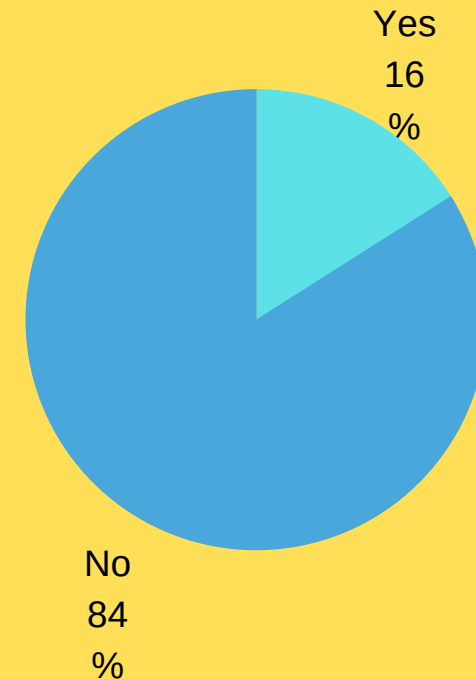
Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is very rarely, while 5 is very often



11. Do you follow topics related to the Homeland war in the media on a regular basis?

If YES, indicate in which media.

- TV
- radio
- Internet
- newspapers
- documentaries



If NO, which themes do you follow on a regular basis? On which media?

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| • contemporary themes | • animals | • Internet |
| • sport | • science | • news |
| • music | • education | • social media |
| • politics | • traveling | • TV |
| • fashion | • ecology | • Youtube |
| • I don't have preferred themes | • crime reports | • newspapers |
| | • films | |
| | • books, culture | |

12. Do you think that the Homeland war is an event which we are not allowed to question or criticize?

If YES, why?

- if war hadn't happened, we wouldn't have an independent country
- it changed Croatian history
- we are not allowed to forget, but there is no sense in questioning it
- it isn't right to criticize past events
- it is not allowed to question and criticize anything that is in public media

If NO, why?

- every war should be questioned
- it's needed to research and find the truth, so it won't happen again
- every historical event should be approached objectively
- we are not supposed to be silent
- the new generations should know more about the topics
- I don't know



13. Do you think that today a good coexistence is possible between Croats and Serbs in Croatia?

If YES, why?

- the youngsters nowadays spend time together, without thinking about nationalities
- we are all humans and everybody should be good to the others, without thinking about the past
- the Serbs have more rights in Croatia than the Croats in Serbia.
- yes, but tensions are still present
- there isn't discrimination at the local level, and also the society is changing
- it is possible, but the past won't ever be forgotten
- I think that the tensions are decreasing
- I have Serbian friends, my family is Orthodox, we are doing fine
- the youngsters can have a harmonious coexistence, but the older generations can't
- because I haven't seen any conflicts between Croats and Serbs
- hate is still present, but today is more rare and weaker

No
54%



Yes
46%

If NO, why?

- it is not defined, hate prevails
- it will never be good, the past won't be forgotten
- some people are too much attached to the past and don't want to move on
- to achieve it, a few decades more need to pass
- some Croats are judging people only because they are Serbs
- maybe in a couple of places, but not in the majority of the country
- they don't cooperate as much as they would need for the best of both sides
- I don't like Serbs
- Croats don't accept Serbs
- we are still looking at Serbs as enemies, competitors, a hostile nation

COMMENTS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRES' RESULTS

Following the first question, the majority of the participants heard about the war related topics in primary school or from their family, which was an expected result. However, a difference exists between the cities selected. The students in Zagreb (30%) and in Rijeka (18%) mostly chose primary school as the place where they heard for the first time about the war. However, in Karlovac (64%), a city strongly affected by the war and where the citizens still feel its consequences, the majority of participants stated that they first heard about these topics in their families.



On the next question, **asking from whom they heard for the first time about the topics, the majority answered from the family.** Interestingly, in the first question **the majority of the participants chose the primary school as the place where they first heard about the subject.** On reflection, we believe that the participants may have responded to the first question with formal education in mind, associating it with school learning. They appeared to connect the second question to a less formal context, associating it with the primary information, stories and testimonies from that time that they received from family.

On the third question, we received very interesting answers on the question from whom did the participants get more information about the war related topics. We were expecting the most common answers to be family and school. However, **the participants indicated that they received more information from the Internet, social media, TV, and media than from their families.** The school was still the primary source of information.



On the fourth question, the participants had to estimate how much they know about the war topics. We got an expected result. Everybody stated that they know something about it, but most of them perceived that they don't know enough.

When asked if they wanted to know more about the topics, **the majority of the participants answered that they want to and expect to receive more information from the school.** Second on the list is the family, which is interesting, given that in the third question most of the participants wrote that they looked for additional information mostly on the Internet or TV. We can surmise that this data highlights that they expect to receive valuable information from people or institutions that they trust and that can offer them reliable and formal facts. In relation to the answers of the participants who chose no (they do not want to know more about the war topics), it is clear that they are tired of dealing with war related topics and in general with references to the past. They would like to discuss more contemporary themes, which are currently troubling Croatian society.

We received a really interesting answer to question number six, asking if the participants have ever read a book or an article about the war topics. **The majority of the students have read something about it; a data which contradicts common thinking and previous research that today's young people don't read and are not interested in serious topics.** Similarly, their motivation in reading these books is also interesting. We were expecting that the majority would have chosen school obligations and homework as the main reason. However, interest and wishing to know more about the theme were indicated as their main motivations. Also in the seventh question, where they were asked if they had ever researched war topics themselves, we received a similar answer. The majority of participants researched the mentioned topics on their own because they wanted to know more about them; only some of them stated that it was because of school obligations.

On the question of whether only historians should deal with historical themes, the majority of the participants answered no.

They stated that everybody who is interested in the topics should deal with them, with the aim of educating themselves and learning from the past so that war won't happen again. Still, it is interesting that some

participants believe that only Croats should speak of and learn about the topics, because they are important for "our nation", they "raise national awareness" and because it is a shame for Croats not to know their national history. In the same way, some young people answered that only the ones who took part in or who lost someone in the war should comment and deal with it. Thus some participants believe that, besides historians who have an expertise in this area, these themes should be dealt with only by witnesses from that time and people who have had personal experiences of the war. The students who think that only historians should deal with the themes consider them as the most competent and educated, while the rest of the society is, on the contrary, perceived as uneducated.



On the ninth question, we asked participants if they believe that the topic of Homeland war is overly discussed and present in our society. Surprisingly, the majority answered no. **Despite our assumptions that the students are tired and bored by war related topics, they think that it is necessary to speak about these themes and, in particular, they would like to know more about the causes and the consequences of the war, the personal experience of people who took part in it, the victims and the missing people.** In addition they perceived it is important for them to speak about the topic in a **more objective way**; they are aware that many different actors in our society have their own biased interpretations of the war events. The students who think that the topic is more present than it should be in society believe that history should remain in the past and would prefer to focus on contemporary issues and on the future.

The responses to the tenth question showed that in the majority of the participants' families the war related topics are not discussed at all and that they don't usually speak about them.

On the question of whether the participants follow on a regular basis in the media the topics related to the war, we received an expected answer. The majority, in fact, circled no and listed the different topics they follow; topics appropriate for their age and interests (contemporary issues, fashion, sport, music,..). Still, 16 % of the participants responded that they follow war related topics on a regular basis. This is a significant number, considering their young age.



A significant majority of participants believe that war should be, even needs to be, criticized and questioned, to get to know the truth and to learn from it so that the war won't happen again. Many of them underlined that these topics should be approached in a more objective way and that the new generations should know more about them. The participants (9%) who answered that war related topics shouldn't be questioned connected the war to the Croatian national identity and the difficult fight for the creation of an independent state. Because of these reasons, they think that it is not right to criticize it.



On the thirteenth question, on the topics of whether there is a **good coexistence between Croats and Serbs in Croatia**, the opinions were divided almost in half. It is positive that a huge number of participants think that the coexistence is present and that the younger generations are more ready for it. However, many of them indicated that hate and tensions still exist and that they are not going to disappear. They perceive that coexistence, in particular between the older generations, is not possible.

After reading and analyzing all the questionnaires, it is clear that the opinions presented by the participants reflect the predominant trends of Croatian society - nationalism, revisionism and the impression that questioning and criticizing events and people connected with the war is wrong. In addition, the attitude of some participants, who stated that only the people who took part in the war should speak about it, is challenging for the promotion of public dialogue. In this sense, in fact, it gives the idea that only some groups within society are allowed to question, criticize and interpret the war related facts. Furthermore, many participants were really skeptical about the possibility of a good coexistence between Croats and Serbs, in the near future.

However, **the whole project leaves a really positive impression and raises hope about the possibility of reconciliation and coexistence in Croatia in the future.** The students demonstrated that they would like to know more about the war related topics, that they are ready to research them, read about them on their own and that would like to approach them critically from more objective sources. Of equal importance are their claims stating that we shouldn't be quiet about these topics, or other controversial themes. They feel that it is necessary to deal with them in order to learn from them and prevent terrible events from history happening again. Finally, their belief that younger generations are more prone to accept Serbs and coexist with them, - despite recent researches illustrating that young people are more radical than their parents - raises hope that the Croatian youth will positively steer our society in the direction of peacebuilding, both in Croatia as well in the region.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this project was developed by Roberta Bačić, the curator of the "**Conflict Textiles**" collection (<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/>).

The collection consists of a large number of international textiles, which originated in Latin America and later spread to other parts of the world, in particular the countries affected by conflict and war.

The majority of the collection consists of *arpilleras*, a three dimensional embroidered tapestry from Chile. *Arpilleras* were mostly made by women, who wanted to denounce human rights violations and the repression they experienced during the Pinochet' dictatorship (1973-1990),

Homenaje a los caídos / Homage to the fallen ones

Chilean *arpillera*, anon., 1970s

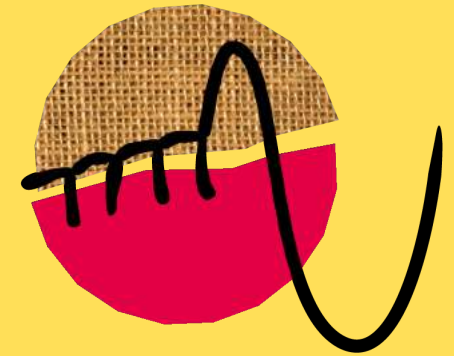
Photo Colin Peck © Conflict Textiles

Conflict Textiles collection.

Provenance Fátima Miralles, Spain

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fulltextiles/?id=9>

CONFLICT TEXTILES



During the three workshops of this project, the participants were divided into pairs and were given the task of choosing **one picture depicting Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s, during wartime**. After they discussed the chosen picture, they **devised a character to add to it**. The aim of the discussion was to reflect on the situation and the feelings of the people who lived in the places affected by the war.



After developing the character, giving him/her a name and creating his/her background story, **the participants then made the character**. Following an example, they created the body of the doll from tights and yarns.



Then, from the available textiles, they **made the clothing** and the different accessories. They also added hair, consisting of wool and yarns.



In the end, the dolls were taped to the pictures.







After making all the dolls and inventing their stories, **the participants presented them in pairs.**



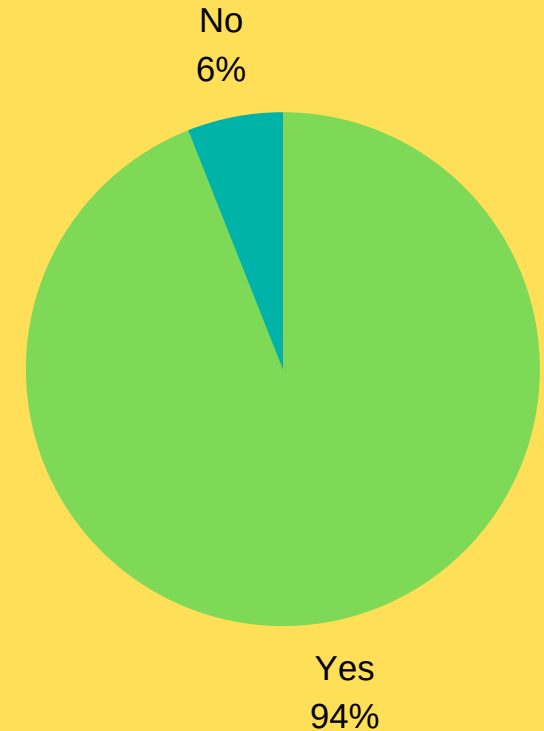
The method used proved to be really engaging and involving, as well as being a **creative and different way** to start a discussion about **controversial and painful war themes**. The participants appreciated being able to express their creativity while inventing the character and making the dolls and being able to participate actively in the workshop.

EVALUATIONS' RESULTS

1. *Are you satisfied with the workshop?*

If YES, what did you like the most?

- making the dolls
- the stories about the dolls and their presentations
- the discussion
- spending time together
- the method used, which was different from all the other lectures
- the promotion of peace
- it was educative and interesting
- the message that all people are equal and that we need to respect everybody's opinions
- the freedom and the respect of different opinions
- the friendly approach to everybody
- the organization and the friendly approach
- everything

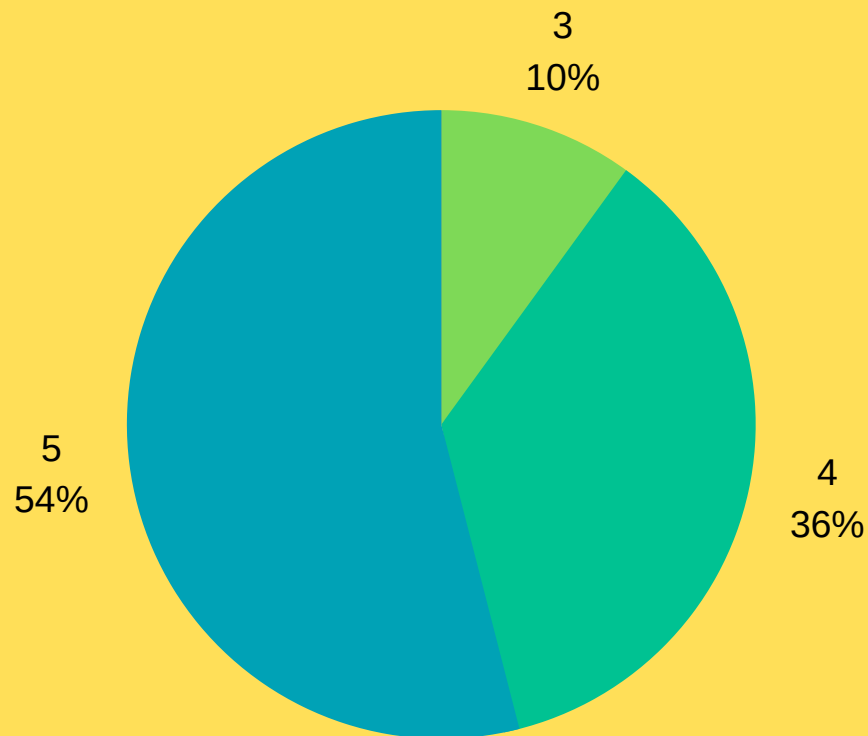


If NO, what would you change/make differently?

- the breaks were too long
- the information on the war weren't enough
- more actual stories from the war
- the discussion could have been more dynamic

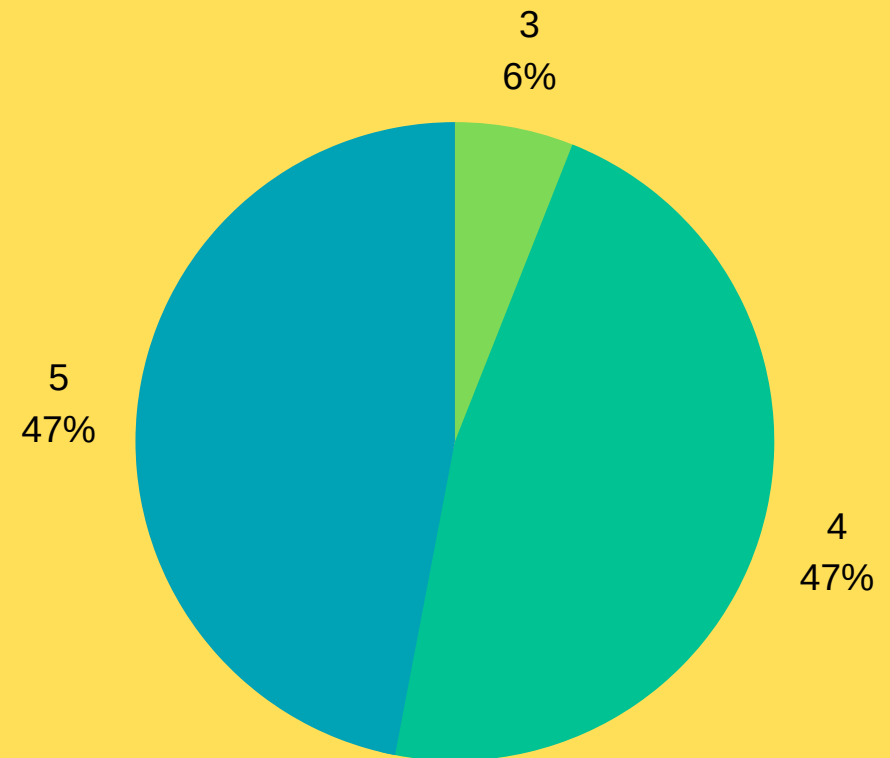
2. Are you satisfied with the methods used?

(Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is I am not satisfied, and 5 is I am very satisfied)



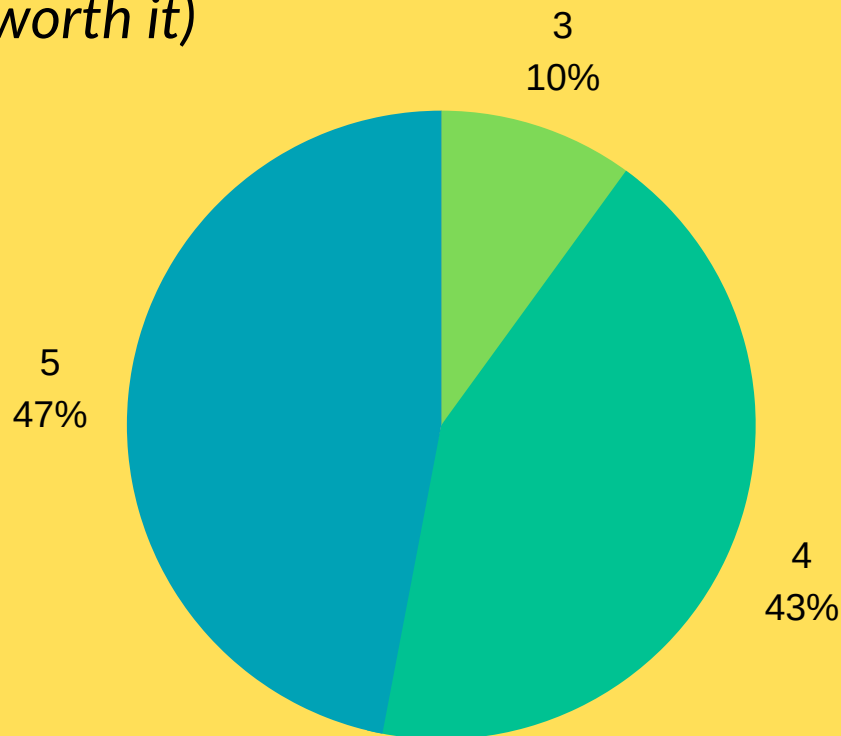
3. The methods used in the workshop were inspiring, motivating, different, interesting

(Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is they were not, and 5 they really were)



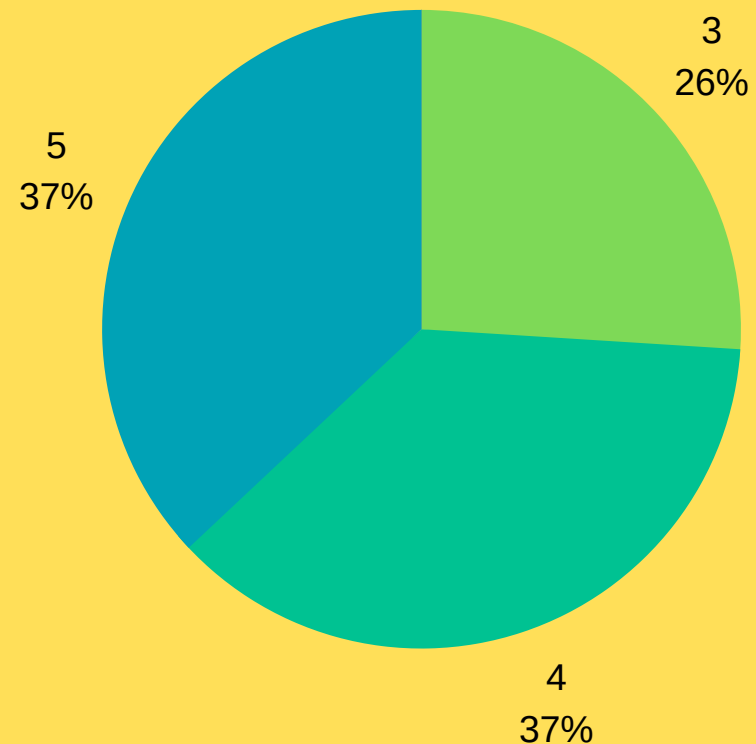
4. Do you think that the workshop was worth of participating in as it motivated you to reflect on the topic of the Homeland war?

(Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is it was not worth it, and 5 was really worth it)



5. Are you motivated to learn something more about the topics of the workshop after participating in the project?

(Numbers from 1 to 5, of which 1 is I am not at all, and 5 is I am really motivated)



SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The workshop participants **showed an interest in the themes related to the Homeland war** and the majority of them expressed the **desire to know more and learn more** about the topic. Even if they receive their first information in the family and have some ideas about the events from the family stories, they expect to receive more knowledge from school and formal education. Because of this, **it is important for the teachers in school to dedicate time to the war related topics**, to deal with them and to work on these themes with different methods and, above all, not to skip them, because they don't have time or are afraid of dealing with these controversial and disputed facts.

We believe that students, besides the bare war facts, should learn more about **the processes, the causes and the consequences of the war, in a broader regional context**, as well as about the potential other directions that the events could have taken. In addition, we believe that it is important to approach the subject **from a contemporary perspective** and to discuss the consequences that are still present and that have an impact on contemporary Croatian society. Because of this and considering the age of the students who do not remember the war events because they were born long after them, the teachers should focus on the issues of **transitional justice**, anti-war campaigns and **the process of peacebuilding**. By dealing with contemporary issues, the teachers will help the students to understand the relation between the contemporary situation of Croatia and the past events. In this way, it is possible to explain to them that history shouldn't be forgotten and left in the past because it has consequences on our present day society and on the country we are living in.

Furthermore, the students expressed **the desire and the need to speak and learn about the war related topics in a more objective way**. They are interested in using more objective and reliable sources of information, particularly from that era (newspaper, documents, documentaries). Because of this, we recommend to teachers to work on the resource materials in the classroom and to show students how to use them and how to **approach them in a critical way**. Because the participants expressed the interest and the need to research this topic on their own, it is even more important that they learn how to use this resource material, and how to distinguish objective from more biased sources. Showing students how to approach the resource material in a critical way is crucial because they will use this skill in everyday life. It is important to offer them different perspectives on the same event or topic, to enable them to learn how to look at the same issue from different sides and to be able to formulate their own opinion about it.

In addition, the students expressed interest in knowing more about **personal testimonies and experiences** from the people who participated in the war. Because of this, we think it would be really important for the students to make contact with people who can talk with them about their experiences. Ideally, these people should come from **different social backgrounds** and should have had different roles in the war. In this way, they can transmit to the students different perspectives on the events and their diverse experiences. The students are most interested in meeting people who were victims, who lost someone in the war and whose family member are still missing. In addition, we believe that it would be useful for the students to speak with people who, during the war time, were their age (kids and teenagers), because it is easier for them to relate to their situation and imagine themselves in the same position. Also, for the students, it is easier to be open and ask questions to younger people, who may have an informal approach and act more friendly with them.

In the workshop evaluations, the large majority of the participants stated to be satisfied with the activities, especially with the creation of the dolls, with the discussion and with spending time together with their classmates. The participants who answered that they were not completely satisfied, had expected a more formal approach to the workshop as well as more information and facts on the war. However, those participants who liked the workshop emphasized its informality and relaxed and friendly atmosphere as the most positive feature.

Because of the reasons stated, we recommend using the method outlined (pg. 24-27) in the classrooms. By using this methodology, which is **non-formal, engaging and creative** and, because of this, different and more interesting for the students, **it is possible to start a discussion about controversial and often difficult themes in an easier way**. In this way, the students will reflect, first of all, on the personal experiences of the people who lived during the conflict, their positions, actions and feeling; that is actually what the participants indicated as the most interesting theme for them and as the topic they would like to deal most with. In the classroom, after the presentations of the participants' works, it is possible to start a discussion about the war related topics, about the potentially unclear or unknown issues and terms, and about the reactions of the students to the method or to the works presented by their classmates. Also, the method presented can be a good introduction to working with source materials on the stories and personal experiences from the war time. Finally, it is a good preparation when meeting people who would like to tell their testimonies to the students.

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<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/>

Booklet with the results of the project

BUILDING PEACE: DISCUSSING THE TOPICS OF 1990S WAR, RECONCILIATION AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE WITH CROATIAN YOUTH

May - July 2019.

Udruga za razvoj građanske i političke kulture Karlovac Polka

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