Sociotechnical Systems Under Stress: Studying Disaster Mitigation in Turkey

by Louise K. Comfort, Director of Center for Disaster Management GSPIA, University of Pittsburgh

Turkey is well-known as a disaster-prone nation. The North Anatolian Fault crosses the country from east to west, with a mesh of earthquake faults branching in multiple directions. This natural hazard creates a pattern of seismic risk in varying degrees of intensity that extends to 97-percent of the country, generating an average of 1.1 earthquakes every year. Given this high degree of seismicity and a rapidly increasing population in areas of high risk, the Turkish Government has established a national agency, the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), to develop a systematic program of research, educational programs, and public preparedness for managing recurring threats from not only seismic risk, but all hazards. Through the Marie Curie International Researcher Staff Exchange Scheme, which is funded by the European Union Center of Excellence/European Studies Center in partnership with Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara, Turkey, I was invited to spend a month as a Visiting Scholar at the Disaster Mitigation and Implementation Research Center (DMIRC) at METU. The goal of this exchange was to develop a program of collaborative research and scholarly exchange on disaster mitigation

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In Review

Pizza and Politics

On Oct. 15, the school year’s first installment of the EUCE/ESC’s Pizza and Politics Graduate Lecture Series was held. GSPIA’s EU and the World Organization executive members spoke about their experiences interviewing policy-makers, EU civil servants, and visiting major institutions in Brussels and Luxembourg as participants in the EU in Brussels Program, co-sponsored by the EUCE/ESC and GSPIA.

Political Competence & Voting Behavior in European Parliament Elections

On Oct. 30, Dr. Nick Clark, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Susquehanna University, presented a lecture titled, “Political Competence & Voting Behavior in European Parliament Elections.” Dr. Clark’s lecture highlighted the state of the public’s knowledge about the European Union and how that knowledge influences voting behavior in European elections.

Conversations on Europe

On Oct. 21, the EUCE/ESC continued its monthly virtual roundtable series, Conversations on Europe, with a videoconference devoted to “1914 Revisited? The EU-US-Russia Triangle.” On-site panelists were (from left to right): Gregor Thum, professor in the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh, EUCE/ESC Director Ron Linden, who served as moderator, and Andrew Konitzer, Acting Director at the Center for Russian and East European Studies. Other expert panelists included: Frank Furedi, sociologist and author of First World War: Still No End in Sight, Mark Steinberg, Historian at the University of Illinois and co-editor of Eurasia Past and Present, and Carol Saivetz, Research Associate at Harvard’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies and a research affiliate at the Security Studies Program at MIT.
FUmbliNg FORwARD: boSNia aNd HERZegovina 20 yearS aFter war

by Jessica Kuntz, Boren Fellow, Fulbright Alumna
GSPIA, University of Pittsburgh

When I returned in July from a 10-month language acquisition Boren fellowship in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I anticipated the question that I would inevitably field from friends and family: How was it? The truth was, I had no idea where to begin. On one hand, I wanted to do my part to support America’s public diplomacy and paint a simplistic, cheerful snapshot of the country. To talk about the close and lasting friendships I had made, to pay homage to Bosnia’s much loved culinary speciality – cevapi – and to show my family photos of Sarajevo’s Ottoman style old town that predictably wins over foreigners with its ‘East meets West’ feel.

But to do so is to tell a half-truth. Because when I think of Bosnia, a lot of words come to mind. Many positive: kava, hospitality, friendship, mountains, warmth. I recall the feelings of hesitant hopefulness I felt observing the post-protest citizen-led forums in February, the sense of togetherness that characterized the public response to the floods last May. But many of the words are negative: corruption, greed, inefficiency, resignation. And above all, frustration. Frustration over the failure of opportunities to materialize. Frustration towards the sense of boredom that characterizes so much of life in Bosnia. Many days, I felt like I was spinning my wheels in Sarajevo.

It’s no secret that the many levels of Bosnian government are a casebook study in infighting, excessive bureaucracy and self-advancement. The Bosnian public places their hopes in the international community; the international community, in turn, places its hopes in the NGO community. Both are misplaced.

In the past 20 years, NGOs have proliferated in Bosnia, driven in no small part by the perceived easy money flowing from Western donors. Unfortunately, the vast majority of NGOs are rich in inspiring mission statements but poor in meaningful program results. Admittedly, NGOs are confined by their environment. But my own impression is that NGO leaders are sullied by the same self-advancing mentality for which politicians are condemned. Impressions are everything; getting that photo with Angelina Jolie while she is on her heartfelt humanitarian jaunt through Srebrenica proves decisively that you are a vital partner in the human rights scene. The uncontested decision by the citizen-led plenums to exclude NGOs is telling.

When I arrived in Sarajevo, a highly placed international official told me that the city has the second highest concentration of expats in the world (second only to Pristina, Kosovo). Judging by the volume of blue diplomatic license places cruising the streets of Sarajevo, he was correct. Quantity, however, does not generate quality results.

The reduced impact of the international community is partly intentional. Nearly 20 years after the signing of the Dayton Accords, the West is increasingly reluctant to continue its involvement in Bosnia. The EU in particular has tried to facilitate local/national empowerment, only to find that local elites do not share the

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10th Annual Graduate Student Conference on the EU: “Still United? The EU through Enlargement, Crisis, and Transformation”

On March 27-28, 2015, the University of Pittsburgh will host the 10th Annual Graduate Student Conference on the EU. In 10 years, among other problems, the EU has seen the rejection of European Treaty, the inability of European soft power to affect the Arab spring, and a weak response to Russian dismantling of Georgia and Ukraine, and the Eurozone crisis. After such a tumultuous decade, is there still cause for optimism? The Organizing Committee of the 10th Annual Graduate Student Conference on the European Union welcomes submissions from all disciplines and topics including, but not limited to, EU politics, governance, economics, history, security studies, institutions and behavior studies, as well as policy, enlargement, immigration, development, trade, and foreign policy. Papers addressing the theme of the conference will receive special consideration. Apply online on the EUSA website. **Deadline: Nov. 21.**

EUCE/ESC Faculty Grants for Research on Europe

The EUCE/ESC has grants available for faculty doing research related to Europe that is not focused on the European Union. The purpose of the European Studies Grant Competition is to develop faculty expertise on aspects of historical or contemporary Europe. Awards are intended to be used during summer, 2015, for travel and/or other expenses related to original research on some aspect of European politics, culture, society, or history. Awards for research-related activities typically range from $500 to $2,000. Applicants will be asked to show efforts to secure matching funds from their department or from external sources. To apply, visit www.ucis.pitt.edu/euce. For questions, contact Allyson Delnore, EUCE/ESC Associate Director, at adelnore@pitt.edu or 412-624-5404. **Deadline: March 31, 2015.**
This month, EUCE/ESC Newsletter Editor Gavin Jenkins interviewed Ryan Kearney, an undergraduate researcher for the Center. A senior at the University of Pittsburgh, Kearney is earning a West European Certificate. He majors in History and Anthropology and minors in Classics and Museum Studies. Kearney is a Verona, PA, native, who graduated from Riverview High School. This semester, Kearney is enrolled in the Museum Studies Exhibition Seminar, the goal of which is to create an exhibit of Gertrude Quastler’s artwork.

Q: What are your responsibilities as undergraduate researcher for the EUCE/ESC?

A: I have worked on several projects dealing with undergraduate student opportunities in Europe. For my first assignment, I researched internships (domestic and abroad) for undergraduate students that relate to European studies. Additionally, I have been developing a comprehensive guide for the various study abroad opportunities for students in Europe and accompanying scholarships that would aid the financial process of attending one of the programs. Finally, I have worked on other smaller projects, such as compiling guides of European-related community organizations in the Pittsburgh region and English as a Second Language (ESL) opportunities in European countries.

Q: How has working for the EUCE/ESC advanced your studies?

A: The aspect of this job that has impacted my studies most has been researching the various ESL opportunities in Europe. Previously, I had very little interest in teaching, but researching the different programs available has had a profound impact on my interests and studies. The opportunities not only allow you to gain experience through teaching, but also cultural exchanges, which sounds appealing. I am now interested in pursuing something similar following graduation.

Q: How has the Museum Studies Exhibition Seminar shaped your European studies?

A: I really enjoy this course. It allows students an opportunity to assist in the planning and implementation of an exhibition in the University Art Gallery here on campus. Along with other art history courses I have taken in conjunction with this seminar, I have been able to supplement my European studies with art history. This seminar in particular has had a significant impact on my European studies. Gertrude Quastler’s life and artistic story is one that is reflective on the changing European landscape during the 20th Century. The historical and political changes during this time period had a profound impact on her movement throughout Europe and the United States and showed in her artwork.

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Q: Tell me more about Quastler. Why should people interested in European studies visit the exhibit?

A: Gertrude Quastler is a relatively unknown European-born American artist. She’s best known for her prints, but she also painted, sculpted, and wrote poetry. Born in Vienna in 1909, Gertrude’s life can be characterized as tragic and heart-warming. She was a millinery apprentice in Paris before studying art. However, as art began to interest her, she contracted pulmonary tuberculosis and traveled home to Austria to recover. While recovering, she met her husband, Henry Quastler, a renowned radiologist in Austria.

Henry was commissioned by King Zog of Albania to train the country’s new radiologists. In Albania, Gertrude refocused on art and made it a form of therapy. She and her husband lived in the countryside. The landscapes she depicted in her work allowed her to transform her dark medical condition into liberating works of art and relieve her worries. Things began to change quickly for the Quastlers, however, as the European political landscape began to change. Benito Mussolini invaded Albania in April 1939, forcing King Zog and the Albanian government to flee the country. Because of this, Gertrude and Henry were also forced to flee. However, the two could not return to their native Austria, as Henry was Jewish, leading the couple to move to the United States.

Gertrude’s formal art training began to intensify following her emigration to the United States. Studying at Columbia University in 1940, she developed the diverse styles and techniques that defined her artwork. In the subsequent decade, she produced much of the work that survives today, including various woodblocks, which gained her notoriety. In 1950, her first woodblock was featured in Life and Time magazines. In 1963, Gertrude succumbed to her illness, leaving behind a legacy of distinct art, poetry, and letters.

Q: Has taking this course made you want to learn more about other European artists?

A: Yes, definitely. Gertrude’s story is so moving. She traveled around the world for most of her life, and much of her art and poetry is indicative of this. I would like to learn more about European artists with similar backgrounds and tendencies. €

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Western reform agenda. But some of the shackles on the international community are structural. Top down goals issued by Brussels, Washington and New York keep management overly focused on performance indicators. The scarcity of jobs creates an environment in which local staff feels compelled to make themselves indispensible to operations. Consequently, many resist sharing workload or asking for expert advice for fear it would diminish their own organizational importance. And, in the year-to-year contract environment in which they must exist, one can hardly blame them.

I am not inclined towards hand wringing. I pride myself on being oriented toward solutions and action. Time and again, I returned to the question: what can be done? But that begs a clarifying question: what can be done about what? What can we do to decrease corruption? To increase government accountability? To move the ball forward towards EU membership? The somewhat stale answer is to explain everything away in terms of ethnicity. To remove the Dayton-imposed quota system that permeates all levels of government would indeed force voters to focus on (currently nonexistent) policy variations between parties rather than differences in last names. Politicians, no longer secure in the knowledge that ethnic politics would keep them in power, would be forced to differentiate themselves and deliver. Perhaps equally important, scrubbing ethnicity from political structures would open the door to non-ethnic parties.

It would not be a panacea. Bosnia is nothing if not a tangled web and the world’s smartest policymakers have yet to develop a one-size-fits-all policy for such challenges as low economic growth and sky-high unemployment. But an accountable government that actively pursues what it perceives as Bosnia’s national interest would put the country on a far better path than the one it has trudged for the past 20 years.

Bosnia is no longer a post conflict country. True, physical reminders of the war remain. Survivors live with
how the process could be strengthened for other complex operations. We were fortunate to receive additional support from the EUCE/ESC, GSPIA, and METU to cover immediate travel costs. We also received a small RAPID grant from the National Science Foundation that allows us to continue this study with more systematic data collection and analysis.

On May 29, we made the nine-hour drive from Ankara to Soma, with a van and driver provided by METU. The next day was sobering. We interviewed personnel who had responsibilities for managing different aspects of this event. We questioned a psychosocial worker from Kizilay, the Turkish Red Crescent Society, who was working with families of the miners who were killed and who were struggling with the sudden trauma and profound loss. We spoke with the kaymakam, or mayor, of Soma, who was one of the first people to arrive at the mine after news of the fire reached municipal authorities. We also drove to Manisa to interview the district representative of AFAD, Turkey’s Disaster Management Agency, which was responsible for coordinating response operations and providing assistance to the families of the miners lost in the event. Returning from Manisa, we stopped at the cemetery where a number of the miners were buried: young faces smiling in photographs surrounded by helmets and flowers, their families standing by grieving.

On May 31, we met with the kaymakam again. He graciously gave a more detailed account of the municipality’s role in the search and rescue operations at the mine. He described the frantic convergence at the mine site: worried family members of the missing miners waiting for news, voluntary organizations bringing supplies, search and rescue teams who, despite their willingness to enter the mine, did not have the technical skills needed for mine rescue; news reporters seeking to capture the story. As the local official responsible for mobilizing response operations in a local disaster, the kaymakam notified the District Office of AFAD, triggering a national response that included the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Prime Minister’s Office, and Turkish Red Crescent Society. Yet, despite intense efforts to rescue the trapped miners, most had died within minutes from carbon monoxide poisoning, including five engineers from the Soma Mining Company who had rushed into the mine to investigate the fire.

The kaymakam also arranged access to the Soma Mine through the local Turkish military unit that was providing security at the mine site. As we were leaving the Soma mine, the kaymakam called and invited us to a briefing at the neighboring Imbat mine, where the chief mining engineer had led a search and rescue team to the Soma Mine and described in detail the events and timing on that tragic day. The size, scale, and complexity of mining operations were evident from the tangle of buildings, equipment, and machinery assembled to wrest the coal that is essential to Turkey’s energy production from these high, rolling hills of western Turkey.

During my four week stay in Turkey, I had many other interesting experiences and visited other university research centers and cities, from Ankara to Zonguldak. I am grateful to the EUCE/ESC and GSPIA at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as to the Disaster Mitigation and Implementation Research Center at METU, for making this trip possible. The friendships and research initiatives begun during my brief stay will surely prove to be a starting point for a thriving program of research and exchange between the two universities in building resilience for communities at risk. This exchange is continuing, as I have been invited to serve as an international member of the committee formed to review the current National Disaster Management Plan for AFAD. This review is supported by the World Bank in an international effort to strengthen disaster mitigation in Turkey. I have been participating on this committee virtually since September, 2014, and will return to Turkey for the final review and presentation of the revised National Disaster Management Plan to AFAD in February, 2015.
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the memories and the personal consequences. But the war and its legacy do not explain or excuse Bosnia’s present day problems. Nor does the Dayton Constitution, at least not by itself. The bulk of Bosnia’s problems are of its own making and elites’ refusal to implement policy solutions.

One might argue that the international community could have done more, done things differently, taken a more active role to steer Bosnia towards reform. There’s no doubt the story could have been different had the West micromanaged Bosnia down a reform path. But it is not the responsibility of the West to do so. It is the responsibility of those who call the country their own. Politicians are partly to blame for furthering their own interests at the expense of the nation. Voters are at fault for falling prey to apathy. NGOs have fallen short by prioritizing grant money and reputation over results. The international community is not free of blame, but the future of Bosnia lies with its citizens. Even leaving aside the sense of being owed by the EU for their delayed intervention in the war, the hard truth is that the world is a troubled place. Bosnia, simply, doesn’t make the top ten list of the worries of world leaders.

Immensely frustrating though the structural obstacles often were, I held to my belief that individuals, more so than institutions, create history. Despite the immense obstacles they face, I came to know many Bosnian citizens who are educated, passionate, and creative. They too expressed frustration with the failure of their political system, whether they did so through political disengagement or by participating in DeTocqueville-style plenums in the aftermath of the February protests. They – be they young or old, employed or not, Muslim or Christian – are Bosnia’s best hope.

We in the U.S. have our own words for that elusive concept that can make or break democracy: public service, volunteerism, civic engagement. It is the essence, rather than the phrase, that matters. As the war recedes further into the past, it remains to be seen whether it will germinate in Bosnia. €