

# CrossFit: A Tool for Developing Social Capital in Post-Violent Conflict Nations?

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## Abstract

More than twenty years since the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains a nation divided. Critically deficient in social trust, the country is experiencing an imbalance in the various forms of social capital precluding development of diverse horizontal and vertical relationships. Grassroots organisations, in particular sporting ones, have proven a useful avenue in helping build such relationships by uniting diverse groups over a common point of interest. However, one sport remains hereto explored for this potential—CrossFit. Remediating this deficiency, this project relies on CrossFit Sarajevo as a case study and seeks to explore whether this community has generated social capital and if so, what types. Relying on semi-structured interviews with thirteen of the club's members, it shows that CrossFit can indeed build high levels of social capital and thereby contribute to development of diverse relationships in post-violence contexts. It also highlights the importance of encouraging behavior conducive to the development of inclusive norms and the need for vigilance against a recurring slide towards imbalance in social capital. Ultimately, these findings suggest further studies of grassroots organisations harboring potential for social capital generation—such as CrossFit clubs—and urge more-robust exploration of their permeability and influence across post-violent conflict societies.

**Keywords:** Social capital, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, community-development, social trust, grassroots organisations, sport, CrossFit.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Founded in August 2014 as the first official CrossFit club in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), CrossFit Sarajevo (hereafter CFS) sought to contribute to the plight of community-development in a post-violent conflict society still affected unequal power in decision-making or resource distribution, lack of social justice, and inequitable opportunities for various minority groups. That BiH is such a society—plagued first and foremost by ethnic divisions exploited by powerful elites for their own ends—has been documented by many. This division has left the country in a perpetual state of competition between the various groups encouraging them to continue “fighting for statehood; only their means of securing territory and national survival have changed” (Woodward, 1997, p. 29).

Others have highlighted that one consequence of such identity politics and divisions in BiH is a deficiency in social capital—broadly defined as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society

by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). Of particular interest for post-violence context such as BiH is the notion of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. The former strengthens bonds in close family and friendship groups with similar demographic characteristics but can in ethnically diverse environments threaten democratic principles through preferential treatment of the in-group. Bridging, on the other hand, can help nurture and support differences through weak horizontal ties between diverse groups. Linking social capital creates vertical ties between the broader population and those in positions of influence and can reduce elitism and centralization of power.

Since the turn of the century, a burgeoning body of literature has shown extensive links between sporting organisations and the creation of social capital. However, most studies focus on sporting organisations that are voluntary and not-for-profit while the effects of sporting businesses on the creation of social capital remain largely unexplored. This is particularly so for the sport of CrossFit, which has been the subject of

social capital studies for only a limited number of authors. Importantly, as the fastest growing fitness regimen in the world—widely recognised for its ability to build communities—no studies to date appear to have explored its utility in building social capital in post-violence contexts. Hence, the aim of this project is to explore whether CrossFit—using CFS as a case study—can be considered a useful tool for the cultivation of social capital in nations recovering from violent ethnic conflict. As such, it is guided by two central questions:

1. Has CFS generated social capital between its members and if so, in what way?
2. If CFS was successful in generating social capital, what types of social capital did it generate and what are their effects?

By answering these questions, this project seeks to contribute towards an improved understanding of the potential of CrossFit to create social capital in post-violent contexts. Ultimately, and to quote a prominent voice on the subject, “[i]f social capital is amenable to being created, it would not just *explain* differences in success between projects or between communities. It would *contribute* to success” (Uphoff, 2000, pp. 227, emphasis added).

## 1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### 1.1 Setting the context

More than two decades after the war that left over 100,000 dead (Tabeau & Bijak, 2005, p. 207) and nearly half the country’s population internally or externally displaced (Belloni, 2001, p. 164; Dahlman & Tuathail, 2005, p. 644), BiH is no longer a multi-ethnic state but a construct of coexisting ethnically homogenised ‘nation states’ (Divjak & Pugh, 2008; Marko, 2000; Ognjenović & Jozelić, 2017, p. 307). Bringing the devastating war between 1992 and 1995 to an end, BiH was partitioned by the General Framework Agreement for Peace, commonly known as the Dayton Peace Accords (hereafter DPA), which declared 51 percent of the country as the Bosniak- and Croat-dominated Federation of BiH (hereafter FBiH), and 49 percent as the Serb-dominated Republika Srpska (hereafter RS). Importantly, the Constitution of BiH—Annex 4 of the DPA—enshrined ethnicity into the structural fabric of the nation by proclaiming that the country’s three presidents must come from the three ‘constituent peoples’—Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats (United Nations General Assembly, 1995)—thus embedding ethnicity as a founding pillar of the nation (Belloni, 2009, p. 360). This resulted in the continuation of wartime social and political fragmentation, as well as competition along ethnonational lines, maintained largely by the country’s leaders who continue to profit—whether financially or through retention of power and influence—from these imposed divisions (Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Leonard et al., 2016, p. 6; Moll, 2013, p. 911; Sekulić et al., 2006, p. 801).

Although silencing the guns, the DPA were only ever meant to be temporary agreements, intended to halt the killing under terms agreeable to all sides (Gordy, 2016). It was hoped that the absence of violence, and by awarding territorial gains and advantages acquired during the war, a path towards reconciliation may be forged (Gordy, 2016). Unfortunately, the commonly propagated and accepted points of contradiction between the conflicting parties in BiH—ethnic supremacy in employment, welfare and political influence; and fear of being an ethnic minority alongside a hostile majority (Eriksen, 2001)—remain a source of competing truths between the belligerents (Moll, 2013). As elucidated by Clark (2009), this heightened focus on dominance and competition over the national agenda has frozen the conflict in a state of what Galtung (1969) calls ‘negative peace’—the absence of physical, but the continuation of structural, violence. Since the end of the war, the country’s elites, as well as international actors, continue to merely balance animosities to prevent a return to physical violence, while neglecting the need to set conditions for national unity, accountability, community-development and long-term reconciliation between different groups (Clark, 2009). The result is a divided society dominated by identity politics where different ethnicities merely coexist and national or local forums that promote a single supra-ethnic community remain limited (Clark, 2009).

These structurally imposed divisions and segregation—coupled with the war itself—have resulted in the absolute weakening of social bonds and solidarity between the nation’s ethnic groups. In short, “social trust is virtually non-existent” (UNDP & ORI, 2007, p. 2). Highlighting particularly the diminished intergroup networks, surveys conducted across BiH indicate a persistently high level of suspicion towards the ‘other’ (Haider, 2011), leading to an overreliance on bonds with those of similar demographic characteristics, most commonly family and close friends (UNDP, 2009). The conclusion of this, and similar research (Belloni, 2001; Håkansson & Hargreaves, 2004; Pickering, 2006; UNDP, 2007; UNDP & ORI, 2007; Whitt, 2010), is that greater effort and resources should be directed towards fora capable of creating bridging and linking social ties (UNDP, 2009). In particular, they challenge academia to explore the growing community development, peacebuilding and interethnic reconciliation work carried out by local grassroots organisations, as these—unlike the numerous failed top-down approaches (Belloni, 2001; Greener, 2011; Kříž & Čermák, 2014; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Mitchell, 2010; van Leeuwen et al., 2012)—may pose an innovative approach towards the kind of relationship building necessary for the successful resolution of inter-group conflict (Lederach, 1997;

Schulz, 2008). At its core, this project aims to answer that call.

## 1.2 Social Capital in BiH

Over the past two decades, the notion of social capital has gained increasing prominence in conceptual and policy debates concerned with political participation, social exclusion and economic development (Evans & Syrett, 2007). Recognised as a public good, it has become particularly relevant for researchers seeking to understand how the (re)building of interpersonal trust, social relations, institutional confidence and associational membership can contribute to post-violent conflict community-building and political transitions (Cox, 2009). Kaldor (2012) emphasizes that one of the most-damaging impacts of modern conflict is the destruction of social networks and relationships within local communities. Hence, as also argued by Colletta and Cullen (2000), peacebuilding and conflict transformation do not merely rely on rebuilding of infrastructure, economic stabilization and functional government institutions, but necessitate the rebuilding of social capital crucial for strengthening social cohesion, managing diversity, preventing return to violent conflict and sustaining peace. Put succinctly, “[r]econciliation itself is a process of rebuilding social capital” (Colletta & Cullen, 2000, p. 121).

More than two decades since the signing of the DPA, BiH remains a country where social networks and relationships may still be viewed through a post-violent conflict lens (UNDP, 2009). It is a country where social trust between citizens as well as in institutions is abysmally low, and where four out of ten citizens—and two thirds of those below 30—would emigrate if they had the chance (UNDP & ORI, 2007). This lack of trust manifests in the majority of Bosnians seldom or never spending time with people of other ethnicities (UNDP, 2009). The Pew Research Center (2013) found, albeit for only one ethnic group, that 93 percent of BiH Muslims said that all or most of their close friends are also Muslim. These findings indicate an absence of the necessary conditions for inter-group reconciliation—restoration and rebuilding of relationships between conflict parties (Lederach, 1997). Importantly, although ethnicity is the most obvious fault line, it is certainly not the only one. Minority groups such as youth, children and people with disabilities also experience severe marginalization, resulting in more than 50 percent of the BiH population experiencing some form of exclusion. Notably, levels of exclusion increase when gender is accounted for (UNDP, 2009).

Further, there appears to be a close relationship between social capital and economic development (Evans & Syrett, 2007). Improved relations and cooperation between diverse groups reduces the need for cumbersome procedures and bureaucracy, resulting in reduced business transaction costs. Additionally,

improved communication across horizontal as well as vertical links reduces the time and bureaucratic complexity of starting a business or enforcing contracts (UNDP, 2009). According to the World Bank (2018), BiH is currently ranked 86th out of 190 nations for the ease of doing business. Although this is a considerable improvement to previous years, a part of this assessment is a measure of how easy it is to start a business. On this scale, BiH currently ranks 175th (World Bank, 2018), which is emblematic of the bureaucracy plaguing the nation’s institutions, influenced in part by the complexity of the DPA as well as by diminished levels of social trust (UNDP, 2009). These structural deficiencies are exacerbated by an excessive reliance on *štela*, a term best described in English as nepotism, favoritism and clientelism (UNDP, 2009). It relates to the intentional creation of benefits, preferential treatment or ‘setting up’ of situations through personal connections that would otherwise not be available to an individual or a group. As a result, nearly 95 percent of people in BiH report that having *štela* is always or sometimes useful for obtaining a job, and 91 percent report that it is always or sometimes important in getting access to authorities (UNDP, 2009). This imbalance perpetuates key components of structural violence—exclusion, inequality and indignity (Galtung, 1969)—and raises the risk of conflict escalation (Colletta & Cullen, 2000). Hence, the absence of social capital inhibits the creation of pluralist relations and social trust (UNDP & ORI, 2007), and its development should be seen as a critical necessity.

## 1.3 Sport, Social Capital and CrossFit

The nexus between sport and social capital development is well established (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Auld, 2008; Darcy, Maxwell, Edwards, Onyx, & Sherker, 2014; Seippel, 2005, 2006; Tacon, 2013; Tonts, 2005). Although all of these authors focus on not-for-profit sporting organisations, other researchers have shed light on the impact socially focused for-profit organisations, such as CFS, can have on social capital creation (Madhooshi, Hossein, & Samimi, 2015; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007; Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010). Stimulated in part by an increasing societal expectation to look beyond self-interest (Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010), as well as a growing appreciation for social enterprises—defined here as businesses whose commercial transactions ensure its sustainability, yet whose mission is to alleviate a social challenge (Marshall, 2011; Sabeti, 2011)—such organisations have proven capable of generating bonding, bridging and linking social capital (Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010). Their existence is particularly important to life in BiH, where, according to UNDP (2009), less than one in five people are members of any kind of club or association and where a misunderstanding exists at the policy-level about the potential of such spaces for the creation of diverse ties.

While CFS is one such organization, scientific research into CrossFit—recognised as the fastest growing fitness regimen (Dawson, 2015)—remains sparse, although incipient (Claudino et al., 2018). Self-acclaimed as the ‘Sport of Fitness’, CrossFit is a form of rigorous and often-intense exercise, comprised of various components of Olympic weightlifting, gymnastics and cardiovascular training (Glassman, 2002). CrossFit gyms are simple in appearance and usually comprise of large open spaces located inside industrial or warehouse-like facilities, earning them the apt title of a ‘box’. Since its inception in 2000, it has experienced a phenomenal growth and adoption rate across the globe, in part due to its unique business model. Independent entrepreneurs need only attain and maintain a CrossFit certification, submit an application and pay an annual registration fee in order to affiliate (Woolf & Lawrence, 2017). As of March 2019, there were nearly 14,000 boxes right around the world (CrossFit, 2019).

Setting it apart from regular gyms, there are no exercise machines in CrossFit boxes, but rather free-standing equipment such as Olympic weightlifting bars, kettlebells, pullup bars, gymnastics rings, climbing ropes, sand-bags and skipping ropes. Exercise is done in a coach-led group and all participants complete the same ‘Workout of the Day’ (WOD). Prescribing to its maxim of “constantly varied functional movements performed at high intensity” (CrossFit, 2018), WODs are different every day and are usually quite challenging. What makes CrossFit appealing to all fitness and ability levels is the mantra that the “needs of an Olympic athlete and our grandparents differ by degree, not kind” (CrossFit, 2002, p. 10). Hence, every workout can be ‘scaled’ with lighter weights or movement modifications allowing even a complete novice to partake in the WOD. This philosophy also allows for the participation of individuals with impairments, disabilities and injuries, many of whom reportedly regained their self-esteem and a sense of worth by their involvement in the sport (Cecil, 2002). This open and egalitarian approach to fitness has allowed CrossFit to attract individuals from all walks of life.

In their systematic review and meta-analysis, Claudino et al. (2018) confirmed a higher sense of community, satisfaction and motivation among participants in CrossFit. This analysis was built, in part, on the findings by Pickett, Goldsmith, Damon, and Walker (2016) and Whiteman-Sandland, Hawkins, and Clayton (2016), but was also confirmed independently by Woolf and Lawrence (2017), Brogan, Benson, and Bruner (2017) and Dawson (2015), who collectively found that the dedicated focus on community-development in CrossFit was a key contributor to these results. In all studies, participants reported that training at a box presented opportunities for socializing and the making of new friends. Additionally, unique to this

environment was the near-expected mutual cheering-on and encouragement between participants, helping them to finish a WOD. Unlike some might expect, this experience is not viewed negatively by members, but rather as a positive attribute of CrossFit (Dawson, 2015). According to Brogan et al. (2017) and Dawson (2015), being watched by your peers creates an expectation within the observer, and an obligation within the athlete, to complete the workout. As such, individuals within a box influence, or perhaps help, each other to achieve their common goal—completing the assigned WOD—contributing to a greater sense of community. That sport is capable of creating such communities through a common purpose is a finding also shared by Darcy et al. (2014)

Further, and of particular relevance to this project, Whiteman-Sandland et al. (2016) have shown that CrossFitters report significantly higher levels of bonding and bridging social capital, as well as significantly higher levels of community belongingness, when compared to traditional gyms. Highlighting the potential negative impact of the sport, Dawson (2015) has questioned whether CrossFit should be considered a ‘cult’ or rather as a ‘reinventive institution’, offering individuals voluntary self-transformation and identity reconstruction. Although her findings suggest the latter, this research does raise the question of whether CrossFit faces the risk of building excessive amounts of bonding social capital, thus creating strong out-group antagonism. Conversely, however, Heinrich et al. (2015) have shown the positive effects of CrossFit in cancer survivors, and Cecil (2002) the potential for recovery of substance abusers, demonstrating its potential for bridging social capital between different groups within a community. Further, Knapp (2015) has found a committed effort by the organization towards gender inclusivity, as well as an additional finding of inclusivity towards people with physical impairments. Consequently, CrossFit’s alleged ability to build cohesive and diverse communities makes it a potentially valuable contributor to social capital development in post-violent conflict contexts and worthy of research.

#### 1.4 Impact of Grassroots Organisations

Underpinning all of the social capital research discussed thus far is the notion of relationships and contact between individuals. Particularly relevant for the BiH post-violence context, Lederach (1997) reminds us that reconciliation “is built on mechanisms that engage the sides of a conflict with each other as humans-in-relationship” (p. 26). The ongoing ethnic segregation and homogenization of entities continues to reduce the likelihood of such engagements in BiH. It is here that grassroots organisations such as citizen associations and sporting clubs have proven helpful (Pickering, 2006; UNDP, 2009). While not a new idea, their importance has gained prominence since the 1990s, largely due to the continuous failure of the



internationally-sanctioned ‘top-down’ approaches in successfully developing cohesive communities in places such as Somalia, Rwanda and BiH (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015). Other authors (Belloni, 2001; Greener, 2011; Križ & Čermák, 2014; Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015; Mitchell, 2010; van Leeuwen, Verkoren, & Boedeltje, 2012) have highlighted that such approaches failed because they excluded from the process the very people they were designed to help—the local population. Conversely, the essence of the ‘bottom-up’ approach is grounded in the belief that those affected by conflict should be considered a valuable resource in peace- and society-building, rather than merely recipients of it (Lederach, 1997). As summarized by Leonardsson and Rudd (2015), it is only through local production and reproduction of peace by those living in post-conflict contexts that its long-term survival can eventuate. “Outside actors can lend valuable support but are never more than bystanders in decisions on what type of peace is to be built” (pp. 826-827).

Albeit slow and gradual, grassroots initiatives have already proven a viable avenue for the creation of diverse engagement and relationship-building in BiH. One example is the ‘Association of Mushroom Gatherers and Nature Lovers’ in Mrkonjić Grad. Bringing together a diverse range of people in terms of ethnicity, gender and age on an issue of common interest, the association successfully facilitates the creation of bridges between those otherwise divided. Frequented by members from FBiH and RS, its focus is the preservation of nature and sharing of knowledge, but a critical consequence is the creation of diverse networks (UNDP, 2009). Further prominent examples of inclusive associations are the ‘Oasis Association’ in Sarajevo and the ‘Association of Persons with Muscular Dystrophy’ in Doboј, whose aims are to improve the lives of people living with disabilities. Tackling some of the issues of exclusion faced by their members, both associations are building national and international networks of supporters and thereby creating not only economic opportunities for people with disabilities, but increasing their sense of wellbeing, independence and belonging to broader society (UNDP, 2009). Another well-known example is the ‘Open Fun Football Schools’ that was popularized firstly in BiH and later in other countries in the region. Focused on building bridges between children of different ethnicities, it has been remarkably successful in not only bringing children closer, but has encouraged “families and communities to cheer for them, and their local football clubs and town leaders to cooperate so that they can play” (Gasser & Levinsen, 2004, p. 470). Grassroots organisations such as these facilitate an increase of inter-group knowledge of the Other, and consequently lead to a positive shift in mutual attitudes by reducing prejudice and stereotyping (Schulz, 2008).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

### 2.1 Defining Social Capital

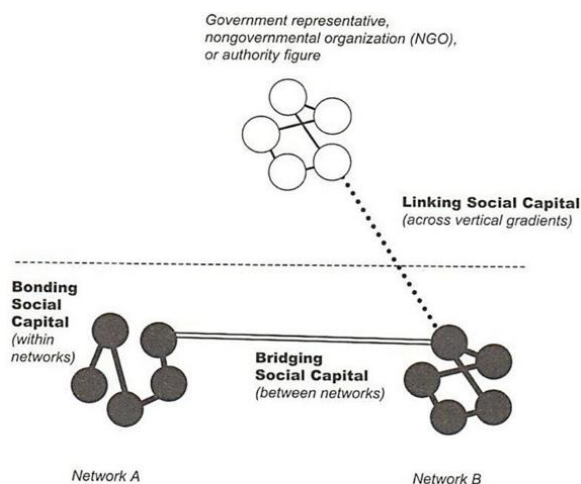
While there is no single, universally-accepted definition of social capital (Spaaij & Westerbeek, 2010), a number of common dimensions exist. Bourdieu (1985), as one of the first to systematically consider social capital (Häuberer, 2011), highlights its collective utility and defines it as membership in a group, “which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu, 1985, pp. 248-249). Importantly, the more extensive the formal and informal networks are between individuals, the more those individuals are collectively capable of achieving (Coleman, 1988). This collective feature of social capital manifests through the conduct of favors between members of a network. This, much like for Bourdieu, creates ‘credit slips’ that can be mobilized through reciprocal action. It establishes an ‘exchange market’ within the network that is founded on the expectations of those providing ‘credit’ that it will be repaid and the obligations by those receiving it, to reciprocate in kind (Coleman, 1988).

Putnam (2000) builds upon the work of Coleman (Häuberer, 2011) and defines social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). He continues that, “[t]rustworthiness lubricates social life” (p. 21) and facilitates a feeling of community, the conceptual cousin of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, Putnam (2000) also introduces two kinds of social capital—bonding and bridging. The former he describes as “sociological superglue” that brings people together who are similar in important aspects such as ethnicity, age, gender and social class. In other words, bonding social capital is considered exclusive and inward-looking and useful to strengthen identities, mobilize solidarity and improve communication, understanding and trust within homogenous groups (Pickering, 2006; Putnam, 2000; UNDP, 2009). These types of dense networks encourage social and psychological support towards members of that community, resulting in strong in-group loyalty. However, while bonding social capital can have significant positive effects, its strong in-group focus can create strong out-group antagonism (Putnam, 2000).

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, Putnam (2000) describes as the “sociological WD-40” (pp. 22-23) that is inclusive and serves as a conduit between disparate identities or communities. Drawing a connection with Granovetter (1973), who showed that weak ties between individuals from different social circles and backgrounds are indispensable to their “opportunities and to their integration into communities” (p. 1378), Putnam (2000) argues that

bridging social capital can generate broader identities and inter-group reciprocity. Bridging relationships are produced through acquaintanceships, loose friendships and working relations, but greatly contribute towards diversity and heterogeneity (UNDP, 2009). According to Pickering (2006), voluntary organisations help facilitate such bridging as they allow a diverse spectrum of citizens to congregate over issues of common interest—be they political, religious, social or cultural—and thereby facilitate increased communication and interaction, leading to the development of relationships of varying familiarity.

Building on these two types of social capital, a third conceptual refinement has since been introduced—linking social capital. Defined by Szreter and Woolcock (2004) as “norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society” (p. 655). In other words, it represents a vertical link between members of a community to those outside it, who are in positions of authority, power and influence such as government employees, bankers, police officers or social workers (World Bank, 2000). In short, while bonding social capital creates strong ties with in-group members and bridging social capital creates weak horizontal ties across different groups but of similar demographics, linking social capital highlights ties between disparate groups from dissimilar backgrounds with different gradients of authority and influence. The relationship between the three types of social capital is presented in Figure 1 below.



**Fig-1: Bonding, bridging, and linking social capital**  
(Aldrich, 2012, p. 34)

## 2.2 Working Definition of Social Capital

A working definition of social capital is difficult to attain due to its many and varied applications (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). However, in an attempt to capture the main components, this project relies on an eclectic definition of social capital, components of which are briefly described below.

- Social trust between members. While there is an ongoing debate about whether social trust creates or is a product of social capital (Lin, 2008; UNDP & ORI, 2007), there is little argument that it is an essential element of it as it facilitates the generation of relationships that bind individuals and societies together (Coleman, 1988; CONSCISE, 2003; Putnam, 1993, 2000; UNDP, 2009).
- Reciprocity and mutuality. The notion of cooperation between individuals is a feature apparent in most, if not all, discussions of social capital. Most notably, Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000) emphasize the benefits of ‘favor-trading’ for the individual as well as the group as a whole. This benefit stems from the accumulation of trust as a result of this ongoing ‘exchange’ between members of a community (Colletta & Cullen, 2000), which establishes norms of behavior where both actors—the helper and the helped—have an understanding of their mutual expectations and obligations (Coleman, 1988).
- Formal and informal networks. Formal social networks involve official membership within a community, while informal social networks imply a willingness by members to engage outside of defined parameters (Onyx & Leonard, 2010). It is through the formation of both formal and informal networks that information-sharing, in particular, contributes to the creation of friendships and acquaintances, and ultimately, social capital (CONSCISE, 2003).
- Balance between bonding, bridging and linking. The three types of social capital are not mutually exclusive but rather coexist to varying degrees, and it is the varied combinations of bonding, bridging and linking that give communities their uniqueness but also determine their wellbeing (OECD, 2001; UNDP, 2009; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Maintaining a healthy balance between them facilitates the (re)building of relationships, which, as Lederach (1997) highlights, are essential for inter-group conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

These components of social capital form the foundation of this research and have shaped the ultimate presentation of its findings.

## 3. METHOD

### Research Strategy

This study adopted an inductive approach. Accordingly, the author aligned qualitatively-interpreted data with theoretical concepts after the data collection process was completed (Bryman, 2012, p. 111). Hence, from an epistemological perspective, the study assumed an interpretivist position. That is, as categorised by Bryman (2012, p. 28), the project sought to understand, rather than merely explain, human behaviour. This implies that the author aspired to shed light on how members of a particular social group—

CFS members—interpreted the world around them. Taking this stance called for the exploration of data without relying on preconceived theoretical perspectives, allowing unexpected findings to arise (Bryman, 2012, p. 31). Additionally, it is pertinent to highlight that this study is indeed a third interpretation, as the author is “providing an interpretation of others’ interpretations” (Bryman, 2012, p. 31), which is subsequently explained through an appropriate theoretical framework—social capital. This fact, without diminishing the knowledge derived from the study, is a recognised limitation of such qualitative research, as it relies on the worldview of a limited representative sample that is later interpreted and theoretically-categorised by the author (Bryman, 2012, p. 31). Lastly, the ontological position assumed in this study, relying on the theoretical framework of social capital, is that of constructivism. It is the constructed understanding of phenomena by participants and its associated meaning that studies such as this one seek to unravel (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8).

### Research Design

To answer the central and sub-questions, this research relied on interviews with thirteen members of CFS. As the purpose of this study was to listen to and interpret a story within its own context and gain insight into the lived experience of the participants, interviews were deemed the most appropriate method, as suggested by Jacob and Furgerson (2012, p. 1). Due to the inductive nature of this research, semi-structured interviews were employed to allow for a fluid exploration of topics, which have provided additional—and at times unexpected—dimensions. Further, and noting the author’s familiarity with all participants (see Section 5.8 below), using a less-formalised approach allowed for the maintenance of a natural and conversational interaction during the interviews.

Importantly, although a survey would have provided a more numerous sample for the study, it would not have allowed for the exploration of topics in depth, which this study relied on. Further, and noting that the study sought to understand the world as experienced by CFS members without a preconceived idea of findings, structured interviews would have negated the opportunity to shift focus on unexpected topics of interest. The same applies for participant observation, which might have provided greater context to topics discussed, but unlike interviews, it is not a method that allows participants to self-consciously reflect on their understanding of the world. As the participants’ responses resided in the realm of individual perceptions, any approach restricting the depth of engagement was discarded in favour of the flexibility of semi-structured interviews.

While a mixed-method approach using semi-structured interviews followed up by a web-based survey was considered, time and resource limitations

made this option unfeasible. Although such an approach may have helped to confirm interview findings, it was not deemed detrimental to the aims of this project that, in the first place, sought to explore the ability of CrossFit to build social capital in a post-violent conflict context. As the existence of social capital, and the aforementioned dimensions used to assess it (see Section 4.2 above), is largely a matter of personal perception, it is assessed that semi-structured interviews allowed for the achievement of this aim.

### Participants

Seeking to interview a representative sample of CFS members, the study’s participants covered a broad demographic spectrum. To explore whether any major differences in perceptions exist based on a member’s duration of membership, participants who joined within one month, six months, one year and one and a half years of opening were interviewed. Aiming to replicate current CFS gender representation, which according to the club’s owner is a 30-percent-female to 70-percent-male ratio, four participants were female (31 percent of sample) and nine were male (69 percent of sample). Additionally, as the study sought to also explore whether a difference in perceptions exists between the club’s management and clients, four participants were coaches, one of whom is also the owner of the box. Ensuring a broad age-group representation, participant’s mean age at the time of interviews was 31 years. As a way to disguise the participant’s identity, all were categorised according to the age brackets of 20-29, 30-39 and 40-49. Lastly, seeking to capture a broad vocational representation, participants included students, self-employed and wage workers. It is assessed by the author that these participants are representative of the club’s diversity in age, vocation and gender. All aforementioned data are captured in Table 1 below.

**Table-1: Participant Demographic Data**

Participant	Gender	Age group
A	M	20-29
B	M	20-29
C	M	20-29
D	F	20-29
E	M	20-29
F	F	20-29
G	M	20-29
H	F	20-29
I	M	30-39
J	M	30-39
K	M	30-39
L	M	40-49
M	F	40-49

Due to the sensitivities surrounding ethnic denomination, detailed in Section 5.8, and to protect the privacy of participants, their ethnic denomination is

presented separately in Table 2 below. Additionally, the ethnic composition of the Canton of Sarajevo, from the final results of the 2013 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in BiH (BHAS, 2016, p. 55), has been added for representative comparison.

**Table-2: Participant Ethnic Identification**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Canton of Sarajevo</b>
Bosniak	5 (38.4%)	346,575 (83.8%)
Croat	2 (15.4%)	17,520 (4.2%)
Serb	2 (15.4%)	13,300 (3.2%)
Other	3 (23.1%)	28,075 (6.7%)
Undeclared	1 (7.7%)	7,250 (1.8%)

As evidenced by the figures in Table 2, a statistical cantonal-representative sample was not achieved although given the necessarily small sample size, this would always be difficult. However, in terms of broad patterns such as the biggest ethnic group and representation of minorities, the project engaged members of CFS who represent the broad mosaic of different ethnicities. Further, as the purpose of this project was to explore the creation of social capital inside a particular social group—members of CFS—and subsequently its utility in building, among others, inter-ethnic relations, this is not considered a deficiency. Importantly, all ethnic identifications represented in the national census were also represented within the participants providing diverse insights and thereby meeting the study's intent.

### Interview Setting

Eleven interviews were conducted in Sarajevo between 15-20 December 2017 in secluded and comfortable environments, conducive to private and at times sensitive topics. Six interviews occurred in quiet cafes in Sarajevo known to both the author as well as participants. Another two interviews were conducted in private and secluded areas at the participant's place of work, while three interviews were conducted at the author's private residence in Sarajevo. A further two interviews were conducted on 19 and 22 April 2018 via Skype. These interviews were conducted as a follow-up to interesting findings, as well as due to the frequent mention of one participant by several others during interviews conducted in December 2017. The average duration of interviews was 46 minutes, with the shortest lasting 27 and the longest 67 minutes. To allow participants the freedom to construct the meaning of a situation, all principal questions were open-ended, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 8). Every interview commenced with rapport-building and general discussion to put the participants at ease.

All interviews were recorded to ensure, in the first place, accuracy of data and subsequent transcriptions. Although conscious of the 'observer's paradox', which suggests that a recording device inhibits researchers from observing interviewees in their

natural state (Labov, 1972), as the author is not an outsider but rather peer-like (see Section 5.8 below), personal stories quickly unfolded, allowing the speakers to, as inferred by Labov (1972, p. 115), 'forget' the recording device. Further, recording of interviews negated the need for note-taking and allowed for a natural flow in conversation. Consent for the use of data was obtained from all participants, which included a caveat that any data used in this paper would remain anonymous and that recordings would be kept on a standalone hard drive to ensure privacy protection. All acknowledgments were done verbally—and captured on the audio recordings—as signing a consent form was deemed inappropriate due to the personal nature of the relationships involved (See Section 5.8 below).

### Interview Guide

Before commencing field work, an Interview Guide was constructed as a memory prompt of areas of investigation, as suggested by Bryman (2012, pp. 472-473). Seeking to explore the participants' view of their social world, questions were intentionally broad and exploratory in nature. Used in a semi-structured way, such questions allowed for areas of interest to become apparent for further exploration through follow-up questions. Although inductive in its approach, the questions represented broad categories indicative of phenomena of interest to the author, that were subsequently analysed using the theoretical framework of social capital. The questions as well as categories are detailed in the Interview Guide in Appendix 1 below.

### Coding and Analysis of Data

To conduct analysis of the data, the following sequential and systematic approach was assumed, as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193),.

1. Organisation and preparation of data. All interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word and all resulting documents codenamed to ensure participant privacy.
2. Reading of the data. All interviews were then read with the aim of establishing general ideas forthcoming by the participants.
3. Coding of data. Two interviews that extensively discussed topics of interests such as sense of belonging, trust, ethnicity and member interaction were selected for draft-coding by hand. All data deemed of relevance was highlighted, while corresponding notes in the margin provided a general category that the particular data represented. At the conclusion of this process, emerging categories were compiled and formed the baseline for the coding of the remaining eleven interviews using NVivo software.
4. Categories and themes. The coding process led to the emergence of 31 categories. If one segment of text could serve as an instance of multiple categories, then it was coded against all that applied. This allowed for links between categories to emerge.



5. Choosing categories. At the end of the coding process, an unequal distribution of codes against categories identified dominant themes. These themes were then analysed for a theoretical link, allowing the inductive process to lead to the theoretical framework of social capital. A complete list of categories as well as the number of sources and references to each category is in Appendix 2 below.

#### Use of non-English data

To allow for fluid and complete expression of opinions by the participants, twelve interviews were conducted in Bosnian and one in English. Due to the author's native fluency in both languages, this was determined as the approach that would allow participants the complete repertoire of expressions afforded by native fluency. Further, noting the author's familiarity with the participants and extensive previous engagement exclusively in Bosnian (see Section 5.8 below), this approach allowed for a more natural and fluid conversation to unfold. The one interview conducted in English was due to that participant's extensive and fluent command of the English language.

As highlighted by, for example, van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg (2010, p. 313), concepts discussed in one language may be understood differently when translated into another. As such, to ensure that the distance between the meaning as intended by participants and quotes presented in the findings of this paper is minimised, the author not only translated but, when necessary, also interpreted the data. Hence, on a few occasions, the data presented in this paper slightly deviates from a direct translation in order to communicate the intended meaning of that participant to the reader, as recommended by van Nes et al. (2010, p. 314).

#### Ethical Considerations

The most important ethical consideration of this study is the fact that the author was one of the two founders and managers of CFS for the first 18 months of the club's existence. In light of this fact, there exists a potential bias, notwithstanding a genuine commitment to objectivity on behalf of the author. Additionally, as the author is familiar with all participants of the survey, there is an additional possibility that participants may have, at times, felt compelled to respond in a way interpreted as favourable to the author's research. However, considering the nature of questions asked, and the sincere commitment of all participants to the wellbeing of the CFS community, this bias is not deemed to be detrimental to the study's findings. All participants are part of this community and are positively dispositioned towards it. Deconstructing this positive disposition was the very intent of this project, as a way to explore whether participants consider CFS different to the broader environment.

An additional ethical concern was the discussion of potentially sensitive topics related to ethnic divisions in BiH. Also, to develop a demographic picture of participants, there was a requirement to confirm their ethnic identification. As noted by Van Mannen and Schein (1979, p. 21), the existing relationship between an author and participants, as well as an author's intimate understanding and previous immersion in the studied environment, serves to shed the outsider label, allowing for a 'natural' exploration of inner workings of an organisation. In line with this suggestion, in both instances, the personal relationships between the author and participants was deemed of benefit as it negated any outsider connotations or negative perceptions about the use of such information. All participants were advised that no attributable ethnic data would be used in the final paper.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the overall findings of this project, and answering the first central question, CFS appears to have generated high levels of social capital between its members. The following part explores in what ways this was achieved and is divided into three sections corresponding to the first three components of social capital used in this project.

### 4.1.1 Social Trust

As indicated in the Interview Guide in Appendix 1, to assess the levels of social trust between members of CFS, participants were asked whether they expected to have a wallet that had been lost—firstly in their neighborhood and secondly in CFS—returned. Ten out of thirteen participants expressed very little to no chance of having one's wallet returned if lost in the neighborhood. Indicative of the severe deficit of social trust highlighted previously, Participant J stated that "I'm not even sure whether my closest relatives would return it any more". Another participant, perhaps suggestive of the economic and social troubles of BiH, explained that "[t]his is the current situation [...] People look for opportunities to steal something, they dream of that. People dream of finding a wallet full of money" (Participant E). The negative nature of these responses was not surprising and coincides with previous research in this area (Pickering, 2006; UNDP, 2007, 2009; UNDP & ORI, 2007; Whitt, 2010). Notably, out of the ten participants negatively-dispositioned towards trust in their neighborhood, only one participant highlighted an experience of theft. This is akin to a society-wide prisoner's dilemma—when there is no trust that members of a network will uphold their obligations, there is no incentive to participate in that network (Hardin, 1993). This appears to have resulted in an overwhelming belief that people in the broader society cannot be trusted, which reduces incentives to develop trusting relationships beyond those with family and close friends.

On the other hand, when asked whether their wallet would be returned if lost in CFS, all thirteen participants responded that it would. Participant K provided a representative response: “[i]n the box people leave all sorts of things behind and nothing has ever gone missing. Everybody looks after each other. A wallet would be 100 percent returned and not a mark would be missing”. Additionally, four participants drew comparisons between CFS and other fitness venues in Sarajevo. One had a moment of self-reflection and although unable to provide a definite answer why a wallet would be returned in CFS, explained that she always leaves her valuables in the club’s change rooms but “I would never do that in another gym. In other gyms they always have those lockers; there are warning signs about leaving valuables at your own risk and so on. We don’t have any of that. Yet, I’ve never heard of even a single case of something going missing” (Participant D). Echoing a similar trust in fellow members, Participant H explained that she trained at the box immediately before departing on a holiday and although she had “lots of cash and jewelry on me, I left it all there”. This overwhelmingly-positive disposition is significant as it presents a stark contrast with the broader society. It also suggests the willingness of members to accept certain levels of risk under the assumption that other members of CFS will not betray them, implying a high level of social trust (Hardin, 1993; UNDP, 2009).

Importantly for BiH, social trust is an essential component for the creation of a community characterized by a sense of belonging (Putnam, 2000). All thirteen participants made reference to the existence of such a community. Participant A suggested that “[i]t’s not necessarily that I love the exercise, but I love the afterwards. I love the community. How we are all like a family”. Another explained that at first “it was only about CrossFit. Later that became a family, a community. You meet new people, and they become your best friends [...] these are people you meet every single day and share this common story with” (Participant C). Additionally, it appears that the ability to scale workouts to match individual abilities also served as a useful enabler. Providing an insight into this, Participant M explained that it is “this sense of belonging to a group [...] Nobody expected me to know anything about [CrossFit] training. We had the scaled option and it made me feel like I was worth something”. This finding provides support to that of Cecil (2002), who emphasized the inclusive nature of CrossFit regardless of an individual’s physical abilities.

Overall, it would appear that a high level of social trust exists between members of CFS. While there exists a possibility of bias due to the participants’ positive disposition towards the community, this constitutes the very finding sought by this project. The fact that participants believe that other members of CFS will stay true and uphold the norms they perceive as

representative of the box—potentially reinforced by the absence of any reported thefts—is indicative of a significant level of social trust, which is a finding shared by Coleman (1988), Hardin (1993) and Putnam (2000). Further, it appears that the existence of social trust facilitates the creation of a distinct community and a sense of belonging, irrespective of the member’s ethnic identification, gender, age, vocation or time in training. Finally, the ability to scale workouts appears to reinforce this sense of belonging by making CrossFit workouts suitable to all members, regardless of physical ability.

#### 4.1.2 Reciprocity and Mutuality

Reciprocity and mutuality, defined as acts of helping, doing favors for others and displaying a sense of commitment towards a community (CONSCISE, 2003), featured extensively in the minds of the participants. One notable example, highlighted by all thirteen participants, is an expectation to cheer each other on during workouts. As aptly summarized by one of the youngest members of the box, “training is not finished until all are finished” (Participant G). Supportive of findings by other authors discussed above, this feature of CFS was deemed not only as endearing but also as beneficial. One participant explained that she would not “finish half of those workouts without that support. And I know it is the same for others” (Participant D). Echoing the findings of Dawson (2015, p. 371), such reciprocity and mutuality appear to be an essential component of training CrossFit.

Another prominent demonstration of reciprocity and mutuality was the small gestures of care that members expressed towards each other. One participant explained that “when you’re done with a WOD, you help the other person while they’re recovering by putting their weights away for them” (Participant A). Importantly, and indicative of how such behavior is fostered, another participant recalled what happens when new members join the box: “It is all organized in such a way that when someone new comes, people try to help them out. Even those who don’t really know much it try to contribute. That is exactly what CrossFit did. Everyone is trying to be of assistance to someone, somehow” (Participant B). This sentiment of looking after each other was common among all participants and is best summarized by one who stated that CFS is “a place where you’re not alone. People look after you to make sure you don’t get injured” (Participant J).

Importantly, when asked how these norms were established, seven participants suggested that it was the coaches who initially set the standards, but all also emphasized that it was ultimately the members themselves that regulated behavior. A representative example was provided by Participant D, who highlighted that “coaches behaved towards us in that way, and then we somehow learned that that’s how we

train here". This is a finding consistent with that of Dawson (2015), suggesting that CrossFit by itself may not be sufficient, but that desired norms need to be actively established by the coaches. This also coincides with research conducted by Pickett et al. (2016), who emphasize the importance of the management team when establishing a fair and equitable community. Additionally, according to these seven participants, CFS bestows these norms of reciprocity on 'veterans' of the club, as well as new members.

This ongoing and mutual exchange of goodwill between members appears to have morphed reciprocity into a generalized norm. As summarized by Participant M, "[i]t's not the case that you finish your work and then go shower. You are simply shaped into behaving like that". Implying the subconscious nature and mutual influence of members on each other, Participant K highlighted that "[w]e help each other succeed, we push each other and all in a positive sense. Those are values that no one needs to talk about; it just happens automatically [...] People welcome you immediately [...] it's all-inclusive straight away". These responses suggest a generalized commitment towards the inclusion and wellbeing of other members, which is a finding shared by Dawson (2015) and Whiteman-Sandland et al. (2016). It is also indicative of expectations and obligations that arise as a result of established and adopted norms, as proposed by Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000).

Based on these responses, it appears that members of CFS readily display acts of reciprocity and mutuality. Moreover, expectations and obligations to help others appear to be inculcated in the community, and there exists a commonly-held belief that this mutuality helps members complete the often-arduous WODs. Additionally, these norms appear to encourage a commitment towards the community. Importantly for the BiH context, this notion of reciprocity and mutuality exists regardless of participants' ethnicity, gender, age, vocation or time in training, which suggests a normative tendency towards inclusivity, cooperation and wellbeing. Noting the preference to rely predominately on close and familial relations in BiH, this is a significant finding and highlights the impact small gestures of cooperation may have on the building of relationships between diverse individuals.

#### 4.1.3 Formal and Informal Networks

"Networks, formal and informal, are recognised as essential to the building of social capital" (CONSCISE, 2003, p. 96). All thirteen participants made reference to the existence of both networks in CFS. The formal network is characterized by interactions between coaches and members during designated class-times and was described as professional. One participant explained that "you know that between 5pm and 9pm, there is a boundary to one's friendship with a coach. During breaks we can joke

around or before or after training go for a coffee, but during classes, you know where the line is" (Participant B). Participant J, corroborating a similar sentiment, explained that "during a class, when the training starts, it is strictly professional. There is no friendship. A coach is in the first place a coach [...] but after and before a class it is a friendship". Importantly, when asked to explain what the impact of such formality was, seven participants expressed that it encourages discipline and compliance with agreed rules of the box. Asked to describe this discipline, one participant explained that "people come on time, people don't talk back to coaches. They accept feedback" (Participant A). Further, lending credence to Coleman's (1988) suggested need for enforceable and community-endorsed sanctions to incentivize desirable behavior, Participant M highlighted that "we are a people that are always late. That's a fact! [...] But in CFS, no problems, be late! But you'll be doing your punishment burpees<sup>1</sup> in front of the whole club!" Supported by comments by two other participants, this enforcement of sanctions appears to provide an incentive for timeliness and is another example of member self-regulation.

Importantly, along with engagement during formal class times, all thirteen participants highlighted that many members spend time together outside the box. One explained that box members "go out together. They go for lunch or dinner. And they do so frequently [...] They go to each other's birthday parties and so on" (Participant K). Members also engage each other through informal social media networks. One consistent reference was the existence of a Viber group where members discuss, apart from CrossFit, where to go out and what is happening in town, as well as canvass advice. As this group is unofficial, membership is regulated by the members themselves but remains exclusive to the CFS community. The existence of such consistent informal engagement, as also asserted by Pickett et al. (2016), appears to further strengthen the group's sense of community.

While the existence of formal and informal networks appears to positively contribute towards creating a strong sense of community, eleven participants expressed an additional theme associated with a significant element of pride. As a community, the box regularly initiates and supports humanitarian actions to help the most vulnerable in the community—socially-disadvantaged children. As one participant explained, "people support it because it is positive. Children without parents, kids with cancer. I mean, you somehow feel responsible to help, to give your

<sup>1</sup> A burpee is a conditioning exercise in which a person begins in a standing position, then places the palms of their hands on the floor in front of them, jumps back into a push-up position, completes one push-up, returns to the standing position, and then jumps up into the air while extending the arms overhead.

contribution” (Participant M). According to these participants, these activities are facilitated through the club’s informal networks, such as the Viber group, but the box always serves as the formal collection and coordination point. This gives credence to findings by Coleman (1988), CONSCISE (2003) and Darcy et al. (2014) who assert that the existence of both networks enables them to be productively used for successful resolution of social challenges. Noting the marginalization of children and youth in BiH, organisations such as CFS may be well-placed to help resolve such social injustices, while at the same time foster opportunities for the development of horizontal as well as vertical relationships.

A further point worthy of inclusion is a discussion of how effective these social networks appear to be at influencing members. When asked why so many people in CFS supported these charity drives, five participants highlighted, in slightly different ways, that just by being part of this community, one is compelled to support them. One participant, highlighting the impact of individual leadership of CFS members, expressed that “[w]e just need to be pushed a little [...] someone just needs to give us a hint about what we could achieve” (Participant B). Another two participants emphasized the influence other members have on their willingness to participate. One explained that “[h]ere we’re all together. You see someone bring some donation and that encourages you to do it as well. It makes me want to give my contribution” (Participant C). The other surmised that being exposed to a community that participates in such charity work “somehow encourages you to do something. Maybe you thought about it before but never did it on your own [...] you somehow feel like you’re giving back a little, that you contributed” (Participant I). These findings shed further light on the power of mutual influence and is indicative of a strong sense of bonding, as proposed by Dawson (2015).

A final point and a source of great pride—expressed by eight participants—was the unique nature of such humanitarian activities. Providing support for findings by UNDP (2009), which indicates that only 4.5 percent of BiH citizens engage in organized charitable activities, one participant explained that “no one else does that. I mean really, no one else does that in Sarajevo” (Participant I). Another stated that this charity work is a “really important part of CrossFit and that other gyms don’t do anything like that. People elsewhere don’t even think about those kinds of things” (Participant D). The apparent community sentiment towards charitable activities was best summarized by Participant E:

“[i]t is a really positive thing because the situation here is so difficult that any help means a lot to those children [...] Providing any kind of help to your [broader] community means you are no longer just a regular club. You are not just a gym. It’s not that you just come here

and train and that is what makes CFS different. That’s what makes the community”.

In summary, it would appear that the CFS community enjoys both formal and informal networks. They enable significant individual and group benefits, but also encourage civic behavior within CFS members that have a positive impact on the broader community. Further, much like one is expected to cheer-on those still completing a WOD, so it appears that similar expectations and obligations arise in relation to humanitarian activities. Noting the low participation rate in charity work in BiH, this is a noteworthy finding and provides a possible avenue for encouraging greater civic engagement.

## 4.2 Findings as Related to the Second Central Research Question

This part is dedicated to the exploration of the final component of social capital used in this project which seeks to explore the balance between different types of social capital—bonding, bridging and linking—as they exist at CFS.

### 4.2.1 Bonding Social Capital

One of the key indicators of bonding social capital, is the perceptions of group homogeneity (UNDP, 2009). Based on the responses by the participants of this study, this perception certainly appears to exist within the CFS community. Seven participants were asked to describe differences between members of CFS and all suggested that none exist. When asked why the differences apparent in the broader society do not appear to exist in CFS, Participant D explained that “No one looks for that [...] we’re all here to train, to learn something new and to support each other”. Participant G suggested that it is the “collective sharing of pain and completion of a task that brings people together”. This is an insight shared by Brad Ludden, a world-renowned kayaker, social entrepreneur and avid CrossFitter, who said that “through challenge, we grow closer. Any time you challenge yourself in a group, you bond strongly with the others” (cited in Belger, 2012, pp. 104-105). A potential by-product of such bonding, as again suggested by Participant G, is a desire for continuous improvement. He emphasized that the benefits he derived from CrossFit have proven to him that hard work pays off, which has a positive influence on his life outlook. Interestingly, the same sentiment was shared by another four participants, all of whom are below 30 years of age. This is an interesting contrast between these participants and their peers in BiH, two thirds of who wish to emigrate due to a loss of hope for a better future, and is potentially indicative of the positive correlation between bonding and future prospects.

Further and building upon the reciprocity and mutuality described earlier, three participants provided examples where members helped each other outside of



the box. Two cited times when a member's car broke down on the side of the road and where other members of the box provided assistance. A third participant, emphasizing gratitude towards another CFS member who is an architect, explained how valuable their advice and connections to trusted workmen were when renovating an apartment. These favors were exchanged free-of-charge and are a result of friendships developed at CFS. The same participant made reference to the lack of availability of CrossFit-related equipment and apparel in BiH, and how much pleasure he, as someone who frequently travels to the European Union, derives from being able to bring small items for the community. He explained that members often "order things online and I pick them up [in the European Union] and bring it back for them. But these are all small items, nothing really significant. It is easy for me to do" (Participant E). Such examples of multifunctional cooperation provide an insight into the lengths members are prepared to go to assist their community, and is indicative of a strong sense of bonding (Darcy et al., 2014).

An interesting, and perhaps unexpected, finding was highlighted by four participants who explained that members of CFS do not use the formal 'you' otherwise used in the Bosnian language as a respectful way to address someone older or not of close relation. Indicative of a lack of power and status differential between members of a box, described also by Brogan et al. (2017), it suggests an orientation towards equality and lack of hierarchy between members of CFS. Not using the formal form of address in the broader society, as highlighted by participant D, would invite "scorn from the community". Importantly, she continued, this norm is self-regulated by members, who willingly discard the formal 'you' while at the box. She also explained that she would automatically revert to the societal norms if she saw them outside to avoid broader community backlash. This suggests a set of exclusive norms within the box that may be in conflict to those of the broader community, which is indicative of a unique identity between members and is a finding consistent with that of Woolf and Lawrence (2017).

A final finding relevant to bonding social capital is the way new members are recruited. Two members highlighted that this occurs through "word of mouth. Exclusively through recommendation. People who are already [training] would tell others" (Participant L). Another explained that "it's not like you place an ad in the local paper or online. They come because people like I went, and since we liked it, we then bring our friend, girlfriend, cousin or whoever" (Participant J). Once they join, new members are readily welcomed into the box but are expected to behave in accordance with set norms. As explained by Participant L: "The community is very homogenous, and it rejects [those that cannot adjust] as antibodies. There were a few that came, who were antisocial or expected something different. They stayed for a short time and

then left. Or there were those who were very extroverted and though they were superior and were loud and obnoxious but who left when they realized they weren't the center of attention" (Participant L).

Based on these findings, it appears that CFS has generated a high level of bonding social capital. This finding partially corroborates that of Whiteman-Sandland et al. (2016), who found that CrossFit boxes produce higher levels of bonding social capital as compared to regular gyms. However, keeping the dangers of exclusivity and potential for out-group antagonism, as highlighted by Putnam (2000), as well as the preference for bonding social capital in BiH in mind (UNDP, 2009), a word of caution is warranted. While such strong bonds contribute to the sustenance of norms, mutuality and reciprocity, they also harbor the potential for exclusion and progressive homogenization of a box (Dawson, 2015). Noting the endemic divisions in BiH, adopting a potentially-exclusionary 'our way or leave' methodology implied by some participants may antagonize individuals who resist the values espoused by CFS. While there is little evidence of such tendencies in CFS currently, noting the broader society and tendency towards in-group bias, there remains a perpetual requirement for vigilance. The responsibility for this lies with the coaches and the management team, who, as discussed earlier and also asserted by Brogan et al. (2017), play a critical role in ensuring an egalitarian, and presumably desired, organizational culture is established and retained.

#### 4.2.2 Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital is defined as horizontal relationships that exist across demographic lines characterized by weak ties, which contribute towards diversity and heterogeneity of a community (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; UNDP, 2009). Noting the importance of such relationships in BiH, especially across ethnic lines, this was a particularly relevant focus of the project. When asked to discuss ethnic divisions within CFS, all thirteen participants, in remarkably similar ways, highlighted that such divisions do not exist. Participant I provided a representative example: "Ethnic division? No, it's absolutely not allowed. It's not even a topic of discussion. I mean, I believe that it simply wouldn't happen. You would stand out completely. Everyone would look at you and ask what's wrong with you? [They would ask] 'Are you crazy?'"

Asked how minority ethnicities felt when they entered CFS, Participant C explained that "when they see what the atmosphere is like, what's important, then they don't even pay attention to those things". Another explained that "you are all there together in one space training with someone you don't know, and you simply don't care whether they are Serb, Croat, or Spanish" (Participant F). Importantly, when asked whether individuals who may have harbored animosities against

minorities changed their views while at CFS, Participant K provided an example of a young male who was aggressively dispositioned towards ethnic minorities but who allegedly, after consistent exposure to different ethnicities in CFS, changed his outlook. Other participants were largely unsure, emphasizing that it is very difficult to know what someone may be thinking, but suggested that a change in such ethnonational individuals may be possible through frequent engagement with diverse people enabled by clubs such as CFS.

Such opportunities for diverse interaction appear to be in contrast to the broader community. When asked about the ethnic composition of his friendships outside of the box, one participant identifying as Bosniak guessed that they were 99 percent homogenous, which is an estimate supported by the Pew Research Centre. He additionally explained that building friendships with other ethnicities, particularly Serbs, was not only difficult but often frowned upon by the broader ethnic community. However, he became close friends with a Serb member of CFS and highlighted that “we built our friendship somehow differently. We never focused on [those divisions] and managed to avoid them completely. It’s just how it is [at CFS]”<sup>2</sup>. He recalled a time when he and a friend, also identifying as Bosniak, saw this Serb member while shopping in town. After a brief chat and exchange of pleasantries as warm as they are inside the box, he was chastised by his Bosniak friend for having such an inter-ethnic friendship. Although he in turn challenged his friend’s narrow views, this type of inter-group antagonism and bias is the norm, according to this participant, rather than the exception in BiH. This was a sentiment broadly echoed by the other twelve participants and is indicative of the lack of diverse social ties in BiH. However, this example is also an indication of opportunities for inter-ethnic relationship development that organizations such as CFS present.

Further, that bridging between different age groups and professions occurs in CFS is evident by the diversity of participants. Broadly representative of the CFS community, they span from young students to more-mature individuals in senior and established positions. This diversity and benefit thereof was aptly recognised by one of the participants who explained: “If I knew a mechanic who trained with me, he’d be the first guy I call if my car broke down [...] because that would be someone I trust so that I don’t get ripped off like I might in another shop. [At CFS] I have people that I have a relationship with, that I can trust, which is not what I would necessarily get in my everyday life” (Participant A).

A similar bridging phenomenon appears to

exist between genders. Eight out of thirteen participants highlighted the stark contrast between the broader BiH society and CFS. To illustrate the current state of gender affairs in BiH, one female participant explained how—while donating blood at a local clinic—the doctor on duty recommended that she should train less due to her muscular physique, citing a “study that said 90 percent of men like it more when women do not train” (Participant D). Echoing similar concerns about gender inequality in BiH, another participant explained: “We have male and female coaches [in CFS] and because of that we have lots of women participating in workouts [...] meanwhile, in the Council of Ministers of BiH, there is not a single woman. So that’s how it is in the government [...] representation of women, or gender equality, to be more precise, is still science fiction in our country” (Participant L).

When asked whether there is gender bias in CFS, Participant D said “no, there is definitely none but to be honest, sometimes it is the men who can get embarrassed when they see a female lift more weight than them”. This is an interesting observation—also mentioned by another female and three male participants—and is potentially indicative of a challenge to dominant perceptions about females lifting weights in the broader community. While pushing boundaries of ideal femininity is a recognised feature of CrossFit, as shown by Knapp (2015), it is certainly a new sight in BiH. As mockingly summed up by Participant L, the prevailing broader perceptions of physical activity in BiH remain highly gendered: “women do Zumba, and we do bench-press. That’s the classic division”.

A similar bridging disposition was highlighted by Participant K towards physically-impaired individuals, who face some of the highest risk of social exclusion and marginalization in BiH. He said:

“We had a lady with a shoulder injury. Her whole life they were telling her that she’s not allowed to do any exercise. She started training with us and ended up in tears [of joy] [...] We also had a soldier with an injured calf muscle [...] not only did he regain a lot of mobility in his leg, but also his self-belief that he can still do things”.

Although a topic brought up with only one participant, it provides support to previous findings by Cecil (2002) who found that CrossFit leads to higher social inclusion of physically-impaired individuals. It is also in line with findings by Heinrich et al. (2015), who have shown positive effects of CrossFit in cancer survivors.

Based on this, it appears that CFS has indeed generated a high level of bridging social capital. This is particularly important for bridging between different ethnicities, which is a serious impediment to BiH becoming a cohesive multiethnic society (UNDP,

<sup>2</sup> Alphabetical identifier withheld to ensure participant’s identity remains disguised.

2009). While no specific mention was made of favors between ethnic groups beyond those already discussed, it can be asserted, based on the general reciprocity as well as lack of ethnic divisions in CFS that such acts also exist between members of different ethnicities. Equally, the positive disposition towards gender equality and people with disabilities is a further encouraging indicator. Importantly, there was no deviation between respondents, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, vocation or time in training, which suggests a generalized view towards diversity and inclusivity.

#### 4.2.3 Linking Social Capital

Linking social capital focuses on relationships that connect individuals and groups with those in positions of power, authority and influence (UNDP, 2009) and increase their capacity for leveraging resources, ideas and information from formal institutions (Woolcock, 2001). Four participants made references to such links existing within CFS. One explained that when the club requires new equipment, members with appropriate links “suggest applying here or there. We can get some money from that department or that one. And then it’s just a matter of getting organized and getting it done” (Participant K). As a result of these vertical external connections, in this instance, the club received sufficient funding from the local government to facilitate the purchase of a number of new Olympic weightlifting bars.

Another participant, highlighting the comfort he derives from simply knowing that there are many people connected to CFS that he can call upon in the time of need, explained that “if a person from the box, knows a person that doesn’t go to the box but whom I need for some reason, just by making a phone call to that person on my behalf, all my worries are erased. It opens doors” (Participant A). Suggesting a similar ability to leverage resources otherwise not available to individuals, but also its ability to have an economic impact discussed earlier, Participant K described a time when a CFS member who had lost their job canvassed the club for opportunities. The extensive links within the club to people of influence—whom the member would otherwise not have had access to—resulted in them securing a new job within two weeks. Further, highlighting the vertical diversity as well as the broad span of professions and educational levels, Participant J explained:

“At [CFS] we have an ambassador, a doctor, a special-forces soldier, a judo champion, and they all train there together. There is a huge difference between people’s professions but also between their education. But CrossFit teaches you that a person who you thought was ‘untouchable’—so far out of your reach and who previously intimidated you—is actually just ordinary, like you.”

The implication from such vertical ties is that members have direct access to those in positions of power and influence. This was further evidenced by Participant I who works as an essential services provider for a national institution. He indicated that friendships developed at CFS give a member permission “to call me to fix things for them quicker, just like I could call someone to get them to fix something for me. I don’t mean fix, but you know...you know what I mean, right?” While this participant did not intend to imply favoritism, this statement is perhaps indicative of how blurry the line between *štela*—nepotism, favoritism and clientelism—and merely helping an acquaintance truly is in BiH.

These examples, albeit few in number, indicate not only an existence of vertical links that span social class and standing, but also that members are aware of their potential value. The actual as well as potential benefits of such vertical networks were certainly recognised by Bourdieu (1985); Coleman (1988); Field (2008); and Putnam (2000) alike, who explained that they allow a community to leverage a much wider range of resources than would otherwise be available. While there is no doubt that this is the case for members of CFS, whose broad network evidently includes vertical characteristics, there exists a potential for such cooperation to constitute preferential treatment. Considering the nature of relationships in BiH and the extensive reliance on *štela* for essential services and employment, it is extremely difficult to avoid. However, its ability to produce inequalities as well as further disempower already marginalized individuals needs to be understood and guarded against as much as possible. The aim behind linking social capital is to allow the ‘disempowered’ to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions; however, this does not imply preferential treatment. Lest organizations like CFS become part of the problem rather than part of the solution, linking relationships should most certainly be fostered, but not in a way that further marginalizes others.

## 5. CONCLUSION

More than two decades since the end of the war, BiH remains a post-violent conflict nation characterized by structural violence, severed social ties and a deficiency in social capital. Grassroots organisations may pose a novel approach to the plight of peacebuilders seeking the long-term development of such nations. CFS is one such organization and serves as a case study to explore in what ways a sporting grassroots organization can generate social capital within its members. Based on the findings of this study, one way CFS appears to have achieved this is by generating high levels of social trust. Although the scope of this project limited the exploration of reasons for its development, it appears that members are willing to take initiatives and risks within the club due to a belief that other members will not betray their trust,

which is potentially reinforced by an absence of known incidents of theft and is consistent with previous findings suggesting that the upholding of expectations of trust encourages desirable behaviors. Additionally, this study has found that social trust is bolstered through cooperation between members both inside as well as outside the venue. Whether through cheering each other on during workouts or by doing favors for one another, such acts also appear to translate into collective norms of behavior. Importantly, it was initially the CFS coaches—followed by members—that set and enforced these norms, affirming the importance of leaders in creating and sustaining a desirable organizational culture.

Further, and in line with previous studies of CrossFit, this project showed that repeat-interaction and a common goal foster the development of friendships, shared commitment and a sense of belonging. Additionally, as also evident in previous research, the fact that all workouts can be scaled to an individual's ability make this type of training universally-accessible and appears to further encourage a sense of community. Besides benefiting individual members and the club as a whole, such feelings seem to have inspired activities that help the broader BiH community. Relying on extensive formal and informal networks, CFS regularly engages in charity work helping marginalized children and thereby meeting one of the club's principal goals—contributing towards the alleviation of a significant social challenge. An additional notable finding is that members mutually influence each other to support charitable activities. Considering the extremely low participation-rate in volunteer and charity work in BiH, the CFS community has the potential to serve as a catalyst for encouraging similar engagement through the club's extensive horizontal and vertical networks.

Further, it appears that CFS has generated all three types of social capital—bonding, bridging and linking. Based on the findings of this project, bonding manifests through an overwhelmingly strong sense of belonging, multifunctional reciprocity and mutuality, solidarity and loyalty towards the group and the rejection of hierarchy and formality present in the broader community. While such strong bonds make recruitment of new members easier, which occurs almost-exclusively through 'word-of-mouth', they may suggest a tendency towards homogeneity of membership. As indicated by other authors reviewed in this study, this harbors a risk that the community becomes exclusionary towards members not readily-identifying with CFS. Noting the existent divisions and segregation in BiH extensively discussed herein, there is a need for continued vigilance for signs of exclusive homogenization. This will ensure that the extensive bonding social capital evident in the venue remains that of the positive kind.

Additionally, based on the tendency towards inclusivity of all members, regardless of ethnicity, gender, physical ability or vocation, it appears that CFS has built high levels of bridging social capital. United over a common passion, much like other grassroots organisations reviewed in this paper, CFS appears to have facilitated the creation of friendships across ethnonational lines, which—noting the general tendency of BiH citizens to rely on intra-ethnic friendships—is a significant finding. These relationships facilitate the much-needed rebuilding of relations between divided groups and, although at a micro-level, contribute towards the eventual deconstruction of endemic structural violence prevalent in this nation. Further, there exists some evidence for the ability of CFS to positively influence those members who may espouse ethnonational views towards a more inclusive outlook. Additionally, reducing gender inequality and social exclusion of the physically-impaired, as CFS appears to have done, is indeed a feat worth acknowledging.

Finally, the evidence provided by the participants indicates a reasonably high level of linking social capital in CFS. Members are broadly aware of the benefits of such vertical relationships and, in some instances, the community appears to have greatly benefited from them. While these relationships afford CFS remarkable advantages, noting the excessive reliance on *štela* within the country, members of this community should remain vigilant of nepotism, favoritism or elitism. CFS enjoys a somewhat privileged and unique position in terms of diversity, acceptance and social impact, and it should therefore continue to hold itself accountable to a higher standard. This, ultimately, is what will ensure that CFS indeed contributes to the long-term change so desperately needed in BiH.

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