Welcome to the 2nd INFORM Year!

Eric Gordy
Project coordinator
UCL SSEES

The second year of the INFORM project has been the time to put into action the theoretical and methodological strategies that we developed over the first year. During this period we also began our conversations with people from regional and EU policy communities. In numerous meetings we have discussed how the project findings can contribute to meaningful reform that strengthens the rule of law in the Southeast European countries, while recognising and nurturing those fields where informal practices make a positive contribution.

Most of the researchers' energy in the second year went to conducting and analysing fieldwork. In the spring of 2017 we also began our programme of consultations with policymakers from the offices for European integration of Southeast European candidate states and the EU Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement (DG NEAR). At all of these consultations we have been greeted with enormous understanding for the necessity of INFORM's research and interest in the results. The shared understanding we have developed is expressed in the Conference Declaration from the INFORM meeting with policymakers in Bled (Slovenia) in November 2017.

Research, analysis, publication and consultation will continue at an intensive pace until the final presentation of project results in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) in Spring 2019. By then INFORM will have generated a holistic picture of the causes and consequences of informality, and a set of concrete recommendations on these processes, and how informality can be regulated where necessary and encouraged where it is beneficial.

I hope you will find valuable and enjoyable the various aspects of the INFORM project presented in this newsletter!
INFORM Survey Results

Predrag Cvetičanin
Coordinator of the research activities
CECS

The INFORM survey, compiled with the input from all the INFORM project researchers, was conducted in the period from May to June 2017. The survey was done by the IPSOS ADRIA group in Albania (919 respondents), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1246 respondents), Kosovo (930 respondents), Macedonia (1015 respondents), Montenegro (803 respondents), and Serbia (1127 respondents), totalling 6040 respondents altogether.

The responses of the INFORM survey respondents show that they perceive informal practices in their societies – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia – as omnipresent. In all of the analysed societies more than 70% of the respondents agree with the proposition that one needs to have personal connections and one’s own people in important places to get a job done (the red and orange bars in Graph 1).

At the same time, the respondents also consider informal practices to be present as various forms of social solidarity among family members, relatives and friends, and as a safety net in cases of life-threatening accidents. Graph 2 shows that between 60% and 70% of the respondents think that people can rely on their parents, cousins or friends to help them take care of their children and care for the elderly and ill. A further 50% to 60% of the respondents consider that, in cases of great life misfortunes (death, illness, permanent loss of employment), they can count on the help of their family, cousins, friends, and neighbours.

Graph 1: Perceptions: Informality is omnipresent (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Agree (8–10)</th>
<th>Rather agree (6–7)</th>
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Graph 2: Perceptions of “good” informality: Respondents who agree that the following practices are widespread in their society (%)

To rely on grandparents, relatives, friends, to take care of the children, elderly or sick people

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>67.2%</th>
<th>62%</th>
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To offer help in situation of great misfortunes (to friends, relatives, neighbours)

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The second main finding refers to the ambiguity of informality (Graph 3). A great number of the respondents think that in their societies informal channels are used to gain employment, get better healthcare, influence court decisions, etc. (blue bars). A significant number of them know people from their immediate surroundings who achieved their goals through these means (orange bars). On the other hand, the respondents themselves rarely admitted to participating in such transactions (grey bars), and the majority strongly condemn all forms of informal practices (red bars). Therefore, it is reasonable to ask, who, then, takes part in informal practices?

SEVEN BATTERIES OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Respondents’ perceptions: the extent to which they considered informal practices to be widespread in their society (in the sphere of politics, economy, and everyday life)
2. Informal practices of respondents themselves, or those of people in their immediate surroundings: whether they use informal channels to get things done
3. Respondents’ attitudes towards informality: whether they justify the use of informal practices and to what extent
4. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, place of residence, marital status, household size, etc.)
5. Economic, social, political and cultural capital of respondents and their household members
6. Respondents’ value orientations (egalitarianism, conformism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, trust, etc.)
7. Respondents’ attitudes towards the European Union

INFORMALITY – OMNIPRESENT AND AMBIGUOUS

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In our society, if you want to get a job done, you always have to have connections and your own people in important places

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In order to answer the question of who takes part in informal practices in the surveyed countries, we performed a hierarchical cluster analysis and identified several groups among the respondents. The cluster analysis was based on three aspects of data: the respondents’ perceptions of the presence of informality in their society, the informal practices they themselves and the people from their surrounding use, and their attitude towards informality.

We identified three clusters (groups of respondents) each in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania, four clusters in Serbia, and five clusters each in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. They can be grouped in eight different clusters, which we labelled:

1. “Informality Champions” – perceive a high degree of informality in their society, rely on informal practices themselves, and find moral justification for that;
2. “Good Citizens” – also perceive a high degree of informality in their society, but do not rely on informal practices themselves and are explicitly against them;
3. “Moralists” – do not consider the level of informality in their society to be high, do not participate in informal practices themselves, and judge them harshly;
4. “Naïve” – do not even notice that there are informal channels in their society being used to get things done by so many; they do not take part in informal practices and do not approve of them.

These four groups of respondents can be found in most of the analysed societies. In Macedonia and Albania the analysis singled out a group of respondents whose perceptions of informality, and especially their moral judgment of it, are ambivalent, and were thus so named (5).

In addition, in Bosnia and Herzegovina a group of respondents emerged who obtain only part of their income from informal economy and, on the whole, do not use informal channels to get things done; still, they strongly justify informal practices. This group was labelled (6) “Informality Justifiers”.

And the existence of two additional groups was determined in Kosovo: (7) “Practitioners” and (8) “Powerless”. “Practitioners” use informal practices, but do not justify them. On the other hand, the “Powerless” are a group similar to “Informality Justifiers”, with the exception that they do not even participate in informal economy (nor do they do so in the formal one, since they are mostly unemployed), but still perceive a high extent of informality in their society and justify it.

What the survey analysis shows – and is a cause for concern – is that most of the respondents who use informal practices and justify them are predominantly young people and people of working age, while the majority of those who are opposed to informal practices are older and retired. At the same time, it indicates that the omnipresence of informal practices in the studied Southeast European societies is primarily an outcome of the period of transition, that is, an unwanted child of the transition process.
Political Clientelism in Southeast Europe: Securing Election Outcomes in Two Steps

In the surveyed Southeast European countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia – political parties offer money and favours in exchange for votes, but citizens also turn to political parties for help when necessary.

Political clientelism is typically defined as a personalised and reciprocal relationship between citizens/voters (clients) and political parties or office-seekers (patrons); this relationship is asymmetric in terms of distribution of power and resources. Clientelism happens when the formal institutions in place are inefficient or unwilling to resist various pressures to achieve particular interests.

Numerous reports by international actors such as the European Union, World Bank and Freedom House, as well as regional research or civic organisations reveal the lack of implementation of rules as well as the inefficiency of institutions in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Yet, the enforcement of rules is a key for them to become an institution: that is, if an anti-corruption agency does not enforce the rules under its authority, it is just a group of people sitting in an office.

This, let us call it inefficiency, is exploited by political actors interested in abusing the rules. They work in parallel to formal institutions and often become the “middle men” between public services and citizens. That happens when incumbent political parties appoint their own “loyal” personnel to manage various public institutions. This mingling between parties and institutions makes the two appear the same in the eyes of citizens, who know that the former are an entry point to receive the services of the latter. If such a practice is widespread, it becomes embedded as a rule of the social game.

In our analysis of the INFORM survey, we focused on clientelism with regard to voting, that is, the links between political parties and citizens that are established to secure voter loyalty, which eventually affects election outcomes. The survey shows a wide occurrence of clientelistic pressure before elections as well as benefit-seeking from political parties. The size of distribution is large enough to easily sway elections in all the surveyed countries in favour of the political elites that can distribute benefits or successfully broker public resources.

One in five respondents in Montenegro (22.5%) and Albania (20.6%) reported receiving an offer of money or favours in exchange for a vote, while the corresponding figures in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were 15.4% and 12.5% respectively, and the lowest in Serbia (8.4%) and Macedonia (7.4%).

On the other hand, the survey findings suggest that citizens also try to establish relationships with political parties and party officials in order to solve personal problems and “get things done”. When asked whether they have ever approached a party official for help, the highest proportions of affirmative responses were in Macedonia (14%) and Montenegro (13%), followed by respondents in BiH (9.6%), Kosovo (8.1%), and Serbia (7.1%), while the lowest rate was recorded in Albania (4.5%) (Graph 2).

These findings suggest that clientelism is widely present in the surveyed societies and appears to have a notable effect on electoral outcomes. In addition, citizens often consider employment to be associated with the use of informal connections, providing gifts, favours and even bribery, and are sceptical about the extent of merit-based employment. The perception that clientelistic practices are widespread suggests that citizens view them as the “rules of the game” in the surveyed countries.
Informal Economy and Informal Practices in the Formal Economy of Southeast Europe

Adnan Efendic  
Working group leader for formulating policy measures  
CISAR

The Southeast European countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia record quite a high share of grey economy, ranging between 30-80% of GDP, which is a consequence of many existent informal economic practices. As a key vessel of informality, individuals and entrepreneurs extensively rely on informal networking – a practice most often used to compensate for the failures of formal institutions.

Entrepreneur estimates of informal economic practices (%)

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Undeclared revenues</th>
<th>Employees without contracts</th>
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<td>ALB</td>
<td>40.7</td>
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<td>BiH</td>
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<td>KOS</td>
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The empirical findings suggest that both ordinary citizens (household sector) and entrepreneurs (business sector) in the region do not necessarily perceive tax evasion as a negative phenomenon.

For instance, when individuals from the household sector are asked if evading taxes is justified, around 20% of respondents give affirmative responses in Montenegro, around 10% in BiH, followed by Macedonia (9%), Serbia (8%), and Albania (7%), with the lowest percentage in Kosovo (5%). If we examine the same attitudes in the business sector among entrepreneurs, the obtained results imply even lower tax morality than among ordinary citizens.

Furthermore, around 5% of respondents (ranging from 3% in BiH to 6% in Albania) report having an informal job (either full-time or part-time). When we take the data about income coming from additional (informal) sources - for example, home production of food, informal trade, and remittances - we obtain much higher percentages. Almost one third of respondents in the surveyed countries report a proportion of their income coming from such sources, ranging between 24% in Macedonia to 34% in Montenegro. This pattern indicates that many respondents working in the formal sector of the economy supplement their income from other, most likely informal sources.

The second focus of the study - informal networking - is a widely identified informal practice in the surveyed countries. It plays an important role in everyday life and business activities of entrepreneurs. It is primarily used to support daily business operations, from providing advice to making new business deals within existing and expanding networks. Still, the majority of entrepreneurs in the region underline that informal networking is mostly used to ease cumbersome and demanding formal institutional procedures. Once the formal institutional environment for business is improved, informal networking is less widely used; the best example is Macedonia, which, according to the recent World Bank Doing Business reports, has improved the official business environment. Such findings imply that the practice of informal networking can be tackled indirectly and in quite a short period of time.

Interestingly, interviews with more than 70 entrepreneurs in the region (including Slovenia and Croatia) highlight that informal business networking is blind to ethnic and religious diversities, while formal institutions in this region sometimes suffer from this kind of intolerance.
Attitudes Towards the European Union in Southeast Europe

Even though the image of the European Union (EU) has been on the decline in the Southeast European countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, the EU still retains an overall positive image in the region.

While the European Commission tries to maintain a credible EU membership perspective for the Southeast European countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, the processes of rapprochement have so far been slow and in many cases a source of disappointment. Simply put, the region went through almost three decades of stagnation in terms of economic development and democratization, and the EU was not particularly successful in its role as the crucial reform-oriented partner. Based on the analysis of the INFORM survey data and on secondary analysis of Eurobarometer (2013, 2017) data, we assessed different aspects of attitudes towards the EU in light of the described developments.

Not surprisingly, we found that the image of the EU has been in decline. Compared to 2013, a substantially lower number of citizens from the surveyed countries associated the EU with such ideas and ideals as economic prosperity or democracy in 2017; a larger number of respondents connected the EU with concerns about bureaucracy and loss of cultural identity.

Nevertheless, positive representations still substantially prevail over the negative ones. For instance, while only about one third of the INFORM respondents associated the EU with bureaucracy, three-quarters of people in all six surveyed countries associated the EU with economic prosperity. In general, citizens of the countries in the region most often associate the EU with freedom to travel, cultural diversity, and peace. On the negative side, concerns about absence of national border control, bureaucracy, and loss of cultural identity prevail.


Contrary to popular stereotypes, our analysis indicates that the Muslim populations in the region are major supporters of the EU accession process. Thus, apart from Albania, in each of the surveyed countries the Muslim respondents generated more positive attitudes towards the EU in comparison to their Orthodox Christian counterparts.

Finally, our findings show that the socio-economic status of the respondents significantly influences the intensity of support for EU accession. Educational achievement and income come as stable predictors of positive attitudes towards the EU in all the surveyed countries. In almost all cases, the support for EU accession increases along with the level of education and income. Thus, the respondents whose level of education and income is higher appear as the greatest supporters of EU integration.
The INFORM ethnographic research shows that in Montenegro, a society characterised by low levels of trust, people rely on various information flows to ensure a certain amount of predictability in their daily lives. Both kin ties and those of political parties work to ensure that people are locked in reciprocal exchanges.

Three INFORM researchers from Riga Stradiņš University, Latvia carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Montenegro in order to untangle the workings of formal and informal institutions there. The researchers conducted their fieldwork in different locations and found their research participants through various channels, thus aiming to gain as wide an insight as possible. We then compared and combined our findings in order to provide an ethnography-based picture of the organisation of informal life in Montenegro. As a result, we propose the following framework for understanding informal institutions in Montenegro.

The INFORM quantitative survey demonstrates that people in Montenegro have low trust in each other. Although trust in government institutions is comparatively higher, formal institutions do not appear to be good facilitators of trust from the perspective of the surveyed Montenegrins. Our ethnographic research strived to address the question of what mechanisms the Montenegrin society possesses that allows for turning this lack of trust into practices that make it possible for one to live in a more or less predictable way.

There are two channels through which people in Montenegro ensure that they live among people whose behaviour they can predict (at least to some extent). Both are to do with information flows. First, people can rely on their families and kin. This is a circle that people believe and trust the most. Second, the kin-belonging of other people can provide information about their life and preferences as well. It is for this reason that people, when meeting strangers, often start by localising their position among the families that they already know. One can also actively shape his or her network of trusted people by befriending them (friendships are often strengthened by mutual godparenthood – kumstvo) or by providing each other with useful goods and services, i.e., locking each other in reciprocal exchanges.

This principle of information flows and locking-in works similarly when it comes to political parties. Parties engage in exchange of information and the practice of locking in at a more organised and professional level. Ambiguity regarding one’s position is something that Montenegrins tolerate unwillingly both at the personal level and at the level of political affiliation. Just like individuals, parties use their power to lock people in reciprocal relationships by providing jobs or other services. It is for this reason that parties make it their business to be informed about the political positions of their prospective voters. Political participation is not only a person’s individual choice, but it also affects the lives of their relatives and acquaintances. Thus, for instance, a father’s political inactivity may affect his daughter’s employment chances.

The insights outlined above emerge from our ethnographic analysis and do not necessarily represent the views of people in Montenegro. Not everyone would even consider themselves to be a part of either kin or party networks. As our research also shows, there are many people in Montenegro who genuinely strive for better organisation of their lives in line with the principles of bureaucratic fairness.
Women in the Southeast European countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia start businesses out of necessity rather than opportunities. They employ various informal means to deal with the formal demands they face, at the same time calling for a more empathic and solidarity-oriented form of entrepreneurship in the region.

In post-socialist countries, social stratification and unemployment has come to be a pressing issue, along with the precariousness of labour market experiences. Women, as statistical data and ethnographic research show, carry the greater part of the load. It is for this reason that our team within the larger INFORM group investigate the practices of women entrepreneurs who choose to actively face their socio-economic precarity.

This case study relies on ethnographic research with twenty-four women entrepreneurs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia. On the basis of a common body of questions and relying on semi-structured and unstructured interviews, the researchers aimed to examine the attitudes of women entrepreneurs regarding their social and economic status, motivation for entrepreneurship, job expectations, obstacles to and advantages of self-employment and, particularly, the networks or help they use.

It is important to note that in each of the four countries the number of women entrepreneur associations is increasing, their networking and cooperation improve, while their projects are financed also by the European Union (EU) or the governments of EU member states. Entrepreneurship is often presented as an underused resource of new jobs and a way for women to improve their economic status. However, official documents and policy analysis repeatedly point to what could be called the traditional gender roles as a factor that prevents women from realising their economic potential to its fullest. This impediment also appears in our ethnographic research: as the statements of our interlocutors imply, a gendered society produces a gendered entrepreneurial world. One of the findings of our study is that women enter entrepreneurship less because of opportunities they notice and more because of necessity.

Since we were particularly interested in the informal practices in which women engage, we aimed to learn about the rationale behind them. We identify three patterns of how women entrepreneurs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Serbia deal with the formal demands they face: 1) ignoring, that is, all entrepreneurial activities are done informally; 2) negotiating, that is, the business is formalised, but informal practices are frequently used to complement regular activities; 3) bypassing, that is, the business is registered, but informal procedures are used to substitute the failures of formal institutions. In all cases, informal networking is the most dominant and visible informal practice among women entrepreneurs: reliance on personal informal networks helps women in setting up a company; once the business is established, this informal practice does not stop, but changes its form.

In addition, our interlocutors often highlighted the particularity of women’s management. According to them, women express leadership styles that are caring, supportive, democratic and inclusive. The women entrepreneurs of our research claim to be more respectful of formal rules – a notion that is somewhat contradicted by our findings.

Women’s visions on leadership, even though embedded in essentialist views of femininity, may offer us a business model premised on ethics and accountability. Thus, one of the most important gaps opens up between the dominant understanding of entrepreneurship as a competitive, ever-growing and conquering activity and its female performances, which are more directed towards solidarity, empathy, and everyday life, including family obligations. The examples of bridging this gap point in the direction of an entrepreneurship which takes fewer risks, is more considerate of work-life balance, and is more concerned with keeping jobs than expansion – that is, practices that are insufficiently accepted and recognized as valid economic behaviour.

Where?
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Serbia

Who?
Nirha Efendić
Danijela Gavrilović
Vjollca Krasniqi
Orlanda Obad
Ines Prica
Tea Škokić

How?
Ethnographic research with 24 women entrepreneurs, Semi-structured and unstructured interviews
June – November 2017
The Ethnographic Method in Studying Informality: A Case Study of Reciprocity in the Village of Dobrovnik, Slovenia

Andrej Naterer
UM

The ethnographic approach is crucial for studying informality. Ethnographic research in the Slovenian village of Dobrovnik shows that reciprocity is one of the main driving forces in both formal and informal interactions.

Ethnographic research is of particular importance within the INFORM project. 36 months of ethnographic work (6 months in each participating country) was planned in the project proposal, and ethnographic data was gathered from the 7th until the 18th month of the project. Apart from being aligned with the expected project deliverables, ethnographic approach was conceptualized as an endeavour to produce detailed accounts of how people live their lives in different social settings, based on systematic and long-term observation.

A case study in Dobrovnik, a village in the Northeastern part of Slovenia, was designed as a detailed research enquiry into formal and informal practices and social interactions. The research focused on social processes, organisation, and different aspects of collectivity. Dobrovnik was selected both because it is a culturally, socially and economically vivid, diverse and dynamic village, and also because it was subjected to numerous attempts of formalisation once Slovenia joined the EU. The formalisation affected two spheres in particular: the production of sugar beet and the village water supply; both attempts faced severe public rejection and eventually lead the people of Dobrovnik to look for informal solutions.

The fieldwork was based on participant observation, interviews, and visual notes. An initial non-random sample of 18 people was chosen and researched. After acquiring their verbal consent for participation, initial data was collected (personal cards with name, gender, age, location) and snowball sampling was applied in order to broaden the network of potential study participants. In total, 72 people participated directly in the ethnographic study of Dobrovnik.

The collected data shows reciprocity to be one of the main driving forces in both formal and informal interactions. Three different forms of reciprocity are actively present among the inhabitants of Dobrovnik: generalised reciprocity, balanced reciprocity and negative reciprocity. Generalised reciprocity is the most common form of reciprocity. It refers to transactions that are altruistic, “on the line of assistance given and, if possible and necessary, assistance returned” (Sahlins, 1972: 193-194). In Dobrovnik, generalised reciprocity is described in, for instance, the following way:

“/…/ of course we help each other. Small everyday things. Things nobody even counts. I already told you – you cannot live in the village otherwise.” (P., a member of Family B, February 2017)

Balanced reciprocity refers to direct exchange of relative equivalents without time delay, as shown in the following example from Dobrovnik:

“When you call your friend Robi to help you out in the fields, how do you pay him back? (A.N., interviewer)

“Hmm... well, never with money. I usually go and help him when he needs me or I give him a portion of our crops as a payment. /.../ I know approximately how much he charges per hour, I calculate how many hours he helped me, I transfer this to, let’s say corn or potatoes, and that’s it.” (P., a member of Family B, March 2017)

Negative reciprocity is the attempt to get something for nothing and is largely egoistically motivated and destructive, and one Dobrovnik villager describes it in the following way:

“/…/ it isn’t happening very often. Once my friend sold his car very cheap to somebody from another village. He practically gave the car for free. But he also knew that there was something wrong with the car and that the buyer will come back to his shop for repairs. And that’s when he’ll make his money.” (P., a member of Family B, February 2017)

Each type of reciprocity comes with an entirely different set of motivations and function mechanisms and forms a unique relationship with the established systems of social responsibility of the village as a social organism. The ethnographic study allowed not only to gain insights into the social processes of Dobrovnik, but also highlighted the importance of the ethnographic approach in studying the interplay between formal and informal interactions and institutions.

Where?
Slovenia

How?
Anthropological fieldwork: participant observation, interviews, visual notes
72 research participants in total
January – October 2017

Who?
Andrej Naterer
INFORM Project: Shrinking Gaps and Building Bridges Between Policy and Research

Rudi Klanjšek
UM

The INFORM project builds a bridge between policy makers and researchers and provides research-based policy recommendations to both the European Union (EU) institutions and the Southeast European countries on their road to EU accession: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The main goal of the INFORM project – building theoretical and empirical knowledge about the gap between formal and informal “rules of the game” in Southeast Europe in the context of EU enlargement – is undoubtedly important in its own right. Nevertheless, it crucial to bring the gathered knowledge to life, that is, to the forefront of decision-making processes. It is for this reason that the INFORM project includes three parts (or work packages) the main goal of which is to build a bridge between research and policy.

These three work packages – capacity building, creating policy recommendations, and dissemination of research results – jointly form an effort to build and strengthen communication between researchers and policy makers and raise awareness about these discussions among all the relevant stakeholders and public in general. Specifically, this multi-layered process includes efforts to establish the relevance and importance of the project, gathering suggestions from policy makers at the national and EU level, and consequently building and presenting policy measures based on the gathered data to the relevant stakeholders.

In the first two years of the INFORM project, a series of dissemination, promotional and capacity building activities were performed to fulfil these goals. Among them were media articles about the project, interviews with members of the research team, project workshops, conferences, and a series of workshops with policy makers at the national and EU level. The main objective of these workshops was - and still is, as another round of workshops is planned for 2018 - to build the capacity of the research team, of the national offices for European integration in the studied countries, and of the DG NEAR (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations) in order to jointly advance capacity for tailor-made action in relation to each of the target countries.

One of the key insights obtained during the various workshops, is the indication that policy makers, both at the national and EU level, desire and need stronger support from experts and academia. At the same time, policy makers are clear in that researchers and experts should operationalise their findings in concrete policy recommendations. Taking this recommendation into consideration, the INFORM’s team adopted a Declaration that offers the first set of concrete policy recommendations.

Another important finding was that policy stakeholders at the national level of the candidate countries indicated that gaps, often perceived as a state of incomplete-ness (i.e., slow, partial implementation of EU rules, EU rules not being enforced), cannot be understood only in the framework suggested by DG NEAR representatives. Specifically, the problem lies not only in the lack of “service mentality” at the level of national institutions (low work dedication and motivation, poor coordination between institutions, low efficiency of state administration, etc.). Instead, national policy makers suggested, slow implementation is also a consequence of the fact that EU-inspired rules are sometimes at odds with informal institutions of the country, strongly grounded in the local culture and as such perceived as something that has stood the test of time. In other words, there was a strong sentiment that the EU acquis assumes a quite indifferent position toward the existing and already regulated (by local formal and informal institutions) practices that are not always necessarily bad and dysfunctional from the local perspective. For example, such informal ties can play an important role in communal exchange systems or function as a survival strategy in difficult times. In addition, it was also suggested that the lack of domestic “administration power” (e.g., cadres, financial resources) and time to implement changes, as well as people’s low resources have contributed to the slow implementation and adoption of EU rules.

It goes without saying that raising awareness and communicating about such issues is very important. It is crucial to shape the formal rules in line with the one and only legitimate political goal: to provide citizens with physical, economic, social and legal security and to strip rules of anything that could support the image that they are meaningless or serve only particularistic interests.
Who are we?

University College London (UCL SSEES), UK
has expert knowledge in comparative research of the Balkan region and the field of informality. UCL also employs its vast administrative experience in coordinating the INFORM project.

The Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research (IEF), Croatia
adds anthropological field experience and brings theoretical strength to the project.

The University of Maribor (UM), Slovenia
team brings in experience in wide-ranging social research. The UM team also coordinates the interaction between INFORM and the EU policy circles, as well as between INFORM and the accession countries under research.

The Center for Historical and Anthropological Research, Albania
team brings to the project strong fieldwork experience and expertise on informal institutions in Albania. The research background of the team members in different disciplines – such as history, anthropology and sociology – contributes to the interdisciplinarity of the INFORM project.

Social Research Kosova (SRK), Kosovo
brings together researchers in social sciences from Kosovo Southeast Europe. The SRK strength lies in its application of scientific quantitative and qualitative methods to address social problems.

Riga Stradiņš University (RSU), Latvia
brings anthropological expertise on Montenegro. The team is also responsible for the project communication activities: the INFORM website, social media accounts, and newsletters.

Inform at a glance

• Multidisciplinary social science research
• 9 partner institutions
• 10 countries involved: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Latvia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia, United Kingdom
• Region of research: Southeast Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia)
• Research topic: formal and informal institutions
• Mixed qualitative and quantitative methods
• Meticulous, bottom-up approach
• Theory development
• Outcome: original research and policy recommendations
• Launched in April 2016
• Length: 3 years
• Funded by EU Horizon 2020

What’s next?
• April 2018 - March 2019
• Third phase of the project

Databases:
• Survey-based interview database
• Policymaker interview database

Events:
• Consultative workshops with representatives of the national offices for European integration in 6 Southeast European countries
• DG NEAR consultative workshop III
• Final conference 2019 in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Publications:
• Research articles
• Policy papers
• A study of theoretical project results
• A study on policy measures