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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 conducted our survey of perceptions and experiences of informality in six Southeast European states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), and the first results became available to us in June. Our on-going analysis of the results is shedding light not just on the extent of worrying informal practices like political party clientelism, but is also revealing ways in which people draw on informal networks as a source of social capital to meet needs.

In the ethnographic portion of INFORM's research programme, we have released reports on migration and informality, on community networks in Montenegro, on entrepreneurship among women, on informal business networking, and on partial enforcement of EU regulations. Each of these reports reveals places where informality opens spaces for corruption and discrimination, but also spaces where informality compensates for shortcomings in

regulatory and social welfare systems.

Work has begun on two major publications planned for the project: one book bringing together the theoretical and empirical findings of INFORM, and another presenting the policy recommendations that have been generated by the project. We are also maintaining an intense schedule of journal articles and public presentations.

In 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 the 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.

SEVEN BATTERIES OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

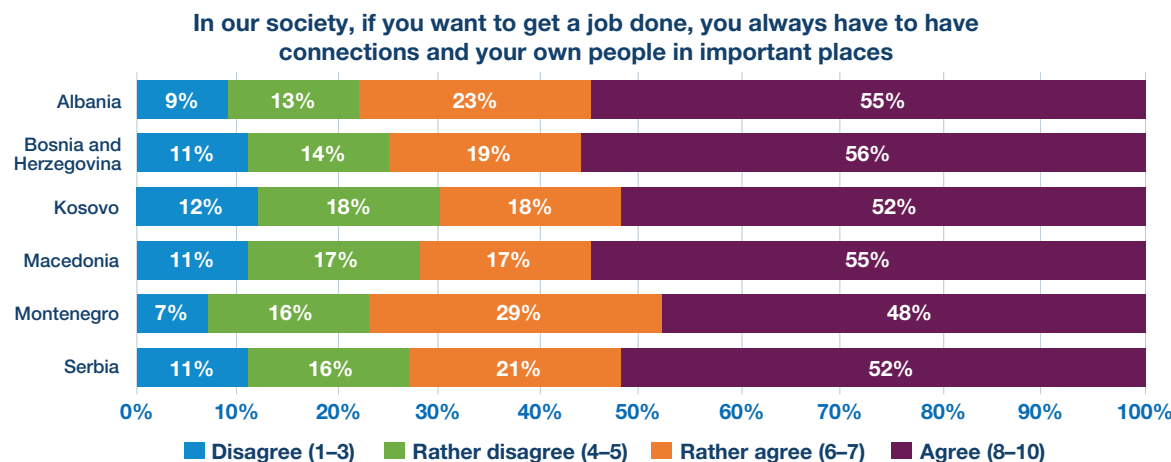
1. Respondents' perceptions: the extent to which they considered informal practices to be widespread in their society (in the sphere of politics, economy, and everyday life)
2. Informal practices of respondents themselves, or those of people in their immediate surroundings: whether they use informal 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

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).

Graph 1: Perceptions: Informality is omnipresent (%)

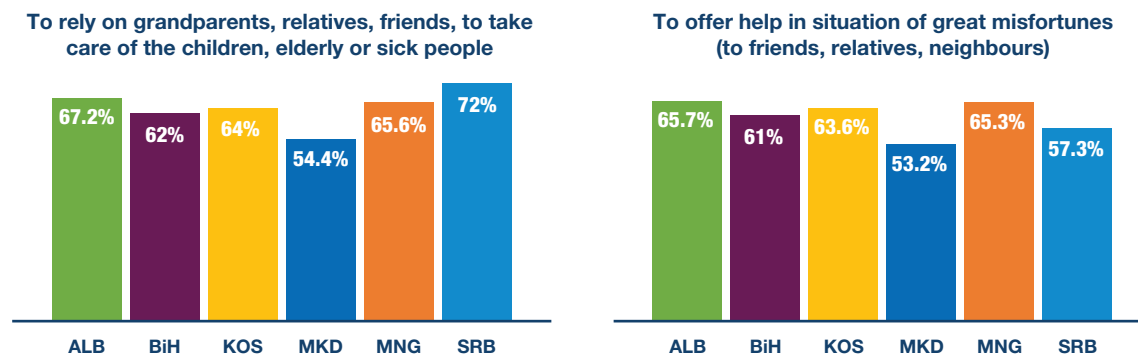


At the same time, the respondents also consider informal practices to be present as various forms of social solidarity among family members, relatives and friends, and as a safety net in cases of life-threatening accidents. Graph 2 shows that between

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 2: Perceptions of “good” informality: Respondents who agree that the following practices are widespread in their society (%)

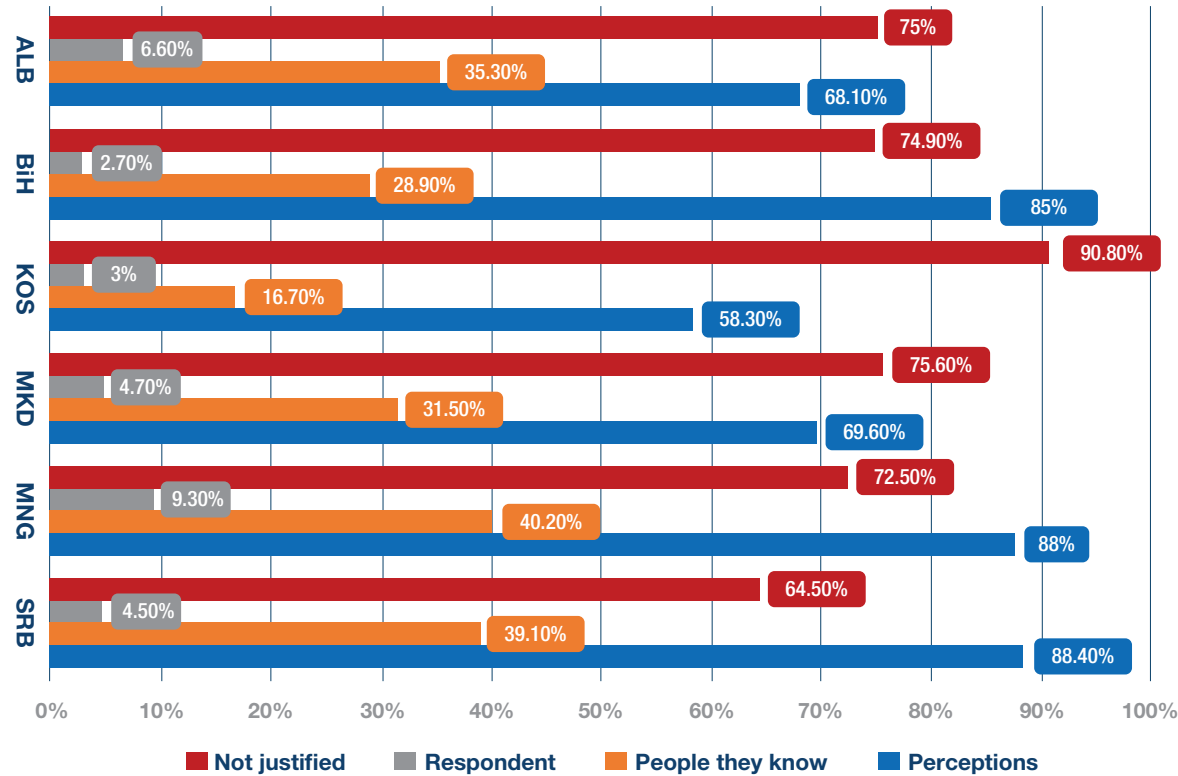


The second main finding refers to the ambiguity of informality (Graph 3). A great number of the respondents think that in their societies informal channels are used to gain employment, get better healthcare, influence court decisions, etc.

(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?

Graph 3: Ambiguity of informality (perceptions, practices and attitudes): bringing a gift, providing a favour, paying money or finding a contact in order to get a job in public companies or institutions (%)



EIGHT CLUSTERS IN RELATION TO INFORMALITY

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) **“Practition-**

ers” 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.

Table 1: Group of respondents based on their overall attitude towards informality

	INFORMALITY CHAMPIONS	NAÏVE	GOOD CITIZENS	MORALISTS	AMBIVALENT	INFORMALITY JUSTIFIERS	PRACTITIONERS	POWERLESS
Albania	●			●	●			
Bosnia and Herzegovina	●	●	●	●		●		
Kosovo	●	●		●			●	●
Macedonia	●	●			●			
Montenegro	●	●	●					
Serbia	●	●	●	●				

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.**

Where?

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia

How?

INFORM survey analysis

Who?

Coordinator: Predrag Cvetičanin

Team: Misha Popovikj, Danijela Gavrilović, Miloš Jovanović, Jelena Dinic

Political Clientelism in Southeast Europe: Securing Election Outcomes in Two Steps



Misha Popovikj
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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.

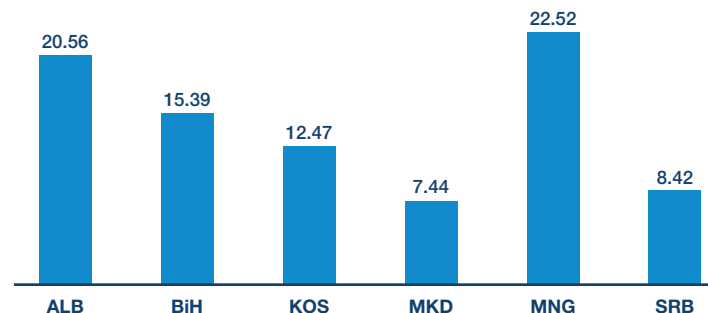
This, let us call it inefficiency, is exploited by political actors interested in abusing the rules. They work in parallel to formal

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%).

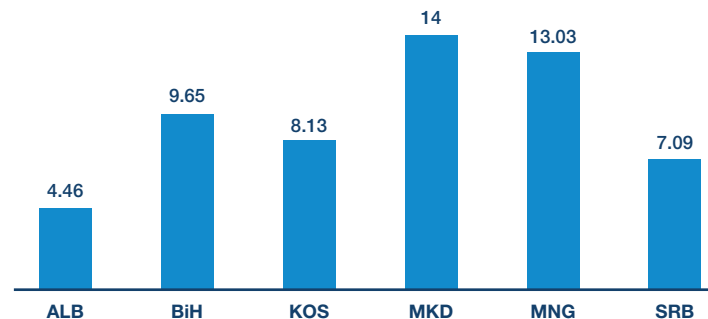
Graph 1: Have you ever been offered money or a favour in exchange for your vote in elections? (%)



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).

Graph 2: Have you turned to a party official for help? (%)



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.

Where?

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo
- Macedonia
- Montenegro
- Serbia

How?

INFORM survey analysis

Who?

- Jovan Bliznakovski
- Borjan Gjuzelov
- Misha Popovikj

Informal Economy and Informal Practices in the Formal Economy of Southeast Europe



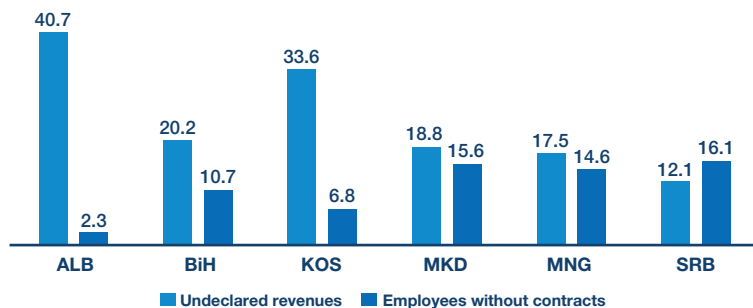
Adnan Efendic

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.

Entrepreneurs in the studied countries estimate that around 10% of employees work informally and that around 25% of business revenues and salaries are not declared to tax authorities. The general pattern, except in Serbia, is that hiding revenues and salaries is more prevalent than hiding employees. The lowest estimate of underreporting employees is recorded in Albania and Kosovo; at the same time, entrepreneurs from these countries estimate the largest proportion of undeclared revenues in the region, 41% and 34% respectively.

Graph 1: Entrepreneur estimates of informal economic practices (%)



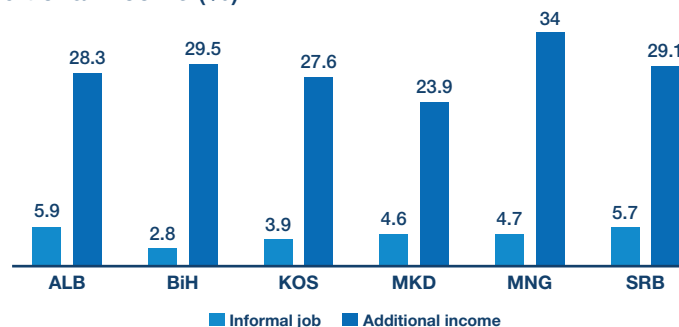
The empirical findings suggest that both ordinary citizens (household sector) and entrepreneurs (business sector) in the region do not necessarily perceive tax evasion as a negative phenomenon.

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.

Graph 2: Percentage of respondents with informal jobs and additional income (%)



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.

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.

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

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.

Where?

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo
- Macedonia
- Montenegro
- Serbia

How?

- INFORM survey analysis
- Semi-structured interviews
- Ethnographic data

Who?

Coordinator:
Adnan Efendic

Team:
Mirza Mujaric
Hariz Halilovic
Nirha Efendic
Ismet Kumalic

Attitudes Towards the European Union in Southeast Europe



Miran Lavrič
UM



Ivan Damjanovski
IDSCS

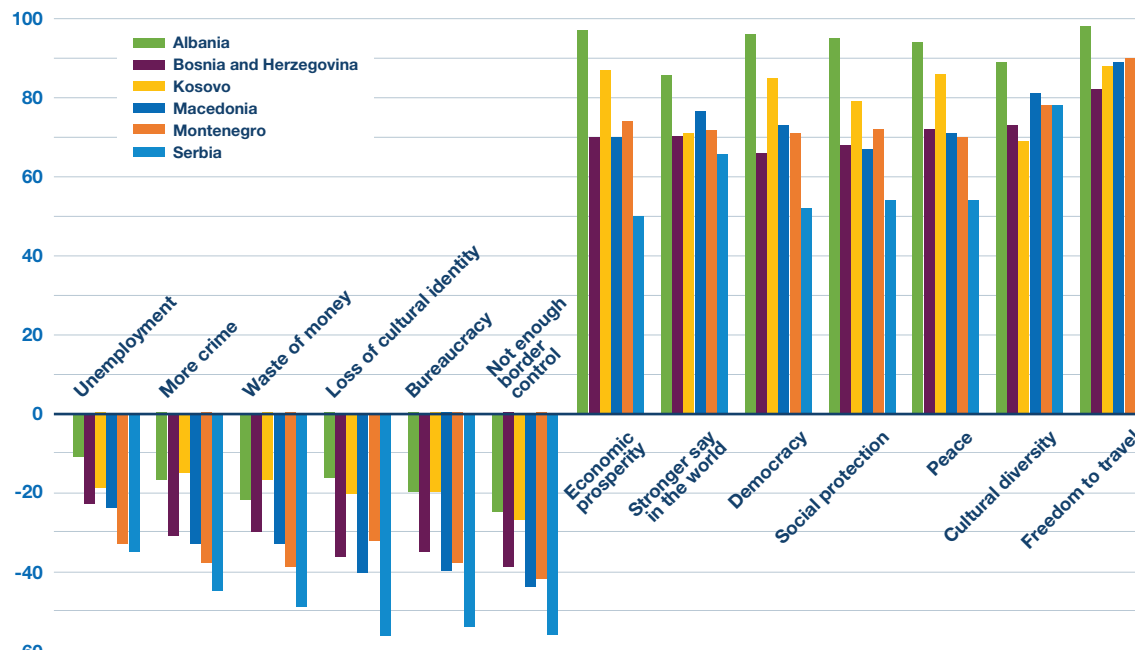
Even though the image of the European Union (EU) has been on the decline in the Southeast European countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, the EU still retains an overall positive image in the region.

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 democratisation, 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.

Graph 1: Representation of the EU (%)



Differences between individual countries, however, are quite sharp, with Albania and Kosovo showing extremely high levels of positive representation and Serbia exhibiting a relatively high presence of negative ones. For instance, around 97 % of Albanians associate the EU with economic prosperity, while this percentage is only at 50 % in Serbia. On the other hand, almost half of Serbians associate the EU with loss of cultural identity, compared to less than one fifth of respondents in Albania. In a similar vein, these varied cross-country patterns of support for the EU prevail across all assessments in the survey. Hence, while Albania and Kosovo appear as the two most Euro-enthusiastic countries, Serbia gives the impression of being the most Eurosceptic, with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia placed somewhere in between.

More specifically, our survey analysis also sheds light on citizen perceptions of the impact of formal EU rules on their societies. **While, apart from Serbia, the majority of the population in all the surveyed countries consider compliance with EU rules to be the best option for their societies, only the citizens in Albania claim to have felt positive effects from their implementation.** In a way, the adaptation of formal EU rules in the region comes into conflict with more historically established practices, as significant parts of the surveyed populations think that EU rules would harm their traditional values and good practices. For example, half of the population in Macedonia and Montenegro and more than 60% of the respondents in Serbia consider EU rules to be a threat to their traditions.

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.

Where?

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia

How?

INFORM survey analysis
Secondary analysis of Eurobarometer data (2013, 2017)

Who?

Ivan Damjanovski
Miran Lavrič

Who Do You Trust and How Do You Do It? Informal Institutions in Montenegro



Klāvs Sedlenieks
Communication working group leader
RSU

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.

Where?

Montenegro

How?

Ethnographic research
March 2017 – March 2018
INFORM survey analysis

Who?

Coordinator:
Klāvs Sedlenieks

Team:
Diāna Dubrovskā
Ieva Pužo

Women's Entrepreneurship Between Production and Reproduction in Southeast Europe



Reana Senjković
IEF

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 in small and medium-sized enterprises 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

How?

Ethnographic research with 24 women entrepreneurs, Semi-structured and unstructured interviews
June – November 2017

Who?

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

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 care 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 do precisely that: 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 incompleteness (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 Interdisciplinary Social Applied Research (CISAR), Bosnia and Herzegovina

shares experience in cross-disciplinary research in the region, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, bringing together the fields of economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science. The CISAR coordinates the formulation of policy measures.



The Centre of Empirical Cultural Studies of South-East Europe (CECS), Serbia

applies its vast experience in researching the social and cultural sphere in the region and is mainly responsible for the coordination of research activities.



The Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje (IDSCS), Macedonia

brings expertise in democracy studies and is primarily responsible for developing theoretical understanding of the observed phenomena. The team members have conducted extensive research in public opinion, elections, democratic governance, Europeanization and nationalism, among other topics.



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 Kosovo (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

team 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



Social media

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