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# Informal institutions in everyday life

## Montenegro

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# 1 Introduction

Montenegro is one of the smallest countries in the Balkans. It has approximately 600,000 inhabitants. Among the Western Balkan countries that aim to join the European Union, Montenegro is one of the “front-runners” (European Commission 2018, 7). At the same time, Montenegro has had the most stable (some might say – stagnant) political system in terms of leadership personalities and the ruling party which have changed little over the last 30 years. Montenegro has a reputation for informal economy, patriarchal values, poverty and economic inequality. It uses the Euro as its official currency without being a member of the EU, and in 2017 it joined NATO. Taking in consideration the success of Montenegro in adjusting the formal framework to external requirements imposed by EU and NATO, the workings of informal institutions in the country are of particular interest.

**This report untangles the paradoxes embedded in everyday life in Montenegro by analysing the informal institutions that one may observe in this country.**

The overall framework in which we propose to understand everyday life in Montenegro is the following (the supporting data and considerations are unfolded in the following chapters):

## Background:

- 1) According to the INFORM survey, **people in Montenegro have low trust in other members of the society;**
- 2) **The institutional framework in the long run is prone to regular change,** therefore people cannot trust and rely on it (Sedlenieks 2013).

There are two main mechanisms by which uncertainty is overcome in Montenegro:

**1. Detailed information about each other.** The principle of mainly patrilineal kinship system and family provides a certain security of information as the circle of one's relatives is rather precisely knowable. One knows and therefore may more or less rely on one's relatives. Knowledge about kin relatedness of other people is also the first basis for making more or less stereotypical judgements about them – from their everyday habits to their political preferences. Thus, one also has to keep an eye with whom one associates and be aware that one's deeds, bad and good, will radiate to other people and close or open doors for them. Information about other people may be obtained through direct enquiry as well as through gossip.

**2. The extension of the network of trusted people by locking them in circles of reciprocal interdependencies.** This is done by means of various exchanges, starting from mutual streams of gifts and ending with symbolic parenthood through *kumstvo* (godparenthood). People who are thus attached form a reinforced layer of those whom one can trust.

By means of these two mechanisms, people ensure that they can more or less certainly proceed with their lives despite being aware that people should not in general be trusted and are supposed to seek their own advantage and profit first of all.

**The surprising stability of the ruling political party reflects largely the same two mechanisms.** Thus, the party system is parallel to the everyday interactions between people in general. Party stability is most probably due to the fact that it mirrors this general pattern of interaction.

Political parties ensure their circle of voters by gathering information about would-be voters' political preferences (again by direct inquiries or by indirect means). On the basis of this information, parties make steps towards locking both political opponents and already existing supporters in networks of reciprocal obligation, through providing jobs or other services, access to which party members control.

The dominance of the ruling party is, though, not absolute, because the dependency and lack of freedom that the locking-in creates, is repugnant to many Montenegrins who continue either to avoid political activity altogether or to support the opposition parties thus ensuring at least minimal political opposition.

The mechanism outlined above results in an informal world that exists parallel to and, in many aspects, quite independently from the state bureaucracies. The latter are treated in Montenegro with certain trust (higher than trust in people in general), but the world of informality ensures that even without the bureaucracy the society does not disintegrate. On a theoretical level, this does not speak so much about the quality of the bureaucratic state as about the role of it in the everyday life.

The following chapters provide details on how informal institutions work in the overall framework outlined above.

**Chapter 2** defines informal institutions and emphasises that, on the one hand, informality should not be equalled with the lack of legitimacy or legality. Informality is the basic form of sociality. On the other hand, the chapter argues that the formal/informal division unnecessarily hegemonises the state perspective making it almost the only possible solution to everyday issues.

**Chapter 3** explains the main method on the basis of which this report was created: ethnographic field-work (carried out in the period from March 2017 to March 2018, interviewing and interacting with more than 200 people in a variety of circumstances), combined with data from the original INFORM quantitative survey and other primary and secondary data.

**Chapter 4** outlines the basic principles of relatedness in Montenegrin society, arguing that the patriarchal inclination has some unintended consequences. The principle that the bride should live in the husband's house leads to the requirement that inheritance is left to sons, which in turn shapes the son-preference, which in turn forces women to alter

their reproductive practices (including sex-selective abortions). The complex situation affects men as well; they sometimes are left desperately lonely, which in turn pushes them to look for brides in ways that sometimes may overlap with human trafficking. The chapter concludes with description of *kumstvo* or godparenthood which is another mechanism of relatedness that increases the circle of people one can trust.

**Chapter 5** shows that political parties mimic the ways individual Montenegrins ensure their social safety. Political parties gather information either by hearsay or by direct inquiry about people's political preferences and later lock their followers and, at times, their opponents in a reciprocity circle by providing means of subsistence in the form of jobs or other services. Nevertheless, the values of individual freedom and independence keep people from massive engagement in the reciprocal relationships and is also a source of political opposition.

**Chapter 6** links together the low trust in fellow-citizens with the ways that informality is used to get things done. The chapter demonstrates that lines between formal and informal institutions are difficult to draw. The atmosphere of suspicion and distrust provides justification for one's involvement in informal arrangements. The resulting mutual dependencies and knowledge about other people can somehow compensate the overall lack of trust and allow cooperation.

**Chapter 7** provides some concluding remarks, arguing that the informal organisation of society that depends on individualised and personally maintained networks might be the form of social organisation that will characterise the society of the future.

Each chapter and subchapter starts with a very brief abstract of that section.

## 2 Defining informal institutions

The main objective of this research was to broaden the knowledge base about the interplay between formal and informal institutions in Montenegro and, ultimately, to identify gaps between the formal and informal institutions in the Western Balkans. In particular, the task of the ethnographic work was to identify and describe the informal institutions, practices and norms that *do* work.

For the purposes of this paper, we follow and expand on North (1990) defining institutions as a set of rules as well as practices that are derived from these rules (see also Helmke and Levitsky 2003, 727). **Formal institutions**, such as legal and political regulations, as well as organisations and mechanisms of their implementation, determine formal constraints. **Informal institutions**, on the other hand, comprise the unwritten rules within a society and highlight the importance of such aspects of social life as conventions, cultural norms, and networks of affinity. While it is important to note that in practice the distinction is not nearly as clear-cut, we do not aim to resolve this theoretical issue in this report.

Trying to understand where informality actually works is not the usual approach when researchers, policy-makers and other members of society talk about informal institutions. The vast majority of thought and writing on informal institutions has been dedicated to the problems that the very existence of such institutions pose for formal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2003). It is usually assumed that formal institutions are rational and purposeful and, as a result, beneficial to society, while informal institutions are deviations from these rational ways (Herzfeld 2005). However, it is not necessarily so. It is possible that formal institutions, despite their good intentions, constrain people's lives unnecessarily or attempt to enforce a change where there is already perfectly good life model in place. Anthropologists who have studied acculturation, globalisation and colonialism are all too well aware about the adverse effects of some formal institutional changes. Virtually all work done in the anthropology of development to some extent addresses the question of how the imposition of new formal rules shapes and interacts with already existent informal practices (see for instance Ferguson 1990; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ferguson and Gupta 2002).

Moreover, the concept of informality is itself not without problems, as Rune Steenberg convincingly argues. The informal only gains existence in the context of the formal or the state bureaucratic apparatus. Thus, inevitably, the discourse of the formal and informal hegemonises the state-centred approach, whereby the bureaucratic arrangements seem to be the proper solutions for social needs and the "informal" or social institutions are treated as deviant or outdated. Steenberg also writes that, in everyday life, what is usually called "the informal" is more important than the formal bureaucratic institutions. Finally, what is routinely categorised under the term "informal" may in fact be a collection of practices that are much too diverse for such classification to make analytical sense. Thus, while not denying the value of the concept of informality in general, Steenberg urges us to be reflective and cautious when using the term "informal" (Steenberg 2016).

### 3 Methodology

The empirical data on which this report is based comes from three sources: ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and the INFORM survey.

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out by Klāvs Sedlenieks, Ieva Puzo and Diāna Dubrovskā in the period from March 2017 to March 2018. Klāvs Sedlenieks and Ieva Puzo were in the field for 4 months, while Diāna Dubrovskā was in Montenegro 8 months.

The research was done in several localities starting from the coastal region (Kotor Bay) and ending with the North of Montenegro (to protect confidentiality of research participants we do not disclose the actual localities where the ethnographers did their fieldwork). The broad range and length of the fieldwork in combination with various data sources allow us to draw conclusions not only about the actual people that we were talking with, but about the whole Montenegro and perhaps even a wider area. Despite common knowledge in Montenegro that customs of people vary significantly in different places of the country, we base our methodology on the idea that culture is shared. The idea about sharedness of culture has a long and solid history throughout social sciences (see, for instance, Durkheim 2008; Durkheim and Lukes 1982; Douglas 1987). We acknowledge that there are sometimes important regional variations, but since culture is shared, basic assumptions that we talk about in this report are recognisable to people across Montenegro. Due to these fundamental cultural features a person from one district of Montenegro can move to another without experiencing culture-shock and would overall understand and accept the basic mode of how society operates (save individual variations which may render some people in every group starkly critical regarding the behaviour and views of other people of the same society). This said, we also want to emphasise that one needs to keep guard against methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) which assumes that the units of analysis necessarily coincide with nation-states. Therefore what we are writing about Montenegro is not necessarily limited to the current political borders of Montenegro. **The phenomena described below in many cases are common to a much larger region** (for instance, marrying Albanian women with a help of a paid matchmaker is similarly important in neighbouring regions of Serbia). In this sense Montenegro is not a separate case of an indigenous, bordered and self-sufficient cultural system that starts and ends at the borders. The connectivity is ensured by movements of people, ideas and goods (in particular – media products) across the region as well as shared historic heritage that allows sustaining integration that Tim Judah describes as Yugosphere (Judah 2009). Moreover, the concept of culture does not render all people the same. Culture although partly shared is also always contested and constantly changing.

The research design was based on the assumption that informal institutions are (or may) be observed in every aspect of life, not only the ones that are mostly discussed in academic or political discourse. Therefore, the three researchers did inquiries in areas that were not pre-determined by expectations that informality is going to be manifested best in this or that particular place or field of activity. Instead, researchers were doing fieldwork among the people and in the fields that they felt most comfortable as

academics, i.e., the field sites were based on their field of expertise. Klāvs Sedlenieks researched everyday economic life and interaction mostly in rural settings; Ieva Puzo did research among young, educated urban dwellers linked with academia mostly in larger cities; Diāna Dubrovskā researched mostly women in central and northern Montenegro, focusing on family and reproductive strategies.

Ethnographic fieldwork is a complex undertaking which produces a wealth of mostly unstructured information, but which may give deep insight into the qualitative features of the lives as experienced by the members of communities that are researched. Ethnographic research is a manifold method that consists of trying to collect “whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, 1). **The central method is participant observation, but researchers use also observations (direct, indirect, structured, unstructured) and interviews (unstructured, semi-structured, structured).** In ethnographic work, the anthropologist mainly relies on long lasting personal relationships and informal conversations. Therefore, in ethnographic research sampling is not strictly done, but rather defined by access to people and using “snow-ball” technique that implies selection of participants based on recommendations of a previous person. Snow-ball technique is a standard sampling method in ethnographic research which makes advantage of existing networks and often is the only means how to recruit research participants in hard-to-reach situations (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao 2004, 1044; Bernard 2006, 192; Miall, Pawluch, and Shaffir 2005, 191, 198; Somekh and Lewin 2005, 36:44).

The choice of informants for this research was mainly based on their availability. In ethnographic research, the researcher is heavily dependent on the willingness of the research participants to talk and in general keep company with the researcher. Thus, the INFORM researchers started with a small circle of people they knew, moving from one person to another person suggested by the already existing participants. In this manner, researchers contacted approximately 200 people across Montenegro.

Depending on the situation and the disposition of the research participants, the interaction with them could be described as either formal semi-structured interviews or in many cases – informal conversations. All researchers had prior training in the Montenegrin language; however, only Klāvs Sedlenieks did interviews primarily in Montenegrin. Diāna Dubrovskā mostly used her research assistant as an interpreter, while Ieva Puzo mostly used English to conduct interviews.

Interview data provided only part of the information, as much was collected by direct observation or participant observation (Bernard 2006, 415). The researchers participated as much as possible in the lives of their research participants, starting from informal gatherings, cafes (an important institution in Montenegro) and ending with political manifestations.

A part of the interviews and conversations were recorded and transcribed while others were not – depending on the willingness of the participants and a sound judgement of the situation. In any case, a detailed private research log and field-notes were kept for records.

**Mass media, where available, also formed a part of the material** that provided insight into the lives of research participants. This is also a level which illustrates the best why it would be an error to treat research that is done in one locality as strictly limited only to this geographic area or people that one is talking to. The mass media that people in Montenegro use not only unite them as a community, but also provide access to themes that easily cross borders (for instance, by following Turkish soap operas or news channels from Bosnia, Serbia, or international news channels such as Al Jazeera or CNN).

When it comes to data analysis, “ethnographic research is iterative-inductive” (O’Reilly 2005, 4), that is, it is a lengthy process of shifting between deductive and inductive approach, testing and rebuilding an applicable explanation.

The current report is a result of an analysis that **also draws on the quantitative data obtained through the INFORM survey** (detailed elsewhere) and qualitative interviews that were carried out in connection with the survey.

The report is based on a synthesis from all three research sub-sites. The research data was discussed among the research team, analysing the field notes and coming to conclusions about “regularities [that] often are expressed as “patterns” or “language” or “rules”, and [...] provide the inferential keys to the culture or society under study” (Miles and Huberman 1994, 8). To complement this information, the survey data and in some cases secondary data was used.

The three sub-fields **allowed the researchers to gain access to a spectral insight in Montenegrin life, which safeguarded against one-sided views.** The everyday life in a rural area provided a vivid picture of how people try to organise their own social life in a situation where formal constraints are rather weak, thus leading to the prominence of informal arrangements. The case of family planning practices displayed a direct confrontation between a very strong traditional institution of patriarchy with the formal rule of gender equality; in this confrontation, people tried to circumvent the official rule while relying on the services of formal institutions to bring about outcomes preferred by informal institutions. Work among people in the academic environment, on the contrary, showed that young people in Montenegro expressed preference for formal institutions and ways of succeeding in the job market, associated with the EU and other international organisations, but also relied on informal networks when they experienced exclusion from formal institutions. The interplay of formality and informality in the spheres of life researched in Montenegro show a spectrum of informal institutions that range from, on the one end, outlawed but somewhat tolerated practices to informal practices that are actually facilitated and engendered by formal institutions on the other.

Unless specifically indicated, the data mentioned in the report comes from the INFORM researcher’s ethnographic work.

To preserve anonymity **all names of people and localities who participated in the research have been changed**, in some, more sensitive cases, adding also other steps to avoid identification of the research participants.

## 4 Kin Ties: The Power Behind Informal Institutions

**Kin relations – family, more distant relatives, godparenthood and friendship form the backbone of the informal institutions in Montenegro. In the general atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty these are the primary networks which one may generally trust and rely on.**

It is no coincidence that we start the discussion of informal institutions with kin ties. On the one hand, various kinds of relatedness are perhaps *the* institution that permeates human cultures across the board. On the other hand, kin-related informal structures used to dominate Montenegrin society up to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century (Morrison 2009; Boehm 1984; Boehm 1983). Thus, the idea of kin-relationships often goes hand-in-hand with the local ideas about the origins and – to a certain degree – about the current basis of Montenegrin society. Nevertheless, it would be too hasty to assume that life in Montenegro is dominated by principles of kinship, family and other forms of relatedness that are specific to Montenegro. At the same time, a research focus on the family as an informal and fluid, yet ever-present and strong entity makes it possible to provide crucial insights into the gap between formal and informal institutions in contemporary Montenegro.

That said, present-day Montenegro is a diverse place, the cultural features of which are (sometimes fiercely) debated among Montenegrins themselves (see, for instance, Banović 2011; Banović 2016; Brković 2014; Čegorović 1993; Džankić 2016; Gallagher 2003). It is for this reason that the practices that we describe here may not necessarily coincide with the views of every Montenegrin. However, the overall picture that we draw here approximates ideas widely shared in Montenegro about the meaning and forms of family ties and their importance in arranging everyday life in the country.

In a society where, as the INFORM quantitative survey shows, people do not trust each other much, **the family is the hub of trust and care**. Most significantly the trust is established through birth, so it is not rare to hear that people (particularly women) say that their real wealth is children. Inquiries about children are among the first questions one encounters when meeting strangers in Montenegro (especially in more rural settings), a couple's childlessness is often met with comforting reassurances not to worry and that children would come soon. It is important to have many children not only because a large family is a symbol of prosperity and success, but also because children are members of the community one trusts the most (see Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6).

Publicly men, more so than women, tend to think of and take pride in the family past, that is, the previous generations of their families through the male line, while often it is women who keep the knowledge alive.

*Thus, for instance, Branko,<sup>1</sup> a man in mid 50s who lives in the coastal area of Montenegro, can (without looking into any notes and in one go) recount 86 members of his patrilineage<sup>2</sup> (relatives in the male line) in 7 generations. While doing so Branko from time to time would forget a name in which case he would call his wife or sister who could fill in the gaps.*

Often even men in their 20s are able to recount the names of their, importantly, male predecessors for multiple generations. Some can also tell stories of epic behaviour associated with their, again, male predecessors' behaviour in past battles, or their movements from place to place in Montenegro or across the present-day borders, or the manner in which they acquired their last names. Such kin-related stories form an important part of the Montenegrin identity. They form an information background that explains why one is in this particular place in Montenegro (for instance, because the family fled from Kosovo after the infamous battle on the Kosovo field or due to a blood-feud) or why one has this or that last name.

This patrilineage is formally reinforced every year when its members come together to celebrate *krsna slava*, the Orthodox Christian family patron-saint day. Each patrilineage (and therefore each nuclear family) has a saint that is their patron. On the *slava* day, the members of a patrilineage would sometimes travel large distances to attend the commemorative service in a local church and later have a traditional feast. Even if no such large events are held, guests, friends and *kumovi* (god-parents) would visit the celebrating family and spend some time together. The celebration of this tradition is also instituted by the law; according to the Montenegrin Law of National and Other Holidays, Orthodox Christians are allowed to have a paid holiday on the day of their *krsna slava* (Paragraph 3).

The family, especially one's birth-family and nuclear family is of great significance to Montenegrins. This is the place of the greatest trust and confidence. Parents take great care for and derive pride from their children; children, in turn, place great importance on the wishes of their parents and other close kin members. This, for instance, can be seen in the narratives of young people who decide to leave Montenegro to study abroad. Most of them speak of the support of their families in making the decision to leave the country, and they highlight their wish to return to Montenegro to be close to their families. Due to the economic situation in the country, young people of Montenegro may not always rely on their families for financial support in their study plans (and therefore often actively search and opt for fully- or partially-funded study opportunities), and their parents may not necessarily fully understand on what their children plan to embark. However, young people are quick to express their appreciation for the moral and emotional support their families can and do provide.

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<sup>1</sup> The names, localities and other characteristics of individuals mentioned in the report are changed to protect the privacy of the research participants.

<sup>2</sup> Patrilineage refers to the institution and/ or praxis of tracing a person's descent only or mainly through the paternal line.

*That the opinion of one's family is taken into consideration when making decisions about, for instance, moving abroad is highlighted in Maja's story. As a young student, she had gained acceptance, as well as a scholarship to study at a prestigious institution in Western Europe. Her parents, however, had opposed to her plan, and Maja remained in Montenegro, attending the (at the time only) university in the country. Even though now, years later, she regrets the decision to heed her family's advice and has since used other opportunities to pursue her education outside the country, her case highlights the importance one places on the opinion of the family in Montenegro.*

The general sense is that, if parents can afford it, they would often care and support their children well into their adult lives, especially if they are students. The reputations of parents and children are closely interlinked. What parents do or have done or what children do or have done affect the reputation of the nuclear and other extended family members to a certain degree as well (see also Stanko's example below).

Despite the discursive importance placed on the family, Montenegro follows the world trend of growing age at the first marriage. If in 1990 it was 24.1 years for women and 28.8 years for men, then last three decades have changed this significantly with the respective ages now being 28.5 and 32.5 (Jovanović 2017, 1). Divorce rates in Montenegro are still the lowest in Europe at 0.9 divorces happening per 1000 persons, equalled only by Malta and Macedonia (Eurostat 2017).

Kin relations outside (and in many cases and to a great degree also inside) the family are influenced by patriarchal preferences.<sup>3</sup> One of the cornerstones and at the same time results of this preference is the marital residence of a newlywed couple.

## 4.1 Postmarital residence and inheritance

**The principle that the bride moves to her husband's house forms the background for inheritance in favour of sons.**

In Montenegro, it has been a tradition that, upon marriage, the bride leaves her original birthplace and moves in with her husband. In some cases, the actual distance might not be too large, but in case of more distant marriages this would mean that the bride after marriage meets her birth family only rarely. Thus, the bride often moves away from her birth-family, takes up husband's family-name and virtually becomes part of his lineage. In most cases the wives are the holders of knowledge about the kin ties and history of the lineage of her husband (see Branko's case above).

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<sup>3</sup> We say "preferences" rather than "traditions" or "principles" in order to emphasise that this is a contested process, quite unequally shared by members of Montenegrin society.

More importantly, however, patrilocal residence also means that **inheritance tends to be left to sons**, especially if the inheritance consists of real estate. The daughter after marriage would most often move to her husband's dwelling place. If that is in a different location than the woman's parents used to live, she would therefore not be able to take care of the family business. Thus postmarital residence patterns are closely linked with a strong preference to leave inheritance to the son. The INFORM research also highlights this trend and, importantly, its implications, as outlined below.

*Nadja is a young woman in her early twenties and lives in Podgorica. She works for an NGO that deals with women's rights. She has an older sister and a younger brother Branko (16). Nadja remembers that since childhood her mother has kept repeating that the family house would be left to Nadja's brother: "This house is for Branko, only for Branko. Don't ask me for any part of the house or to sell it. You can go, have marriage, have your own house". Despite the fact that Nadja works for an NGO that defends women's rights, she (in her own words) "got used to" the situation, where she will not inherit anything from family's real estate. Nadja is married and has a daughter. According to her mother, Nadja's marriage gives her access to her husband's inheritance; therefore, there is no need for her to inherit anything from her birth-family. Her brother, on the other hand, will need to take care of his wife, who would be in the same situation as Nadja.*

Legal professionals, working with inheritance questions on a daily basis, recount similar attitudes from their clients.

*Nenad is a lawyer from the north of Montenegro. He says that some of his clients are older couples that come to him and ask to make arrangements to bequest all their property to their son/s. When asked if they have other children, they may say that they have daughter/s, but that they do not want to inherit anything. The explanation that they give is, similarly, that the daughters would go to their husbands' houses and would therefore have places to live.*

When it comes to deciding on who would inherit a family business, adjustments must be made according to the preference for sons. In the presence of sons, daughters get sidelined and discursively become almost invisible, as Boris' case suggests:

*Boris is a young man in his late twenties. During weekdays he lives in Podgorica where he has a white-collar job. During weekends he works at a family business, run by his grandfather, while his father is less interested in it. Boris' father has two brothers and each of them has one son. Boris says that it is good that there is only one son in each family, because, was it not so, there would be a problem of how to divide the family property. He is recently married and also hopes to have one son. When talking about the future inheritance, he does not mention any other family members. Only when asked if he has other siblings, he shortly answers that he has two younger sisters.*

*Slavka, a woman in her 60s tells about the house where she and her husband used to live when they were young. The plan had been all the way to build it in*

*such a way that their two sons could stay there with their families. In this story she even does not mention that she also has a daughter. The daughter is not a part of the default story of what will happen to the parent's house. It is clear that it would be for her sons while the daughter will, just as Nadja's mother said – marry and move to her husband's house.*

More specific adjustments are made when a family has only daughters, who – as Boris' attitude in the example above shows – from the outset are perceived as inadequate to take over the property. This is clearly visible in Pero's situation:

*Pero has inherited a successful traditional business and is comparatively well-off. He is married and has three daughters. One is still at school and the two older ones are in college. However, when it comes to dealing with the family business, his main partners are his brother and brother's son. It seems inevitable that the property will go to the brother's son eventually, along with the business. The daughters do not take too much interest in learning the business either. It is the brother's son that is slowly but surely taking the business in his hands, and Pero gives him all available assistance in that.*

The overall life in Marići, the village where Pero lives, demonstrates clearly the prevalence of patrilineal inheritance. All the nearby families that still hold on to the farming as well as those that are engaged in the tourism business in the village, rely exclusively on the work of sons and occasionally also their wives. Most wives and children, though, live in nearby towns and cities where they own or rent flats and where the children can attend schools. During the week, the village is mostly inhabited by men and occasional older women. Women and children arrive almost only during the holidays. Daughters of the villagers have nearly exclusively moved out to other (mostly urban) dwellings – some because they have established independent professional lives there and some – because they moved into their husband's house.

## **4.2 Social pressure to have a son: Sex-selective abortions**

**Both the value of a son as the main heir, as well as the general preference for sons creates social pressure for women to give birth to sons. Sometimes this leads to sex-selective abortions, the example of which demonstrates how the informal and formal institutions fuse.**

Due to the above considerations, as well as other attitudes women in Montenegro may experience social pressure to give a birth to a son. That such a pressure exists is public knowledge in Montenegro, and is also discernible from the following account:

*A woman in her forties from the North of Montenegro has two children: an older daughter and a younger son. When asked what would have happened if she had not given birth to the son, she answered: "My husband would leave me". When she eventually gave birth to the son, her husband gave a big rose bouquet – something he had not done when their daughter was born.*

The pressure to have sons leads to various tactical manoeuvrings that are aimed towards giving birth to a male child. This includes **sex-selective abortions** which lead to an unusually high proportion of boys being born in Montenegro (see details below).

The following description of the processes and practices related to sex-selective abortions demonstrate that **the line between formal and informal institutions is not always easy to draw**. We do not pay such a close attention to this case because it is very salient in Montenegro (after all the cases of sex-selective abortions only concern a small part of population), but because it vividly demonstrates the mesh that formal and informal institutions may create in everyday situations.

While the pressure to have a male heir comes from social (informal) institutions, the actual practice is only possible because of advances in the formal medical system. The formal system has been adapted in order to accommodate the tradition: on the one hand, the practice is outlawed. On the other hand, the law cannot be enforced (the fact that an abortion is done due to the sex of the child and not due to some other considerations is very difficult, if not impossible, to prove) and thus the law creates a formal edifice behind which the abortions may continue. At the same time, *technically* sex-selective abortions are performed legally (abortions are allowed) while at the same time being illegal (sex-selected abortions are forbidden). The advanced technologies now available allow women to take fate into their own hands by opting for sex-specific abortions.

Historically, women in Montenegro gave birth to several children and were expected to have at least one son in order to comply with a custom to maintain the family name and lineage (Milich 1995). Nowadays, due to the rapid development of biomedicine and new technologies such as ultrasound, amniocentesis, chorionic villus sampling and cell free foetal DNA test, women can find out the sex of the foetus starting from the week 10 or even earlier. This has resulted in a situation where the number and the sex of new-borns can be regulated.

It is widely believed that in the last few decades this has caused a skewed sex ratio in Montenegro. The country has received criticism from international actors such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe. The standard level of sex ratio at birth in the world is 102-106 boys to 100 girls<sup>4</sup>. Montenegro exceeds this standard as in the last 27 years the number of male new-borns in Montenegro was 107-110 male to 100 female new-borns<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the United Nations in their report on sex ratio at birth in 2012 indicated that the standard biological level is 104-106 boys to 100 girls. The European Commission in their documents indicate 102-106 boys to 100 girls.

<sup>5</sup> During the period from 1990 to 2000 the sex ratio at birth was 110 male to 100 female (Centre Population et Développement 2010)(Centre Population et Développement 2010)(Centre Population et Développement 2010) but from 2005 till 2015 the ratio was 107-108 male to 100 female (United Nations DESA/Population Division 2015).

Based on Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) article in September 2017 about son preference, prenatal testing and abortions in Montenegro, Women's Right Center located in Podgorica together with advertising company from Serbia launched a social campaign "Neželjena" (in English "Unwanted") in November 2018. The aim of the campaign was to condemn the practice in Montenegro whereby genetic testing is used to determine the sex of the foetus that can foster sex-selective abortion. The organizers of the campaign invited Montenegrins to sign a petition with an aim to improve a law that would prevent abuse of prenatal testing for selective abortions. The campaign was broadly reflected both in local and international media such as "Aljazeera", "Weltspiegel" and others.

After the campaign the government of Montenegro started to recognize the problem officially. Ministry of Health introduced the requirement to doctors not to disclose the sex of the foetus before week 10. During the fieldwork, several laboratories in Montenegro were contacted. While asking about the prenatal non-invasive test and the possibility to know the sex of the foetus, one laboratory pointed out the new regulations of Ministry of Health that allows to give all the genetic testing results, but keep the information about the sex till the week 10 passes. Another laboratory said that this regulation could be bypassed.

Ethnographic research demonstrates that son preference is a widely known social fact in Montenegro and some of the interviewed persons knew women personally who had done the testing and had a selective abortion based on the sex of the foetus. When approached, these women were not open to talk about their experience. Montenegrins tried to explain the women's unwillingness to talk, because the topic is a taboo or that because of this social campaign women have learnt that their actions are seen as condemned and unwanted. Despite the lack of direct observations or interview with these women, both, the statistics, state institutions and most of the interview people recognized son preference and following selective abortion as an existing practice and a problem in Montenegro.

From the legal perspective, Montenegro has the Abortion Law (2009) that allows abortion with some limitations. Abortion without the Ethical Committee approval can be done only within the first ten weeks. Starting from week 10 till 20 there should be a sufficient reason and the committee must approve it. Sex-selective abortions are fully forbidden. By the law, a healthcare professional that proceeds with a sex-selective abortion can get a fine in the amount of ten to twenty times the minimum wage in Montenegro<sup>6</sup>.

Until now (at the time of writing in early 2018), no cases of sex-selective abortions have been recorded officially. When approached about this issue, state representatives refer to the Abortion Law as if it *per se* meant the absence of the informal practice or would automatically ensure that the informal practice will soon disappear. Informal conversations with workers at a women's rights centre based in Podgorica reveal that putting this law at the forefront also indicates the absence of real policy initiatives

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<sup>6</sup> The minimum wage in Montenegro is 288,05 € per month (IEconomics 2017)

regarding this issue. Representatives from the Gender Equality Department of the Ministry for Human and Minority rights explained the absence of state action between the formal law and informal practice by the lack of human and financial resources in the state sector.

A very important actor in this story is the medical establishments and doctors. In Montenegro, there are state hospitals and private clinics. Legal abortion can be performed at the Clinical Centre of Montenegro (the central hospital in the country), other state hospitals in other cities of Montenegro, as well as in one private clinic in Podgorica. According to gynaecologists working in the state hospital, private clinics, except one, are not authorised by the state to perform abortions as they lack proper blood transfusion facilities. Indirect information<sup>7</sup> obtained during the ethnographic fieldwork indicates that there are unofficial gynaecological cabinets in Montenegro, some of which perform abortions.

In order to find out the sex of the foetus, women go to their gynaecologist in Montenegro.<sup>8</sup> Another option is to go to Belgrade in Serbia. The CVS test costs around 350 euros, but the blood test 500-600 euros<sup>9</sup>. Most of the gynaecologists in Montenegro do have contracts with laboratories in Serbia that test mother's blood samples. One of the doctors in Podgorica explained to the INFORM researcher that gynaecologists have financial interest in offering this service to women as they get 10% of the deal.

Although all these procedures and testing are legal, the situation becomes more complicated when women want to terminate pregnancy after week ten based on the information about the sex of the foetus. The Abortion Law says that between week 10 and 20, the abortion can be done only with the permission of a special committee and only if the child is expected to be born with physical and/or mental disabilities, or if the pregnancy is the result of a rape or other type of crime, or if the woman may face uncertain family conditions during or after pregnancy<sup>10</sup>.

To accomplish a sex-selective the abortion after week 10, an informal agreement between the woman and her gynaecologist must be reached. The doctor has to come

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<sup>7</sup> Conversations with women and observations.

<sup>8</sup> There are several ways how to find out the sex of the foetus. It can be done by chorionic villus sampling (CVS) method starting from the week 10-12, but in some cases it can be done also earlier. Starting from week 10 women can also do a non-invasive mother's blood test. There is also ultrasound method available starting from week 12 and amniocentesis – between week 14 and 16. It should be noted that these procedures are meant primarily to detect chromosomal or genetic disorders in the foetus.

<sup>9</sup> The information about costs was gathered by calling laboratories in Montenegro and Serbia and was later confirmed by gynaecologists in Montenegro during fieldwork interviews. Besides, this information is also freely available online.

<sup>10</sup> Zakon o uslovima i postupku za prekid trudnoće (2009)

up with a formal reason that corresponds with the Abortion Law and would allow the woman to get the abortion. Or as one gynaecologist explained during an interview, the doctor can also indicate an earlier pregnancy week in order to fit within the 10 weeks when there is no restriction regarding termination of pregnancy. Therefore, women are interested in **maintaining good relationships with their gynaecologists, as the doctors are the gatekeepers of their reproductive strategies.**

Another option is to go to a private clinic. Several gynaecologists from Podgorica argued during the interviews that even though private clinics are not authorized by the state to perform abortions (except one private clinic - "Cordis"), they do offer this procedure to women. Besides, the private clinics are not accountable to the state regarding abortions. State institutions are struggling to get statistical data about abortions performed in private clinics. There is widely accepted opinion among gynaecologists that there are not credible statistics in Montenegro regarding abortion. The third option is to go to Belgrade, where abortions can be performed even at very late stages of pregnancy.

The sex-selective abortion is a phenomenon that is closely linked to other formal and informal institutions in Montenegro; it is a practice that makes the line between the two blurry and unclear. The preference for sons, closely linked to postmarital residence and the tradition of transferring inheritance to male heirs, strengthens the cultural logic under which **contemporary technologies and formal institutional settings are employed to achieve particular informal ends.** The involved women, in order to fulfil the culturally imposed expectations, must navigate both formal and informal institutions, maintaining purposeful ties with formal and informal health specialists, often putting their bodies and finances at risk.

### 4.3 *Lonely men, imported brides*

**The patriarchal inclination produces shortage of females which in turn pushes lonely men towards desperate moves in search of brides. This activity sometimes overlaps with human trafficking.**

Women, however, are not the only people who experience adverse effects of Montenegro's patriarchal inclination. Men inherit their parents' property and take over family businesses. That means that they are also under a certain pressure. Daughters who are not expected to take care of family inheritance and are supposed to move away anyway (when they eventually get married) are often more mobile; they move to bigger cities or abroad with more ease. They do not have a social obligation to stay with the family. Instead, they leave villages and smaller towns. The effect of this is that smaller places, especially in rural areas, are almost empty of women suitable for marriage. Therefore, **some men at marriageable age stay without potential partners, especially in rural settings.**

Such men are pushed either to move and arrange life in more urban settings, live alone or look for partners in the neighbouring countries. A mother of six sons, living close to Rožaje, told one of the INFORM researchers that only one of her sons has a wife from Montenegro. All other daughters-in-law are from abroad. This apparently is not an isolated case, but may be an expression of a larger process whereby women from Albania marry into Montenegro and Serbia, thus filling in the gap left by out-migration of local women. The situation in Serbian region of Sandjak has been described by Armanda Hysa. She argues that it is a process that has started only from 2006 and is breaking the so far existing taboo about marital relations between Serbs and Albanians who on everyday level often perceive each other as enemies. Hysa argues that Serbian men of the region are often left with little choice because of lack of women. On the other hand, they praise the stereotypical industriousness and obedience of Albanian women. For the women there are various reasons why they consent for such marriage, including wish to improve their material status (in just a few cases), wish to escape Albanian society that they perceive as too oppressive and wish to escape shame for a family that could be caused by a daughter that cannot be married (Hysa 2015)

Although Hysa does not specifically emphasise that, the Serbian-Albanian transborder marriages invoke another cycle of informality, i.e., the informal business of matchmaking. Because in most cases the grooms do not know Albanian language, it is virtually impossible for them to find Albanian wives without help of a local matchmaker. The matchmakers work for a fee: Hysa mentions 3000 Euro (Hysa 2015, 256).

In 2017 this business of matchmaking was picked up by Montenegrin media because in some cases the matchmaking did not result in marriage and the would-be grooms lost their money. These cases, however, border with human trafficking, thus minimising the willingness of the men to complain about their failure, as described below:

*In 2017, national newspaper "Vijesti" published a story describing a series of events where men in northern parts of Montenegro engaged with brokers in order to obtain wives from Albania. Although there apparently have been several lasting Montenegrin-Albanian marriages in the region, the story was about men who lost their money as well as brides. Surprisingly, in many cases the process consisted of several visits, including a visit from the bride's family to Montenegro. Even if the brides initially started travelling to Montenegro, they ran away: one at the border, another from a restaurant in Podgorica, and a third one after almost three weeks at the husband's house. The men were left without brides, money (sometimes up to 10 000 Euro) and ashamed to have been conned. Apparently, only later did the men realise that they could get in trouble for "trading in white slaves" [original expression]. The men themselves explained that they needed to do this because Montenegrin women do not want to live in the countryside (Skorupan 2017).*

Thus, the general patriarchal inclination creates a cycle where women are pressured to have less female children; this, combined with better prospects elsewhere leads to a lack of women in the countryside and that, in turn, creates a fertile ground for the development of different kinds of arrangements often (at best only) bordering with trafficking in women. The business of arranged trans-border marriages itself is only possible because of the background expectations held by the involved men that it is

perfectly possible to arrange a marriage without obtaining full consent from the bride first-hand and that the bride would eventually obey the arrangements made by her family. This story, though, demonstrates that it is in fact not something that actually works, at least not always.

#### 4.4 *The informal institution of kumstvo*

**Kumstvo or godparenthood is a means to ensure an additional web of people one can trust.**

Along with kin ties, another informal way of establishing links between people is *kumstvo* or godparenthood. Although it is a practice closely linked with the Christian tradition, *kumstvo* is a system that goes beyond religious sentiments and occasionally crosses the borders of religious affiliations.

Essentially, *kum* (or *kuma* for female godparents) is a baptismal sponsor, i.e., a spiritual parent that introduces the spiritual child into Christianity. However, in Montenegro (and similarly in the surrounding Orthodox Christian societies), *kumstvo* is a way of formalising an intense friendship. A person, for instance, would invite his or her friend to be *kum* at his/her wedding. The ceremony usually formalises already pre-existing friendship ties. As a result, the families become each other's *kumovi* (plural) which in most cases do not pre-suppose patron-client relationships, but rather emphasises the mutual equality of *kumovi*, who are all members of the involved nuclear families. Later on, the *kum* who married the couple may baptise the children, so *kumstvo* would be entangled on multiple levels.

On the everyday level, *kumstvo* is not particularly visible. If one is easily able to spot people related through patrilineal ties (due to the same surname), *kumstvo* is much more concealed. Usually people would just be presented as the best friends, not necessarily emphasising that they are also sharing *kumstvo* relationships. Nevertheless, in most cases *kumstvo* is an important determinant of whom one is going to trust and therefore cooperate with, as the following example shows:

*Andjela, a woman in her thirties, remembers how she was asked to become a kuma and how she was looking for a kuma for her wedding. Her story with kumstvo started when her colleague and friend, a single mother of two daughters, asked Andjela to become kuma to her older daughter. She felt honoured, but also understood the seriousness of this request. Andjela felt that she as woman with husband and two daughters, with good education and work could be perceived as a role model for her friend's daughter. She thinks that even though it is a big honour if somebody asks you to become a kuma, it could also be interpreted as a partly forced relationship. People in Montenegro, she says, try not to refuse these kinds of requests as they are linked with a person's honour that should be maintained as much as possible.*

*Andjela also tells the story of finding a kuma for her wedding. First, she approached her friend from childhood and school years. Even though her friend felt honoured, she refused Andjela's request. It was a very unusual situation, but Andjela was thankful to the friend for being honest and not following, as she put it, the typical Montenegrin way of accepting even when not fully wanting it. Andjela's husband suggested her to look for a kuma among people with whom she shares the same values. She approached her husband's best friend's wife, with whom they had good relationship. She accepted to become Andjela's kuma in her wedding. Andjela is very satisfied with the choice she made and is confident that her kuma will always be there for her. Her kuma is the first person Andjela calls when something happens. Sometimes she even doesn't talk to her husband or friends but calls her kuma. Andjela thinks that even though your family is something you cannot choose, you can choose your kuma.*

Relationships established or strengthened in this manner form another stable network of people one can trust. Although it is difficult to be sure, the fact that respondents of the INFORM survey indicated complete trust in friends more often than complete trust in relatives (excluding immediate family) very likely means that the friends they meant were also *kumovi* and therefore of exceptional importance (see Figure 6). While one is born with the relatives that one has, the network of *kumovi* is something that is more subject to individual preferences.

To conclude, family, kin and *kumstvo* combined with the male preference, form the cultural background on which many other informal institutions rest and unfold. As already demonstrated, such officially condemned practices as sex-selective abortions or human trafficking, take root in this background. At the same time, the practice to prefer male children over female children is linked not only with general male preference (although it eventually takes this form) but also with the practical considerations that stem from the fact that women usually move to their husband's dwelling place.

In the next section, we turn to explanation of a rather different sphere – the way political parties touch everyday life of Montenegrins. This area, nevertheless, is also linked and should be read with the background described above in mind.

## 5 Political Parties: Loyalties and Ambiguities

**Political parties to a large extent ensure their support by means of gathering information on the basis of which they lock-in opponents and already existing supporters in circles of reciprocal dependency. This ensures the surprising stability of the party system over the decades.**

According to the INFORM quantitative survey, approximately 9% of survey respondents identified themselves as party members. Although this is not an overwhelming number, political parties and party membership play an important role in Montenegro, especially considering the fact that the ruling party keeps winning each national election over the past few decades (Komar and Živković 2016; Komar 2013; Vuković 2015). The formal institution of political parties in Montenegro is imbued with ambiguities and party loyalties, as well as party membership and non-membership entail, once again showing the fluid nature of the gap between formal and informal institutions in the country.

### 5.1 “They will know”: The grip of political parties

**Individual voting preferences are widely known information. The one who has not clearly demonstrated one’s preferences causes suspicion. Belief that ballots are not secret is widespread and helps ensuring that citizens will vote in a particular way.**

The INFORM ethnographic research shows that party membership is a factor in one’s career, in opportunities one has as a business person and may influence one’s overall prospects in life. Even more: relationships with political parties extend to other members of the family as well, so one is affected not only by what she or he has done or has not done in relation to certain political parties, but also by what the closest family members have or not have done. There seems to be a well-developed custom regarding of how political parties are extending their influence through informal social pressure or more directly through controlling employment.

*Branko is a man slightly older than 50 years of age. He lives in the coastal area of Montenegro. Although his aspirations may have been different when he was young (he enjoyed water-polo and played at a semi-professional level), his life and health situation led him to follow the trade his father had started in the later years of socialist Yugoslavia. In his younger days Branko was a politically active person. Back in the 1990s, he was actively involved with an opposition party, but eventually the party lost and fell apart. His business is doing rather well, although the difficulties in trade with EU countries, especially with Croatia, make the*

*enterprise less successful than it could otherwise be. However, Branko's kum Slavko (i.e., the man whose children Branko baptised), is doing much better. For one or another reason they are not best buddies anymore. Branko says: "He is one of the tycoons", by which he seemingly understands people who got rich in the last decades by utilising their membership in the ruling party. Being a "tycoon" obviously is not something that Branko would like to consider being himself, although it seems that Slavko reaps good fruits from his party membership. Not only Slavko (as Branko believes) pays lower electricity bills, but he is also the appointed leader of the local ground-level municipal unit. If nothing more, this position keeps Slavko informed about what is going on in the coastal village they both live. Branko does not vote for Slavko's party when elections come, but he can enumerate all the neighbours and tell how they voted in previous elections. "Everybody knows how everyone else is voting here" is Branko's firm belief.*

Two elements should be taken from Branko's story: the assumption about the shared knowledge about the political choices of other people and the firm belief in the influence of party affiliation (or even sympathies) on one's welfare through job and business opportunities. The notion that one's voting practices and political sympathies are well-known is highlighted in Marko's story as well.

*Marko is a road-construction engineer and lives in the capital. He has moved to there from a town in the North of Montenegro and considers that a positive development in his life. When it comes to elections, Marko is certain that he would go to the polling station for one simple reason: he considers it impossible to conceal that he has not voted. This, according to his belief, would endanger his employment at the company where he works. What's more, along with the job he and his family might risk losing their flat which is provided by the company. Asked how anybody would know who he voted for, Marko looks at the ethnographer with an insider-smile: "Oh, they will know, about that you can be sure!"*

Although widespread and often mentioned, the belief that cast votes are transparent to those interested, is not a uniformly shared opinion. Thus, for instance, Dragica is confident that nobody can actually check who voted for whom. She thinks that parties are manipulating with voter's lack of knowledge on how the voting system actually works by threatening that they will find out who voted for whom. At the same time, she herself tells a story of elections during which parties were giving instructions to their voters to make special marks on the voting bulletin, for example, by using green pen or, instead of circling the party number, they asked their followers to draw a triangle around it. Thus, even the ones who do believe in the secrecy of the vote are aware that techniques exist how to avoid this secret and that many people succumb to the pressure applied on them to comply with such suggestions.

## 5.2 Ensuring the knowledge about voting preferences

**Undeclared political affiliations are not easily tolerated, and mechanisms are in place that ensure that one's status will be made public.**

The shared knowledge of political sympathies, voting and party affiliation speaks to the **uneasiness with which Montenegrin society deals with ambiguities regarding other people's status.**

*As argued by Milica, a university employee from Podgorica, most Montenegrins are neither pro-government nor pro-opposition. She thinks that this renders them suspicious in the eyes of others who have clearly expressed their identities. Their ambiguous identity creates a series of questions: who are they, why they haven't taken any position? Milica adds that sometimes, as if jokingly, Montenegrins would ask if those who are not openly sharing their political position are not spies.*

*Dragica, a journalist from the northern part of Montenegro, also firmly believes that everybody knows who is voting for whom. While sitting in a cafeteria and observing people passing by, she can comment on each person's political choice. At work she does not want to disclose her own political stance to her colleagues. Because of that, during the local municipality pre-election time, she experienced certain social pressure. Several times she was asked directly about it, but she answered elusively or answered with a joke: "What are you going to offer?", referring to the shared stories about the vote buying practice in Montenegro. Her decision not to be open about her political choice put her in an ambiguous position and opened up a space for speculations and gossip. Some of her colleagues were guessing that she might be the leader of a youth section of one political party as she attended an event that was financed by that party. Apart from Dragica's co-workers' inquiries, her father received two phone calls from two different persons trying to find out his daughter's political stance.*

The stories of Milica and Dragica indicate that inability to locate a person's political position creates not only confusion, but also lack of trust in that particular individual. **To overcome these ambiguities, several mechanisms are employed – starting from gathering unseen clues and ending with direct inquiry.** As they depend on ensuring loyalties, political parties employ the latter method and ask their members and followers to gather relevant information and keep records about it.

That Montenegrins are highly aware of this practice and at times make fun of it, is highlighted in the following chat between two young researchers – Marko and Stojan, each affiliated with a different university in Montenegro.

*Marko laughingly said that he was happy to work for University X because, when he applied for the current job, nobody asked him for which party he was voting. Stojan immediately responded: "It's because they took for granted for who you would vote!"*

This episode reveals several facets of party loyalty in Montenegro and the way people think and talk about it. First, Marko drew attention to the fact that, unlike at his school, at University Y he would be asked to reveal his political sympathies and allegiances in order to get a job. Second, Stojan implied that, unlike at University Y where he worked, at University X party loyalties were so ingrained in the fabric of the school that nobody would even dare to question or go against them. Third, this conversational snippet

shows that, indeed, party politics and political allegiances shape processes of seemingly independent institutions and practices of individual lives. And, finally, it highlights the fact that people discuss the party involvement in the everyday life of Montenegro – and joke about the ambiguities it entails as well.

### 5.3 Jobs and other perks: locking the voter in

**Political parties offer to both already existing supporters and current opponents jobs and other valuable services. As a result, people enter the circle of reciprocity where they become dependent on the political party and are forced to comply to their demands.<sup>11</sup>**

As the above description demonstrates, “undecided” is a position that causes all kinds of questions and diminishes trust. **Political parties aim to ensure minimisation of ambiguities through direct inquiries and locking their supporters in a system of reciprocity** where they are offered better economic prospects in exchange of either direct support or ensuring support of other people (for instance by calling and asking about the political preferences). Moreover, political activity is not only the business of a single individual, but it also radiates to other members of his or her family who then become collectively responsible for each other’s political choices.

Dragica from the story earlier, demonstrates how the collection of information (which is at the time an expression of social pressure) as well as locking-in works:

*A couple of years ago, Dragica herself came close to asking questions about people’s party membership. When she finished her university studies in Podgorica, Dragica returned to the North and was unemployed for two years. During the unemployment period she received a phone call – an offer to meet and talk about her job opportunities. During the meeting a representative of a political party promised her a job, but in return asked her to collect information about the political choices of people she knew. She rejected the offer and continued to be unemployed. According to Dragica, trading with positions is*

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<sup>11</sup> There is also a more blunt way of buying votes, but we have only hearsay information about this. During interviews with people in the North of Montenegro, a couple of interlocutors mentioned that during the local elections the ruling party in Montenegro gave money to people in order to get their votes. They believed that the regular sum was 50-100 euros, while some could bargain and get 200-300 euros. One of the opposition’s party members explained that besides direct money transactions, parties used their budget to cover the travel expenses of their voters. People are believed to have received money to cover fuel for their car rides from outermost places of the municipality and even plane tickets, if a person was still registered as a resident in the municipality, but practically lived abroad. According to the law, parties are allowed to cover travel expenses from their budget. Reports of alleged vote buying is a common part of discourse at every major election process. In the INFORM quantitative survey 22.5% reported that they had been offered money for casting their vote in a particular way.

*common in Montenegro. She could provide several examples of how political parties offer jobs to their party members and those who provide certain service to them. Dragica assumes that at her workplace there are around 4-5 people out of around twenty who are members of the country's ruling party. She thinks that these people got their jobs because of their party membership. According to her, the "overproduction" of employees is a typical situation in Montenegro, with more people being employed than it is actually necessary for work to get done.*

This opinion is shared by other Montenegrins as well: they think that, in state institutions in particular, more people than necessary are employed and that their employment stems from their loyalty to the ruling party. This notion came up poignantly in Bojana's narrative.

*Bojana is a professional in her 30s, working for a private institution. She is busy and hard-working. Bojana mentioned a friend of hers who worked for a state company where her salary was quite low but where she had no real tasks or responsibilities, allowing her to do whatever she wanted during the day. Even though the salary was low, Bojana said, her friend's job was considered stable. This stability, consequently, ensured employees' loyalty to the ruling party during every election cycle. After all, if a different party came to power, who knew what would happen to the jobs and workplaces?*

Job prospects are among the most effective ways of how political parties lock-in their followers. Other perks come with job positions that make it more and more risky to change one's political preferences.

*Slavenka, an activist from the city of Bar, suggested that this was the reason why the ruling party did not mind amidst its members people who had been involved in scandals or accused of corruption. Rather, he pointed out, it probably gave the party leverage against the individuals; allowing them to lay low for a while, the party would then expect them to do the party's bidding with no questions asked or objections raised. A forgiven scandal is not a forgotten one.*

Job offers is another way of how opposition may be subdued, i.e., through drawing in the opponent into a lucrative job to require reciprocal sense of indebtedness that eventually minimises the opponent's willingness to oppose.

*Slavenka said that she was surprised that, after criticizing the ruling party and accusing it of corruption in a particularly visible way, she was soon offered an important job – by the same people she had decried with her activities. Before, she said, her activism had only led to her being constantly denied access to resources important in her field. Slavenka had contemplated whether to accept the job and finally did it, staying in the position for several years. She focused on the fact that not only the ruling party, but also the opposition approved of his efforts at the job. Nevertheless, Slavenka was cleverly drawn into a network of obligation with the ruling party and her activist voice was rendered if not mute, then at least quieter and less biting.*

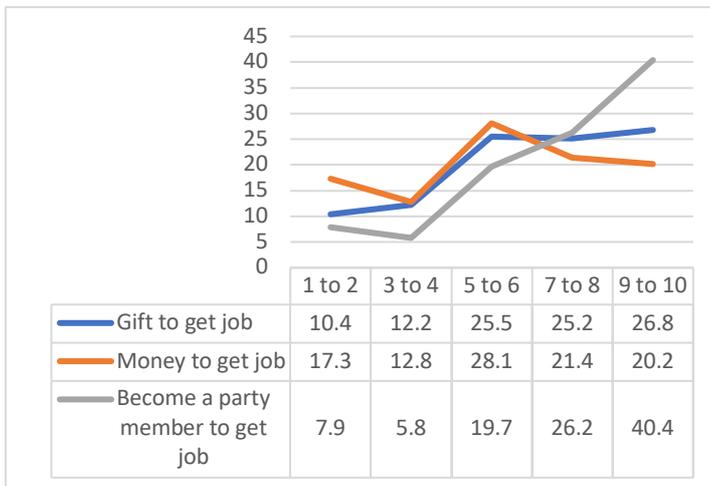
Apart from offers, not-so-subtle threats can also be used. Dragica recalls a local municipality pre-election time, when some of her colleagues were threatening her by saying: “You will see after the election!”, meaning that she would most probably lose her job in the local business. After the elections, however, Dragica kept the job, as the party that had offered her the job won.

Locking one in the particular party loyalty is done also through sustaining a view whereby voting is not only the business of the particular person, but also of his/her immediate kin. Thus, parents may be held responsible for their children or the parent's political (in)activity leaves impact on the prospects of their children. Party activists do not hesitate speaking to would-be voters and their relatives to make sure they would not forget their mutual obligations.

*Stanko is a pensioner and lives in a town in the area that is called Old Montenegro. He says “I am not politically active any more. Because I am not employed and live off my pension, they cannot black-mail me anymore. My daughter received a good law degree in Belgrade and wanted to get a job in her native town, but because neither I nor my wife are politically active, she could not get a good job here although she had a very good education. So, she took her papers and moved to Podgorica where she immediately got a good job.”*

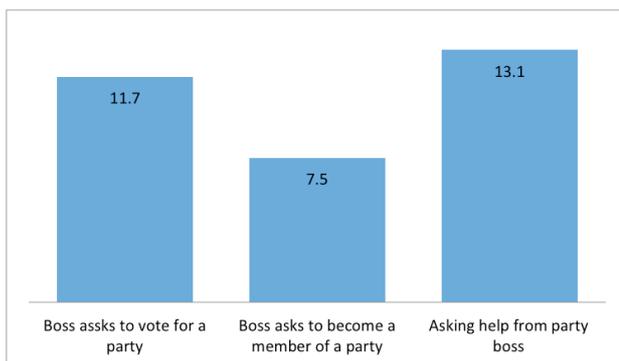
*Dragica also constantly repeats that the higher education diploma in Montenegro does not guarantee any success in finding a job. She was an outstanding student, active citizen, engaging in debate club, NGOs, but it did not help her to get a job easily after she moved back to her hometown in the North. After two years of unemployment, she got a job in a local business. Even though Dragica did not join any party and did not openly share her political choice, the job was offered by one of the party in the opposition.*

The ethnographic data on the locking-in of party membership and party loyalties in Montenegro is corroborated by the results of the INFORM quantitative survey. Thus, for instance, when respondents were asked about getting a municipal or government job, more than 40% said that becoming a party member was the required action almost always (chose 9 or 10 on the scale from 1 to 10 where 1 represents ‘never’ and 10 represents ‘always’, see Figure 1). A very similar situation, as it seems, is believed to be in the job market in general: almost 40% of all respondents said that the main way of getting a job is through party lines, although private connections (*veze*) score somehow higher in this question (see Figure 7 as well as chapter 6, page 31 for more detailed description of getting job).



*Figure 1. Reciprocity for getting a municipal or government job. Respondents were asked how often according to their estimate a given behaviour happens. 1 means "never", 10 means "all the time". % of all respondents, who gave answers.*

Figure 2 illustrates that almost 12% of all respondents were asked by their party boss to vote for a particular party and slightly less (7.5%) were asked by the boss to participate in activities of a certain party. This figure also demonstrates that this is not a top-down movement where those in power actively exert pressure. Party bosses also may be directly approached for help in some problematic situation. Ethnographic data also shows that such enquiries are not rare. However, asking a party boss for a help inevitably invokes reciprocal relationships: the one who asks for help is from the moment onwards in debt to the people who helped.



*Figure 2. Reciprocal relationships with parties. Answers to the following Yes or No questions: "Have you been requested by your manager/boss to vote for a certain party?", "Have you been requested by your manager/boss to participate in activities of certain party?" and "Have you turned to a party official/influential for help?" The graph shows percentage of those who chose answer "yes". % of all respondents who gave answers.*

## 5.4 *Pride vs shame of party membership*

**The loss of personal freedom that one is forced into by party membership may be a cause of certain feelings of shame although this does not describe all situations. At certain situations party membership may be a source of pride.**

However, this leaves the question of why some people like Dragica would play with their “unaffiliated” status and leave themselves exposed to various kinds of problems such ambiguity produces. Why not engage in the life of political parties if it promises to bring so many benefits? Dragica is a journalist and the wish to be politically neutral might play a strong role. However, the overall relationships with the political parties should be viewed in relation to patron-client reciprocities and their consequences. Engaging in a deal with a political party requires giving up a part of one’s independence. The party will continue holding the ability to influence one’s life prospects indefinitely, casting a vote in an election will not even out the indebtedness one would have towards the party.

Being in such situation of indebtedness undoubtedly does not play well with the image of being a proud and independent person that many Montenegrins hold dear. Therefore, many people in Montenegro would speak about party members with contempt. Being in a party can bring certain benefits, but it also requires in return giving up part of one’s independence and freedom as one is not any more allowed to speak and do what one wishes, but has to follow what he or she is told by the party boss.

It takes time to find somebody in Montenegro who would proudly declare to be a party member. Knowing that fellow citizens often treat party membership with contempt (especially concerning the ruling party), it is no surprise that being a member of a party is not being loudly advocated. Sedlenieks elsewhere (Sedlenieks 2013, 176) argues that party members are sometimes seen as having lost their independence and with that – their stable inner core. Therefore, as a research participant says “They do not have their identity” (ibid.). It is difficult to spot actual expressions of shame, but the timidity with which one presents his or her party belonging to the public is quite palpable.

At times, though, people take pride in their party membership. This is the case of Miroslav’s grandmother and, to some extent, the young man himself.

*Miroslav is a young entrepreneur, who takes pride in his craft that he is slowly taking over from his grandfather. He decries the corrupt practices of other entrepreneurs in his field, saying that people in Montenegro are trading the traditional values of “honour, pride, and respect” for money and spreading gossip about their more successful neighbours to damage their businesses. At the same time, Miroslav is proud of his grandmother who has been a supporter of the ruling party – very often associated with corruption, money laundering and other illegal deeds. He laughingly tells a story of his grandmother chasing away from her house young campaigners working for an opposition party. His grandmother,*

*Miroslav says, has been voting for the ruling party for the past thirty years and is proud of her loyalty.*

## 5.5 Implications of the party grip

**Changing one's political stance is not the decision of an individual alone, and it is not only about the act of casting a vote, but in many cases a decision that reverberates across many networks and lives, making it impossible to draw a clear line between the formal institution of political party membership or non-membership and the informal effects and repercussions it may have.**

The INFORM quantitative survey demonstrates that only about 9% of all respondents were party members. However, this is the number of only those who have actively declared their affiliation. The above description demonstrates how even the 9% of active members may lead to a rather uniform and stable results of multi-party elections, with the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists emerging as the victor year after year – at least in national elections.

Another aspect of interaction with political parties is that it serves as a mechanism of engaging and to some degree controlling the world that otherwise lacks transparency and is difficult to control. Party affiliation opens up certain avenues to ensure that one's interests are going to be protected, that fluctuations in the job market would not affect one's future. However, that is also a double-edged sword because the same affiliation might become a source of danger if the political landscape changes for one or another reason. Thus, the unwillingness to identify oneself with absolute clarity as a supporter of one or another party may be seen as a way to trade between the drawbacks of ambiguity and drawbacks of future vulnerability associated with strong affiliation to one particular political party.

## 6 Getting Things Done: Between Formality and Informality

### 6.1 Low trust in fellow citizens

**The assumption that people outside one's immediate circle of friends and family cannot be trusted is widespread in Montenegro. This is linked to the idea that people would prioritise their private interests and facilitates the atmosphere of distrust. Outside the family circle, one can enhance trustworthiness of other people by entering in market relationships.**

According to the INFORM quantitative survey, respondents in Montenegro have low trust in people in general. Almost half of the respondents said that they do not trust people either completely or almost completely (chose 1 or 2 on the scale from 1 to 10, see Figure 3). However, such (dis)distrust is not nearly evenly distributed across the society. If we compare the answers about other sections of society, we can see that according to the survey, trust in members of the immediate family is very high (76% of respondents chose either 9 or 10, see also chapter 4, page 10). This is followed by (although much lesser) trust in family and friends (see Figure 4). Importantly, friends score somewhat higher than relatives, especially when it comes to complete trust (9 or 10 on the 10-point scale). Trust in neighbours and colleagues is more or less evenly distributed, as the largest part of respondents chose 5 on the 10-point scale (see Figure 4 and Figure 6.). Comparison of graphs in Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6, shows that there are two clearly distinct patterns of the graphs: On the one hand there are members of family, relatives and friends. This line tends to lean towards the end of more trust. On the other hand there are government offices, friend, neighbours, colleagues (as well as other groups, not illustrated here, but included in the survey e. g., religious or national belonging), the graphs of which are mostly concentrating around the middle of the scale. This apparently indicates that regarding trust, friends, family and relatives stand sharply out of all the other groups in Montenegrin society (the contrast is best seen in Figure 6). Ethnographic data, as we show, provides crucial insights into what the numbers mean in real life situations.

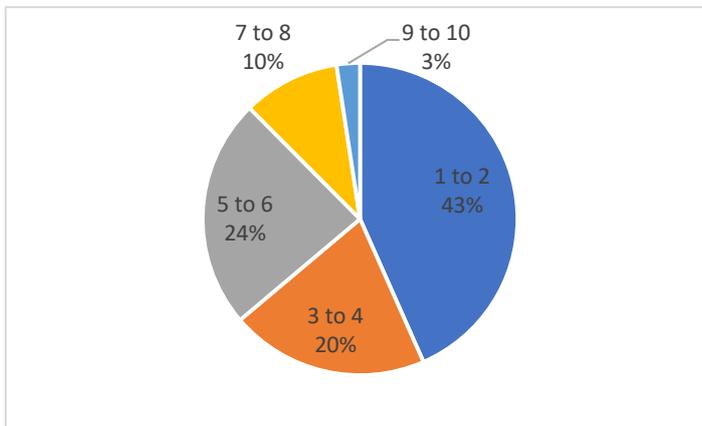


Figure 3. General estimate of whether people can be trusted. Answers to the question: "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?" 1 means "You need to be very careful", 10 means "Most people can be trusted". % of all respondents who gave answers.

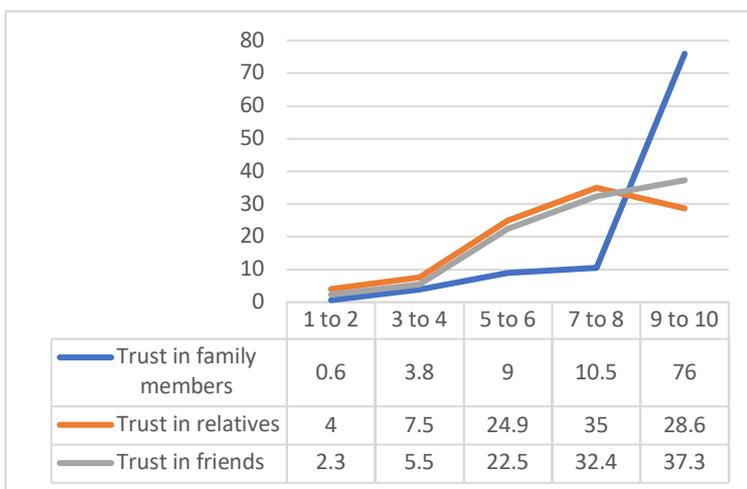


Figure 4. Trust in family members, relatives and friends. Answer to question: "How much do you trust members of the following groups? Members of your close family; Your relatives; Your friends" 1 means "not at all", 10 means "completely". % of all respondents who gave answers.

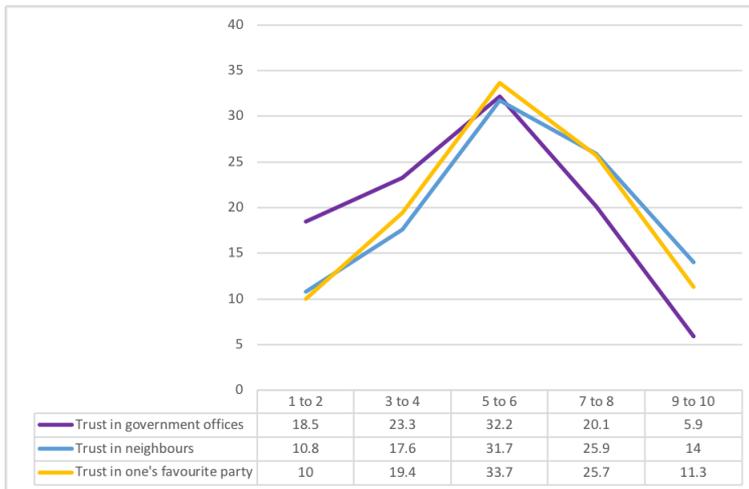


Figure 5. Trust in government offices, neighbours and the party one votes for. Combination of answers to two questions: “Based on your experience, what is your trust in state institutions in your country (like courts, police, governments...)” and “How much do you trust members of the following groups: Your neighbours; Members of the party you vote for” 1 means “not at all”, 10 means “completely”. % of all respondents who gave answers.

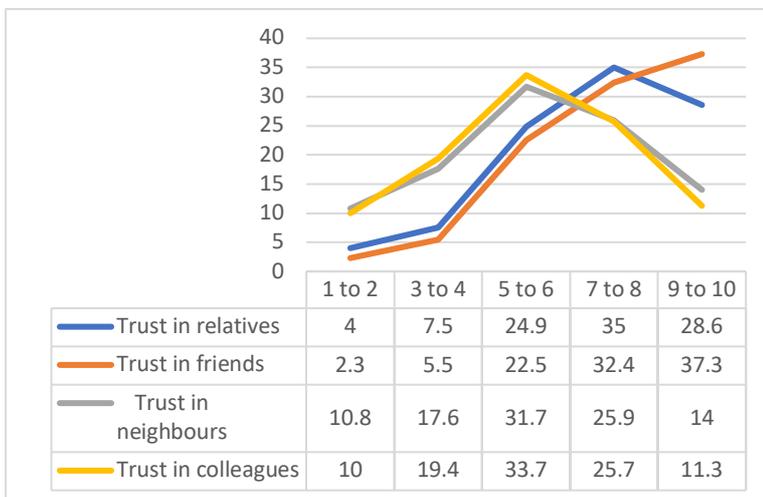


Figure 6. Trust in relatives, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Answers to question “How much do you trust members of the following groups: Your relatives; Your friends; Your neighbours; your colleagues” 1 means “not at all”, 10 means “completely”. % of all respondents who gave answers.

Trust as a social value is widely mentioned in everyday conversations among Montenegrins – when talking about colleagues, acquaintances, professionals whose help is required (such as doctors), and even celebrities. Trust brings people together, and the lack of trust, as the section below shows, creates an atmosphere of suspicion and

ambiguity where the line between formal and informal institutions remains fluid and people make decisions and form opinions from a position of dis- and mistrust.

How relationships of trust work, becomes highly visible when one turns their attention to the medical sphere in Montenegro. When asked about their experience with medical institutions, Montenegrins tend to give positive feedback. However, as it seems, it is not only the result of an orderly system (that is, a formal institution the efficiency of which we did not scrutinise in this research), but also due to various kinds of long-lasting ties that are maintained with people in the system. The following case highlights this notion.

*Danica, a 28-year-old woman from Podgorica, has a sister, who was expecting her first child. Danica's sister talked to her gynaecologist and obtained a document stating that Danica was not capable to work during her pregnancy, even though she did not have any noteworthy problems. Therefore, she could stay at home starting from the first months of the pregnancy and one year after the baby was born. Even though she was on maternity leave, she was still working – doing some projects connected to her specialty. Thus, the fact that Danica's sister had maintained a good relationship with her gynaecologist above and apart from the direct doctor-patient framework paid off to gain the needed results when a necessity arose.*

In Montenegro, there are both public and private medical institutions. Varja, a doctor working in a public hospital says that there are private clinics on every corner in Podgorica. According to her, medicine has become a big business in Montenegro. The reasons why people choose private instead of public medical institutions are directly related to the question of trust and mistrust. For example, when they want to have abortions, Varja says, women choose private clinics, because the environment is more discreet and trustful there. Women assume that by paying more money at a private clinic their gynaecological manipulations will not be disclosed to anybody. Dragica, now a mother of two, says that doctors in Montenegro “think as capitalists”: “They keep their mouth shut as long as you pay them”. At a public hospital, women think, there is a higher risk that a woman's intentions could become disclosed more easily to others, e.g., because several patients have to share one room in the hospital or one of the unrelated medical personnel can see the woman's patient file. These kinds of situations can cause rumours and gossips about somebody's private life that people in general try to hide.

Besides, there is a widespread assumption that the private sector provides better service than the public one, despite the fact that the doctors are the same.

*Dragica had to take her daughter to a paediatrician at a public clinic. The doctor did not pay much attention to her daughter's health condition, and Dragica remembers the case with dislike. After some time, she visited the same doctor in her private office. This time, the paediatrician was very kind and friendly, giving a meticulous examination. Dragica thinks the change of the attitude was related to the fact that the second time she brought daughter to the doctor's private office, where the doctor can earn more than in the state institution.*

*Miloš, a refugee from Bosnia, who could not return to his birth-place after the Bosnian war ended and now lives near Podgorica, has a very critical view on Montenegrin society. "If a house was burning in the neighbourhood or somebody fell down in agony, nobody would come to help. They would rather come and see if they can take advantage and steal something." Being a refugee, Miloš had to re-build his networks of trust, and so far it has been a struggle for him. Not being able to receive adequate support from state institutions and, in fact, not being able to approach them due to lack of proper documents, his only way of sustaining himself and his family has been through informal networks of people some of whom he trusted and some of whom he had not even met, but had to trust due to the desperate situation in which he found himself.*

More often than not, the ethnographic examples of the INFORM research team highlight moments when trust is broken and, as such, discussed and shared with friends and relatives. Thus, for instance:

*Milena, a driven professional, passionate about her field, had long planned to apply for funding to support a project that would be beneficial to her career, her institution, as well as the prestige of Montenegro as a whole in her field. Without giving it much thought, she had relied on her long-time boss to support the project and sign an important document to be submitted to the overseeing agency. The boss, however, refused to do it at the last moment because, apparently, the project did not bring her any personal gain. Distraught and disappointed, Milena said that she would have to re-evaluate her relationship with her boss and that it would no longer be the same as it was before. She could not believe that the boss would be ready to jeopardize any success for the project simply because it did not benefit the boss directly, even though receiving the funding would mean great support for their workplace as a whole, not only her own career.*

*Similarly, Jana, a professional from another country who has been living in the coastal part of Montenegro for more than two years, has learned to be deeply distrustful when it comes to building professional relationships in Montenegro. While admiring a friend, an NGO worker in the town where Jana lives, for her openness to the various people she meets in her work life, Jana expresses more caution. Jana is deeply disappointed with the fact that, despite her efforts, she has had no luck in finding local partners for her project and that she has to rely on foreign volunteers to carry it out – despite the fact that the main beneficiaries of a successfully concluded project would be the state and people of Montenegro. Having put a lot of time in writing a new project application to get international funding for her project, Jana found herself side-lined and pushed out of the project by the single institution that had agreed to collaborate with her. It is no wonder, she says, that the people with whom she formed bonds are other foreigners in the country and those who are in the margins of the Montenegrin society or their workplaces. And it is no wonder, she continues, that people want to leave the country.*

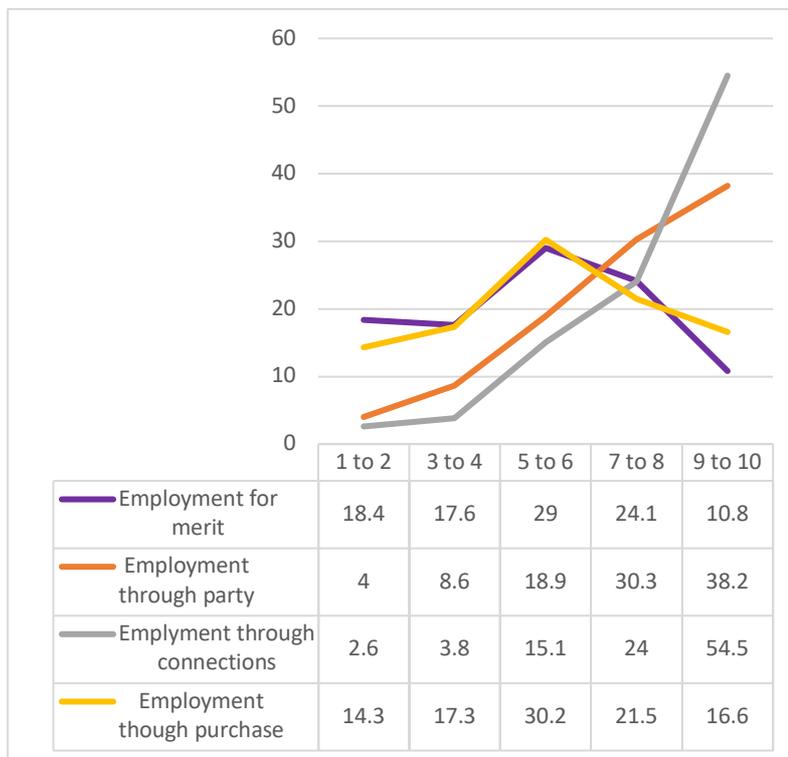
The above two examples of broken trust highlight the notion widespread among Montenegrins that their fellow citizens will not support initiatives that do not benefit them personally and directly. This idea is directly related to **the ever-present belief that “things get done” mostly on the basis of various kinds of private connections rather than the idea of public good.** For instance, the doubt that one can get a job because of his or her professional qualities rather than private connections is omnipresent. Suspicion of Political party influence, nepotism and other means enhanced by private association are often in the background – and sometimes the foreground – of conversations regarding somebody’s career path and other professional success stories, creating a general sense of lingering mis- and distrust.

## **6.2 Informality and getting a job**

**The majority of people in Montenegro believe that connections are the most important aspect at getting a job. The connections can be either relative- or party-based. The connections may vary in the level of influence they can have and thus implicitly compete against each other. The connections, though, do not always work for private gain; sometimes they operate just as a general principle, which, when facing rigid bureaucracies, may be the only way to solve everyday issues.**

Someone’s success in professional life is received with caution and creates a series of questions: how did the person succeed, who helped? Montenegrins usually do not see someone’s success as a solely individual achievement; rather, they view it as a combination of different elements where connections come often first while talent, and education are only of secondary value. Consequently, it is widely believed that those who are really talented in arts, sports, and science, leave Montenegro, as abroad they can succeed based on their merits not connections.

According to the INFORM quantitative survey, more than half (54.5%) of respondents believe that getting a job though connections happens “all the time”. The next most often expressed, but less significant, is the belief that one usually gets job though party membership. Merit-based and employment is seen to be the least possible scenario (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7. Informality in getting job.** Answers to the question: “How often in your opinion, do the following occur while trying to find new employment in our society: “Employment based on merit, education and experience; Employment through entering political party or party support; Employment through relevant informal connections; Employment by paying for the job” 1 means “it does not occur at all”, 10 means “it occurs all the time”. % of all respondents who gave answers.

This belief is often strengthened by stories like the following one:

*Radmila, a university employee from Podgorica, recalls a situation from her previous work place – a national media outlet where she worked as a journalist. She started her work with a trial period. At the same time, a new girl was recruited immediately without testing her skills and knowledge. Radmila thinks that it was because she was a relative of her colleague: “She is somebody’s niece, I am nobody’s niece”. Jokingly she adds that her parents are to be blamed for her disadvantageous situation.*

This episode from Radmila’s professional life and the following joke illustrates that parents’ and other close relatives’ work positions and connections are perceived as a sort of capital that could be transferred to other family members in order for them to get ahead in life, a theme that we also highlighted in the previous two sections of the report.

*As Radmila puts it: “Who do you help if not your own people”. She believes that it is a regular practice in Montenegro that parents help their children get a job. According to Radmila professors’ children work at the university and bankers’ offspring work for banks. When asked what happens if a person who got a job*

*because of connections is not qualified enough or does not perform well, Radmila is short: “They continue to work”. In a similar vein, Maja, another young professional, jokingly suggested one of the INFORM researchers to take a look at the academic staff member last names at one of the faculties at a university in Montenegro; they would all be the same, she said smirking, because all the people there are related to each other<sup>12</sup>*

Radmila also used to work at an elementary school for half a year, and she was surprised how many of the employees were actually interconnected. By that she implied that, in order to get a job at a school, a person needs connections. She says that people get very low salaries at state schools, but there are other aspects that attract people to these kinds of jobs. Radmila thinks that working for a state institution means stability and security and that there is more free time that one can spend with family; jobs at state institutions, she thinks, are less stressful than in the private sector.

In various spheres of life, and in those related to getting a job, the **trope of “getting phone calls”** from party officials (see also sections 5.2, 5.3) and other people in comparative positions of power is widespread. Thus, a member of a youth organization related stories of her predecessors receiving phone calls to influence their votes in seemingly highly localized and professionalized elections. To escape the same happening to her, before the upcoming elections Radmila had avoided picking up her phone and being in places where she might be easily reached through other people.

Marko’s story demonstrates how phone calls can influence decisions also in the private sector thus influencing the selection of the candidates in the job market:

*Marko is a man in his mid-thirties, living with his family in the North of Montenegro. In autumn 2017, he lost his job in the state sector. He was ready to do less skilled work just to secure income for his family. Marko found out that a new store would be opened in his city and that they would need several salespersons. Even though he applied for the sales position formally, at first, he and his wife looked into informal ways of getting the job. His wife contacted her classmate from primary school that, according to her, was a successful entrepreneur and could help with connecting Marko to the storeowner. The entrepreneur promised to do something but could not guarantee a position. Marko took the formal application road and was shortlisted from 200 applications. He and 15 other people were invited for an interview. During the meeting, the store representative told Marko that he considered Marko a good candidate. However, the store representative also said that he could not offer Marko a position, because he had received phone calls from ministers and several other influential persons in the country asking to give the salespersons positions to specific people. The representative of the store told Marko that he has never experienced such a situation that ministers would call to tell who needs*

<sup>12</sup> A sample of three faculties at one of the universities shows that, on average, in the faculty that has 20-25 members, two to four people would share the same surname, suggesting that the reality does not necessarily stand up to the perception.

*to be recruited for a sales position. Later, Marko and his wife went to the store to observe the people who got the sales jobs and spent quite some time trying to figure out the exact connections the hired people might have.*

This episode highlights several important aspects of getting things done in Montenegro. First, the lack of job prospects in the North creates great competition to get even a sales position in a store<sup>13</sup>.

Second, this example demonstrates that there is a competition between various networks and their influence. Some people have more influential networks. Friends, relatives or party comrades are seen not just as good people but people in positions of power who can make direct phone calls even to private companies. Marko's informal network that formed through his wife and his childhood friends was not strong enough to compete.

Third, situations and stories like this create further ambiguity and dissolve the remaining trust in merit-based ways of getting a job or in social justice in general. Coupled with the general distrust in people that Montenegrins hold (also highlighted by the INFORM quantitative survey), this indicates quite strongly that one needs to work on his/her networks, that decisions must be made strategically, and that one needs to maintain good relationships with people of influence.

Fourth, this episode illuminates how political power might be used for personal reasons and to influence processes in the private sector.

Finally, Marko's story highlights the circulation of stories of mis- and distrust. One cannot know for sure whether the store representative did indeed receive phone calls from people in political power – or said that because, for instance, he did not want to hire Marko. Marko and his wife, in turn, may have drawn incorrect conclusions about the connections the hired sales people did or did not have. What matters here – a theme developed further down in the report – is how stories of party connections, nepotism and other informal connections circulate and how such stories create an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust among people in Montenegro.

A slightly different perspective on the importance of informal connections is discernible from the case of Miloš, the refugee from Bosnia whose story was briefly mentioned earlier:

*Miloš, who now lives near Podgorica, is an expert at manoeuvring informal avenues not only to get a job, but also almost anything else in his life. When he came as a refugee to Montenegro, his old Yugoslav ID card expired and there was virtually no way he could get a new one in Montenegro. As a result, he spent*

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<sup>13</sup> In 2016, the unemployment rate in Montenegro was 17.7%, but in the northern part of the country it reached 34.9% (<http://monstat.org/userfiles/file/publikacije/2017/CG%20u%20brojkama%20-%202017ENG%20-%20za%20sajt.pdf>)

*almost 20 years in the grey zone of law without proper documents, but still with a life to live. In the meantime, he managed not only to get a job, but also got married. His children are born in Montenegro and his wife is Montenegrin citizen. Without any clear support networks, friends and good acquaintances Miloš was forced to do all kinds of manual, short-term and low-paying jobs despite his expertise in programming. While he was without work, he frequented an internet chat-room and met an anonymous person who arranged a job interview for him at a large state-owned company. He did everything according to the instructions the friendly stranger provided and was accepted for the position without ever being asked for papers that he did not have.*

Miloš's case is interesting from several perspectives. Firstly, it corroborates the widespread belief that one gets job through connections rather than due to his or her qualifications. In Miloš's case qualifications were important, but they got taken into account only after he was connected through a personal tie. Secondly, the story demonstrates that trust is not always something that derives from personal and immediate connection. People can befriend each other in anonymous internet chatrooms, but it is not a connection that one should or would trust very much. The anonymous person who helped Miloš get his job also did not gain much apart from perhaps satisfaction for helping a fellow human being. And, thirdly, this situation demonstrates that in certain situations informal solutions are nearly the only solutions.

**When the system does not work efficiently or puts unnecessary restrictions, informal solutions help life to still go on.** Eventually, when Miloš got the job, he had to travel to other towns in Montenegro and had to stay overnight in hotels. Due to his lack of documents, he again was not allowed to stay there officially, but could still enjoy hospitality of the hotel if the staff was flexible enough. The same could be said about other spheres of his life, including his marriage. Thus, Miloš was unwillingly thrown by fate into a bureaucratic void (it was beyond his control to receive the documents), but he was able to lead a more or less ordinary and, over the last 10 years, comparatively successful life only because there were informal cracks in the formal edifice of Montenegrin bureaucracy.

The notion that one can only get a job through personal connections and other informal means is pervasive in Montenegro. Importantly, this idea extends beyond the sphere of work and shapes the way people think of getting access to other kinds of resources and opportunities as well, as the following ethnographic vignette highlights.

*One of the INFORM researchers had joined a small discussion group where young people come together to talk about each other's past experiences abroad and ask questions before they themselves embark on such study or short-term work trips. During one such meeting, Dragana, a lively student who had recently returned from a study trip abroad, was asked whether she had experienced any changes in her peers' attitudes toward her upon returning to Montenegro. Poignantly, among other things, she remarked: "They [her peers] thought I had gotten the scholarship 'illegally,' I guess, or that I'm a nerd. But I don't know why I got it."*

Thus, Dragana was able to reflect on her peers' attitudes through the lens of the most common explanation for somebody's professional success – that is, as something that is attained through informal means and connections. Taking into account that decisions about the study trip scheme in which Dragana participated are not made in Montenegro, it is highly unlikely that her access to the fully funded study trip was arranged informally. However, it did not stop Dragana's peers from suspecting it – or her recognizing the pattern of suspicion lingering around her trip.

### 6.3 *The atmosphere of suspicion*

**The atmosphere of suspicion as to how and why people get jobs and access to other resources – including study opportunities – often affects the way people interpret various processes they observe or about which they hear from their peers. However, the rigid and restrictive regulations are often more problematic than the informality that makes it possible to deal with them.**

The following two episodes highlights this notion well.

*Jelena is a young woman who no longer lives in Montenegro, largely because her partner Boris – not Montenegrin himself – is a highly successful professional in his field in a different country. Jelena, having left Montenegro more than five years ago, is convinced that most jobs in her and related fields in the country can be attained only through party connections or nepotism. Even her partner Boris, she suggests, had attended a meeting during which he had been subtly invited to trade his influence at his workplace abroad and provide opportunities for an undeserving, yet well-connected person in order to gain access to potentially useful resources in Montenegro. Jelena recounts this situation as an episode of what she considers to be an example of a corrupt manager trying to get his relative hired at Boris' company. Boris himself, however, views the situation differently. He thinks that the manager he was meeting was not interested in collaborating with him in the first place and that the manager's relative was too educated and accomplished to need or want Boris' help anyway.*

What is crucial in Jelena' and Boris' accounts of the episode, are their differing views on what had happened during Boris' meeting with the manager – a meeting in which Jelena did not participate. Boris perceived the conversation he and the manager had as a meeting of two people who were not necessarily too keen on collaborating with each other but felt obliged to do out of sense of propriety and maintaining a good relationship in the future. Jelena, on the other hand, saw it as an attempt on behalf of the manager to influence Boris to help his relative for an opportunity to conduct business with him in Montenegro. What is important here is not so much the question of who is more correct in their interpretation of the situation – Jelena or Boris. What matters is the fact that Jelena used the “corrupt Montenegro” prism of suspicion to view and interpret events around her, while Boris was more lenient and assumed an “I don't quite know” attitude toward the same events.

That the atmosphere of suspicion is present and engenders a circulation of stories aimed at increasing ambiguity regarding a person's career, is discernible in the following vignette as well.

*Stevo is a quite successful man in his field. One of the INFORM researchers met him for an interview and later, thinking that a particular set of his experiences would be helpful to a friend, put Stevo and the friend in touch via email. Several months later, the friend told the researcher that he had met Stevo and Stevo had been a great person with whom to talk and very helpful in his advice, but that he had also heard "stories" about Stevo from other friends and colleagues that called his expertise into question and made others suspicious as to how he had reached certain steps in his career.*

Yet again, what this vignette aims to highlight is not so much the question of whether or not Stevo had achieved his current position without informal connections in the country and therefore "deserved" the job. Rather, what is crucial here, is how, in a society where people depend on and take pride in knowing "who is who," **the atmosphere of suspicion about potentially corrupt, nepotistic and also more benign informal practices is maintained through a circulation of stories in which every Montenegrin participates.**

It does not mean, however, that all Montenegrins believe that one can get a job only through informal means.

*Jovan, a young man in his mid-twenties currently studying outside Montenegro and doing short-term jobs in the country, is convinced that, once he returns to Montenegro permanently, it will be his education and skill set that will enable him to find a job, rather than his party (non)membership or other informal connections. Irena, a graduate of a master's program outside Montenegro, proudly told the story of the lengthy interview process she had to undergo when applying for a corporate job in Montenegro. That Irena was finally hired after several rounds of interviews and weeks of waiting made it worth for her – and proved to her that the company needed and wanted her quite specific skill set. Ivan, another young man in his mid-twenties, was known among his peers and even in wider circles, as a recipient of a Montenegro government grant. Ivan's success at getting the grant was attributed to the fact that he was clever and had a project worth supporting – not that he had received the grant through nefarious means. While Ivan's peers slightly bemoaned the fact that the Montenegrin government had discontinued the grant, they never doubted the honesty of its distribution.*

Importantly, people like Jovan, Irena and Ivan quite often talk more about the highly institutionalized and regulated processes and practices than express their concerns about informal influences. For instance, young researchers who work for universities in Montenegro, are often concerned about and contemplate leaving their jobs for research stints in foreign countries. However, as they themselves put it, they are afraid to leave for more than a couple of months because of university regulations that impose various restrictions on them (drastically lowered salaries, the obligation to find temporary

substitutes to teach their classes, etc.) – not because they are concerned that, for instance, a friend or a relative of the dean of their faculty would suddenly want the job.

Young, educated people of Jovan, Irena and Ivan's generation, often with experience of studying abroad, are well aware of the challenges their home country is facing. They see that, in Montenegro, they lack access to resources. They refer to Montenegro as a "transitional country" and to Montenegrin "mentality" as a force that impedes more rapid change from taking place. They know the complicated patterns of political belonging and allegiances that shape decision-making processes in Montenegro. At the same time, they do not necessarily partake in the narrative of the all-pervasiveness of corruption and nepotism, and they both possess and bring a hope that they themselves can participate in effecting positive change.

## 7 Concluding remarks

This report demonstrates that despite the internal diversity, the description of which was included in this report (and those aspects that were not included due to the limits of space), there are certain themes and approaches that are present in various aspects and diverse spheres of Montenegrin life.

Knowledge about one other is a very important structuring principle in Montenegrin life. If one knows enough about other people he or she can make sound judgements about their trustworthiness and therefore know more or less precisely how to interact with the person. Kin relations can make this knowledge readily available, and, for this reason, trust one has for his/her family members and relatives is very high and contrasts sharply with trust in other people. Friends are people of whom one has very good knowledge, and *kumstvo* or godparenthood can provide some additional insurance that this non-kin relationship is going to hold.

Outside these immediate relations one feels much less secure. Therefore, one needs to obtain information. Here again some introductory knowledge can be gained by knowing the other person's origin, and thus one can attribute the stereotypes about his/her family to the individual. Otherwise, to strengthen the trustworthiness, one needs to create reciprocal relations with other people by giving gifts and providing services.

These general guidelines work well on the personal level, but the same principles can be used also on the level of, for instance, political parties. Political parties, as it is well visible in the report, play a significant role in the lives of Montenegrins even though only a minority of them are actual members of the parties. However, it is here that they find themselves most often locked in such relationships that are very difficult to break, because too much is at stake – one can lose his/her job or place to live or both and thus would be faced with very existential problems. The fact that political parties use the same basic principles that govern life in any everyday interaction, explains the strong grip that they have over the lives of fellow citizens.

What is important to note here is that it is not the overall presence of the above principles in Montenegro, but their intensity. Every human society would have the same elements to a certain degree, however, not in every society the emphasis would be so much on the ties that one needs to maintain and build around him or herself.

This latter issue provides links between this report and other theoretically close studies. The overall tendency in the Euro-American (what is sometimes called Western) intellectual tradition has been to emphasise the centrality of government and, since Weber in particular, the centrality of bureaucratic government. This model includes central, vertical integration, merit-based recruitment and equality of all citizens before the general regulations. However, it is not difficult to see that this particular model is virtually the same as the image of a large 20<sup>th</sup> century corporation. It is also not a secret that life

in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about different, much more network-based or task-oriented structures while the grandiose bureaucratic structures become less and less able to cope with this new way of life.

These changes, partially brought about by advances in information technologies, are also posing the question about the future of the state as organised around the Weberian types of bureaucratic machineries. For a longer time, while the Euro-American world dominated the scene, it was rather difficult to break away from the existing orthodoxy of bureaucracy. All alternative models seemed to be coming either from the past or from some economically disadvantaged places (see, for instance, Scott 2009; Graeber 2004).

However, with global changes in power centres, the question of whether the bureaucratic governance is the only possible one regains momentum. The observations that a successful country might operate on principles other than the Weberian bureaucracies of the Euro-American world, might prove right (See, for example, Lovett, Simmons, and Kali 1999; Chung and Hamilton 2001).

In this context Montenegrin “informal” institutions – just like “informal” institutions elsewhere – might be seen in different light. Perhaps in the world of future, where large, well-structured and well-integrated systems are not viable, the people-centred approach will become more and more prominent.

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