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# **(in)formal**

## **Everyday life in contemporary Montenegro**

Klāvs Sedlenieks, PhD

Ieva Puzo, PhD

Diāna Dubrovskā, Doctoral Student

**Riga Stradiņš University**

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# 1 Introduction and preliminary findings

In the period from early March till end of August 2017, the research team of Riga Stradiņš University (consisting of Klāvs Sedlenieks, Ieva Puzo and Diāna Dubrovskā) carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Montenegro. The main objective of the 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 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 define institutions as a set of rules as well as practices that are derived from these rules. Formal institutions and rules, 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 the good intentions embedded in them, 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).

The ethnographic work that the team of Riga Stradiņš University carried out in Montenegro approach the interplay of formality and informality via three avenues: 1) political organisation at the level of a small rural village, 2) networks and practices of academic mobility from Montenegro, and 3) the case of sex-specific selective abortions. The diversity of the field is intentional and has an objective to widen the scope of analysed institutions. On the one hand, the practices discussed in the report highlight that the formality-informality interplay resides on a spectrum (rather than two opposite poles) and takes a variety of shapes in different spheres of life. For instance, the motivations and practices of people in the small Montenegrin village of Njeguši are not necessarily the same as those of the residents of the capital city Podgorica. On the other hand, the practices discussed in the report all show that people in contemporary

Montenegro experience tensions in their understandings of formal rules and informal practices as they navigate their everyday lives.

The three cases that we studied present rather contrasting interactions between the formal and the informal. The everyday life in a rural area shows 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 sex-specific selective abortions displays a direct confrontation between a very strong traditional institution of patriarchy with the formal rule of gender equality; in this confrontation, people try to circumvent the official rule while relying on the services of formal institutions to bring about outcomes preferred by informal institutions. The case of academic mobility shows that young people in Montenegro express preference for formal institutions and ways of succeeding in the job market, associated with the EU and other international organisations, but also rely on informal networks when they experience exclusion from formal institutions. The interplay of formality and informality in the spheres of life researched in Montenegro by our team 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.

### **1.1 Towards re-theorising institutions**

The ethnographic work carried out indicates that a clear conceptual divide between formal and informal institutions (as is done, for instance, by Helmke and Levitsky 2003) does not prove to be an adequate analytical tool. The difficulty of defining what an institution is (or is not) becomes even more complicated when we take into consideration actual human behaviour. As the ethnographic cases we present indicate, formal arrangements are always intertwined with informal ones, and informal activities often rely on formal institutions to be accomplished. In light of the conceptual problems that the strict division between the formal and informal poses, it would be useful to reconsider the applicability of the concept altogether.

A further complication derives from the necessity to identify the existence of an institution. Institutions by the definition we use are sets of rules accompanied by enforcement mechanisms that make sure that the rules are followed. However, the link between the rules and the actual practices remains ambiguous. Practices may or may not happen all the time. If practices were a necessary condition for an institution, then institutions would be only sporadic, marked by the moments when we can actually observe a specific activity (e.g., the institution of war only springs into being when an identifiable confrontation takes place, the institution of marriage only happens where married couples exist and not elsewhere). Such a notion hardly corresponds to the idea of institution as a lasting phenomenon. In our fieldwork, this problem became particularly salient in the case of sex-specific selective abortions that cannot be easily identifiable. Although by triangulation we can deduce that the practice exists, it is virtually impossible for a researcher to witness it. Moreover, as stated earlier, it is difficult to objectively establish whether an abortion is based on the sex of the foetus. However, we can see that there is a statistically detectable result, that incentives and sanctions are present, and that there is a widespread belief that people do engage in the particular activity. The same problem exists when scholars study informal practices (e.g., corruption or tax

avoidance) that are either completely illegal or illegitimate to the extent that people are unwilling to talk about them. However, from the point of view of social significance, this difficulty does not render the problem less important. The theoretical hypothesis that derives from the above considerations would be that there might be institutions that do not have any practical expression, but exist nevertheless.

## 1.2 Implications: What works?

The informal practices and institutions that we observed were far from ruthless criminal activities. Quite the opposite – most of the practices we observed or discussed with our interlocutors were carried out because the people involved tried to be nice and sociable with each other.<sup>1</sup> This represents a general human principle that exchange of favours just as material goods must be both materially and emotionally satisfying in order to be sustainable. Informal practices are often motivated by the necessity to protect one from violent or emotionally unsatisfying interactions with other people (for instance, in formal institutions not interested in the problems of a single citizen). In Montenegro gifts, favours and symbolic kinship exchange (such as in the Montenegrin case of *kumstvo*, i.e., godparenthood) are carefully managed elements of the game to maintain the balance between independence and social connectivity.

Next, people in Montenegro have a particular attitude towards authority. On the one hand, the strong leader discourse is widely present in the country, exemplified by several historic(al) figures and the current political leadership. According to this discourse, strong leadership is a solid cultural feature among Montenegrins. However, there is also a competing discourse, according to which personal or family independence is fiercely guarded from any vertical infringements. This was particularly visible in the case of Njeguši, but was observed across our field experience. The implication of this to the interplay of formal and informal institutions is that formal regulations, associated with vertically organised political structures might not fit well with the ethos of independence, thus promoting more egalitarian structures as more comfortable for the participants. The same duality may be one of the reasons for the strong condemnation Montenegrins often direct at political parties, as they are seen as actors that violate the independence and dignity of the members of Montenegrin society.

Furthermore, the patriarchal kin organisation has visible implications for specific interplays of formal and informal institutions. The kin organisation takes a variety of shapes. Thus, in Njeguši, the patterns of residence, political decision-making and collection of semi-formal funds are structured mostly around the resident male representatives of families. The case of sex-specific abortions indicates and reinforces the idea of cultural preference for males. However, in the case of academic mobility, gender is not an overt aspect of the practice, suggesting that the patriarchal kin organisation may take a more covert shape or be of less importance in organisational structures outside the immediate household.

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<sup>1</sup> There were, of course, exceptions that our research participants sometimes mentioned, but that we have not directly covered in this report for lack of substantial and complete information on a specific practice, e.g., casting votes in order to retain one's job and the associated benefits.

Finally, among Montenegrins, formal requirements are often designed or adopted without considering actual practices. As a result, the form tends to be considered more important than the actual practice. This, however, does not mean that the formal is completely delegitimised: there are often high hopes for the European Union that, to some extent, seem to overlap with Yugonostalgic cravings for equality and state-regulated standards. Again, the implication for closing the gap between formal and informal institutions is that there is a significant demand for less particularistic and more universal application of rules – a principle that many people in Montenegro associate with the European Union.

The following individual reports were prepared shortly after the end of fieldwork and therefore should be treated as a preliminary analysis of the situation. More in-depth understandings will be reported in later publications. However, some insights regarding the workings of the interplay of formal and informal institutions in Montenegro can be derived.

## 2 Njeguši: economic and political decisions at a village level

Ethnographer: Klāvs Sedlenieks, PhD

### 2.1 Introduction: why Njeguši

Njeguši is a small and shrinking village in the area that is known as the Old Montenegro (*Stara Crna Gora*). My previous ethnographic information about this village led me to believe that the village could provide interesting field material regarding the way the local public life is managed and negotiated. Namely: in an interview that I carried out in 2008 a local man told me about a form of self-governance which consists of male representatives of local families who decide on particular locally important issues, including collection of the financial resources that are required to carry out specific projects/tasks. Therefore, it seemed that Njeguši was a locality where some kind of self-governance was in place – something that exists either completely in the informal or in the interstices of the formal and informal institutions. The size of the village also was more graspable for the time span that I had for this project (roughly 3 months).

With hindsight the choice of this particular village had some other characteristics that made the site particularly interesting. Njeguši is located roughly half-way between Cetinje, the historic capital of Montenegro and the old sea-trade town of Kotor. Currently auto-roads connect Njeguši to the two centres, but an approximately similar trade route has existed for centuries. Previously this position ensured the relative prosperity of the village and in combination with a relative protection due to the mountainous location (approximately 850 m above sea level surrounded by formidable steep mountain slopes on all sides). Due to this favourable situation Njeguši has been the centre of Montenegrin independence movements, the birth-place of several rulers and the original dwelling-place of the Petrović dynasty. Due to that Njeguši occupies a particular place in the historic imagination of Montenegrins. At the same time currently it is dwindling in population. Several settlements that historically made up Njeguši have already been completely abandoned or are occupied only during the holiday season. At the same time the village is a booming tourist destination and a very active production site of the *Njeguški pršut* (a brand of cold-smoked ham known widely in the region) and *njeguški sir* (a brand of local cheese also well known, but produced on a significantly smaller scale). This particular combination makes Njeguši an interesting case in relation to European integration as it both has strong historic and traditional roots and engages in active, outward-looking business that would gain significantly (as at least a part of business people of Njeguši suppose) from joining the European union.

### 2.2 Doing fieldwork in Njeguši

The fieldwork was carried out during the period from the beginning of March 2017 to the beginning of June 2017. I rented a small house in the settlement (*selo*) of Raičevići, which

is located in the central part of Njeguši and is among the settlements that are not completely abandoned. I lived there with my wife who accompanied me in the field and often served as a field assistant. My closest neighbours became important participants in my research as well, providing wealth of information about life in Njeguši in particular and Montenegro in general.

When I arrived, I had proficiency in the local language to the degree that I could carry out conversations and express my interests. I could also generally follow conversations (although nuances of discussions carried out in the local slang often escaped me).

Due to the small size of the village, not many activities happen in the public sphere. There were no schools, no local municipality, no clubs, and no wide public festivities happened while I was in the village. Nevertheless, during my stay a citizens' meeting was held in a semi-abandoned building, which used to be a school, and I could participate in it. This event was followed by several semi-formal meetings, which I also could observe. Njeguši has 11 churches – another venue that could potentially provide entrance to the society, but none of these churches operate on a regular basis; some serve as a place for funeral rites and some are not used at all and are gradually falling apart. Even Easter and the day of St George (*Djurdjevdan*), the patron saint for several settlements, turned out not to be a time for public gatherings. However, Njeguši has a large number of cafes and restaurants or pubs (*konoba*). These proved to be the main centers of public life (at least for men) where people could be met outside their homes and on regular basis. Therefore, I frequently spent my time in one of the *konobas*, striking conversations, arranging more or less formal interviews and just observing the everyday conversations of other people who came in.

The second avenue through which I gathered information was through systematic visits to all of the houses in vicinity. In this way I managed to get to know almost all people in the settlement of Raičevići. The result is a comprehensive map of all of Raičevići and to a lesser degree also other surrounding settlements: Erakovići, Velji Kraj, Kopito, Dugi Do and Vrh Polja. I only visited two more settlements: Vrba, which has two or three permanently inhabited houses, and Žanjev Do, which is only inhabited during holidays. I also visited one of the summer pasture settlements, which is now only used by one man in his 70s. The official 2011 census data indicates that there are only 35 permanent inhabitants in Njeguši. However, in 2017 I visited no less than 26 households and counted 70 permanent inhabitants that I personally met and talked to. Most of the households consisted of elderly people (above 60) and unusually high proportion of these inhabitants were unwed sisters living with their brothers (who usually had married, but whose children lived elsewhere).

The third avenue was through engaging in the everyday economic life of the village. There is only one shop, which supplies basic food and household necessities. However, we also tried to purchase as much locally grown food as possible. Since almost every household engages in meat production and there is also a handful (4 that I have visited personally and some others that I have heard of or seen) farms that produce meat, eggs and milk, we could rely on these purchases. This also provided good opportunities to meet and maintain friendly relationships with the people who sold the goods.

As it happens in anthropological fieldwork, we also maintained more friendly relationships with some of the families whom we visited more frequently, spent with them more time, had meals together and had lengthy conversations, on occasion worked together in their fields and went for short walks in the surrounding mountains.

I only rarely used a tape recorder. One of the participants had a very interesting and particular life story, which I recorded on a tape recorder. I tried recording on some other occasions, but the presence of the equipment inhibited the natural flow of events and conversations so I tried to avoid it. I took also a large number of photos during the fieldwork.

### **2.3 Some preliminary insights and ideas**

Njeguši is a small community on the outskirts of the formal state system. If the state is, as many argue (e.g. Gupta 2006), represented by the buildings and officers of the state institutions, then in Njeguši one can find only remnants of these institutions. Just like the formerly strong and united church is now represented only by a number of buildings in varying states of decay, also the buildings of state institutions stand as sad representatives of their former glory. One of the school buildings has its roof already collapsed. A neighbour that lives next door uses a part of the school as a barn, and otherwise the main inhabitants are stray cats. The other school building is still standing although majority of doors and many of windows are broken. The local '*registrar*' keeps the light in the second floor rooms on day and night because she believes this prevents unknown hooligans from smashing windows. Nevertheless, the building still serves some state-related purpose when the '*registrar*' records a new-born baby, a death or wedding or when (as it happened during my field-work) the inhabitants have a common meeting (*zbor gradjana*). Ruins of the late 1980s resort hotel stand as a vivid reminder of the past glory of the socialist state and its regulated attempts to govern markets. Yet another layer of statehood is added because the ruins are located on a plot of land, which is now returned to the former king's descendant, the last representative of the Petrović royal dynasty. Just like the school, the former hotel also shelters some chickens and hay for cattle.

Numerous interviews and observations indicated a particular line of thought regarding the formal institutions. There was hardly anyone (regardless the age) who did not praise the socialist Yugoslavia. Two arguments were most important here. First, the state provided certain standards of quality (regarding both, services provided by the state and goods sold in the shops) and, second, it ensured equality among the citizens. While the equality seemed to be gone forever, there was still a strong hope for of standards of quality that at least some of my interlocutors associated with the possible integration in the EU system. Provision and supervision of such unified standards seemed to be also something that people in Njeguši expected from the state institutions.

On the eve of the day when we arrived to Njeguši, an attempted theft of some electric wires had caused the local people to call for the police. However, I did not happen to see a uniformed officer in the locality. They were never far away, though, – one only had to go to Cetinje or Kotor (each in a distance of about 50 min drive).

This situation of the “shrinking state” (where the state institutions retract) does not mean that life in Njeguši lacks a structure around which social life is organised. At the one hand, this structure is based in some tradition and is completely informal; on the other hand, it gets interlaced with formal structures. The informal end is formed around kinship, fictive kinship, friendship and maintaining good relationships with the neighbours. The mental images of the two central villages (Raičevići and Erakovići) are wrapped around the founding brothers (Raik and Erak, respectively) who supposedly founded the settlements, and many of the current inhabitants count themselves as distant descendants of the two. Households, though, are made up of individual extended families, often including several generations grouped along patrilinear principles (grandfather and his wife, their sons and wives of the sons as well as grandchildren). In most cases though the women of the middle generation and grandchildren spend most of their times in either Cetinje or Kotor, and some of those who do not, dream of that. These households are linked with other households by means of godparenthood, which in most cases is a curious sort of formalisation inside an informal realm of altogether informal friendship ties. Apart from that, a more distant neighbourly relationship is maintained with the neighbours. One of the main drivers for cooperation among neighbours currently is the tourism trade and production of *pršut* ham.

Production of *pršut* is an extremely important issue in Njeguši. The total capacity of ham production in Njeguši is about 200,000 pieces a year (but the actual estimate of production is closer to 100,000).<sup>2</sup> Many households have in the recent decades renovated or built completely new *sušara* – the building for production of the ham. A tiny fraction of the meat is produced locally while most is imported from across Europe (EU as well as non-EU). 14 producers of *pršut* have created an association (*udruženje*) that works towards defending interests and promoting quality of the production. Among the goals of this association at the time of my fieldwork was gaining the European certificate of protected geographical origin. The members of the organisation hoped that this would allow them to protect their brand of *pršut* made in Njeguši (the well-known *Njeguški pršut*) from widespread counterfeits. Along these lines the 14 producers involved (males only, roughly representing 14 extended families) regularly met, discussed, argued and even went on a study trip to Croatia and Italy (supported by the Ministry of Agriculture). Among other things the point of the *udruženje* was to use the formal institutional framework in order to put restraints on the members themselves. It was an open non-secret that the quality was sometimes sacrificed to quicker turnover (the proper curing cycle should be at least 12 months). The strict standards required by the EU certificate, some hoped, could act as an additional requirement for maintaining the standards. At the same time, it was also quite clear that there is no way the neighbours, who comprise a group of equals, could be forced to do something they did not want. So hours were spent arguing about the best procedures that would be acceptable for everyone. It was quite clear that whatever is the formal institution, the informal will always take priority and therefore agreement must be reached first.

<sup>2</sup> These numbers are according to what I was told by the head of the local association of the *pršut* producers. I have not checked the capacities of the production sites myself.

However, a due respect had to be paid to the formal institutions. The *udruženje* was also a clear link between the local community and structures of the state. In order to get the EU certificate going, the group needed to keep in constant touch with the Ministry of Agriculture, consulting them and negotiating procedures. Representatives of the Ministry also came for an inspection one time during my fieldwork.

Another avenue of local cooperation is more politically oriented and got expression through the *zbor gradjana*, or meeting of the citizens. The meeting that I observed was initiated by the chair of the local council (*mjesna zajednica*) and discussed two pressing issues: reconstruction of the local road which threatened to cause floods, according to the local experts; and the long-debated construction of a local chapel. *Zbor gradjana* acts on the interstices of formal and informal. While it is formally envisaged in the Law On Local Self-Government (*Zakon o lokalnoj samoupravi Crne Gore*), the law only regulates the general principle of voting (majority decides) and how the meeting can be initiated. The practices of running the meeting, representativeness principles and further workings are mainly custom-based. The particular meeting demonstrated that the citizens were (from my Latvian perspective) unexpectedly active: there were about 30 participants (roughly 1/3 of all permanent inhabitants), mostly men, although some economically active women were also present. None of the decisions were accepted by voting; instead a form of (mostly silent) consensus was reached. During the meeting a committee was formed for the construction of the chapel – all men, representatives of the particular villages, roughly representing each of the inhabited ones. It was also assumed that the committee would collect set donations (*po muškoj kapi* or “by the male hat”, usually 100 EUR) and that it would be enough for the works (note that the official number of inhabitants is only 35, including women and children). It was expected that the state would only support construction by providing free land and maybe levelling the rock at the site of construction. Thus (despite scepticism that many later expressed) the informal self-organisation had a clear tradition and established principles to which all mostly agreed. The negotiation for the construction of the road demonstrated also various ways (formal and informal) how the construction was negotiated.

While there are certain indications of the way that cooperation functions in Njeguši on both economic and local-political level, there are also some tendencies that undermine the capacity to work together. On a symbolic level, this is visually well represented by the multitude of churches in Njeguši. Each settlement has at least one. One settlement (Raičevići) has three churches, two of which stand side-by-side with each other and are approximately of the same size. There was no explanation why it was decided to build the other church right next to the first (instead of, for instance, expanding the old one as it is often done). The churches originally were built at various times in history, the newest being from mid 19th century. However, the buildings and the surrounding events that tend to be rather private, suggest the multitude of churches is a reflection of the rather fiercely guarded individual or at least family-level independence. Curiously this goes hand-in-hand with the self-perception of people who tend to like one strong leader. However, it seems that outside the actual reciprocal circle there is a tendency to enjoy freedom and independence.

Such independence could partly explain that the realities of state institutions seemed completely detached from people's everyday lives. While participation at the local *zbor* or

*udruženje* was treated as a normal activity of an engaged adult (male), membership in a political party or in any of the elected institutional positions were met by negative reaction ranging from cautious scepticism to open criticism. So far I have still to meet a person who would openly demonstrate enthusiasm and trust towards a politician or the party-centred political system. The main points of this scepticism turned around the belief that work in political parties is motivated by and rewarded with individual gains. At the same time, this scepticism and hostility does not preclude integration of the local system into the wider one. As the local people assured me, it is hardly unknown how each of them voted; the belief in the transparency of individual votes is widespread. In the end, the moral legitimacy of the elected leaders is more than disputable and often tarnished by allegations of self-interest and corrupt party links.

To sum it up, despite the small scale and dwindling population, Njeguši presents a lively, actively interacting community. The formal institutions are hardly noticeable at the surface level and are in general of little importance for the everyday life of the people there. However, there is a traditional capacity of self-governance that allows neutralising the wish to live independently. This gets expression in various semi-formal or informal institutions of political and economic governance. However, it is clear that for everyday cooperation a consensus must be reached on any activity before it can be carried out. If such consensus is not achieved in the first place, the informal practice is going to take precedence over the formal one.

## 3 Formalizing the informal, informalizing the formal: Academic mobility from Montenegro

Ethnographer: Ieva Puzo, PhD

### 3.1 Introduction

Academic mobility from Montenegro highlights not only a set of paradoxes embedded in the higher education and research system in the country on its course to join the European Union, but also the fluidity between formal institutions and informal networks in the processes and practices through which students engage in the decision-making progress regarding leaving the country to study or conduct research beyond the country's borders. Academic mobility from Montenegro is a contentious issue, filled with hopes and anxieties. It is an ambivalent process – both on the part of those who desire to depart the country for a longer or shorter period to pursue studies and research abroad, and those who are in charge of science and education policies and practices in Montenegro. In the framework of the INFORM project, my research suggests that young people in Montenegro navigate the playing field available to them by informalizing seemingly formal institutions and formalizing informal ones in order to increase their present and future employability. For this reason, academic mobility from Montenegro emerges as a set of practices that avoids simple distinctions between the formal and the informal and calls for a conceptualisation of a different kind.

### 3.2 Research context

To provide some context, it is important to note that policy-makers and representatives of academic institutions in Montenegro acknowledge the necessity to join the EU academic and research network and establish strong and lasting ties with educational and research institutions abroad.<sup>3</sup> The increasing number of EU-wide academic exchange programs (such as the Erasmus framework<sup>4</sup>), bilateral agreements between

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<sup>3</sup> While this question is worthy a report of its own, it is important to note here that “abroad” itself is a category that, in the case of Montenegro, escapes easy definitions. Particularly in the context of academic mobility, “abroad” does not necessarily refer to all places beyond the country's geographical borders; rather, it refers to the imagined “modern” (to quote my interlocutors) community that begins beyond the borders of former Yugoslavia and is commonly associated with the European Union. That these categories sometimes conflict is highlighted in the narratives of my interlocutors who tended to include ex-Yugoslav countries Croatia and Slovenia in the category of “abroad.” In most cases, however, they did not consider study or research trips to, for instance, Serbia as part of their “international experiences.”

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.neomontenegro.ac.me/index.php?l=en>

institutions in Montenegro and other countries, as well as the establishment of the EURAXESS initiative in Montenegro<sup>5</sup> attest to this fact. At the same time, however, there is a lingering concern about “brain drain” and the potential loss of human resources that increased mobility activities and Montenegro’s accession to the EU may bring.

Another set of worries relates to the competitiveness of Montenegro’s system of higher education and research. There are three universities in Montenegro: the University of Montenegro (Univerzitet Crne Gore), established in 1974, is the only public university, and it is also the largest; Mediterranean University (Univerzitet Mediteran) and the University of Donja Gorica (Univerzitet Donja Gorica) are private universities, founded in 2006 and 2007 respectively. To address concerns regarding the competitiveness of higher education in Montenegro, the 2017 higher education reform, among other things, rids bachelor programs of the so called “specialization year” and thus allows Montenegro to switch from its 3+1+1 higher education system to – for EU institutions – the more recognizable 3+2 system.<sup>6</sup> The recent years have also witnessed an increase of discussions on academic integrity, with the three universities in Montenegro, governmental and nongovernmental institutions, as well as international actors (for instance, the Council of Europe) involved in such conversations.

While changes in higher education lie within the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science expresses dedication to increasing Montenegro’s research output and competitiveness. The establishment of Centers of Excellence in Montenegro (such as the “pilot” Center of Excellence BIO-ICT) is considered to be one of the means of achieving this goal – and, at the same time, retaining smart, young researchers in the country. The Ministry also has – or at least used to have until this year – several scholarship schemes to support young researchers during their studies abroad or to partially fund promising research projects within Montenegro.

### **3.3 Research question**

It is in this context that, as a component of the INFORM research in Montenegro, I set out to investigate how young people make both sense and use of the formal and informal support mechanisms available to them when they make the decision to leave the country for a shorter or longer period of time to pursue studies or research outside Montenegro. For the purposes of this report, I consider academic mobility as an extended and, importantly, affect-filled process which also involves aspirations for mobility and obstacles to it; it is a process that starts long before the physical mobility takes place and lasts well after it has concluded. Analysed as such, my project aimed to provide new insights into the research on the interplay of formality and informality in the Western

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.euraxess.me/>. Ironically, as I was told by a representative of the University of Montenegro, despite the development of the formal EURAXESS framework (and the funding the development had attracted, [http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/93387\\_en.html](http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/93387_en.html)), as of July 2017 nobody had used the new application system.

<sup>6</sup> Intriguingly, however, the same reform makes higher education free of charge for the students of the University of Montenegro, thus leading to discontent from the two private universities.

Balkans through an examination of the extent to which the distinction between the formal and the informal applies to the practices of academic mobility from Montenegro.

### **3.4 Research process**

As an anthropologist, I relied on the ethnographic method to engage with these questions. During the summer of 2017, in the INFORM project framework, I carried out three months of research in Montenegro, based in the capital city of Podgorica. As Podgorica is home not only to almost one third of the county's inhabitants, but also to the largest campus of the University of Montenegro, as well as the two private universities, it is the perfect location to gain access to students and researchers and study problems related to academic mobility from the country.

During my stay in Montenegro, along with countless unstructured conversations, I carried out 30 semi-structured interviews with students and their representatives, researchers, administration representatives from the University of Montenegro, one official from the Ministry of Science, NGO representatives, and employees of organisations aimed at increasing academic mobility from Montenegro (such as the Erasmus+ office in Podgorica, the US Embassy, and the Education USA<sup>7</sup> office). I also engaged in several hours of observation at one such organisation, and carried out an informal group interview with members of the board of a student organisation. Interviews were conducted in English with references to Montenegrin terms and phrases interspersed.

Unfortunately, I was not able to carry out extended observation and participant observation due to the fact that not many offices and organisations held their regular meetings and events during the summer. In addition, many potential interlocutors (for instance, representatives from the Ministry of Education) were also unavailable for interviews for the same reason, thus limiting the number of interviews conducted. However, as I have planned my next research trip to Montenegro in the fall of 2017, I aim to gain access to spaces and research participants that were unavailable during the initial research period.

I relied on snowball sampling to gain access to my interlocutors. It is also partly for this reason that, in my project, I do not treat students and researchers as inherently separate categories and do not focus on the mobility of academics in one particular field of study. Following the leads suggested by my research participants, I contacted their colleagues and friends for interviews about their experiences studying and conducting research abroad, thus directly tracing and experiencing the fluidity and overlapping of formal and informal networks in the decision-making process of my interlocutors. While the challenges and practices of students and those higher up the academic ladder are not necessarily the same, for the purposes of this report, I discuss the practices of students at various degree levels. What is important, however, for the study of the fluidity of formal and informal institutions in academic mobility, is the question of how people employ various resources – across the lines of formality and informality – to find study, research and, ultimately, employment opportunities.

<sup>7</sup> <https://educationusa.state.gov/centers/educationusa-montenegro>

### 3.5 Preliminary findings

My component of the ethnographic research carried out in Montenegro set out to examine the extent to and ways in which students and researchers make sense of and use formal and informal networks and connections as they make their mobility decisions – both leaving the country and, in many cases, returning to it. Ultimately, my research suggests, students and young researchers in Montenegro rely on a fluid set of formal and informal resources available to them in the decision-making process about their academic mobility – including immobility – with the ultimate goal of increasing their employability. Students and researchers move between formal institutions and informal networks to increase their present and future employability; they draw on formal structures to achieve personal goals, and, in turn, employ informal networks (from friends and family, to other kinds of personal connections) to gain access to formal institutions. Influenced by values associated with the European Union and other international organisations, they also strive to formalize and, therefore, legitimize informal networks. Consequently, my research suggests that the practices of academic mobility from Montenegro avoid clear-cut distinctions between the formal and informal, highlighting the fluidity between the seemingly separate spheres.

During the research, I encountered three main groups of mobile Montenegrin students and researchers: students attending Montenegrin universities and using short-term exchange programs such as Erasmus Mundus/ Erasmus+ to attend foreign universities for one semester or academic year; Montenegrin students enrolled in bachelor's, master's or doctoral programs in other countries; and young researchers with teaching and research positions in Montenegrin universities. In this report, the focus is on the mobility practices of students at various degree levels.

I did not meet or hear of anyone who paid for their own studies, or whose families fully financed their education, suggesting that the availability of the formal structures of grants and scholarships are an important factor for Montenegrin students in their decision to leave Montenegro to pursue knowledge abroad. That is, their opportunities to study abroad would be limited otherwise. Many of my interlocutors pointed out that they could not have asked or relied on their informal networks (for instance, their families) to financially support their studies abroad. “Studying abroad” implies not only gaining admission into a university, but also getting a scholarship to finance the studies and/ or living expenses. This factor was acknowledged at the organisation level as well. For instance, at the Education USA Podgorica office where Montenegrin students go to inquire about opportunities to study in the United States, they are explicitly told that the only way to study in the United States is through securing a scholarship of one or another kind, that is, by relying on the formal structure in place. Many of my interlocutors elaborated on the necessity to learn how navigate the formal structures of scholarship and grant opportunities; in terms of gaining access to such opportunities, informal networks were reported to be of limited, if any, use in the process.

At the same time, despite the fact that formal structures aimed at fostering international mobility and collaboration are present in Montenegro in general (the Erasmus+ program,

Fullbright programs, Marie Curie funding opportunities, and various bilateral programs, among others) and higher education institutions in particular (for instance, offices for international cooperation at all three universities), not everyone is ready to make use of these support systems.<sup>8</sup> Those who do, however, rely on a fusion of formal and informal networks when making decisions regarding the universities and scholarships for which to apply. For instance, when considering the universities which to attend in the Erasmus+ framework (that is, the formal structure), they rely, among other factors (such as the climate, closeness to Montenegro, or the perceived character of the people), on the experiences of relatives and peers to gain insights on particular countries and institutions of higher education (that is, their closest informal networks). Very often, their friends' experiences prompted students to apply for the same institutions, even though such choices may not have been the most beneficial academically. In turn, upon return to Montenegro, personal relationships established in other countries prompted the young people to search for other opportunities to engage in further mobility, yet again seeking out formal structures to achieve personal goals.

What emerged in the conversations with students who have been on Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ and other short-term exchange programs, is their allegiance to the ideals represented by the European Union and a sense of Montenegro as lacking in comparison. The narrative of modernity, development, and advancement manifested in students' stories about their host universities in EU countries, and Montenegro tended to be described as a country in a "transitional phase." My interlocutors praised the chance "to learn about other cultures," provided by the Erasmus+ program and embraced the opportunity, to quote one of my research participants, to "become a EU citizen even if you are not one."

That is, students associate the European Union with formal institutions and socio-economic successes achieved because of such formal structures. In turn, they consider Montenegro to be characterized by an abundance of such informal institutions as nepotism and undue political party influence. Informal institutions of this kind are perceived as, if not ineffectual, then at least embarrassing and something from which to distance oneself. The allegiance to the ideals associated with the European Union prompts students to favour – at least in their narratives – formal institutions that are seemingly free of informal influences. For instance, one student organisation explicitly disallows members of political parties to belong to their organisation, considering that such membership would necessarily imply the presence of what they referred to as "political influence" – something they wish to avoid to be perceived as neutral and representing students' interests. Another one, while largely relying on informal networks of friends and acquaintances to constitute its core membership, aims to represent such ties as strictly professional, that is, formal networks.

However, the opportunity to "become an EU citizen even if you are not one," is fraught with tensions, and so is the reliance on formal structures, associated with international

<sup>8</sup> At this stage of the project, I did not interview students and researchers who had actively decided to remain immobile, that is, chosen not to leave Montenegro. I aim to conduct interviews with such students and scholars during the next phase of the research in the fall of 2017.

organisations. To a great extent, mobility – and the sense of belonging that it seems to bring – remains an aspiration, something that young Montenegrins are teased with but never fully given. That is, Montenegrin students on exchange programs are given a hope of belonging that is then taken away when they realize they may not stay in the EU country of their choice as easily as their counterparts from “Europe” (that is, the European Union). Consequently, while students favour formal institutions, they also experience exclusion from them.

Montenegrin students enrolled in higher education programs in other countries from the start also face a similar problem. They tell stories of applying for hundreds of jobs in the European Union only to be told at the end that their Montenegrin citizenship is too huge of an obstacle for the interested company to overcome. One interlocutor, currently successfully employed in Montenegro, told me that he invested his own financial resources in gaining two master's degrees abroad (“studying too much”) not because he necessarily wanted it, but because he had made a conscious decision to be in the country where he earned his second degree. While a master's student, he sent out “hundreds” of applications only to receive rejections – both, as he reasoned, because of the great competition in the particular labour market and because of his citizenship. The reliance on formal structures, he came to realize, had its limitations.

As a result, in situations where they face employment obstacles of the kind highlighted above, educated young Montenegrins rely on the fluidity of formal mechanisms and informal networks to carve a niche of their own. Under the conditions of the formal structure that admits Montenegrins in EU countries as students and then eschews them when they hope to enter the labour market, they (re)turn to the informal networks of various kinds available to them in Montenegro. Thus, for instance, the above-mentioned young man with two master's degrees is determined to start his own consulting business advising Montenegrin students who want to study abroad how to apply for degree programs and scholarships. He already has his “pilot” clients among friends of friends and other acquaintances, and is thus able to invert his own failure to gain the desired employment in Western Europe into an opportunity to draw on his experiences as a career resource.

Another set of informal networks that Montenegrin students rely on are ties at their academic institutions in Montenegro. The cultivation of relationships with one's superiors is an important aspect of securing employment – even if temporary – in Montenegro upon one's return from studies abroad. The goodwill of former (and at times current) professors is crucial for ensuring participation in short-term research projects or gaining teaching assistantships. Thus, for instance, while not explicitly iterated so in our conversation, it was clear from the narrative of one of my interlocutors that his open enthusiasm about the guiding principles of his University and its leading figures helped him secure both a research visit to a large academic institution abroad as well as employment at the University upon his return. Others, especially among those pursuing their graduate degrees in institutions abroad at the time of the interview, were confident that their knowledge and education in combination with the networks they had forged in Montenegro with their former instructors would help them find employment in their home country.

A particularly intriguing mechanism of maintaining one's employability through the fusion of formal institutions and informal networks among young Montenegrins studying abroad was highlighted to me by the editor of a Montenegrin news website. Every two weeks or so, the website publishes short articles featuring Montenegrins studying in other countries. Puzzled by this rubric, I inquired about its format and purpose. The editor explained that the ultimate goal of the rubric was to boost the confidence of young people in Montenegro and show the value of their degrees, while at the same time introducing the readers with lifestyles and education systems in other countries. Intriguingly, while it is largely informal networks that bring specific students to the attention of the website (for instance, through reader suggestions of interesting young people), the featured students, according to the editor, use the articles about them to boost their CVs and raise their visibility in the country. The website, then, serves as a formalizing mechanism that transforms informal networks into a person's formal presence in the job market.

That formalizing informal networks is a strategy for securing employment and maintaining employability is clear from the story of another interlocutor. A young graduate of a master's program in a former Yugoslav country, he was able to draw on the overlap of formal institutions and informal networks to gain full-time employment at a Montenegrin company in the respective country. Very active in a Montenegrin student organisation, he had been a frequent visitor to a Montenegro government institution in the country where he studied. When a Montenegrin company approached the government institution for employee suggestions, his name was the first one on the list, thus allowing him to benefit from his active networking (informal work) and visibility to the institution's employees that such activities entailed.

This example, along with the ones mentioned earlier in the report, suggests that, in order to gain employment and retain employability, one of the ways young and mobile Montenegrins navigate between formal institutions and rules (often associated with the European Union) and the less structured informal networks is through the formalization of informal networks and practices. On the one hand, the young and mobile Montenegrins prefer the formal institutions represented by the European Union and other international organisations; in their mobility practices, they rely of the formal structures and opportunities presented by international grants and scholarships. On the other hand, however, when facing the exclusion from the formal structures represented by, for instance, the same supranational organisations, young Montenegrins (re)turn to the reliance on informal networks (from their peers and families, to cultivating relationships with one's superiors, to increasing their visibility through various means) to find their place in the country and the world at large.

## 4 Quest for a son: women manoeuvring between tradition and law in Montenegro

Ethnographer: Diana Dubrovska, PhD student

*She [mother] got four abortions till she got a son. Can you imagine that?*

*Jelena<sup>9</sup> (23, Podgorica), interview on 13 August 2017*

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### 4.1 Introduction

Starting from the first day of the fieldwork in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, whenever the research topic about son preference and the following phenomenon - sex-selective abortion was introduced, people confirmed the existence of these practices. Very soon it could be observed that in most of the cases there was rarely anybody who would openly share one's own experience. Rather, people tended to talk about general perceptions of gender roles and traditions in society, but in some rare cases they shared stories from their relatives or friends. Moreover, the state representatives insisted that the existing formal regulations solve the problem.

This ethnographic report demonstrates how the existing tradition in Montenegro to have a son in order to continue the family lineage fosters women to manoeuvre between informal institutions such as traditions in family and larger society and formal institutions such as the state law about abortion and health care organisations. It could be argued that despite formal regulations, informal practice is often taken for granted and takes precedence over the formal rule.

### 4.2 Fieldwork site and methodology

This report is based on three months ethnographic fieldwork (29 May – 25 August 2017) in Podgorica<sup>10</sup>, the capital of Montenegro<sup>11</sup>. Over three months semi-structured (13),

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<sup>9</sup> This person's name has been changed upon request in order to secure the anonymity. All the following persons' names and work titles mentioned in this report are real.

<sup>10</sup> According to Census, total number of population in 2011 was 620 029, in Podgorica - 185 937 (Statistical Office of Montenegro 2011).

unstructured interviews and informal conversations (18) were conducted with women, men, gynaecologists, other health specialists, NGO workers, journalist, researchers, ombudsmen, a lawyer, and other representatives from state and international organisations. Most of the interviews and conversations (21) were written down during or after the meeting. Ten interviews were recorded (total time - 10h 6min) with the permission of interviewees; mostly it was done in the interviews with representatives of the state and international organisations. A few observations were made in public spaces, Clinical Centre of Montenegro (*Klinički Center Crne Gore*) and at women's rights NGO.

Taking into account limited time period for the fieldwork, sensitivity of the topic and the fact that some of the observed practices could be considered as semi-legal or even illegal, data collection about the phenomenon was indirect. Informants that spoke about the phenomenon were representatives from ministries, NGOs, international organisations and state hospital. During informal conversations informants talked about son preference and sex-selective abortion practice indirectly, referring to families around and friend circles. This does not necessarily indicate that there is no such phenomenon, rather it requires looking for different methodological strategy.

Most of the informants were contacted via e-mail to arrange meetings and interviews. The "snowball method" helped to gain more informants through existing contacts. As I only possess basic knowledge of the local language, the interviews and informal conversations were carried out in English. In three cases an interpreter was used. All the informants were introduced to the INFORM project and particularly with the research topic and objectives.

### **4.3 Preliminary conclusions**

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 and cell free foetal DNA test, women can find out the sex of the foetus starting from the week 7-9 (in the case of cell-free foetal DNA test). This has resulted in a situation where the number and the sex of newborns could be regulated.

It is widely believed that in the last few decades this has caused a skewed sex ratio at birth in several Southeast European countries, including 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

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<sup>11</sup> This fieldwork makes up the first part of a doctoral research and fieldwork that will be continued till June 2018. Therefore, the focus in this particular fieldwork was to get an overall understanding on the phenomena in Montenegro.

girls<sup>12</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>13</sup>.

From the legal perspective, Montenegro has the Abortion Law (2009). Even though abortion is legal, there are limitations on when an abortion can be performed. In order to terminate the pregnancy during the first ten weeks, the person should make a request. During this period it is not possible to detect the sex of the foetus with ultrasound, but recent medical research shows that mother's blood-test can indicate the sex of a foetus starting from week 7 (Devaney et al. 2011). Compared to ultrasound, the blood test is more expensive. Between ten and twenty weeks, abortion is allowed only with the permission of a committee and is allowed only for medical reasons. It is allowed only if the child is expected to be born with physical and/or mental disabilities, if pregnancy is the result of rape or other type of crime, or if the woman could be confronted with dubious family setting during or after pregnancy. Starting from the tenth week it is possible to detect the sex of the baby by ultrasound, but, as stated above, abortion is permitted only for medical reasons with the approval of a committee. Between weeks twenty and thirty-two, abortion must be approved by a committee on ethics, but after week thirty-two abortion is only allowed in order to save the life of woman. Regarding sex-selective abortion, it is not allowed in any of these stages and a healthcare professional who proceeds with a sex-selective abortion can get a fine in the amount of ten to twenty times the minimum wage in Montenegro<sup>14</sup>. Thus the Abortion Law gives the formal reasons for legal abortion. However, informal institutions such as the tradition to prefer to have a son determine that abortion may sometimes be performed also based on the sex of the foetus.

During the fieldwork, gynaecologists, state representatives constantly brought up the fact that the law prohibits abortions based on the sex of the foetus. But when asked why the custom has emerged in the society, they refer to culture, tradition, backwardness, and patriarchy. Curiously, the practice of sex-selective abortion is only possible because of the advances made in biomedicine in the last decades.

Although the European Union and international organisations such as the United Nations has no direct influence on states' policies regarding sex-selective abortion and abortion

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<sup>12</sup> For example, United Nations in their report on sex ratio at birth in 2012 indicated that standard biological level is 104-106 boys to 100 girls. European Commission in their documents indicate 102-106 to 100.

<sup>13</sup> During the period from 1990 till 2000 the sex ratio at birth was 110 male to 100 female (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).

<sup>14</sup> The minimum wage in Montenegro is 288,05 € per months (IEconomics 2017). Till now I have not encountered any information regarding the situations of healthcare professionals receiving a fine.

in general, international bodies have taken a stand on the issue<sup>15</sup>. But according to Nils Muiznieks, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, the international framework has weak influence. In 2014 he published a critical comment about the disturbing sex imbalance among new-borns in several Council of Europe member states, including Montenegro, indicating that women are possibly performing sex-selective abortions (Muižnieks 2014).

Three years later, in July 2017, when the delegation of Montenegro presented the 2<sup>nd</sup> CEDAW<sup>16</sup> report in the United Nations office in Geneva, the state representatives had no answer when the committee asked what has been done to tackle this issue. Later, in written form, the government's answer was short - the Abortion Law forbids sex-selective abortion (United Nations Human Rights 2017). This episode and the fact that state representatives constantly referred to the Abortion Law illustrate the situation – the formal law is being presented as though it *per se* means the absence of the informal practice or that the informal practice will disappear. According to informal conversations with workers at the women's rights centre based in Podgorica, putting this law at the forefront also indicates the absence of real policy initiatives 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.

Another important set of actors that is directly involved in the sex-selective abortion issue is medical establishments and doctors. In Montenegro there are state hospitals and private clinics. Legal abortion can be performed in 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, other private clinics are not authorized by the state to perform abortions as they lack proper blood transfusion facilities. However, according to my informants, abortions are also carried out in several of these private clinics.

Even though methods such as ultrasound (starting from week 12) and amniocentesis (between 14 and 16 weeks gestation) can help to determine the sex of the foetus, abortion without additional committee approval is permitted only till week 10. Therefore, women in Montenegro have been using a new method - a cell free foetal DNA test that can indicate the sex of the foetus starting from week 7-9. Dr Olivera Miljanović, director of the national Centre for Medical Genetics and Immunology and Vice Dean at the University of Montenegro, confirmed that women in Montenegro do go to private clinics that offer this new service. The pregnant woman's blood sample is sent to a private laboratory in Belgrade, Serbia. In addition to screening for Down syndrome and a few other chromosomal conditions, the sex of the foetus also can be determined. After

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the suggestions regarding this issue could be found in Nils Muiznieks comment - <http://www.coe.int/hu/web/commissioner/-/sex-selective-abortion-are-discriminatory-and-should-be-bann-1>

<sup>16</sup> CEDAW is a Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The convention was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly.

receiving the test results, a woman who decides to perform the termination of the pregnancy can do it either in private clinic or in a state hospital up to the 10<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy without giving a reason and requesting the approval of the committee.

Women's relationships with gynaecologists in Montenegro are complex. Some of the gynaecologists in Podgorica combine work at a state hospital and a private clinic. One of the doctors explained that they do it because of the low salaries in the state hospital, but, salary aside, work in the private sector provides additional income. For example, the mother's blood test costs around 600 euros and the gynaecologist as a health broker gets 10% of the deal. This fosters their financial interest in offering this service to women who come to a private clinic. After getting the results, women can perform an abortion in the same clinic or in a state hospital, where this operation will cost less than in a private one<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, while being a part of both the public and private health sectors, gynaecologists' financial interests and ethical position intersect. The reason why women choose private clinics is the widespread assumption that the private sector offers a discreet environment and better quality service than state. In the case of abortion, the discreet setting is crucial.

Despite the provision in the law, there are no reported cases of sex-selective abortion in the country. There are various reasons for that. Firstly, people who can actually report an illegal abortion are persons who are directly involved in the process – gynaecologist and woman. Doctors are not keen to report because by the Abortion law they can get a fine. Women, on the other hand are actually interested in maintaining their relationships with gynaecologists, as they are the gatekeepers of their reproductive strategies. Doctors in Podgorica confirmed that some women do come for second, third and even fourth abortions, despite the risk of losing fertility altogether as a consequence of multiple abortions (thus also losing capacity to bear a son). Secondly, sex-selective abortion is almost impossible to prove. According to gynaecologist Dr Snežana Crnogorac, women are not always honest with doctors about the reasons they want to terminate the pregnancy. And in general there is no mechanism to prove if the abortion is based on information about the sex of the foetus or not. Therefore, it could be argued that the formal Abortion Law not only clashes with the operations taken behind the gynaecologist's cabinet door, but also is impotent as it is almost impossible to determine the motivation for abortion. This creates a space for doctors and women in Montenegro to engage into ambiguous relationships. While on the one hand woman is expected to perform necessary manipulations in order to get rid of the less desirable foetus and keep the more desirable one, on the other hand there is a doctor, who is confronted with ethics (to help women) and violation of law (not to perform a sex-selective abortion).

Besides the formal health sector there are also informal structures and unconventional methods used to get a son. Jelena, a 23-year-old woman from Podgorica, shared with me a story of her relative who had two daughters and desperately wanted to have a son. This woman approached a lady, who performs inner organ massage or as Jelena said,

<sup>17</sup> In the central state hospital the abortion costs 30 euros with local anesthesia and 80 euro with general anesthesia. I am not aware of prices in private clinics in the time of this report. In some online publications the prices in private clinics for abortion in 2011-2013 was 150-240 euros.

“she turns some organs” so woman can have a son. Even though the procedure was painful, at the end the woman got a son. Thus, it is only partly that the informal world of sex-selection overlaps with the formal institutions. The pressure also produces responses that lay altogether outside the formal world.

This report demonstrates how the existing idea of a son as a more desirable offspring fosters women in Montenegro to navigate between tradition, illegal activities, weak international influence, lack of law enforcement, financial expenditures and health risks. Women are manoeuvring not only between formal and informal institutions, but also within legal and illegal settings that go beyond state borders.

## 5 Conclusions

This report presented three cases of everyday life in contemporary Montenegro, and each of them provides a different glimpse into the question of the interplay of formal and informal institutions. In the socio-economic life of Njeguši, informal practices are more visible than the formal systems represented by the state. In the case of academic mobility from Montenegro it is the formal structures in place (funding opportunities, exchange programs, and the ideals represented by the European Union) that are seemingly more prevalent. In the case of sex selective abortions, it is the outward invisibility of both formal institutions and informal practices that dominate social life through the secrecy surrounding the matter. This diversity in the visibility of formal and informal institutions in Montenegro shows that different forms of the formality-informality interplay are dominant in different spheres of life, suggesting that we need to exercise caution generalising conclusions and making comparisons between sites and localities.

The ethnographic research carried out by the Riga Stradiņš University team in Montenegro forms part of the first (empirical) steps towards building a novel theoretical framework, as well as formulating practical policy measures. Therefore, we have limited our recommendations to outlining the main implications of our findings for understanding the interplay between formal and informal institutions in the everyday life of contemporary Montenegro.

The most important theoretical implication is that the binary contrast between formal and informal institutions does not sustain the test of actual life situations. What we see is a constant flow between formal regulations and informal ones, between practices that seem to be formally stipulated and practices that have nothing to do with the formal framework that supposedly regulate them. Therefore, in our future work, we aim to devise better ways of conceptualising and theorising the collected data.

Moreover, what we observe is that people in Montenegro both condemn the existing network-based practices (which go hand-in-hand with Yugonostalgia as well as expectations that the European Union does not and will not tolerate this “informality”) and, at the same time, accept that in certain situations one should rely on personal networks and patrons. Even more, people’s experience with EU institutions makes many Montenegrins notice that the European Union is free of informal rules and practices either.

Importantly, our observations show that informal structures in Montenegro are based on ideas about what it means to be a proper person – a gendered and kin-embedded being that also belongs to a particular nation-state. That means that the informal institutions that we have observed, regardless of their legal status, often are morality-driven rather than desperate measures for satisfying individual preferences.

The ethnographic material that we collected during the fieldwork is much too rich to be adequately reflected in the report that we have presented here, and it is a gap that we look forward to closing in research papers to follow.

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