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FOR AN ACTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY TOGETHER

ANALYSIS OF THE NEEDS AND CAPACITIES OF NETWORKS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN SERBIA

HELVETAS SRB

Civic Initiatives

Analysis of the Needs and Capacities of Networks of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia

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Abbreviations

ACT Project "For an Active Civil Society Together – ACT"
CSO Civil Society Organisations

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Foreword

Comprehensive support for civil society cannot be imagined without the strengthening of individual organisations and support for their networking. Through synergy and cooperation, the effects of their work tend to become more visible, and their social impact stronger, both at the local/regional and the national level. It is no exaggeration to say that networking is a value element that is common to all the organisations that achieve goals and missions in the areas of public interest. Although most organisations are aware of this need and all the potential benefits of networking, the Civic Initiatives survey had identified a number of challenges for its effective implementation in practice way back in 2011. The conclusions of the study conducted in 2019 within the ACT project to help with the initial research have not only confirmed this; eight years later, they have also recognised some downward trends.

Given such findings as well as the global recommendations that view mutual solidarity and cooperation within the sector as some of the most effective responses to the downgraded space for civic action, one of the three pillars of the ACT project is dedicated to networking as an effective way to encourage civic activism in Serbia.

The analysis before you is the result of the efforts of ACT project team members from Helvetas and Civic Initiatives to examine, to further examine in depth the capacities and potentials of currently active formal and informal networks in order to provide adequate access to design of support programmes over the next three years. It is also the result of the synergy of other activities that Civic Initiatives, as a local member of the ACT consortium, carries out in the field of strengthening the capacity of the civil society in Serbia.

The main conclusions of the analysis show that awareness of the importance of networking does exist, but that organisations often approach networking without a specific strategy or plan. A large number of networks in Serbia have emerged as a result of donor and project initiatives. However, there has been no clear consideration of the conditions required for their sustainability. When networks eventually do become functional, they are often regarded as competition by the organisations that founded them, both in the process of their positioning among the actors they influence and among donors.

It can be concluded that all other challenges related to the operation of formal and informal networks stem from insufficient consideration of strategic networking needs, and thus insufficient willingness to direct some of the organisational capacities and resources towards a common structure. One of the characteristics of networks is that they, as a rule, reflect the weaknesses of the internal capacities of their member organisations. This problem is most pronounced in the areas of capacity for advocacy and establishing ties with citizens. Therefore, these areas were particularly the subject of this analysis.

The global crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic has shown the potential for influencing various actors, including civil society organisations. Experiences and lessons from the previous period show that there is a strong link between the joint response of organisations and the degree to which the needs of particularly vulnerable groups are met at a time of crisis. This reminds us all, once again, that solidarity, synergy and cooperation are the most efficient ways to achieve stronger ties with citizens, a more robust influence and better visibility of the work of the civil sector. For this reason, we believe that this approach should not be changed even when circumstances become regular again, and we will thus – within the ACT project and other activities of Civic Initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations – pay special attention to supporting networks.

Also, we believe that this analysis, which follows the publication entitled Civil Society Sector in Serbia in 2019, will be a useful source of information for colleagues, organisations and donors, but also for all others who are interested in needs analysis and creating strategic programmes to support civil society in Serbia.

Belgrade, June 2020

Bojana Selaković
Programme Director, Civic Initiatives

Summary and Recommendations

The analysis included 29 networks of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia – 20 formally registered and 9 informal. These are the networks whose representatives participated in the focus group and interviews, and answered questions from the online questionnaire, which was submitted to the formal and informal CSO networks that were identified in 2012, in the survey on the needs and capacities of networks of civil society organisations in Serbia.[1] The oldest network covered by the research was founded back in 1946 (Association of the Blind of Serbia), while most were established after the year 2010. Their areas of activity are quite diverse: environmental protection, improving the position of persons with disabilities, children's rights, youth rights, decentralisation, European integration, and so on. Half of the networks are active in the entire territory of Serbia, but most carry out their activities at the regional level (at the level of several cities or municipalities). Least of them are active at the local level, although almost 80% mentioned local self-government as the target group of their advocacy-related activities.

As regards **membership**, some networks include only CSOs that meet certain conditions (those that provide support and work on improving the position of certain target groups, or implement programmes and activities intended for them), while others are open to individuals/citizens. Accordingly, the number of members of the analysed networks varies, from e.g. four to all of 10,000. Membership in half of the networks includes a fee, while almost 90% have a formal procedure for admission to membership, which includes several steps. Some networks are not open to new members. They have already established an effective system of work, have sufficient professional staff, and have gained a good reputation both among other organisations and state institutions, which recognise them as relevant interlocutors. That is why such networks are "attractive" to other organisations. They, however, fear that the admission of new members would upset the established balance and system of work.

The vast majority of the analysed networks (75%) have adopted a **strategic work plan,** which is not surprising given that most of the analysed sample consists of formal networks. When it comes to informal networks, their functioning is based more on project activities, and therefore fewer of them have strategic documents. An equal number of networks stated that they do/do not have a **communication strategy**.

[1] Overview of CSO networks in Serbia. TACSO office in Serbia, Belgrade, June 2012

Slightly more than 30% of the networks stated that their **members have undergone training that is important for the successful functioning of the network, while in a much larger number of networks** this was not the case (63%). Topics covered by these trainings are primarily related to improving communication with the public and increasing the visibility of the work and results of networks, public advocacy, research methods in preparing and monitoring the effects of public policies, strategic planning, writing project proposals and fundraising in the local community, administrative and financial management and providing services in the community. It is interesting to note that half of the networks stated that they have secured funds to strengthen the capacity of network members through various projects they implement. Most networks, be they formal or informal, face **management challenges**. The formal ones are in a better position, as they have secretariats and staff (directors or coordinators, programmatic and financial-administrative staff) tasked with coordinating their work. While formal networks with a large number of members cite slowness of response as one of the challenges, informal networks suffer from lack of time to deal with the network. The informal structure often does not involve too much responsibility, which causes problems with the division of labour, meeting of deadlines and the like, regardless of the fact that it is the task of the organisation/network coordinator to ensure precisely that. Networks are therefore in constant search of the best way to coordinate the work of their members.

All the analysed networks mentioned advocacy as one of their forms of activity, while almost 90% engage in disseminating information. When asked about their **advocacy capacities**, almost half of the networks (44%) stated that their capacities are satisfactory, a third (31%) that they are good, while only 20% believe that they have excellent capacities. However, in smaller organisations (network members) and communities, these capacities do not exist.

When asked about the **difficulties they encounter in cooperating with state and local institutions** in the implementation of advocacy campaigns, more than half of the networks (62%) stated that they experienced no such difficulties. However, more than half (56%) have faced problems in cooperation with local self-government authorities and institutions, primarily due to their closedness and lack of interest.

Networks claim that they **involve citizens in their activities** mainly by inviting them to the events they organise (forums, gatherings), while a smaller number of them involve citizens in the initial stages of public advocacy, i.e. in the phase of problem formulation, data collection, etc. Networks with local members are in a better position because they can more easily obtain information about the needs of end users. However, the survey *Civil Society Sector in Serbia in 2019* showed that the vast majority of citizens (79%) believe that they are not informed about the activities of CSOs.

The networks equally listed direct contact and contact via Facebook (81%) as the main channel of communication with citizens. These were followed by the media, the website (68%) email (56%), and to a much lesser extent Twitter (37%) and Instagram (31%).

In most cases, a **network's constituency** is composed of the members themselves (56%), followed by citizens (25%), target groups and other organisations in the broadest sense (19%), but it also includes social enterprises and organisations that provide direct support to the target population.

When it comes to capacities that should be increased, the networks single out the following **three areas/ topics**: 1) writing and managing projects (primarily those of the European Union); 2) diversification of funding sources; and 3) improving external communication by use of modern digital tools.

The downgraded space for civic action and the political context provide new opportunities for establishing cooperation on a different basis, and in this regard, it is necessary to encourage a different approach to networking, one that will not jeopardise the capacities of individual member organisations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

(1) Although half of the analysed networks have obtained funds to strengthen the capacity of their members, they need additional support in writing and managing projects, strategic planning, as well as for strengthening the capacity for advocacy and communication with the public (especially digital communication). This is especially true for organisations that are local members of networks.

(2) Networks should work continuously to develop internal relationships between network members. There is no single model that networks could use for this purpose, but it would be worthwhile to reach - through a structured dialogue of all the members - the best model of work and management that is in line with the capacities and resources of the network.

(3) Networks should periodically (after the expiry of the strategic plan for a certain period) conduct an evaluation of their work (internal, in combination with external). The results of the evaluation should serve as a basis for a new cycle of strategic planning.

(4) Networks do not sufficiently recognise the importance of constituency building. Therefore, they should review their strategies for accessing and connecting with citizens and devise new models for involving citizens in network activities.

(5) It is necessary to establish informal coalitions of several non-profit organisations, which would "share" tasks when it comes to monitoring topics that are important for the entire sector (adoption of new laws and regulations, respect for human rights in emergency situations, etc.). Thus formed, informal watchdog networks could appear together in public and before the decision makers.

(6) Given the context of downgraded space for action of civil society organisations, networks should be open to new approaches to advocacy which would include greater involvement of citizens in all the phases of advocacy and connecting representatives of vulnerable categories/groups with decision makers, in order to develop most adequate policies and legal solutions and encourage socially engaged citizens to demand changes themselves.

(7) Newly established networks are experiencing "growing pains", i.e. problems that most networks which have been operating for a while are either managing or have already successfully solved. Based on these past occurrences, members of the newly formed networks could be trained through peer support, i.e. organisation of transfer of knowledge and experience.

(8) Donors should further support the networking of organisations at the local level, as well as the mutual exchange of experiences of organisations and networks from different parts of Serbia. Given the marked growing trend of establishing informal movements in the country, there is a need to connect them with registered CSOs and their networks. This type of exchange could largely take place online, especially due to the pandemic of the new coronavirus and the need to keep physical distance. However, it should be borne in mind that face-to-face meetings are often much more effective in the off-line world, especially when it comes to building mutual trust and solidarity among organisations.

Introduction

Research for the purposes of this analysis was conducted in the period February-April 2020, through desk analysis, consultations (focus groups) and interviews held with representatives of the networks (additional information is available in the section entitled "Methodology"). It was conducted to gain a better insight into the existing and missing capacities and needs of CSO networks in Serbia, and to ensure greater effectiveness of the future network support programme implemented as part of the project "For an Active Civil Society Together - ACT" and the planned activities of Civic Initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of networks. Support to networks within the ACT will focus on sharing the knowledge and experiences of CSOs, strengthening the capacity of advocacy networks and better communication with citizens, while Civic Initiatives will focus on strengthening management, decision-making, leadership and other elements of internal network development.

The previous (and, at the same time, the first) survey on the needs and capacities of the networks of civil society organisations in Serbia was conducted in 2012. The survey showed that there were 90 active networks, of which two thirds were informal. Informal networks were created mainly through projects, i.e. as a result or an activity of a project[2] that organisations were implementing together. The situation in the civil society sector has changed significantly over the past eight years, which in turn has affected the networks. The survey entitled *Civil Society Sector in Serbia in 2019*[3] provided us with new insights into the state of affairs in and the needs of networks. There has been a noticeable decline in cooperation between organisations. Namely, in 2011 as many as 86% of the organisations cooperated with others in one way or another, while in 2019 only 63% experienced some form of mutual cooperation. Given the fact that the number of CSOs has doubled, this is not exactly unexpected; namely, in 2011 there were 16,000 registered CSOs, while in 2019 there were no less than 32,052. Networking requires time, experience, contacts and resources, which many "younger" organisations do not possess. This is supported by the fact that organisations that were established in the period from 1990 to 2000 (68%) and those with budgets exceeding EUR 20,000 tend to participate in the networks much more often than others

[2] Ibid, p. 10
[3] https://act.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Sektor-gradjanskog-drustva-u-Srbiji-2019_studija_FINAL_compressed.pdf

In 2019, only one third of the organisations (33%) were members of a network - most often national (20%), international (12%) or regional (11%), and rarely local (10%). Organisations that are members of a network, on the other hand, do not believe that the network to which they belong has any impact - 65% of them think that the impact of the network is weak or non-existent. Most organisations believe that, to perform more effectively, networks need more resources (79%), greater understanding of the importance of networking among the organisations (46%), strengthening the capacity to manage networks (36%), greater expertise when it comes to the topic that is the subject of the network's activity (31%), and equalisation of capacities of network members (28%).

One of the main findings of this survey is that it is necessary to further strengthen the overall capacities of the civil sector and ensure greater cooperation and networking of organisations.[4] The current level of cooperation is much lower than it was in 2011; organisations often work in isolation and without mutual contact.[5] Research on CSO capacities for advocacy, *The Need for Change - Analysis of the Advocacy Capacity of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia*,[6] indicates that new coalitions and networks, while conducting advocacy, rarely establish new coalitions and networks for the purpose of involving other organisations/partners in joint advocacy actions. Instead, they rely heavily on existing networks and partnerships.

[4] Ibid, p. 100
[5] Ibid.
[6] Djurović, A., Pavlović, M., Višković, V. (2019) Need for Change – Analysis of Advocacy Capacities of Civil Society Organisations in Serbia, Belgrade Open School, Belgrade, September 2019., p. 4.
Available at: http://www.bos.rs/rs/uploaded/Potreba%20za%20promenom.pdf

Research Methodology

The survey was conducted in the period February-April 2020. It included a literature review and secondary sources (desk analysis), a questionnaire, which was submitted electronically to the networks,[7] group consultations with representatives of the networks, and interviews. It covered a total of 29 networks (20 formally registered and 9 informal), which were identified in the survey on the needs and capacities of networks of civil society organisations in Serbia conducted in 2012.[8]

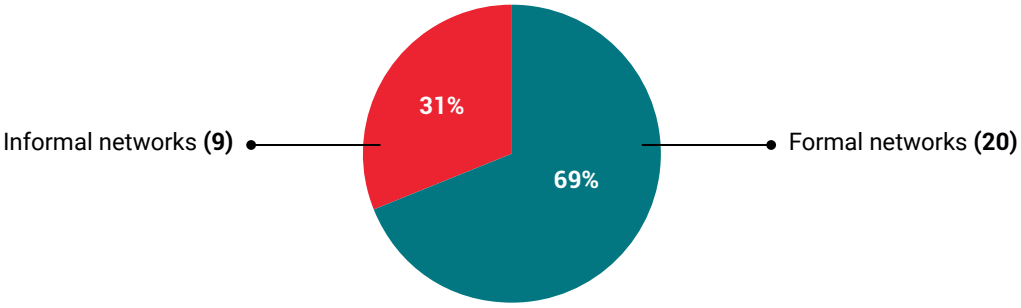

Chart 1. Structure of the survey sample

The review of literature and secondary sources included an analysis of previous surveys of the civil society sector and networks in Serbia (primarily findings of the survey entitled Civil Society Sector in Serbia in 2019 and surveys conducted under the TACSO project), as well as foreign sources on networks, advocacy of CSOs in the conditions of downgraded civic space, etc.

In the second phase, the *Questionnaire for Mapping Networks and Their Capacities* was submitted electronically to almost 4,000 organisations and was filled out by 16 networks (13 formal and 3 informal). The questionnaire was also available on the Facebook page of Civic Initiatives, which has almost 10,000 followers.

[7] The questionnaire was filled out by 16 networks, 7 of which also participated in the consultations.
[8] Overview of CSO networks in Serbia. TACSO office in Serbia, Belgrade, June 2012.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first referred to general information about the network and its activities.The second part of the questionnaire referred to data concerning the networks' management and advocacy capacities. These data were analysed and presented cumulatively for all the networks in the section entitled "**Findings**".

One of the reasons for the less than enthusiastic response of networks to the invitation to participate in the survey is that ACT is a new project, whose activities aimed at networks will start only in the second half of 2020. For this reason, CSOs and networks were not particularly motivated to fill out the questionnaire. In addition, due to the large number of activities they carry out on various projects, many organisations and networks have neither the time nor the motivation to take part in questionnaires and surveys. However, when it came to consultations, the response was much better and group consultations that were held in February 2020 were attended by representatives of a total of 18 networks (11 formal and 7 informal).

The coronavirus pandemic, which was declared during the implementation of this research, as well as the consequent introduction of a state of emergency in the country, also caused the weaker response of organisations. Nevertheless, we managed to organise three interviews in April 2020, by which we further supported the conclusions we had reached through the abovementioned phases of the research.

The results of this survey have certain methodological limitations that should be pointed out. First, we would like to note that there is no single database on (active) networks in Serbia, and it is therefore currently impossible to provide an accurate estimate of their number. The previous survey (from 2012) has identified 90, but it has turned out that this was not the total number of active networks at the time. To verify whether the networks were still active, we searched for information about them on the Internet (official websites, social media accounts, information on activities, formal networks' reports in the Business Registers Agency, etc.). Using this methodology, we established that 71 of the above-mentioned 90 networks were indeed currently active. The next limitation we faced was the relatively small sample of networks covered by the survey, which is why we are not able to draw generalised conclusions about their capacities and needs. In addition, most of the total number of networks that participated in this study (29) turned out to be formal, which could obscure the image of informal networks.

Aware of these methodological limitations, we are convinced that the findings we have obtained give an objective picture of the state of affairs concerning the networks in Serbia and represent a good starting point for designing activities to strengthen their capacities. The experience and expertise of Civic Initiatives – an organisation with decades of experience working with organisations and networks throughout Serbia and a good insight into the challenges they face – greatly contributed to this.

Framework for the Operation of Networks in Serbia

Legal Framework

The legal framework for the operation of networks in Serbia is set forth in the Law on Associations (*"Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia" nos. 51/2009, 99/2011 - other laws and 44/2018 - other law*). It stipulates that organisations (i.e. associations, as recognised by the Law) are allowed to join alliances and other associations in the country and abroad (Article 7). When the seat of an alliance is located in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, the provisions of this Law apply to said alliance. The Law on Associations also applies when a representative office of a foreign network is established in the Republic of Serbia. When the seat of the network is in another country, this Law does not apply.

Most formal networks are registered as alliances, and some of them were founded more than a hundred years ago (e.g. the hunters' alliance, scouts' alliance, etc.).[9] The group of "old" networks/alliances also includes those that were established prior to 1990 as representative organisations operating to meet the needs and interests of their members. Such is, for example, the Alliance of Persons with Disabilities. A new wave of networks came about after the year 2000. At that time, a large number of networks, coalitions and platforms were formed around topics related to the rights and position of women, children, the Roma population, LGBT people, the fight against discrimination, free access to information and so on. The existence of a legal framework (the Law on Associations of 2009), which enabled simple and fast establishment and registration of CSO networks without prior permission by the competent authority, also significantly contributed to the situation. In addition, the Law does not stipulate an obligation to register a network. For this reason, informal, that is, unregistered CSO networks are quite common.

[9] TACSO (2012), p. 8.

It should be noted that, in addition to the terms "alliance" and "association", which are recognised by the Law, other terms are also used to denote networks, such as coalition, movement, federation or platform. Although all of these terms indicate that these are organisations that have voluntarily joined together for the purpose of achieving common goals, it should be borne in mind that they are not all the same. One of the main differences between a network and a coalition is that "network members have the same goal, but do not necessarily participate in joint activities."[10] Members of a network promote the same values and work towards a common goal, but this does not necessarily mean that all members are willing to participate in individual joint, coordinated actions, as is the case with coalitions.[11] Coalitions, on the other hand, are based on joint actions, because they are "networks that are involved in joint action."[12] Movements are characterised by a high degree of cohesion and a common collective identity, as well as willingness to take action.

The Socio-Political Context in Which Networks Operate

The role and position of civil society in Serbia are shaped by two parallel processes. The first is the process of European integration, which opens up space for greater influence of CSOs regarding the creation and implementation of public policies, strengthening of democratic institutions, etc. At the same time, civil society has been exposed to growing state pressure in the last several years, and the space for civic activism is being downgraded.[13] Organisations face threats and attacks on activists, as well as media campaigns in which they are labelled as "foreign mercenaries", "traitors", "spies" and "enemies of the state", while an increasing number of state institutions uses these attacks on civil society for politically motivated actions and measures.[14] As a consequence, in October 2019 Serbia fell on the monitoring list of CIVICUS, the international network of civil society organisations, and was given the rank of a country in which basic freedoms are obstructed. Other international reports,[15] as well as the European Commission's Progress Report on Serbia,[16] also point to a worrying trend when it comes to the collapse of democracy and the state of civil society in Serbia: representatives of the opposition, civil society, independent institutions, academic community and journalists critical of the government are exposed to intimidation and attacks. Although the recent amendments to the Law on State Administration (*"Official Gazette of the RS" nos. 79/2005, 101/2007, 95/2010, 99/2014, 47/2018 and 30/2018*) and the Law on Local Self-Government (*"Official Gazette of the RS" nos. 129/2007, 83/2014 - other law, 101/2016 - other law and 47/2018)* as well as the adoption of the Law on Planning System (*"Official Gazette of the RS" no. 30/2018-3*) brought about certain improvement when it comes to the participation of citizens and CSOs in the process of creation of public policies, cooperation between state institutions and CSOs is still insufficient.

There are authors who call the current situation in Serbia "stabilocracy",[17] or "captured state".[18] The situation is reflected in the "gradual merger of the state and the ruling party which represents its interests

[10] Fox, J. A. (2010). Coalitions and networks. *UC Santa Cruz: Center for Global, International and Regional Studies*. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1x05031j
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Serbia's Civic Space Downgraded: https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/4113-serbia-s-civic-space-downgraded
[14] Ibid.
[15] Freedom in the World 2019: https://freedomhouse.org/country/serbia/freedom-world/2019
[16] EU progress report on Serbia 2019 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf
[17] BiEPAG (2017). Policy Paper: The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans. Authoritarianism and EU Stabilitocracy. Available at: https://biepag.eu/publications/the-crisis-of-democracy-in-the-western-balkans-authoritarianism-and-eu-stabilitocracy/
[18] Open Society European Policy Institute (2018) When Law Doesn't Rule: State Capture of the Judiciary, Prosecution, and Police in Serbia. Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/when-law-doesn-t-rule-state-capture-judiciary-prosecution-police-serbia

as public (and national); basic democratic processes, such as elections and the work of the Parliament, are devoid of substance; the judiciary and public administration are increasingly politicised; transparency in the public sector is declining; high-ranking politicians are accumulating discretionary powers, while media freedom is almost non-existent."[19] Another worrying trend involves an ever increasing number of GONGOs and PONGOs, established with the aim of "extracting" public funds, suppressing the voices of legitimate civil society, creating confusion and giving legitimacy to the decisions of the ruling regime.

Such trends, along with the "legacy" borne by the entire sector since the 1990s, when organisations were also labelled as enemies and foreign mercenaries, are accompanied by a low level of citizens' trust in these organisations and the civic sector as a whole. A survey on the civil society sector that was conducted in 2019[20] showed that 22% of the citizens have a negative opinion of CSOs, while the majority do not think about them either positively or negatively (46%). Citizens are, therefore, mostly either uninterested in the work of these organisations or think badly of them, while only a third (32%) have a positive opinion.

In response to these trends, the "Three Freedoms" platform[21] was created in April 2019 and signed by 20 CSOs. Its goal is to jointly fight against attacks on activists and employees in these organisations and the dissemination of false news and information about their activities, but also to fight for a stronger influence on decision makers concerning topics related to CSO activities.[22]

According to the findings of an online survey conducted as part of the preparation of the Report on the Environment Enabling for the Development of CSOs in Serbia in 2019, 18 CSOs - out of 52 that participated in the survey - answered that they are members of at least one domestic network, 13 that they are members of two, 11 that they are members of three or more networks, while 8 of them said that they are not members of any. On the other hand, in the last few years there has been a noticeable trend of strengthening informal civic movements that mobilise citizens around specific problems or phenomena in the local communities,[23] such as the movement "Let's Defend the Rivers of Stara Planina [Old Mountain]".

The pandemic of the new coronavirus and the consequent introduction of the state of emergency in Serbia, accompanied by restrictions of movement, arrests of journalists and temporary cessation of funding CSO activities by certain institutions and local governments,[24] further increased pressure on civil society and brought about fears that conditions in which civil society organisations operate might deteriorate even further.

How can networks/CSOs (successfully) engage in advocacy in such conditions? Do they have the knowledge and capacity for a new approach to advocacy, a different approach to citizens, and constituency building? These are some of the questions we tried to answer in this survey.

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[19] All Western Balkan countries need "Priebe Reports" to measure state capture:
http://www.bezbednost.org/All-publications/6965/All-Western-Balkan-countries-need-Priebe.shtml
[20] https://act.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Sektor-gradjanskog-drustva-u-Srbiji-2019_studija_FINAL_compressed.pdf
[21] Platform *Three Freedoms for Preserving Space for Civil Society in Serbia*:
https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Platforma-Tri-slobode-FINAL.pdf
[22] Needs assessment of civil society organisations in 2019
https://www.gradjanske.org/procena-potreba-organizacija-civilnog-drustva-2019/
[23] Resource Centre (2019), Needs assessment of civil society organisations in Serbia 2019. Belgrade, June 2019, p. 18.
https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Izve%C5%A1taj-o-proceni-potreba-OCD-u-Srbiji-2019.pdf
[24] State of Civil Society in Serbia – Potential Covid -19 Impact:
https://www.gradjanske.org/en/united-civil-society-responds-to-the-needs-of-citizens/

Findings

General Findings

When it comes to the **level of activity**, half of the networks covered by this survey are active at the level of the entire territory of Serbia. They are followed by those that operate at the regional level (organisations that are active at the level of several cities or municipalities), while only a few are active at the local level. Their areas of activity are highly diverse: environmental protection, improving the position of persons with disabilities, the rights of children, youth and refugees, decentralisation, cooperation with state institutions, monitoring and development of local policies, education, human rights, European integration, promotion, development and advancement of solidarity/social economy and social entrepreneurship, youth policy, post-penal protection and fighting violence against women.

When it comes to **forms of action**, i.e. the ways in which they achieve their goals, all networks declare that they are engaged in advocacy; 88% in list information-sharing and education; almost 70% cite building awareness of certain problems and providing professional support to network members, while 56% deal with the protection of the collective interests of the network's target group. Half of the networks represent the interests of their members.

The oldest network covered by the survey was founded back in 1946 (Association of the Blind of Serbia), while four networks were established only recently, in 2019. The majority of them were established after the year 2010.

When it comes to **membership**, some networks include only organisations that meet certain requirements (provide support and work on improving the position of certain target groups, or implement programmes and activities intended for said groups), while others are open to individuals/citizens. Accordingly, the number of members of the analysed networks varies from e.g. four to all of 10,000.

Membership in half of the networks involves a fee, and in almost 90% there is a formal **procedure for admission to membership** consisting of several steps. Submitting an application or filling out a membership form is a prerequisite in almost 44% of the networks, while in a quarter of them a potential new member must be nominated by an already existing member. Also, in 25% of the cases, the admission procedure includes also the submission of supporting documentation testifying to the capacity of the organisation and its commitment to devote itself to certain topics. Some networks are not open to new members. They have already established an effective system of operation, have a sufficient number of professional staff, and have gained a good reputation, both among other organisations and state institutions that recognise them as relevant interlocutors. That is why such networks are "attractive" to other organisations. They, however, fear that admission of new members would upset the established balance and system of work. Admission of new members would require additional capacity to coordinate the work of the network, which would be a challenge. Such an example is the prEUgovor coalition, which operates as an informal network.

The **prEUgovor** coalition is an informal network that was created in 2013, when seven organisations (ASTRA, Autonomous Women's Centre, Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Centre for Investigative Reporting of Serbia, Centre for Applied European Studies, Group 484 and Transparency Serbia) gathered on the basis of expertise they have built around specific topics concerning Chapters 23 and 24 of the EU membership negotiations. The Coalition monitors the implementation of policies in the fields of justice and fundamental rights (Chapter 23), and justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24), and proposes measures to improve the situation in these areas. The main "product" of the Coalition is its semi-annual independent report on Serbia's progress in Chapters 23 and 24, the findings of which the European Commission adopts in its reports on the progress of Serbia. In this way, the network applies pressure on the state "from above". The findings provided by the network in its reports are based on research and publicly available data; for this reason, state institutions recognise this network as a credible interlocutor, regardless of the fact that it is often critical of them.

In 30% of the networks, the Managing Board decides on the submitted applications/requests for membership, while in one case they are decided upon by a special commission. In 56% of the networks, the final decision on the admission of new members is made by the Network Assembly and in one case each by the Managing Board, Council or Programme Council. One network interviews representatives of potential members before the Assembly takes the final decision. As a formal act of joining, the signing of a membership agreement/charter/statement of acceptance of documents and goals is envisaged in more than 30% of the networks.

The vast majority of analysed networks (75%) have adopted a strategic work plan, which is not surprising since most of the analysed sample consists of formal networks. The strategic plans of most networks have been adopted for a three-year implementation period, in some networks these documents are in the process of revision, while one network pointed out that it is faced with the challenges of insufficient level of implementation of the adopted strategic plan. When it comes to informal networks, their operation is based more on project activities; consequently, very few such networks have developed strategic documents.

There are no significant differences when it comes to the number of networks that have, or do not have, a **developed strategy for financing/raising funds for their work**. Nine networks have such a document, while in seven of them, this is not the case - among these, three are informal networks, and two have been operating for less than one year. Two networks stated that the process of drafting this document is either envisaged in the annual plan or that it has already started. In the case of one network, fundraising takes place without a developed strategy and is the responsibility of the network president and the presidents of local associations. Similar findings were indicated by participants/focus group interviews with members of CSO thematic networks that were organised as part of the preparation of the Needs Assessment Report on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Turkey[25]: the networks generally do have annual financial plans, but they frequently revise them.

The number of networks that do and do not have a developed **communication strategy** is the same. Two pointed out that they publish periodical bulletins/magazines to inform their target groups and the interested public, while two are currently working on the development of their communication strategies.

According to the findings of the Needs Assessment Report on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, networking is one of the greatest powers of the civil society and it is recognised as such. However, the biggest challenge in this regard is to determine its purpose and the sustainability of common structures, and to assess the impact of the established networks. A large number of networks in Serbia were founded at the initiative of donors, and not for the purpose of strategic approach of individual organisations. The downgraded civic space and the political context open new spaces for establishing cooperation on different grounds, and in this regard, it is necessary to encourage a different approach to networking, one that will not jeopardise the capacities of individual member organisations. Given the marked growing trend of establishing informal movements in Serbia, it is necessary to connect these with registered CSOs and their networks.

Network Management Challenges

Most networks, formal or informal, are faced with management challenges. Formal networks, however, are in a better position because they have secretariats and staff (directors or coordinators, programme and financial-administrative staff), whose task is to coordinate the work of the network. The **number of people involved in the programmatic or administrative aspect of coordination of the work** differs from one network to another, but even the informal ones have people who are charged with these tasks. What they all have in common is that more people are involved in the programmatic than the administrative aspect of network coordination.

Decisions regarding the operation of formal networks are made by bodies such as the Assembly, Council, Management Board or Executive Board. In addition, more than 60% of the networks that completed the questionnaire have special working bodies in charge of certain areas or topics relevant for their work, such as a working body charged with raising the capacity of the network, or a working group that deals with the admission of new members. Some networks have pointed out the danger of linking the network with the person who represents it in public (director, secretary, president). In such cases, a particular problem can arise if that person has an authoritarian character and is reluctant to make agreements and compromises.

[25] TACSO Needs Assessment Report on the State of the Enabling Environment and Capacities of Civil Society in the Western Balkans and Turkey, December 2019.

The challenge faced by formal networks with a large number of members is **slow response**. One consultation participant explained it this way:

> *The network serves as a platform for consultation and participation in the decision-making process. Due to the large number of members, the network cannot react quickly (e.g. sign an ad hoc statement or petition) because of the board of directors and the decision-making structure. The procedure must exist, and it is well known at what level specific things are decided.*

Another challenge faced by informal networks is the **lack of time to deal with the network**. In most cases, the person who plays the role of network coordinator is employed in the organisation that coordinates the work of the network and is obliged to dedicate 50% of his/her working time to the tasks s/he performs in the home organisation. Coordinating the work of other organisations, taking care of the quality and standards of operation within the network and sometimes also resolving inter-personal conflicts, requires full-time work. The informal structure often does not involve too much responsibility, which causes problems with the division of labour, meeting of deadlines and the like, regardless of the fact that it is the task of the organisation/network coordinator to ensure precisely that. Networks are therefore in constant search of the best way to coordinate their members. The person who plays the role of coordinator of an informal network often keeps the network active based on personal authority, and his/her departure from the organisation can lead to a loss of enthusiasm in the network. This also happens in formal networks; they periodically replace people who manage the network, which causes them to lose the continuity of work. "Institutional memory" is not sufficiently developed.

The next challenge the networks are facing is **balancing the capacity** of their members. Whether formal or informal, networks encounter inactivity from a number of member organisations. One of the participants in the consultations explained it as follows:

> *Smaller organisations enter networks to strengthen their capacities, while larger organisations do it to legitimise their goals. That is the actual reason for networking.*

Sometimes, however, small organisations, although inactive, draw legitimacy from membership in networks. For this reason, networks, especially those that are large and formal, should review their membership from time to time. When asked "How can network work coordination be improved?", most networks answered that this could be done through better and more frequent communication and "live" meetings of network members, as well as through various forms of training and education, primarily for smaller members and those operating at a local level. In some networks, members disagree on what solidarity work with other organisations should look like. According to a representative of one network:

> *The idea of activist networking of organisations that have essentially the same goals is often not accepted because of the tendency to work in isolation, with the main idea that the network be recognised as the only organisation that is actually doing something and achieving incredible success in the fight for vulnerable individuals. The identity of the organisation, i.e. network is less important than the well-being of vulnerable individuals and their protection. Protection of individuals is possible only in synergy with others, and one organisation cannot achieve much on its own; it cannot motivate the public and provoke a reaction from the authorities.*

The **Coalition for Charity** was founded in 2017, when the following group of organisations engaged in the long-term development of giving for the common good in Serbia – Foundation "Ana and Vlade Divac", SMART Collective, Forum for Responsible Business, Trag Foundation, Serbian Philanthropic Forum and Foundation Catalyst – gathered with the cooperation and support of the Chamber of Commerce of Serbia and the Council for Corporate Social Responsibility PKS. The goal of the Coalition is to improve the conditions for giving for charitable purposes and working together on the development of philanthropy in Serbia. As developing philanthropy requires the support of state authorities, the Council for Philanthropy was formed in August 2018 at the suggestion of the Coalition. Representatives of the Coalition, as members of the Council, have so far achieved significant results: the adoption and publication of the Instructions on the realisation of tax relief for donors and the increase of non-taxable amount of scholarships and loans provided to students. Also, at the initiative of the Coalition and the Serbian Philanthropic Forum, and with the support of the Council for Philanthropy, the National Day of Charitable Giving was established and is celebrated on October 9. The main goal of the Coalition is still the introduction of tax reduction/relief for donations made by individuals to encourage the so-called individual philanthropy and the introduction of the possibility of exemption from value added tax when it comes to donations. Although an informal network, the Coalition has very clear and developed management and operation rules. Meetings of the Supervisory Board - consisting of the directors of the network member organisations and their deputies - are held monthly and even more frequently when necessary. Other employees are also allowed to attend them. Decisions concerning independent or joint actions of members, that is, decisions on potential competition of members whose activities are related to the same topics and/or target groups are made at meetings of the Board of Directors. The key advocacy activities of the Coalition are the preparation of various reports and analyses on the state of philanthropy in Serbia. Citizens also participate in these activities, primarily in the phase of assessing the needs/views, but also by sharing information and putting pressure on decision makers through the media and social networks.

Networks' Public Advocacy in the Context of the Downgraded Space for Civic Activism: Capacities and Needs

All the analysed networks have listed advocacy as one of their forms of operation. Advocacy means "a set of targeted actions aimed at decision makers to achieve change".[26] The ultimate goal of advocacy is to cause a specific decision to be taken (public policy). Influencing a change, or the adoption of a public policy, is a difficult and complex task, especially for actors whose powers and resources are limited. This is especially true in societies like ours, with underdeveloped democratic institutions and a high degree of politicisation and centralisation of decision-making.

On the other hand, apathy and disinterest of citizens in participating in decision-making processes are not helping networks and CSOs. A survey on the state of affairs in the civil society sector in 2019 showed that only 12% of the citizens have participated in some sort of a decision-making activity. Citizens are more active at the local level (11%), while at the national level this percentage is only 4%. However, the percentage of CSO networks at the local level is twice lower than at the national level (10% at the local level, compared to 20% at the national level).

[26] https://cmv.org.rs/javno-zagovaranje/sta-je-javno-zagovaranje/

This shows that there is considerable potential in local communities, both for the greater networking and the possibility of involving a larger number of citizens in the networks' advocacy activities. The low level of networking at the local level is understandable given that public policies are largely adopted at the national level, which is why most advocacy activities are geared toward the central government. Still, although most networks operate at the national level, almost 80% of the analysed networks stated that the target group of their advocacy activities is local *self-government*.

In the second place, the same number of networks cites citizens and ministries/state institutions as their target groups (69%). Other CSOs are in the third place (50%).

When asked: "*Do you encounter difficulties in cooperating with state/local institutions during the implementation of your advocacy campaigns?*", more than half of the networks (62%) stated that they never encountered any.

TARGET GROUPS OF NETWORKS' ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

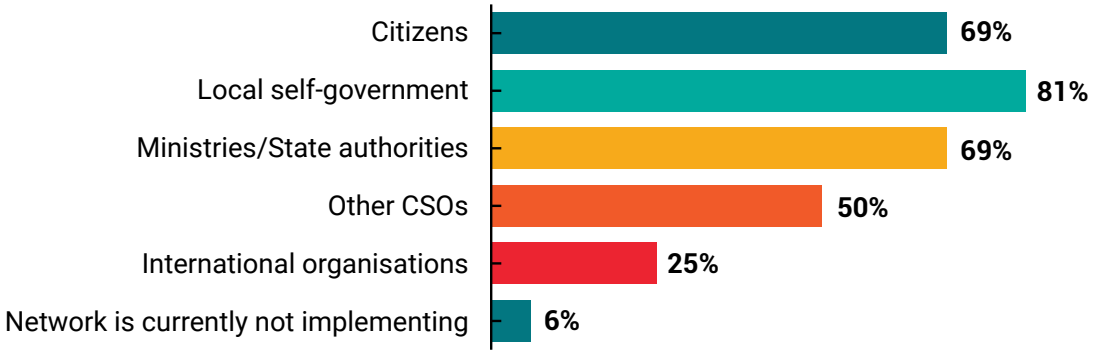

Chart 2. Target groups of networks' advocacy activities

The **Network of Civil Society Organisations of Šabac** is an example of networks that operate at the local level. It is an informal network that was created at the end of 2018, when 23 organisations from the territory of the city of Šabac signed the Charter of Šabac CSOs as their main document. One of the goals of the network is better cooperation with the city administration and monitoring the implementation of local action and strategic plans. The city of Šabac has supported the establishment of the network, and it recognises it as a partner in various areas. The network has managed to change two local action plans (for social protection and for youth) and thus contribute to a better position of the groups to which these plans relate. The second goal of the network is to strengthen the capacity of member organisations. Work is currently being done on the analysis of their capacity, after which they are planning to organise training for strategic planning, project writing, etc. Although informal, the network has a Council, Board of Directors and Supervisory Board. All members meet four times a year.

WHEN IMPLEMENTING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS, DO YOU ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTIES IN COOPERATING WITH STATE AUTHORITIES?

Chart 3. Networks' difficulties during cooperation with state institutions

Numerous networks face difficulties when cooperating with local government authorities and institutions - more than half (56%) claim to have encountered them.

WHEN IMPLEMENTING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS, DO YOU ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTIES IN COOPERATING WITH LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES AND INSTITUTIONS?

Chart 4. Networks' difficulties during cooperation with local self-government

Networks that have encountered difficulties list in the first place the lack of interest and closedness of institutions. This was confirmed by the participants in consultations. Among other difficulties, the networks list the absence of recognition of the role of CSOs and their capacities to contribute to the improvement of the situation, lack of trust in CSOs, and insufficiently developed capacities of decision makers and officials. One participant in the consultations explained it this way:

> *At our meetings, we often have representatives of local institutions who do not actually have a mandate to decide, which is why certain local initiatives finish before they even start.*

Personalisation of jobs and positions is also a challenge, as well as an obstacle to a better dialogue and the possibility of institutionalising certain achievements and practices. The dialogue between CSOs/networks and institutions is underdeveloped, which is primarily reflected in the absence of feedback and non-transparency of the decision-making and policy-making process. In some cases, representatives of state institutions do not respond to invitations and do not come to events organised by networks/CSOs.

When asked about their **advocacy capacities,** almost half of the networks (44%) stated that they are satisfactory, a third (31%) that they are good, while only 20% stated that their capacities are excellent. However, according to the participants in the consultations, there are no such capacities in smaller organisations (network members) and small communities.

Slightly more than 30% of the networks said that their **members had undergone training that is important for the successful functioning of the network**, while many more (63%) said that was not the case. Topics covered by these trainings are primarily related to improving communication with the public and increasing the visibility of the work and results of networks; public advocacy; research methods in preparing and monitoring the effects of public policies; strategic planning; writing project proposals and raising funds in the local community; financial management and community service delivery.

As regards capacities that should be increased, the networks singled out the following **three** as priority **areas/topics**: 1) project writing and management (primarily concerning EU projects); 2) diversification of funding sources; and 3) improving external communication using modern (digital) tools. These are followed by advocacy, strategic planning, and team building and organisation management (one answer each). It is worth noting that half of the networks stated that funds for strengthening the capacity of members have been provided through the various projects they implement.

The findings of the CSO Report and the CSO Needs Analysis of the Western Balkans and Turkey suggest that capacity-building programmes should focus on underdeveloped organisational capacity in terms of transparency, accountability and efficiency, with a special focus on relations with citizens, communication and visibility. Although expressed primarily by more developed organisations and networks, the need to strengthen cooperation with organisations and networks from the EU is quite logical, given that the negotiation process is the only framework through which external actors can apply pressure on the state. EU organisations and networks could play the role of an additional mediator, which could put pressure on EU institutions and Member State governments. In terms of the approach that ought to be taken, it is obvious that training, as the most commonly used capacity-building method so far, should no longer be in focus. Organisations are looking for a tailored, one-on-one approach, and for possible networking with those who have similar problems, which could help them share experiences and provide peer support. In this regard, it is extremely important to conduct in-depth needs assessments and consider them in relation to the environment, which is very dynamic and greatly affects the work and position of CSOs.

The House of Human Rights brings together five organisations dedicated to building a democratic and open society based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. These are the Civic Initiatives, the Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, and the Centre for Practical Policy. The House of Human Rights strives to positively influence social changes through cooperation and joint activities. It also protects, promotes and improves the situation in the field of human rights. By regularly monitoring daily societal events, it adequately and quickly responds to human rights violations and advocates respect for adopted rules and norms that are based on national and international standards, thus contributing to the promotion of a democratic society and the rule of law. Since members of the network deal with the same or similar topics, the final decision regarding the activities of the House is made by the Board of Directors whose members are the Directors of all the organisations. The decisions are made separately in each individual case so as not to usurp the field of work of the members and to ensure that the activities carried out by the House have a synergistic effect and support the work of individual members. In this way, rivalry between member organisations and the network itself is avoided. Important activities of the House are the celebration of International Human Rights Day (December 10) and the promotion of the values of a democratic society in order to raise public awareness of respect for human rights.

The impression is that the "traditional" approach to public advocacy - one that implies that policy change is sought *on behalf* of certain groups - no longer yields desired results. The downgraded space for civic action (and, consequently, for CSO advocacy) requires a new approach, one that will be centred on citizens (people-centered advocacy). The goal of such advocacy is social transformation achieved by encouraging socially engaged citizens to demand change on their own[27]. This approach is also called participatory advocacy, transformative advocacy, and social justice advocacy.[28]

[27] People Centred Advocacy: https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_C_People%20Centered%20Advocacy.pdf, str 1.
[28] Ibid.

Networks' Relationship with Citizens

Prerequisites for a change in the approach to advocacy are: citizens who are better informed about the work of the civil sector and a higher level of trust in the sector itself. On the other hand, many organisations have never established real links with citizens, while dependence on foreign donor funds has contributed to the perception of CSOs as elitist organisations that meet the needs and demands of donors rather than those of the citizens whose interests they claim to represent.

One of the questions in the consultations with the networks was: *"Where does the network get its legitimacy from, i.e. who makes up the constituency?"* The networks were divided here. While one half claimed that they drew legitimacy from their members or "themselves" (from their own expertise and the quality of the work that they do), the other half listed citizens. The participants in the consultations explained it this way:

> *No one can give us legitimacy. We give legitimacy to ourselves, through our activities. Activities that change things qualify us as an equal negotiator with institutions, or as someone who represents citizens. Our members also give us legitimacy, because if we have a network of locally recognised organisations, then the network also gains trust and legitimacy.*
>
> *Legitimacy is gained through the support of citizens. In small communities, in addition to the support of citizens and their reactions that tell us whether what we are doing is right or not, there is also the support of individuals - experts in certain fields.*

The answers from the questionnaire also indicate that, in most cases, the **constituency** is composed of the members of the network (56%), followed by citizens (25%), target groups and other organisations in the broadest sense (19% each), but also of social enterprises and organisations that provide direct support to the target population. The networks equally listed direct contact and contact via Facebook (81%) as the **main channel of communication with the citizens**. They were followed by the media and the website (68%), email (56%), and to a much lesser extent Twitter (37%) and Instagram (31%).

Responding to a question from the questionnaire, 75% of the networks stated that they involve citizens in their activities. However, the survey entitled *Civil Society Sector in Serbia in 2019* showed that only 6% of the population has participated in the work of organisations. The vast majority of the citizens (79%) believe that they are not informed about CSO activities. The organisations, on the other hand, state that they regularly involve citizens in their activities, as well as in their preparation. This shows the alienation of the civil sector from the citizens, and the existence of a disagreement on how the role of CSOs is perceived by the citizens, and how it is viewed by the organisations themselves. One participant in the consultations explained it this way:

> *We are tired. Civil society is expected to "patch" the holes in a society that is on a downward trajectory. The sector has already provided a good number of professionals in certain areas, yet it is expected to produce them once again. At the same time, the donor policy led the organisations to do many different things, only to, once again, seek narrow specialisation. That is why we now lack narrowly specialised organisations. That is why we have the problem of not being recognised by the citizens. When you are clearly focused, the citizens recognise you. But you do not have donor funds for that.*

As an example of an innovative approach to advocacy, participants cited the "snowball" methodology, which was first applied in Serbia by the organisation "Serbia on the Move". The experience of the network that applied this methodology was the following: each of the five or six organisations that formed the core of the network had a duty and obligation to include three more organisations from three cities. Then these new organisations included even newer ones, whose task was to reach the citizens. That way, the network managed to reach 4,000 citizens. Then it asked them to support its petition.

Networks claim that they involve citizens in their activities mainly by inviting them to the events they organise (discussions, gatherings), while a smaller number of networks include them in the initial stages of advocacy, i.e. in the phase of problem formulation, data collection, etc. Networks with local members are in a better position, as they can more easily access information about the needs of end users.

Serbia on the Move was the first organisation in Serbia to start applying Professor Marshall Ganz's community organisation model from the Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Management. This methodology ("snowball") is used to mobilise citizens to solve problems in their own communities. The model is based on a strategic analysis of citizen engagement, which includes questions concerning the following:

- People (Who are "my" people?)
- The problem (What problems do people have and what change is necessary to solve them?)
- Map of actors (Who are the relevant actors at the local, national and national level in terms of their interests and resources, including citizen engagement?)
- Power (Who has the resources (authority) to make decisions; who has resources, time and skills needed to achieve the goals?)
- Theory of change (Hypothesis about how resources can be used to achieve the desired change)

The model is based on the belief that citizens are the ones who have the power to bring about change. While most organisations in Serbia rely on a theory of change that focuses on "raising awareness" and then asking the authorities to do something to solve the problem, "Serbia on the Move" focuses on using the power of citizens. Each of its projects must therefore receive the written support of 1,000 citizens before its implementation can begin, and citizens are directly involved in its implementation. Citizens themselves are the drivers of the organisation - as volunteers in projects or project supporters, and ultimately also as a resource and source of power.

Although research shows a low level of citizen participation and a generally low level of civic activism, the interlocutor from "Serbia on the Move" pointed out the following:

"There is always a critical mass of people who want to do something in their community. But the problem is in the approach – what it is that you are asking them, and how".

Over the years and through various activities, the organisation has reached a large number of citizens and volunteers who have created local "Serbia on the Move" clubs in their communities. These now function as an informal network. The network was to be formally registered as the Alliance of Serbia on the Move in March 2020, but this was postponed when a state of emergency was introduced due to the new coronavirus.

Conclusion

Whether formally registered or informal, networks face management challenges. Coordination of the work of the network with the activities of member organisations, i.e. overcoming thematic and therefore also other types of competition between the network and its member organisations, is a challenge faced by many networks. Taking care of the quality and standards of work within the network, while often also resolving inter-personal conflicts, is a full-time job. Formal networks are in a better position than informal ones, as they have bodies in charge of different areas of operation. Although more flexible and readier to react quickly to social phenomena, informal networks are faced with the problem of responsibility as informal structure often implies a lack thereof. There are also the problems of division of labour, respect for deadlines and the like. Some networks have managed to find a "magic formula" for operation and management and are not ready to disturb the established balance and their system of work by accepting new members. According to their capacities and resources, networks should strive to find the best model of work and management through a structured dialogue of all members. Networks are aware that it is extremely important to work on the development of internal relations and capacities of members. For these reasons, almost half have secured funds to strengthen the capacity of their members through various projects they implement.

Since 75% of the analysed networks have adopted a strategic work plan, it seems that networks are aware of the importance of strategic thinking when it comes to directions of action. After the expiry of their strategic plans adopted for a specific period, networks should conduct evaluations of their work (internal, combined with external), and the results of the evaluation should serve as bases for their new cycles of strategic planning. Fewer informal networks have adopted strategic plans, as they mostly operate based on project activities.

Financial sustainability is a major issue of concern. This is why, answering the question on the capacities that should be increased, they listed project writing and management first, followed by the diversification of funding sources. They need additional support for writing and managing projects, strategic planning, capacity building for advocacy, and communication with the public (especially using digital communication).

This is especially true for network member organisations at the local level. Network sustainability (not just financial) is directly related to the sustainability and capacity of member organisations. Therefore, further strengthening of civil society organisations, in order to increase the degree of their sustainability, remains a key factor when it comes to the development of networks.

Half of the networks are satisfied with their advocacy capacities, noting that they do not actually exist in smaller network member organisations. Most networks practice “traditional” approach to advocacy - one that involves changing public policies on behalf of certain groups. The downgraded space for civic activism (and, consequently, for CSO advocacy) requires that networks adopt a new approach to advocacy - one that would have citizens at its centre. The new approach implies greater involvement of citizens in all phases of advocacy, connecting representatives of vulnerable groups with decision makers in order to develop the most adequate policies and legal solutions, but also encouraging socially engaged citizens to demand change on their own.

Networks, just like CSOs, do not sufficiently recognise the importance of constituency building. Therefore, they should review their strategies for accessing and connecting with citizens and devise new models for their involvement in network activities. It is not enough to just invite citizens to the events they organise (discussions, gatherings); they must also include them in the initial stages of advocacy, i.e. in the phase of problem formulation, data collection, etc. Networks with local members are in a better position because it is easier for them to obtain information about the needs of end users. However, networking at the local level is significantly weaker compared to that at the national level. It is therefore necessary to build the capacity of local networks, especially in the area of advocacy and supervision over the implementation of local policies.

Finally, donors should further support the networking of organisations at the local level and the exchange of experiences of organisations and networks from different parts of Serbia. This type of exchange could largely take place online, especially given the pandemic of the new coronavirus and the need to keep physical distance. However, it should also be borne in mind that face-to-face meetings are often much more effective in the off-line world, especially when it comes to building mutual trust and solidarity among organisations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Networks that Participated in the Survey

Name	**Alliance of Environmental Associations "Green List of Serbia"**
Contact	zelenalistasrbije@gmail.com www.facebook.com/oplanetise/ www.oplanetise.com
Areas of operation/goals	A network of local environmental organisations that contribute to the preservation of natural resources and the quality of life of the citizens of Serbia through public advocacy, education, information and encouragement of citizens' activism. The network was launched at the end of 2007 by the Balkan Fund for Local Initiatives (BCIF). Since 2015, the "Green List of Serbia" has been operating as a formal Alliance of Environmental Associations.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**National Coalition for Decentralisation**
Contact	info@nkd.rs https://www.facebook.com/decentralizuj @decentralizuj @decentralizuj www.nkd.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Decentralisation as a basis for further political and economic development of Serbia, and respect for the citizens of Serbia as active participants in decision-making processes.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Umbrella Organisation of Serbian Youth KOMS**
Contact	office@koms.rs https://www.facebook.com/KOMSmladi/ www.koms.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Youth policies
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**National Association of Youth Labour Practitioners NAPOR**
Contact	nemanja.obradovic@napor.net https://www.facebook.com/NAPORSerbia/ www.napor.net
Areas of operation/goals	Ensuring the quality of youth labour
Pravni status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**National Convention on the European Union**
Contact	ivona.gvozdenovic@eukonvent.org @NKEUSrbija @NKEUSrbija www.eukonvent.org
Areas of operation/goals	With its structure and methodology of work, the Convention responded to the need to establish a structured and institutionalised form of cooperation and consultation with the Government and its bodies in charge of membership negotiations with the European Union (negotiating team, negotiating working groups).The Convention bases its activities on three main pillars: analytical support to the negotiation process, monitoring and evaluation, informing citizens and advocacy.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**European Movement Network Serbia**
Contact	epus.kraljevo@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/epuskraljevo/
Areas of operation/goals	Harmonisation, coordination and initiation of joint programmes and activities aimed at building a democratic Serbia in a united Europe, promoting a society based on democratic principles and European values of the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, understanding, tolerance and solidarity.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Serbian Network of Organisations for Post-Penal Support**
Contact	info.mopps@gmail.com https://fb.me/moppsrbija www.mopps.org.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Post-penal support
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**CSConnect – Bor**
Contact	evropa@kcbor.net https://www.facebook.com/groups/772633982891569/
Areas of operation/goals	Environment and energy efficacy
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Alliance of Associations Assisting Mentally Underdeveloped People in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina**
Contact	mnro.voj@gmail.com www.savezmnrovojvodine.org.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Improving the position and exercising the rights of mentally underdeveloped persons.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Citizens for Nature**
Contact	drustvostaraplanina@gmail.com
Areas of operation/goals	Protection of nature.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Alliance of Teachers of the Republic of Serbia**
Contact	sneznana@gmail.com https://bit.ly/2WMDujk www.surs.org.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Education. Professional development of educators.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Coalition for the Development of Economy of Solidarity**
Contact	dina.rakin@solidarnaekonomija.rs https://m.facebook.com/solidarnaekonomija/ @KoalicijaSP @koalicija.korse www.solidarnaekonomija.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Promotion, development and improvement of solidarity/social economy and social entrepreneurship, civil society and socially responsible behaviour and business.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Holiday Alliance Knjaževac**
Contact	pokretgoranaknjazevac@gmail.com
Areas of operation/goals	Youth tourism
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Serbian Children's Organisations Network MODS**
Contact	s.stefanovic@zadecu.org https://www.facebook.com/zadecuMODS/ @zadecuMODS www.zadecu.org
Areas of operation/goals	Improving the cooperation of civil society organisations in the field of respect and exercise of the rights of all children and youth up to 18 years of age.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Šabac CSOs Network**
Contact	asocijacijaduga@mts.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Ensuring sustainable and lasting cooperation with state authorities and institutions regarding work on improving the quality of life of citizens in areas of public interest. Continuous monitoring and improvement of the work of institutions as well as cooperation with institutions in order to achieve a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach to solving the problems of the citizens of Šabac. Continuous work on building, connecting, networking, sustainability and strengthening of civil society organisations, on reaching a higher level of awareness, and on inclusion in social flows and decision-making processes.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Coalition of Associations in the Republic of Serbia**
Contact	uirhbg@gmail.com
Areas of operation/goals	Protection of human and property rights of refugees in the process of integration and return.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**SOS Network Vojvodina**
Contact	mreza.sos.vojvodina@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/SOSVojvodina/ www.sosvojvodina.org
Areas of operation/goals	Providing support to women who have experienced violence, through a single free SOS hotline of Vojvodina.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Anti-Criminal Action ACRIMA**
Contact	milan@protecta.org.rs https://www.facebook.com/pg/ACRIMA.NET/posts/
Areas of operation/goals	An informal network of youth organisations from Serbia, gathered around ideas related to the non-violent fight against organised crime, the fight against corruption and the affirmation of legality.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**European Anti-Poverty Network - Serbia**
Contact	jasmina.krunic@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/ProtivSiromastva/
Areas of operation/goals	The network is active wherever it is possible to improve the quality of life of people and groups at risk of poverty and the processes of social inclusion in Serbia.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Network for the Rural Development of Serbia**
Contact	ruralnamreza@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/RuralInfoSerbia www.ruralsrbija.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Strengthening regional development and improving the quality of life in rural communities.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**prEUgovor**
Contact	jelena.pejic@bezbednost.org https://www.facebook.com/prEUgovor @prEUgovor www.preugovor.org
Areas of operation/goals	Monitoring the implementation of policies in the field of judiciary and fundamental rights (Chapter 23), and justice, freedom and security (Chapter 24) and proposing measures to improve the situation by using the EU integration process to make substantial progress in further democratisation of Serbia
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Coalition 27**
Contact	koalicija27@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/Koalicija27Srbija/ @Koalicija27 www.koalicija27.org
Areas of operation/goals	Advocating and encouraging public participation in the process of accession negotiations between the Republic of Serbia and the European Union and proposing solutions that will contribute to the protection and improvement of the environment and the quality of life of citizens.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Civic Alliance for Social Inclusion GASI**
Contact	office@gasi.rs https://www.facebook.com/gasi031/ www.gasi.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Promoting the interests of vulnerable and marginalised groups of citizens in Požega.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Alliance of Associations of the City of Sombor**
Contact	soeducentar@yahoo.com
Areas of operation/goals	
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Alliance of Blind Persons of Serbia**
Contact	info@savezslepih.org.rs https://www.facebook.com/savezslepihsrbije/ www.savezslepih.org.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Organisation representing blind people in Serbia.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency

Name	**Coalition for Integrity**
Contact	office@birodi.rs www.birodi.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Protection of whistleblowers and support for anti-corruption activism at the local level, support for the implementation of local anti-corruption plans and activities of Local Anti-Corruption Forums (LAF), and education of citizens and public officials on the topic of fighting corruption.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**Serbia on the Move**
Contact	pokreni@srbijaupokretu.org https://www.facebook.com/srbijaupokretu @srbija_upokretu www.srbijaupokretu.org
Areas of operation/goals	Empowering, motivating and encouraging individuals to actively and jointly participate in creating a better quality of life in Serbia.
Legal status	Informal network (to be formally registered as an alliance in 2020)

Name	**Coalition for Charity**
Contact	zeljko.mitkovski@divac.com
Areas of operation/goals	The goals of the Coalition for Charity are: strengthening the philanthropic infrastructure that can contribute to the sustainable growth of philanthropic giving and the development of cross-sectoral partnerships; improving the legal framework for the development of incentive and transparent giving by individuals and companies; promotion of charity, the culture of giving and transparency among the citizens of the Republic of Serbia, companies, diaspora and non-profit organisations.
Legal status	Informal network

Name	**House of Human Rights Belgrade**
Contact	bghrhouse@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/KucaLjudskihPravaBeograd/ @HRHBelgrade @HRHBelgrade www.kucaljudskihprava.rs
Areas of operation/goals	Education on the topic of human rights, monitoring the work of institutions, giving recommendations and proposals of practical solutions, advocating the application of the law, as well as continuous monitoring of events in society and responding to human rights violations. The work is organised around three key areas: human rights, transitional justice and the rule of law.
Legal status	Network is formally registered in the Business Registers Agency