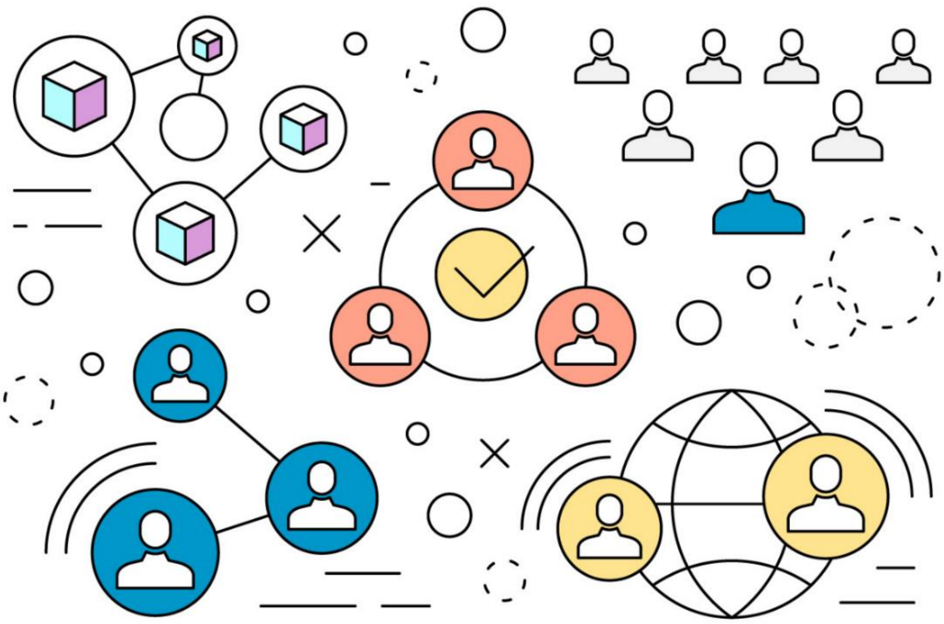
Master Research Thesis

European Accession and Knowledge Network Governance in the Western Balkans

A multidimensional case-study



Quentin Rumeau, 17 July 2020

Master in European Governance

Masaryk University

483196

Politics and Public Administration

Utrecht Universiteit

6398553

First Supervisor: Prof Linda Senden, Universiteit Utrecht

Second Supervisor: Prof Vit Hlousek, Masaryk University

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CEP	Centar Za Evropske Politike (European Policy Centre, Belgrade)
CSOs	Civil society Organizations
EU	European Union
PAR	Public Administration Reform
NAO	Network Administrative Organization
TEN	Think for Europe Network
WB	Western Balkans

1. Introduction

Civil society networks, in the last decades, became prominent actors within the Enlargement process, supported by renewed experiences from previous rounds of negotiations. However, from a CSOs' (Civil society organizations) perspective, and based on the previous EU enlargement rounds, the EU accession process has often been seen as the dialogue between the executives, with very little impact of non-executive actors in the process, focusing on EU-level policies. This 'Executive Bias' (Lazarevic and Maric,2018, p.1) not only impacts the scope of previously performed analysis, but the type of relationship that is regarded as relevant as well. In fact, attempts at circumventing transparency's requirements and the gradual centralisation of the political system within the Western Balkans Region have greatly reduced the prospects for CSOs to engage constructively in the negotiations, and achieving a substantive level of empowerment in the face of an ever more dominant executive.

However, this relationship has evolved in the context of the WB (Western Balkans), and in light of the new EU Guidelines (European Commission, 2014). While the formal integration process is still dominated by the interaction between the executive branches of power, the non-governmental sector is gaining greater traction, due to their increased acknowledged relevancy when it come to the quality, legitimacy and sustainability of both their processes, and their outcomes.

Facing challenges at the national level, and benefiting from incentives emanating from the EU , the need for CSO to organize themselves, became critical. Locally, the need for CSO's to join networks emerged in the wake of the new EU accession guidelines, and that can be understood as a window of opportunity. Following academic interpretations of the notion of policy windows of opportunity, authors suggest that "collaboration formation is contingent on the confluence of relatively independent streams such as worsening situations that a collaboration entrepreneur recognizes" Crosby and Bryson (2010, p.9). In our case, the worsening situation is quite obvious, previously qualified as the shrinking space for CSOs in the EU-enlargement and, in a larger extent, the current Serbian policy-making process. The entrepreneur then is "able to mobilize resources and partners around this opportunity" (Lober 1997, p.7). In our case, the entrepreneur can be identified as CEP.

My situation as an intern the Centar za Evropske Politike in Belgrade (CEP, translated in European Policy Centre in English), made me aware of a few sophisticate and productive networks of CSO's, and of their proper coordination, orchestrated by CEP itself. In fact, one increasingly popular model of interorganizational partnership is the designation of a lead-organization, through which public funding agencies develop a single contracting relationship and then encourage or mandate the creation of a […] network of service providers (Graddy and Chen, 2006; Johnston and Romzek, 2008; Chen, 2008; Provan and Kenis, 2008).

Networks related to the EU-Enlargement and orchestrated by CEP ranges from informal working relations, to organised, funded and proactive structures such as TEN (Think for Europe Network). It is of utmost importance to acknowledge that Networks and efforts oriented toward increasing CSOs' participation in the EU-enlargement are not single-issue, nor single use. EU-Enlargement focused networks sustain long-term betterments of the democratic and public functioning of their own government, such as TEN opening statement : "Ensure long-term effectiveness of the EU's conditionality […] and keep these reforms on track even beyond the point of achievement of EU membership by the WB countries." (European Policy Centre, 2017, p4).

These Networks are focused on securing core reforms in critical areas for the EU enlargement, such as the Public Administration sector, part of the chapters 23 & 24 of the Accession Negotiations *Acquis,* for the whole Western Balkan region rather than Serbia especially. Concerning the *raison d'être* of the TEN network *:* "Think tanks in the region persistently improve the evidence basis for policy making and advocacy to ensure that new policies proposed and adopted in the EU accession process are well analysed, their impact is well assessed and their implementation is properly monitored and evaluated." (Think for Europe Network, 2013, p.2).

'Networkization', in the perspective of EU enlargement, can be understood as a critical requirement in order to safeguard CSO's relevance, influence and pertinency in the EU accession process. In a broader perspective, it serves as an effective tool for maximising CEP's, and related CSO's, impact on policymaking within the Western Balkans Policy arena. Network efficiency in this regard, can be assessed in terms of lead organization performance in coordinating the various members. Consequently, certain strategies might be more effective than others, and this analysis seeks to identify qualities and flaws founds within a specific network and in its orchestration. In the end, this research will propose recommendations. This can be done by asking the following research question :

How does the leadership of NGOs involved in the Europeanization process answers the intricacies of network governance ?

1.1 Theoretical interest

Efficient Networks are difficult to organise, coordinate and sustain through internal structures and coordination mechanisms, especially for the Civil society, but actually already studied (Brinkerhoff, 1999; Chen and Graddy, 2010; Church and others, 2002; Liebler and Ferri, 2004). Based on diverse approaches to network governance, the aim of this research will be to grasp how performative are networks' lead organizations in the realm of EU enlargement processes. "Civil society," in most of the academical corpus describes the structure chosen by "a wide variety of private bodies, through which people come together to pursue shared public interests" (Powell and Clemens, 1998, p 10). This ranges from NGOs to, non-profit, faith, community, and women's rights collective organizations.

The emergence of a 'networkization' process can be explained from a global, and local perspective. Globally, "CSOs may benefit from participation in networks by increasing their access to resources, building their capacities" (Liebler and Ferri, 2004; Yanacopulos, 2005), and "strengthening their visibility and reputation" (Scholte, 2004, p.8). In short, "The formal network has become the organizational form in international development" (Church and others, 2002, p. 1). In addition, network's design and interests are multiple. In our case, focusing on 'Interorganizational networks' seems to be appropriate. Defined as "between markets and hierarchies" (Powell, 1990, p.1). The emergence and enforcement of a Network structure is related to numerous factors, and conditions. Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2015, p.1) state that networks emerge from collaborators acknowledging the potential to gain something significant together, that they could not gain alone. Some evidence suggests that network evolve, simply due to the time passing, starting as structureless and informal, and then moving progressively toward formal structures (Alter and Hage, 1993; Brinkerhoff, 1999; Liebler and Ferri, 2004), while other evidences suggests that the existence of a shared purpose, or rather the absence of conflict in priorities is critical. (Brass and others, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 1999; Chen and Graddy, 2010).

Analysing Networks of CSOs embedded in Accession processes within the Western Balkans region can help in answering several sub questions such as :

How can a multidimensional framework help to explain Networks' logics ?

How has the coordination developed and what are the limitations to it ?

Which leadership practices already worked well and what can still be improved?

2 Theoretical approach : Network governance

2.1 A multidimensional case study

Following Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012, p.2), most of the literature analysing networks' leadership is focused on lead organizations without performing a longitudinal, multidimensional analysis. This research aims at answering that call while opening a discussion on CSO's 'lead organizations' strategies. In consequence, three main theoretical pillars, combined with additional dimensions will be used : Network Governance theory, Communication applied to networks, Leadership applied to networks, and elements related to relevant factors and context.

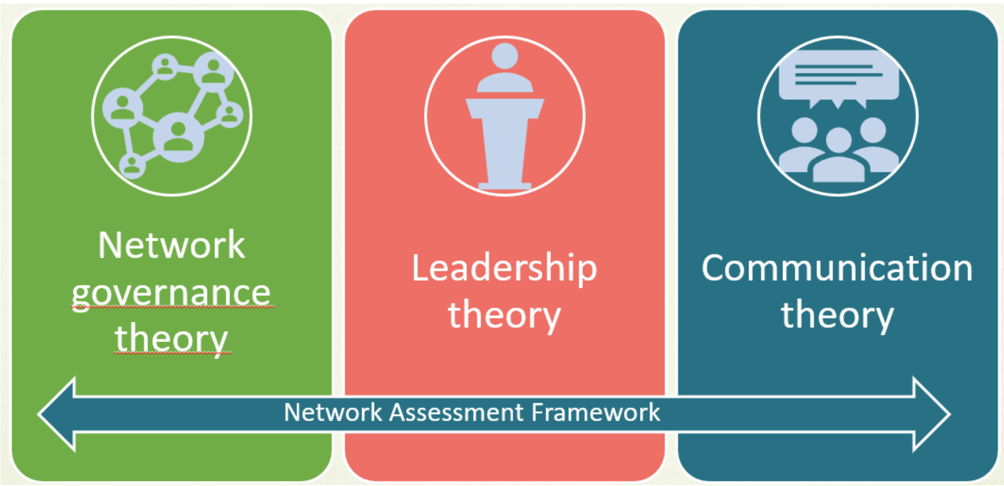

Figure 1: Theoretical pillars Source : Own compilation

2.2 Benefits of the research

In consequence of the complex theoretical framework and the experimental assessment, the relevancy of the study resides as much in its conclusions as in it very existence, and is understood by the researcher as an experimentation that is aimed at answering calls from the academia, while providing some sort of clarity to the network members, since the research will intend to produce a combination of academic materials and policy recommendations for network members, while opening a general discussion over most of the processes and the outcomes of the research. Concerning CEP itself, such research might be beneficial in terms of external communication, but also in terms of documenting CSO's relations and influences, while providing some practical knowledge and recommendations in order to optimise their coordination. Secondly, the approach is in itself an attempt at grasping Network governance from selected theories that do not focus on external outputs and sound value, but rather on the tight interdependency between structure and agents, between the formal decision structure and the informal conduction of activities. Last but not least, defining and characterising design options for CSO's Networks for the determined domain (EU Accession), and for the specific region of the Western Balkans, might be relevant locally and thus be used in future network's design.

3 Literature review

Drawing from the plea for a multi-dimensional analysis, the initial research aimed at selecting three different theories centred around network governance and related case studies. The selection went as follows. Koschmann, Kuhn and Pfarrer (2012) defined an assessment framework for networks in line with the Communication theory, focusing on internal and external strategies. Concerning the network-level governance, Provan and Kenis (2008) proposed a framework that encompass absolute variables and values such as the development of network-level competencies, and the level of trust. Last but not least, Bryson and Crosby (2006) defined critical elements of leadership through formal and informal processes such as the mitigation of conflict, the ability to foster legitimacy, a shared level of trust, and long-term planning. Structures are also considered relevant for studying leadership, notably concerning structures of membership and forms of collaboration, of governance.

The following chapters will aim at presenting the multidimensional assessment framework on the basis of the aforementioned threefold theoretical approach, while identifying relevant variables for the analysis.

3.1 A multidimensional approach of the object : TEN

Combining network's definitions emanating from our 3 separates theoretical pillars and our initial assessment framework, the object (TEN, Think for Europe Network) I intend to analyse can be understood as a goal-directed collective of organization, distinct from market's and hierarchies' usual mechanisms of controls that "manage member coordination to generate emergent capacities for action and enable substantive impact within their problem domains" (Arvidsson, 2010; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010). This collective focuses on producing partnership-level outcomes that cannot be reduced to the contributions of single organizations (Provan et al.,2008, p.238), a network where co-orientation, namely the willingness of individual organizations to align actions in relation to a common objective through an ongoing dialectic of conversations and texts is critical (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p.195). TEN is also a formally established knowledge network, a group of expert institutions working together on a common concern, to strengthen each other's research and communications capacities, to share knowledge bases and develop solutions that meet the needs of target decision-makers at the national and international level, where one organization preside to the coordination effort. A champion acting as a "collaborative capacity builder" (Crosby and Bryson 2010, p.1), defined as "someone who either by legal authority, expertise valued in the network, reputation as an honest broker, or some combination of the three, has been accorded a lead role in the network's problem-solving exercises" (Weber and Khademian,2008, p.340). Efficient leadership is a key element in facilitating the multidimensional collaboration and success when the usual hierarchical command and control structure is absent.

3.2 Network governance theory

3.2.1 Introduction

According to Network Governance theory, Networks are distinctive forms of organization, characterized by interdependent relationships among autonomous organizations (Powell, 1990, p.441). Network governance is a popular field of study for scholars involved in various disciplines (Management, Political Science…), but 'how to govern a network' is a dimension rarely analysed. As such, there was a need of ''illuminating the structure of collective action'' Powell et al. (2005, p.1133). Networks are comprised of willingly joining organizations and are in consequence eminently cooperative groupings. Deriving from their multipolar structure, some sort of governing structure is deemed necessary to enforce collectiveness, to initiate projects, to mitigate conflicts, and to allocate resources appropriately. While networks can exist structureless, a focus on efficient governance implies the need for a coordinating structure to allocate, coordinate, and control.

Defining what a network is about is critical. Networks are considered as "groups of three or more legally autonomous organizations that work together to achieve not only their own goals but also collective goals" (Provan, 2008, p.3). This definition, while emphasizing the synergies potentially generated by collective agency, also highlight the critical need for goal alignment.

Our definition focuses on what Kilduff and Tsai (2003, p.88) refer to as ‘‘goal-directed’,’ as opposed to ‘‘serendipitous’’ networks. In fact, Goal-directed network are becoming increasingly relevant when it comes to the achievement of multi-stakeholder goals in hostile environment that pushes for collective action. Goal-directed networks are based on a clear objective, defined either initially by the participants or during the collaboration.

3.2.2 Network governance theory and lead organizations

According to the literature, the Lead organization model of network governance implies that the initial network is highly brokered, with only few direct organizations-to-organization interactions, aside operational matters such as project coordination. In response to that, a lead organization will act as a centralized network broker. A lead organization can take on a few key governance activities on issues that are critical, while leaving remaining prerogatives to the network members. The lead-organization model of network governance falls in the participant-governed category. This typology, developed by Provan and Kenis (2008, p.4), states that Participant-governed networks have a dual approach in governance. A formal approach is privileged for coordination and strategy planning, with meeting of representatives, while an informal approach for daily tasks and implementations of collectively agreed strategies is preferred.

In short, the lead organization focuses on administrative duties and facilitate the conduction of activities. In consequence, this organization can willingly carry the financial cost of the network administration, while centralizing the steering of funding resources under its umbrella.

3.2.3 Values and variables related to network governance

Assessing networks from a network governance perspective require to assess network-level variables recognised by the literature.

Trust

Trust is an intangible object but can emerge from discussions and interviews. Trust is critical in shaping the development of relations and the long-term efficiency of the network. Trust is defined as “the willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about another's intentions or behaviours'' (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p.10). Trust shall thus be even, distributed, and consistent over time. An adequate network governance structure shall be aligned with the level of trust density within the network.

Domain similarity, homophily and territoriality

''Domain similarity'' (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p.12) is a critical variable that enable good performances and innovation within a network. Homophily, based on the logic of similarity in ideals and activities, has been outlined as a core reason of why organizations are teaming up (Monge and Contractor 2003; Powell et al. 2005).

Network level competencies

Network competencies are the direct expression of what a collective can do better than individual organizations. The presence of network competencies and their dispersion among members is critical since network governance place different burdens on network members. It is then critical to define what is being performed by network members and what is being externally expected from the network. Defining the nature of the task will help assessing to what extent interdependence is present among members. When the network deliverables demand a high-quality production, it will favour a structure centralised around a NAO or a lead organization, since they are better fitting when it comes to foster specialization and enhance the division of tasks.

Level of shared purpose

The alignment of Network members' goals is critical in maintaining cohesion on the long run. As such, this research will consider the level of shared purpose manifested by the absence of conflict in priorities, a dimension considered in the original assessment framework (Creech and Ramji,2004).

3.3 Inter-organizational Communication theory

3.3.1 Introduction to the theory

The theory developed by Koschmann and Kuhn (2012) intend to analyse cross-sector partnerships (XSPs). These partnerships are based on the multiplicity of the actors involved, ranging from businesses and governments to civil society groups. According to the authors, these partnerships are engaged in problem solving, information sharing and resource allocation. This definition fits the type of Network currently being analysed. TEN, namely the Think for Europe Network, is a Network of Civil society organizations, backed by institutional and private donors, dedicated to influence local and international decision-makers. Grasping such complex structures of coordination can be facilitated by adopting the communication theory as a prime element of the analysis. As such, XSPs shall be considered as collectives that "manage member coordination to generate emergent capacities for action and enable substantive impact within their problem domains" (Koschmann and Kuhn, 2012,p.3).

A few key points are necessary to ground the theoretical framework I develop in the following section. One core element is the notion of communication as "co-orientation, whereby two or more individuals align actions in relation to a common objective through an ongoing dialectic of conversations and texts." (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p.195).

The construction of such partnership can be understood as a result of communication processes that are distinct from market hierarchical mechanisms of controls referring to the "Between Market and hierarchies" ambivalence of networks, mentioned by Powell (1990, p.1). In consequence, such networks are constructed primarily through communication means, in contrast with models privileging hierarchies, markets, or resource flows. A comprehensive analysis of network's relations and structures shall be made with regards to their communicative constitution. In essence, the communicative constitution of such network is based on identified practices that facilitate the emergence of a collective agency.

These practices are formalised through primary sources, mainly written documents. This hence define coordination mechanism as consequences of textual co-orientation. According to Koschmann and Kuhn (2012, p.342) "Instead of being the mere transmission of information or the outward representation of actors' internal dispositions, communication is understood as a complex process of meaning, negotiation, and construction by which contextualized actors use symbols and make interpretations to create (and/or maintain, transform, destroy) the meanings that coordinate and control activity and knowledge".

In short, Communication is more than human interaction, and can be considered as the "intersubjective product of coordinated interaction" (Koschmann and Kuhn, 2012, p.335), incarnated by texts, that are the inputs, and the outcomes of conversations. This text-conversation approach thus acknowledges XSPs (cross-sector partnerships) as metaconversations (Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor, 2004, p.1). For networks the textual approach is particularly relevant because "concrete" texts such as reports, statutes and notices about outcomes—are likely to be communicated to external interlocutors in order to present a sense of collectiveness, of unity, and of continuity.

3.3.2 Practices & variables for Inter-organizational theory

The following elements are specific communication practices that shape the trajectory of a collaborative group and increase the potential for value: increasing meaningful participation, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces, and creating a distinct and stable identity.

Meaningful participation

Meaningful participation is a recognised practice that assess the quality of interactions. Valuable partnerships do not develop simply by having the right people in the room; how people interact is at least as important. In consequence, communication is known to be successful when members interact on a large range of singular interests and accept the legitimacy of their colleagues' perspectives. In short, the consensual selection of topics and priorities incarnates what a proper meaningful participation shall be. Last but not least, meaningful participation is hence derived from two values : the distribution of members deliberation (variety of interactions and the related degree of participation), and the outputs of discussion, such as the inclusion of diverse interests within the decision-making processes.

Managing centripetal & centrifugal forces

Concerning the management of such network, the management of individual and collective interests (keeping them 'aligned' with the network aims) is going hand in hand with the need for creating innovative solution to network's issues in delivering its outputs (meaningful impact on policymaking).

Opposition to premature closure of discussion

“XSP members must maintain an opposition to premature closure in conversation, where closure refers to a termination of deliberation, an elimination of conflict, or a refusal to entertain alternatives” (Thackaberry,2004, p.8). Even if conversation can be perceived as endless and as a waste of energy and time, deliberation is acknowledged as critical for the development of close ties between network members.

Creation of a distinct and stable identity

As expressed by Koschmann (2012, p.342), “the mere presence of a distinct and stable identity is not the main issue; rather, it is its outward manifestation that makes a difference”. Therefore, the analysis should focus on the collective textual construction. For networks, one critical issue is the creation of a singular identity, that project the network legitimacy externally. The concept of collective identity is established as a communicative process taking place between network members. For networks, the key issue is to make room for a recognizable and distinct identity. Two key communication practices are involved in creating a distinct and stable identity**:** naming and narrative construction.

1. **Naming**

First, naming provides an image of an agreed-upon existence and assumed internal unity, and the reflexivity it implies is central to a set of people becoming recognized (including by themselves) as a distinct entity.

2. **Narrative construction**

Second, a narrative construction aids in the development of XSP’s identity and distinctiveness and thus helps in increasing XSP’s value. Narratives are rarely intentionally packaged as stories or created single-handedly. They are constructed collaboratively and retrospectively as people confront a problem and depict the scene, the action required, the responsible parties, and desired or actual outcomes (Weick,1995, p.30). Narratives can refer to the factors creating changes to an organization’s lifecycle, or they can be morality tales portraying cultural rules of the partnership (Mumby, 1997, p.12). Narratives display the valued forms of capital, provide evidence of the organization’s definition of its task, portray heroes and villains (e.g., the convener), and exhibit the organization’s path of action (connecting its past and future). Seeing communication as constitutive, then, requires a narrative, with the partnership and it related members at the core.

3.4 Leadership theory

According to Giddens (1984, p.16), nor the macro neither the micro sociologic analysis is alone sufficient to perform a complete study. In short, a proper study shall articulate both the agents and the structures. Social structures mix the involvement of agents and the product of their past actions. Giddens consider this as the core of the structuration theory, while situating these structures in what can be considered as 'human practice'.

Structure are dual, being by essence both medium (agent and social practice) and outcomes. As such, Structuration focuses on structures rather than production, and consider agents as active participants of social systems, in our case, within networks. According to Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012, p.335), The "modality" of a structural system is the means by which structures are translated into actions. In short, the structuration theory is a critical tool allowing us to adequately analyse the relation between the structure and its agents, while denoting social practices. Specific goal-oriented networks within the service industry might present extremely different forms and pattern of network "Manoeuvring" Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012, p.108), namely the practice of one lead organization to coordinate and orientate a network. In this context, leadership is understood as a complex , contested and diffuse phenomenon that is hardly tangible (Kenis and Provan, 2006; Orton and Weick, 1990).

Structuration theory applied to leadership within network implies that some network members are more proactive that others and "make things happen" Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012, p.106).

3.4.1 Role of leaders

Numerous theoretical frameworks assess leadership as critical requirement for Networks' survival. Leaders have to be devoted, boundary-spanning, and well connected to their external environment, defined as either sponsors or champions with a collaborative mind-set (Crosby and Bryson 2010, p.1). Several academics have proposed a framework of leadership in networks, and for collaboration. Morse (2010, p.233), for example, suggests that "leadership enables the different dimensions of cross-sector collaboration to form a whole and achieve outcomes in the absence of hierarchical power and control". Network leaders invest resources in creating common purpose, experiences, and objects.

In consequence, the assessment of CSOs' leadership on the network level will be made on the basis of the work performed by Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012) on leadership within networks, and especially on the notion of 'collaborative mind-set' which will be considered as an element of the management culture rather than a distinct variable.

3.5 Theoretical framework : conclusions

The enumeration of theories and values is not presented here in vain. The idea behind this is to then justify the selections that have been made from the original theories. Elements of the initial theories referring to leadership as a practice of individuals and not of network's institutions were excluded. Elements of the Network governance theory that focussed on quantitative data were excluded as well. Last but not least, elements such as the Initial situation, the resources and CEP's developments were added for the sake of contextualization, since it appeared during the research that those elements were critical in explaining today's leadership of the network.

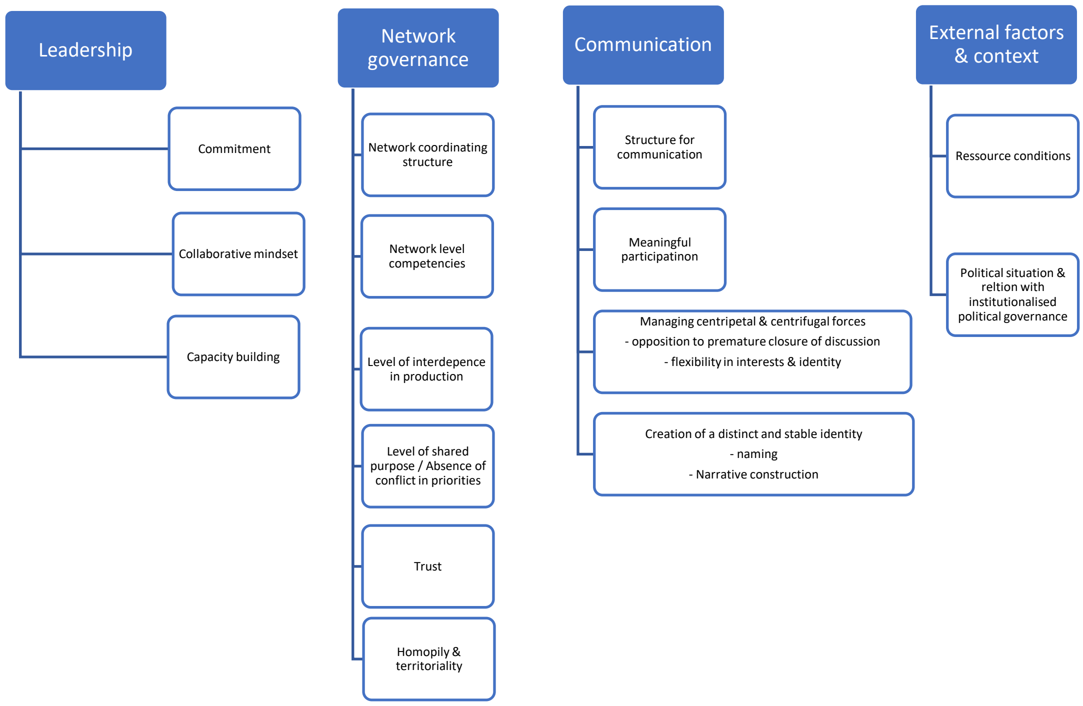

Figure 2: Extended Theoretical pillars source : own compilation

4. Assessment

4.1 Creech and Ramji : a fortuitous framework

The initial desk research that focused on defining an assessment framework for this research, ended-up by acknowledging the quality of the outline proposed by Creech, H., & Ramji, A. (2004), in their article called *Knowledge networks: Guidelines for assessment*. This article identifies core areas that are to be assessed while providing a framework, mostly based on the interpretations that can be derived from semi-directional interviews, but this assessment framework has to be connected to the selected set of theories, as explained later. Creech, H. and T. Willar (2004, p.19), in their article, focus on Knowledge networks : "A formal knowledge network is a group of expert institutions working together on a common concern, to strengthen each other's research and communications capacity, to share knowledge bases and develop solutions that meet the needs of target decision-makers at the national and international level." This definition perfectly fits our object of analysis, namely TEN. TEN, or the Think for Europe Network, is made of 6 Think Tanks dedicated to the production of relevant knowledge on core issues defined in article 2 of the Agreement establishing Think for Europe Network (Think for Europe Network,2013,p.3) : "The specific objectives of the Network are: to foster the exchange of information between the members; to foster the development of expertise, peer-learning and the exchange of best practices; to develop and implement joint projects focused on policy research and related to the EU accession of the Region; to improve the quality and use of policy research as a basis for policy making in the Region; to increase the involvement of the civil society in the policy making process for EU accession; to promote dialogue between civil society actors and national authorities, regional organisations and the EU".

4.2 Changes and outcomes as a qualitative approach for assessment

Concerning our analysis, the proper leadership of a lead organization can be defined as "the attainment of positive network-level outcomes that could not normally be achieved by individual participants acting independently" (Provan and Kenis, 2008, p.230). In consequence, a network assessment shall base its variables on elementary changes. The essence of Creech approach is the changes that occurs when organization moves from individual productions and outputs, to collective, network centralized, processes. Creech and Ramji (2004, p.6) answer that interest in network level outcomes by focusing on incremental changes :

"When it comes to assessing the effectiveness of a network, it is difficult to demonstrate causality—that a network's efforts have led directly to the decision it was seeking. But we can look at incremental changes—changes in attitudes, actions and behaviours—that are a direct outcome of its work". In consequence, the focus shall be on assessing outcomes as changes in behaviour, activities and relationships. As such performances will be assessed under the concepts of effectiveness, while describing the organizational and governance structure, and the decision-making rules that enhance or reduce the network's effectiveness. In addition, the concept of efficiency, focussing on the "transactional costs of collaboration" (Creech and Ramji 2004, p.5) will be considered alongside the analysis of network member's performance on research and communication.

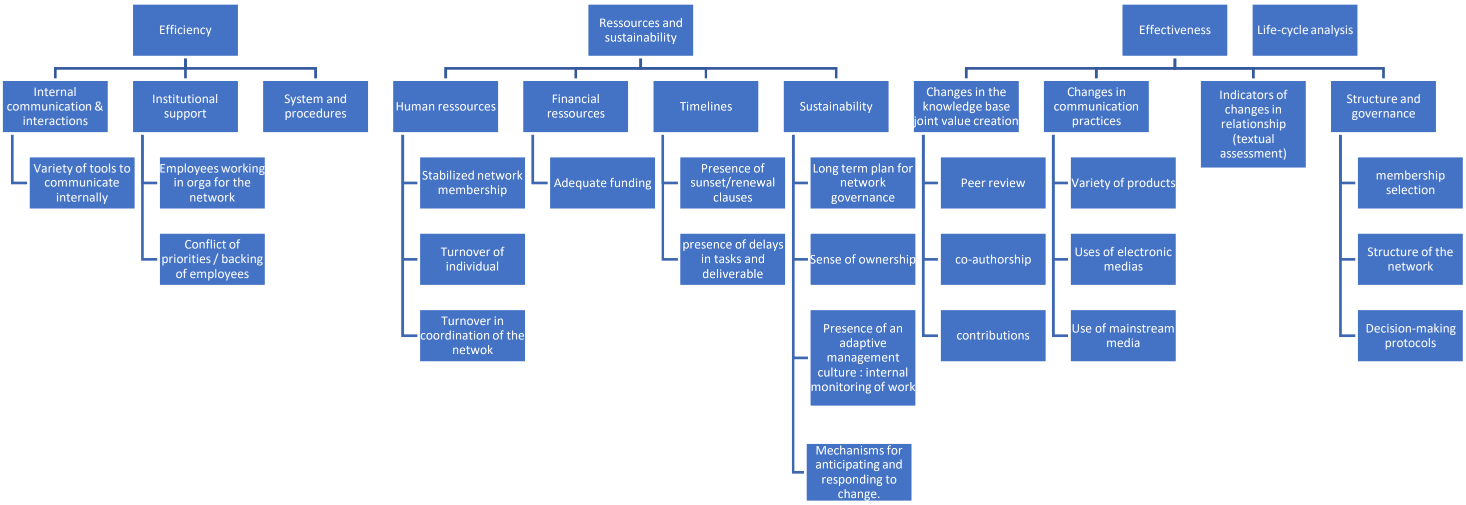

Figure 3: Network initial assessment framework Source: Creech and Ramji (2004) : Knowledge networks: Guidelines for assessment.

Figure n°3 presents the original outline of Creech and Ramji (2004) Network assessment framework, before amending it based on the previously presented multidimensional pillars of this study. In this research assessment, aside these major areas of investigation, additional elements are included in order to contextualise the situation of the network. Investigating the resources of the network will help in understanding the timely developments and the current limitations, while analysing the Lifecycle, namely the ripeness of the network (Creech and Ramji, 2004,p.11) will help in situating the network in its own timeline, as detailed in figure 4.

Years in operation	Quality of interaction and work
1-3 Formative period	Members get to know each other; but work independently with little collaboration. There is some protection of turf; individual institutional priorities take precedence over network "friendships." A great deal of individual work is accomplished – new "knowledge" is created, although not always "jointly" with other members: members are productive if not interactive. Time and money may be invested at this stage in setting up the coordination systems and procedures to support collaboration. Through effective coordination, the work of individual members may be aggregated into "network" successes.
4-6 : Status quo / Growth	Some of the benefits of investing in coordination should be apparent at this point: funding, contracts and work plans should be in place; members will probably have met several times; it should be possible to assess the effectiveness of the network with respect to its knowledge contributions, communications and relationships with those it seeks to influence. Members continue to be productive, but also begin to question why they are bothering to do their work within a network context. They question what the value added of the network is. This is a signal of maturing of relationships

	among the members, recognizing implicitly if not explicitly that they may be limiting their effectiveness by not adding value to each other's work. If this stagnation isn't monitored well, and responded to, then signs of non-performance begin to be seen members miss deadlines, don't execute their tasks, and so forth. Often by the fifth or sixth year, the productivity is either quite high, indicating membership commitment even if collaboration is still an issue; or is quite dramatically falling off, indicating the likelihood of failure and wind-up in years 7-10. It is during this phase that a core group of members may emerge who have the desire to keep the network going into the future.
7-10 Decline and renewal	At this point in their history, networks may go in one of three directions: • Further stagnation and outright failure; OR • Significant reduction of activities to simple information sharing around the network; OR • Real collaboration among a core group of members although not necessarily all members. 10+ Sustainability: long-term relationships built, interaction sustained among members including joint work, peer review, communications and real recognition and influence beyond the network.

Figure 4: Theoretical Network development timeline Source : Creech Network Assessment Framework (p.11)

4.3 Description of the methodology : compilation

The core challenge of this study is to combine academically backed theories, focusing on networks with very practical guidelines for assessment, as previously presented. In short, to connect the dots. The alignment between theories and the initial assessment was designed as follows. Most of the Network governance theory areas of interest were connected to inquiries on Structure and Governance and Changes in the knowledge base since both of these variables help to understand the strength of trust within the network, the level of specialization and of interdependence, expressed through the process of knowledge production, while the structure and competencies of the network can be presented in a large descriptive part. Trust and Homophily will be assessed textually as well. Inter-organizational communication was connected to the broad communication section of the assessment. This ranges from presenting the structure for internal communication, the tools as well as the practices. I considered that presenting initial conditions, resources and political relations was critical in understanding the fundamental nature of the network. Last but not least, the Leadership theory was connected to elements related to the management attitude and culture within the network (collaborative approach, commitment, etc) , this also goes closely with elements from network governance theory incarnated by the critical role of TEN Secretariat.

In order to be clear, the following elements will be assessed :

- Context: CEP as a singularity : Structure and initial developments, management approach , funding system
- Network assessment :
  - Foundation of the network
  - Network emergence context
  - Membership selection and duties
  - Decision-making and organizational structure
  - Central role of the Secretariat
  - Management structure and 'attitude'
  - Structural and governance issues
  - Trust : Dispersion and density
- Effectiveness :
  - Initial expectations
  - Indicators of changes in the knowledge base
    - Joint Research product : analysis
  - Indicators of changes in communication practices
    - Communication strategy and developments
  - Indicators of changes in relationships
    - External communication and dissemination

        - Timely developments
- Efficiency
  - Internal communication and interactions
  - Institutional support and conflict of priorities
  - Human resources of the network
  - Financial resources
- Lifecycle : situating the network in its own timeline

5. Methodological approach

This analysis prides itself in tackling the dynamics related to Network management from the lead organization perspective in an experimental fashion, thanks to a multidimensional theoretical structure combined with the previously mentioned, and amended, assessment framework. As such, a deep case study is relevant, in sharp contrast with usual large-n analysis focusing on a comparative approach, giving little insight on the lead organization. In terms of methodology, a qualitative approach will be privileged for data collection. Qualitative interviews will explain and interpret findings from text documentation and desk analysis against the established list of elements noted down in the revised assessment framework. These findings will be limited by the established scope of the analysis (Territorial : Western Balkans, Domain : EU-Accession/ TEN Network).

5.1 Scope and Case selection

The overall research focuses on CEP and the EU-Accession related network named TEN. Both institutions were chosen as research objects because interorganizational networks are gaining an increased relevancy within the Western Balkans enlargement process as stated in the introduction, while the quality of the lead organization leadership is critical in sustaining the network on the long run. Because I employ the structuration theory to analyse the network when it come to the leadership activities, I adopted an interpretative research methodology focussed on understanding social practices, in line with the structuration theory. An interpretative approach is, moreover, fitting the purpose of exploring a phenomenon that is in dire need of deepened attention. As mentioned earlier, an in-depth case study approach was chosen because it allows us to generate novel insights concerning how network governance is enacted over time.

5.2 Data-gathering

Data will be gathered on variables previously mentioned such as the established communication strategy, the variety of tools to communicate internally, the variety of communication products, the networks resources, the context in terms of political situation and relation with institutionalised political governance, the Network coordination structure, combined with Network-level performances and leadership practices.

The formal and unformal network structure will be analysed by comparing stated elements to network members' comments. Accuracy will be ensured thanks to this comparative approach. Three main sources (Network documentation, Lead organization interviews, Network Members interviews) were utilized for triangulation purposes. This will also grasp the timely development of the network, thanks to the differences between past agreements (2013-2015) and current developments.

Table 1 : Interview framework Source : The Author

Interview	Type of respondent
Interview 1	Lead Organization
Interview 2	Lead Organization
Interview 3	Network Member
Interview 4	Communication Officer

Table 2: list of documentation provided by network members. Source: Own compilation

Origin of the document	Document
CEP	CEP, (2018). Quality Insurance Policy
CEP	CEP, (2017). Statute of the Organization
CEP	CEP, (2015). Organisational Development Strategy
TEN	Think for Europe Network,(2013). Needs Assessment
TEN	Think for Europe Network, (2018), Organisational Development Strategy of the Think for Europe Network (TEN) "TEN 2025 "
TEN	Think for Europe Network, (2013). Agreement establishing Think for Europe Network

First, I consulted a broad range of archival data to reconstruct structures and intentions This data included digital material (websites, posts, reports), and material from CEP's archives (minutes, notes…). Other sources were limited to legal founding documents, 2020-2025 strategies, and interviews. As for now, interviews were limited to 4. They were intended to answer questions layered down in Creech's assessment framework, still relevant for my amended version, while confirming and elaborating on the elements stated in collectively agreed documents. To limit biases, I chose respondents from various levels and regions, as well as from different professional backgrounds : researchers, project managers, and communication officers. These interviews were hence complementing text analysis while being designed to respect the need to interviews specific roles within the network, such as members of the Secretariat (Interview 1 and 2), Liaison Officers from network members (Interview 3) and Communication officers (Interview 4). Questions asked during these interviews were related to the roles being investigated, with the interview sample available in the appendixes.

5.3 Data Analysis

A qualitative and interpretative content analysis of the empirical data was performed. The objective was to harness a handful of subjective perspectives, from the selected interviewees, with regards to the academical interests of the study. The collection of empirical data can be roughly divided into three distinct stages: I initially formed a database, whereby our analysis is based upon the review of interview transcripts, and of archival data. Written comments and reports on the diverse organizations involved and the practices pursued were compiled to obtain an overview. Stage two consisted of writing condensed descriptions of organizations and of networks interactions. The resulting detailed descriptions were discussed , which sensitized us to the way in which CEP manoeuvres the networks. By means of conducting focused interviews, ambiguities in our comprehension of the network's state of affairs were resolved. Stage three consisted in comparing our results with previous researches on network governance, in order to confirm and validate our findings, while reconnecting data and theory. For construct validity purposes, the conclusions and the data will be reviewed by the key interviewees, for future improvements.

5.4 Limitations

What about external impact ?

As such, a gap is present when it comes to assessing the impact on external interlocutors, such as policymakers in the Western Balkans region. In regard to this challenge, I consider this assessment framework dedicated to internal effectiveness and efficiency, to structure and agents, since the external acknowledgement of the Network as a relevant interlocutor can be assumed due to the continuous stream of funded projects. In short, this approach assumes that external partners are stabilised (Governments), and properly connected thanks to the requirements of the current Accession methodology. Outputs are in some extent disregarded, based on a second assumption affirming that, since the network is in essence functioning on a project base, with deliverables required by external partners, the ability of the network to reach and to influence is established *per se*.

Theoretical 'cherry-picking'

I would like to draw the attention of the reader on the fact that the application of the 3 major theoretical pillars (Communication, Leadership, Network governance) is not total (i.e. implementing every single principle and values) since a selection was required in order to fit our object of study while avoiding redundancies, as explained in the following paragraphs.

The ambitious initial plan that intended to use three set of theories that were supposed to be complementary, was limited by the inherent structure of these theories. Since the selected theoretical frameworks focused on the same topic from distinguished approaches (Network governance from a Communication, Leadership and Governance approach) while integrating a pre-established assessment framework proposed by Creech & al, many principles or values were considered redundant or overlapping. In consequence, a selection has been made, with regards to concrete perspectives for assessment. In addition, while Creech's assessment defines the elements to be reviewed, it does not explain how the conclusions should be interpreted, nor provides any guideline for further network's improvements. These challenges in manoeuvring concepts and values and interpretation are, in the other hand, what makes the study relevant and eminently experimental. By proposing a specific set of principles and of values, I consider this "mix" as a first attempt in producing multidimensional assessment framework.

Exclusion of variables

Documenting what has been excluded, in terms of theoretical principles, and of variables for the assessment, seems extremely critical since a discussion over the selection of variables and theories (presented previously) have to emerge from this study, in order to refine the process in the future. The exclusion of variables went as follow. User feedbacks, and interviews with key policymakers were not performed following our previously mentioned assumptions on the Network's outputs. Weblogs (proposed in order to analyse online traffic) were disregarded due to the inability to reach concerned employees. Emails contents and frequency was also not consulted due to issues with the disclosure of sensible content. Peer reviews, as stated within several interviews, are routinized elements of knowledge production, and presented as such in our assessment. Opportunity creation, namely the ability to organize workshop and consultation with policy makers was disregarded due to the absence of official meetings during the period, that was also impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Last but not least, the participation rate in Networks' meetings was not monitored, due to the absence of meeting during the period were the study was performed. Instead, I relied on statements from the interviews.

Situational bias

As an intern within one of the studied organizations (CEP), It is undeniable that performing a network analysis in relation with a lead organization (namely CEP) might be perceived as a bias by the collaborating organizations. In consequence, difficulties, in naming issues and accessing critical information concerning relations between network members were noticed. As for today, I can say that the response from network's members to inquiries for interviews was very low. Out of 6 organizations, solely 3 answered to solicitations, with only 2 of them followed by actual interviews, despite numerous invitations for it, from personal accounts, as well as from network members inviting their colleagues in joining the study. In the other hand, my situation as an intern in CEP greatly helped in connecting with relevant interlocutors and valuable knowledge.

Covid-19 pandemic

The worldwide pandemic of Covid-19 had a severe impact on the study. Since network members are geographically dispersed, the ability to connect with each organization was reduced to online interviews. In addition, it reduced my ability to connect daily with interlocutors from CEP. In consequence, exchanges of information lowered in term of intensity, while still being sufficient in order to produce a coherent study. Last but not least, the pandemic provoked a mechanical reorganization of network members' priorities. Several organizations suffered from a reduced personal, alongside a reduced productivity due to the complicated implementation of work-from-home working ethics. In addition, the concerned organizations focused, at least during the first months, on assuming critical duties, especially regarding contract-based projects.

Limitations in access

The investigation deemed necessary for the research was limited by the status of some documentation. In fact, some core documents (donor's contracts, financial agreements) were considered 'confidential' by our interlocutors. I mitigated that limitation by retrieving precise, but not critical, descriptions of the documents considered as 'confidential'.

6. Descriptive part : CEP

In order to properly understand the lead organization and how it manoeuvres the network (TEN), it is critical to have a look at CEP initial situation, related developments and the current structure and values.

CEP is a non-governmental, non-profit organization definitely centred around the issues and opportunities of the European Integration. In this regard, the organization shall perform various tasks such as research, while engaging for the improvement of the policy and decision-making process in Serbia, based on EU standards and practices. Economics are also a domain of action and research; CEP being devoted to the development of a regulatory environment in line with the Copenhagen economic criteria. This can take the form of outputs such as books, reviews and reports, while organising events and cooperating with governmental and non-governmental bodies.

6.1 History and developments

CEP, In Serbian Centar Za Evropske Politike and in English European Policy Centre, is a non-governmental, non-profit association operating on the basis of the Law on Associations ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 51/2009 and 99/2011), established indefinitely for the purposes of achieving goals in the area of European integration.

CEP has been established in 2011 by former Serbian Civil servants that worked in the Public administration departments, dedicated to foster the EU integration process. Drawing from interview 1, they were confronted by the fact that the integration process started to slow down, and they realised that their expertise and experience can be used to influence the integration process from the outside, as a partner of the State institutions seeking council, or willing to externalise some projects and researches. At its beginnings, CEP, as an emergent think tank, enjoyed the close ties its members retained with ministries, departments and individuals involved in the Accession process, in terms of awareness of their existence and of friendly relations, while being, at the time, the sole proper Think tank dedicated to EU affairs in Serbia, thus solicited for its unique expertise. Both opportunities contributed to generate a constructive partnership between the Think tank and the government. This synergic and sustainable relation attracted Global donors as well, interested by the viability of such relation.

The second phase of development saw the sprawl of Consulting compagnies filled with highly skilled civil servant. This was due, according to recalls from Interview n°1, to two logics.

Firstly, the renewed interest of Global donors to develop a strong civic society in the region through capacity building, a strategy comprising both funding and formation for similar organizations to CEP (CEP, 2015).

Secondly, around 2013 and the advent of the Serbian Progressive Party, the Public Administration and the Government became increasingly subject to malpractices such as nepotism, political selection and state capture, thus expelling, voluntarily or not, skilled but unwelcomed experts in European Affairs, replaced by, at the time, less skilled and more politicised individuals. This had the consequence of curtailing the relationship established between the Think tank and the concerned administrations, due to the loss of interlocutors on the administration side. This 'purge' of the Public administration enacted the end of the constructive relation and influence, implemented since 2011.

The gradual changes, initiated in 2013, largely impacted the financial strategy, but also the aims and means that CEP considered. Since the organization was not anymore able to enjoy a close connection with the Public administration, CEP's *raison d'être* drastically evolved from a partnership with the institutions to the position of an "honest broker" between the Serbian State, EU institutions and the Civil Society.

This period was followed by a moment of survival, during when the Think Tank slowly changed its orientation and approach. The organization gradually realised that some studies and analysis needed information gathered on the ground, and thus sought partnerships with local grassroot organizations that, while most of the time defending a political view, produced constructive data and provided to the think tank a precious access to it. Local organizations provided data while CEP provided its expertise in defining and constructing NGOs in exchange. In short, both entities exchanged what was their core added value. CEP provided an expertise, combined with a methodology and a specific approach. This resource exchange allowed CEP to diversify its network of partners and related projects, in a policy of differentiation, that was initiated by the loss of the collaborative link with the government.

In addition, until 2014 the planning was done in an ad hoc manner, and the organisational development was unclear and mainly intuitive. In 2014, a more purposeful development strategy was very much needed. The development of a proper strategy, namely CEP 2020 Strategy, helped to formalise and stabilise the organization with regards to future large projects and the perspective of Network coordination, such as for TEN.

According to interview 1, since 2012 but around 2016 roughly, there has been a steady but noticeable increase in demand by state institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs) in Serbia for improved, evidence-based policy making, as well as for an enhanced understanding of the EU policies and of the obligations arising from the EU acquis and the negotiation chapters. In consequence, CEP developed activities related to the fostering of independent research for policy decisions, while developing internal capacities. By the end of 2015, CEP became increasingly recognised as a source of competence regarding the EU accession process as well as in a number of sectoral policies, which has brought new project opportunities to the organization.

In fact, by 2015, CEP managed to obtain a large grant from the UK's Good Governance Funds while joining numerous programs such as the ones developed under the PAI, the Pre-Accession Instrument, thus drastically increasing the need for personnel. In consequence, they hired 5 new full-time employees and engaged 2 new external associates during 2014-2015 period. This expansionist trend was confirmed later by the development, in 2015, of a partnership with the National Secretariat for Public Policies (NSPP). CEP was charged of providing its expertise on policy planning and coordination. This policy elevated the unique link that initiated the relation, mostly based on social and professional proximity, to an organizational level, focussing on conserving a coherency in terms of research methods and topics, since both organizations were conducting policy-focussed researches. From close social ties in 2011, the new relation was continued between to independent, well established organization with organizational strategies, namely CEP and the NSPP.

This large and rapid expansion pushed the organization to redesign its internal structure. They diversified and expanded the management lines in order to more appropriately respond to corresponding challenges. This took the shape of a original structure : an horizontal project manager structure was created, in charge of coordinating all the projects and other activities, and a programme manager was hired for the second programme area (Internal Market and Competitiveness), thus relieving the Director (who was previously also managing that programme) from direct supervision of the research.

With the expansion of partnerships came the expansion of CEP's scope of action . Nowadays, CEP is working at the national and regional level, notably through TEN (Think for Europe Network), the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), while establishing initiatives in hands with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

6.2 Structure

As previously mentioned, and extracted from the Quality Insurance documentation (CEP, 2018, p.3), CEP is organised through a vertical programme structure and a horizontal project development and support structure. The programme structure is headed by the Programme Managers (middle management) and the Programme Director (top manager). On the top of the project structure, preside the Senior Project Manager (middle management) and the Executive Director (top manager). The Programme and Executive Director head the organisation and take final management decisions.

In terms of prerogatives' distribution, the article 7 of the Organization (CEP, 2017,p.4) statutes precise that members can participate in achieving the Organization's goals, in the decision-making process through the General Assembly, while voting for the representatives in the Governing Board.

According to article 8(CEP, 2017,p.5), the bodies of the organisation are the Assembly, the Governing Board and the Supervisory Board. The representative function is performed by the Chairman of the Governing Board, or in case of his absence by the deputy Chairman of the Governing Board.

6.3 Management approach

Drawing from the Quality insurance documentation (CEP, 2018, p.5), the organization managerial strategy is based on a "good people-oriented management style" centred around solidifying good relations and values such as compromise and consensus amongst the team member. In short, a benevolent management approach in order to create a team of benevolent actors. This is enhanced by the fact that most of the employees are young EU enthusiasts and completed by the presence of several EU accession confirmed seniors, that have continuously worked on the topic over the past decade, at least. This policy is sustained by the established strategy of attracting young professionals from Serbia and from abroad, despite a current brain drain within the Western Balkan region, using the organization's reputation and the personal development opportunities, as sustained by the flexibility presented in the CEP 2015 (p.3) Organizational development strategy, defining the Human resource approach: “Every team member is free to initiate a project idea and develop it with other team members, provided it is coherent with the programme areas and objectives.” This freedom of initiative given to each team members helps to reinforce the individual empowerment and the ownership of processes within CEP. This creates a motivating working environment and deepen the sense of individual initiative, critical for NGOs and CSOs, while retaining the workforce within the organization. As such, the management approach is very specific to CEP’s historical developments and employees’ strategies.

Last but not least, the combination of a vertical (programme based) and horizontal (project management support) structure enhance the ability of each employees to focus on their areas of expertise, thus increasing their work efficiency and the articulation between various branches, while making room for the development of complex projects, requiring a division of work between project management and project implementation.

6.4 Funding

The end of the unilateral relation between the government and the think tank demonstrated the need for a diverse portfolio of projects, and of funds. In addition, the financing system, was, back in the time, totally relying on project funding, as most of the NGOs and Think tanks. But this position of a perpetual fund-seeker does not ensure a safe future, especially with the lasting risk of a decrease in donor funding, that might go alongside the advancement of the EU membership process. This would have challenged the continuity, independence, and sustainability of the whole organization.

In consequence, and according to the articles 15,16 and 17 of the statute of the organization (CEP,2015,p.6) , CEP can now acquire resources through donors for non-profit project, but also by performing economic activity, such as consulting activities in cooperation with businesses. This will help to overcome the limitations of project-based management, while enriching the investment capabilities.

In short, the 2013-2015 period of survival hence ended when the organization decided to perform a drastic reorganization of its activities. While continuing to provide guidance and perform researches, CEP started to propose services to lucrative organizations, as a consulting company. This “expertise on demand” sparkled controversies of conflict of interests, since it can damage the research independence of the Think tank. These controversies were resolved by the implementation of an ingenious financial system. The profits produced out of the "Consultancy fees" were not attributed to each consultant directly, but rather poured into a common pot, thus building a decent fund dedicated to deliver a fixed salary to all consultant, while these gains can only be used for the sake of achieving the Organization's goals, as stated In article 17 of the statutes (CEP, 2015,p.6), thus preventing potential misuses. This financial system proved itself critical in the definition of today's CEP. This collective redistribution of benefits made from the For-profit branch of the organization contributed to the overall stabilization of the organization. First, each consultant perceived a regular and fixed salary, that, unlike usual payments for consulting, allows for long-term relations and planning. Second, the collectivisation of the benefits allowed for a more efficient distribution of work. Instead of having one consultant per project, producing its own profit and engraining knowledge alone, the fixed salary system permitted the distribution of the workload among Senior and Junior consultants, thus enabling a learning process, more efficient, while building up a sense of collective belonging. Thirdly, the development of this fund generated solid reserves for the Think tank, thus less likely to be dependent on donors, while avoiding periodical financial hazard.

Last but not least, recent discussions sparked debates on new potential ways to diversify funding sources for CEP, in a logic of balancing the non-profit principles and for-profit needs. In one hand, developing partnerships with watchdogs and whistle-blowers, or single-issue NGOs to build complementary projects that required a research expertise, provided by CEP, is being considered. On the other hand, another option would be to seek corporate membership, and hence corporate funding. This might be conducted in the spirit of deepening the research and political appetite of the organization over the potential impact the EU accession process on large multinational businesses. In short, CEP and its research expertise will be employed in order to advocate for a business-friendly transition and environment in the EU membership era.

In guise of a conclusion of the descriptive part, it can be stated that initial developments strongly shaped how CEP considered its own role as a Civil society organization, what can be a healthy, constructive and fruitful relation with State agencies and other CSOs, and possibly led to the emergence of a willingness to 'lead' a network of similar organizations. It also shaped the management culture of the lead organization, very consensual and flexible, thus delineating clear values and concerns that might be transferred at the network level as the network assessment might confirm.

7. Network assessment report

This section of the research will aim at depicting the findings of the assessment framework, thus focussing on the network level.

7.1 Foundation of the network

The Think for Europe Network, is a network regrouping Think Tanks and EU Policy Research Centres in South East Europe, initiated by CEP in 2013. As such, CEP can be considered as the Lead of the organization, since it also held the legal domiciliation of the network and its Permanent Secretariat (Think for Europe Network,2013, p.6).

7.1.1 Membership selection and duties

Since a network is made of organization willingly collaborating, defining what were the criteria of selection and the factual duties of network members' is critical in understanding the network's development as well as the network structure, and related organizational struggles. The network membership is defined by a set of values and principles agreed upon by the members. The network members are aiming at becoming "honest brokers" (Think for Europe Network,2013, p.1) between the civil society and their respective governments, thus giving themselves the role of partners in the development and reform processes that take place at the government's level, in the perspective of the EU enlargement, while being stringent scrutinizers of governments' actions. Members have to be NGOs , well established in terms of governing structure, procedures and standards, while implementing values such as transparency, political independence and legal-financial accountability. On top of these criterion, members shall be Think tanks dedicated to policy research while presenting advocacy capacities.

TEN consists of a network of 6 organization, namely CEP, Institute Alternative from Montenegro, the European Policy Institute from North-Macedonia, the Albanian institute for Democracy and Mediation, the Kosovar Group for Legal and Political Studies, and the Bosnian Foreign Policy Initiative. It ranked n°36 In the 2019 Global Go To Think Tank Index (GGTTI).

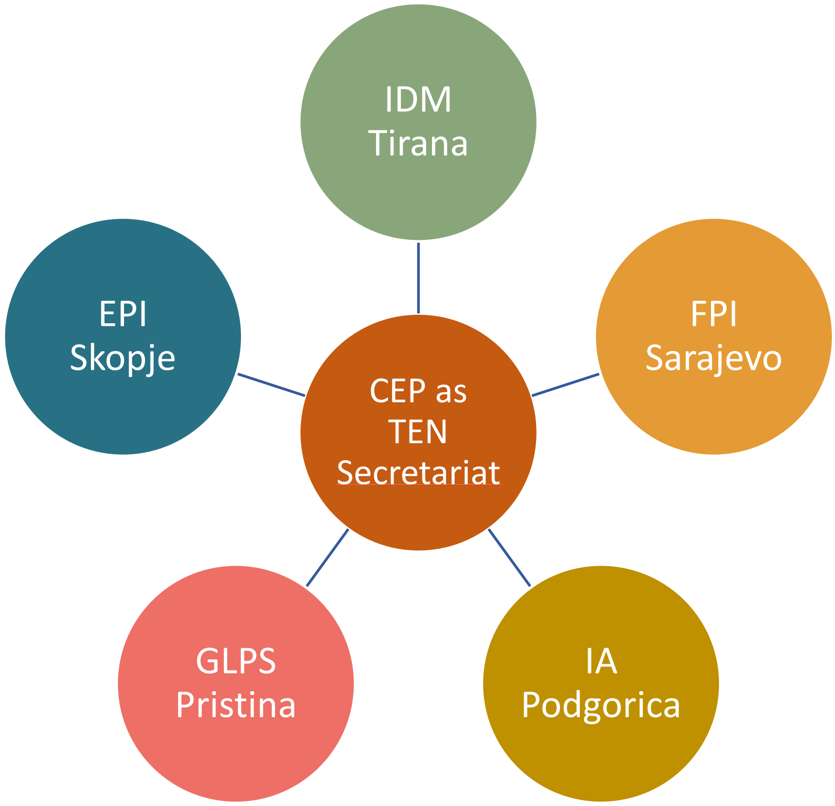

Figure 5: Network Members Source : own compilation

Membership is defined within the Initial Agreement establishing the TEN networks, article 3 . In order for the network to reach its own scope, TEN shall reunite organizations from each country/entity from the region.

Duties and responsibilities of networks members are defined in the article 8 of the Agreement establishing the TEN networks. Network members are in charge of informing each other about their activities and initiative “in order to ensure effective identification of joint projects and initiatives”. This mean that the Secretariat is not forcibly the sole entity initiating collective projects, but network members as well. In addition, network members have the obligation to ensure visibility of the network activities, via their websites, social networks and other communication tools.

7.1.2 Network emergence context

The network was established in May 2013 in reaction of a peculiar context and needs from its members. The network was established in the light of a weak regional cooperation and information exchange in terms of policy research & influence, mostly related to the European Union. On the one side, WB countries' EU integration progress was seen as uneven and rather unsatisfactory, with serious deficiencies of reforms in rule of law, public administration and economic governance, as well as unfavourable circumstances for dialogue and civil society engagement. On the other side, despite the prevailing 'enlargement fatigue' in its most influential member states, the EU has been insistent on pushing the WB governments to pursue open and inclusive EU accession process and to improve inter-regional political, economic, social and cultural relations and cooperation. In such environment, involved CSOs recognised that, despite working on country-based candidacies to the EU, they faced very similar challenges. The mutualization of resources, combined with a shared agenda and objectives, was immediately recognised as beneficial for the founding Think Tanks. In consequence, collective pooling of research and of policy influence efforts was seen as a great facilitator, especially concerning collective issues such as the reform of the Public Administration. In addition, the network became a credible entity, thriving on each organization reputation (and initially , on CEP's reputation), and thus became a major recipient for regional projects, initiatives and funds. The Network has since behaved like a regional platform, implementing regional projects, such as its flagship project, the Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (WeBER). This project aims at developing and structuring the capacity of CSOs and of the media in the region. The first session of the project mobilised more than 130 Civil Society organizations, focused on enhancing the inter-organizational dialogue, while monitoring the reforms in the area of Public Administration, thanks to numerous meetings. This in return fostered the links and interactions between CSOs, governments, and organizations on the regional and international level. In addition, the project triggered an extended involvement of grassroot organizations in the monitoring of PAR in their very localities (cities, municipalities). The European Commission (European Commission, 2017, p.38) has recognised WeBER as one of the examples of a long-haul efforts to bring in structural changes in an institutional environment, that has recently become fairly acute and difficult (deterioration of the effectiveness of public administration, etc.).

Some project, such as the ‘Europeanization Beyond Process’ can help us grasp how the Network define itself and its larger role. As stated in the TEN 2025 Strategy (2018), TEN’s approach is to consider the WB as a territorial entity concerned by the EU Accession process in each of its constituencies. In consequence, TEN advocates for considering the Western Balkans as an entity that present collective features, objectives, and challenges. An entity that “has been going through numerous transformative processes in favour of the democratic governance and rule of law structures, of economic governance as well as for an ambitious reform agenda for public administration.” (Think for Europe Network, 2018,p.1)

In short, “TEN was created with the purpose to improve the evidence basis for policy making and advocacy, to undertake joint research on EU matters and to transfer best practices and experiences in policy making and policy coordination processes. This pertained to the exchange of information among TEN members; exchange of expertise, peer learning and best practices, policy research in the EU accession process, as basis for policy making in the region; involvement of civil society in the policy making, and the dialogue between civil society actors and national authorities. Regional cooperation and joint research and advocacy activities can also ensure regional peer pressure to improve standards of policy research and analysis. Therefore, sustainable EU related reforms would benefit from joint research, analytical and advocacy capacities of think tanks in the region on EU matters, and from the transfer of best practices and experiences in policy making and policy coordination processes among them. TEN gathers think tank organisations across the Western Balkans, which are active in the area of coming up with solutions for mutual obstacles in the EU accession process. The network has so far implemented a significant number of regional projects and produced numerous influential publications.” (Think for Europe Network, 2018, p.2).

TEN developed a proper and precise strategy based on several objectives, jointly defined in the TEN 2025 Strategy Document (Think for Europe Network,2018, p.6). The established objectives are, amongst others, the “exchange of information among TEN members; exchange of expertise, peer learning and best practices; policy research in the EU accession process, as a basis for policy making in the region; for the involvement of civil society in the policy making; and the dialogue between civil society actors and national authorities” .

Emerging from the Strategy, TEN priorities are established on the convergence of its members’ interest, each member has developed with time a unique specialization :

- Civil society involvement in policymaking in the EU integration process;
- Good governance, PAR and administrative capacities for EU integration
- Rule of law and democratic performance;
- EU enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans;
- The regional dimension of the EU accession process and regional sectoral integration;
- Western Balkans and integration into the EU internal market;

7.2 Decision-making and organizational structure

The governance of the network is theorised on numerous layers. The network is headed by the Permanent Secretariat assuring a role of coordination and of initiating projects. The head of the organizations have to meet at least once a year through the Regional Council, while Liaison Officers from each organization meet on a communication level, and project managers through the Project Implementation Unit on an operational level, according to the project currently implemented.

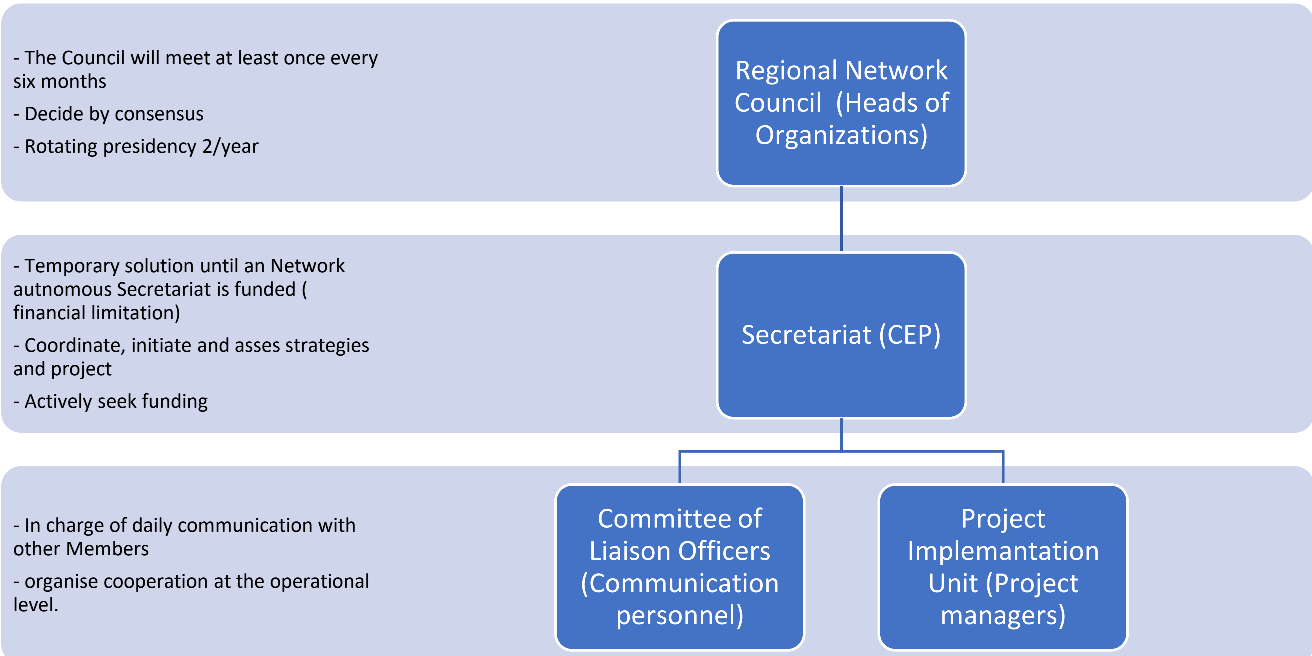

Figure 6: TEN Network structure Source : TEN 2025 Strategy

As mentioned in the figure 6, the Regional Network Council is the reunion of the Heads of each CSO, with prerogatives over the direction of the network. The Council provides strategic planning and guidance for the network, while being in charge of validating initiatives proposed by any of the parties and organization. In reality, the Secretariat is in charge of both the validation process and the initiation dynamic. Concerning the operational branch, the network established the Committee of Liaison Officers, in charge of the inter-organizational communication, while the Project Implementation Unit is in charge of the cooperation at the operational level, assuming the actual implementation of projects.

In short, officially established duties mostly concerns internal and external communications, while there is no official mention of responsibilities in terms of joint collaboration. This might show that the network, while formally established, have divergent interest between informal and consensual conduction of activities, and formal establishments of duties and means for ensuring accountability.

Networks' initiative can be proposed either by network member or by the Secretariat. The Secretariat then gather network's members to assess the desirability of such endeavour and what will be the protocol they will follow. In consequence, members make decision on how to distribute the workload based on consensual agreements, themselves based on several parameters such as availability, and network members specialised expertise in various domains (Security, Economy..).

7.2.1 Central role of the Secretariat

The Secretariat is also the centre for capacity building and for network enhancement. Thanks to the successful implementation of the WeBER project, the Secretariat has developed a proper management and monitoring structure, alongside procedures for joint projects in the future. In essence, the project branch is being rationalised and start to rely on formal documents and previous experience, rather than entrepreneurship. The most important element of this structure is the regular (monthly) meetings of the Project Implementation Unit, which gathers the project manager and project officers from all member organisations. Moreover, an online monitoring tool has been developed according to interview 2 and 3, which gathers all reports, data and documents related to project implementation and tracks progresses towards the realisation of project activities, milestones and results. Future projects' monitoring tools will be developed based on this example and experience, which is overall rather positive.

7.2.2 Management structure and attitude

The management structure is, in one hand, mainly related to the everyday functioning of the Secretariat, and to the management of the Network's projects and initiatives. Thanks to the opportunity created by TEN's flagship project WeBER, CEP, in its role of being the Secretariat of the Network, has developed a management and monitoring structure, aside specific procedures, that the Secretariat intends to enforce at the Network level. According to the TEN 2025 Strategy (Think for Europe Network, 2018, p.12), "The most important elements of this structure are the regular (monthly) meetings of the Project Implementation Unit, which gathers the project manager and project officers from all member organisations".

On the other hand, despite the ability of CEP to orchestrate and coordinate projects, decisions are quasi unanimously consensual. This retainment of CEPs own power over the networks is a powerful move to build a trustful environment that emphasises on collective collaboration, on a communication and decision-making level. In terms of initiation and orientation, perhaps CEP is more directive. In fact, drawing from interview 1,2,and 3, there is a very large gap between the formal protocols and rules established and the informal accommodation of them. It is due to two major reasons. The closeness of the network's members, with working relations based on the good people managerial approach, that has spread from CEP working culture to the network. In this regard, informal solutions and resolutions of conflicts are preferred, in the sense that this maintain Consensus as the core element for decisions, that themselves emerge from daily discussion. In addition, the informal conduction of activities originates from structural necessity. The formal structure and related roles are not filled yet, due to a lack of funding on the network level. In consequence, CEP, being the promoter and the initiator of the network, manages most of the network roles and duties.

An unachieved formalization

According to Interviews 1 and 2 and based on the statements made in the 2020-2025 Strategy, it appears that the Secretariat, currently incarnated by CEP, is a temporary solution. Since there is a lack of funding for the network, on the network-level (and not for the performed projects) the development of a permanent and independent structure is compromised. In reaction, the members of the network have decided to allocate the role of the Secretariat (Coordination and initiation of strategies and projects) to CEP. This can be explained by the capacity of the organization to handle this role financially, in terms of manpower, and in terms of credibility toward donors. This temporary solution shall be resolved by the establishment of an autonomous Secretariat. In this regard, the Secretariat (CEP) has to actively seek funding for the Network, but this goes in hands with the obligation to stimulate other members on the same topic and to rely on their own financial opportunities, as mentioned in the 2020-2025 Network Strategy (Think for Europe Network,2018,p.14): “Essentially, more ownership needs to be developed among all member organisations, which would be demonstrated through greater engagement in fundraising for regional cooperation initiatives via the TEN Network.”

Due to financial limitations …

Concerning the lack of funding, it mostly concerns the network level. According to interview 2, the ratio between the number of applications for grants and of successful allocations of fund ranges between 10 to 20%. This explains the need for the Secretariat to ‘actively seek funding’. In fat, the idea of TEN, namely the establishment of a regional structure coordinating regional actions, is well appreciated by the international donors (increased level of reliability, of trust) , but also highly hinder the willingness of such donors to fund it due to the multiplicity of protocols, of accountable individuals, of size and of scale of the necessary funding, and of the complexity of the post project audit.

…Or risk & commitment distribution ?

CEP is undeniably the organization that carries the greatest financial and reputation risk for success or failure. The strong performance of this organization and the wide range of initiatives it proposes shows its resolution in ensuring the sustainability of the network. It is also undeniable that risk is not evenly distributed between members and thus impact members’ performance and accountability. Network failure, for most members, is unlikely since there is a reciprocal need for “ a coordinator and implementors” (Interview 3). The risk, for the lead organization, however, is the absence of routinization and of enhanced autonomy within the network, as a collective, more than an ad-hoc collaboration of its constituents. In consequence, the sense of risk and of failure, that goes along the distribution of responsibilities, and the development of a routinization that does not require the secretariat to check on its constituents, shall be better distributed, perhaps by appointing different network members in critical positions for large network projects.

7.2.3 Structural & Governance issues : Informal conduction of activities

Issues in the Structure and in the governance systems are numerous but not critical for the conduct of activities, and ranges from issues of internal management, to attendance. First, the Regional Council struggled to enforce the yearly meeting, as each Director had little time to allocate to it. Numerous meetings led to the conclusion that such gatherings need to be done at least twice a year. In addition, the Council was in theory presided by a turning presidency (6 months long). The turning Presidency of the Council is a noble idea on paper. A turning presidency helps in redistributing the roles within the network while empowering each organization alternatively. Unfortunately, this was proven unreachable due to administrative limitations and the lack of interest of members to preside the council. In conclusion, some organization prefers to stay involved at the operational level with regards to their own agendas, priorities and capabilities.

The discussion with members of the network (interview 2 and 3) revealed that the governance was far less formal than stated in the documentation. Two layers were retained, with the Heads of organizations meeting yearly, and the operational level meeting according to the needs of the projects. Liaison officers as mentioned on paper do not exist. They exist only on the basis of a specific project. In consequence, one of the network objectives is that the Committee of the Liaison Officers (CLO) starts to function. So far, this body has not been formalised, although the functioning of similar bodies established for specific projects has been very successful. The organisations now possess the video-conferencing equipment necessary for the facilitation of virtual meetings. In this regard, All TEN members will have to designate one representative to act as a coordinating officer for Network activities and thus to serve at the CLO. At the same time, in order to ensure a maximal flexibility and adaptability of the governance structure, replacement representatives can attend the meetings of the CLO, depending on the meeting topics. In short, the structure only exists on paper. CEP initiates most of the projects and actively search for funding. This centralisation of the management roles at the Secretariat level answers the need for coordination. In short, CEP acts as the ‘Routine reminder’ as much as the lead organization within the network.

7.2.4 Trust : dispersion and density

Another relevant dimension of the collaboration that was identified during the interviews (2 and 3) is the level of trust. While I was being told that the consensual collaboration was based on a strong professional and relational trust, psychological and situational elements can tilt the balance of trust occasionally. Trust might sometimes be hindered compromised due to the international nature of the network. Political stigmas from post-Yugoslav countries might interfere with well-established peers' trust. This might be understood as a "small and big nation complex" and can impact the daily work of the network. For instance, discussions technically dedicated to regional issues tend to get perturbated by the notification of national specificities and gradually decentred from their initial regional focus by actors interested in assuring that their country and cultural specificities receive an appropriate recognition. This reveal that the consensus within the network is in some ways, based on agreed taboos. Divergences in term of political opinions exists, notably on regional issues such as the Pristina-Belgrade relations (independence of Kosovo and territorial integrity). In short, interregional issues are avoided in order to not generate distrust nor conflict.

8. Effectiveness

The notion of Effectiveness basically refers to the capability of producing a desired result or the ability to produce desired output. Translated in Network governance terms (Creech and Ramji, 2004, p.4-8) Effectiveness questions the network's goals and objectives. Are they clear and are they being achieved ? Is the network fully realizing the advantages of working together ? Thanks to the interview N°3, and to the comparison between initial expectation and acknowledged changes, I was able to assess the so-called effectiveness of the Network.

8.1 Initial expectations

Initial expectations were summarised based interview n°3. Organizations that joined the network were interested by numerous benefits that can potentially be gained from the mutualization of resources. Joining the network allowed to gain resources and extra knowledge on their area of expertise, thus increasing their specialization. Concerning the reasons for joining the network, one of the core reasons was the fact that TEN is composed of Think Tanks that have very likewise interests. This is accompanied by the will to deepen their own institutional capacity, and the benefits of sharing resources. In short, joining the network provided to organizations better contacts and advocacy power on specific issues, and an increased impact on political stakeholders and medias. On the other hand, most organizations planned to contribute to the network with their own national and sector-based expertise, which actually appears to be critical since the network has developed a work division between CSOs based on topical expertise (Good Governance, Economy, Security…). As 'implementors', network members contributed to the network by being its local antennas, with connection to grassroots movements and local policymakers. The network was initially perceived as a vehicle facilitating the stabilization of organizations embedded in hazardous national environments, perturbated by political changes, sometimes clearly hostile to the work of civil society organizations. Scaling up and initiating regional collaboration, with international partners and donors, sometimes eminently institutional (European Parliament, Commission…) helped safeguarding CSOs position nationally. In consequence, the main target of influence initially planned by Network members were undoubtedly the local decision-makers and International donors/stakeholders of national processes, such as for the European Integration.

Feedbacks from interviews tended to show that positive changes have been perceived by Network members. For IDM, one very specific outcome of joining the network is the better specialization of the organization on core areas, such as Security for IDM Albania. This is probably due to the sharing of previous experiences, of established working framework, of strategies to optimise time and effort. Relations with other network members improved in terms of working ethics, since they were already pre-existing prior to the network, based on social proximity and on awareness.

8.2 Indicators of changes in the knowledge base

When looking at changes in the knowledge base, one should be questioning to what extent the network is generating new knowledge and/or repackaging knowledge for new insights. Despite a larger number of variables prescribed in the original framework, I have considered that knowledge production as the central process that ensured proper changes in this domain, since it covers a large swathe of the network's activities, and require performance either on concrete collaboration on a document, as well as in terms of efficient coordination and communication. As such, I decided to focus on the distribution of authorship and of contributions, while acknowledging the value of peer reviews thanks to interviews.

8.2.1 Present research products and analysed content

TEN, in its Quality policy documentation (Think for Europe Network,2018, p.14) defined relevant researches and policy products. Those products are presented as follows and differs from communication products. Studies are the main and original product, usually taking the shape of publications, 50-150 pages long, focussing on in-depth research with a prospective approach for issues that matters on the network level. The approach can either be comparative, analyse a cross-border issue, or explore a specific regional case study. Briefs are also being produced as short policy documents (4 pages). It contains both researches and recommendations and is written primarily for the decision makers and executive level stakeholders. Upcoming products are Commentaries, short (1000 words) documents based on cue-taking and expert knowledge designed for media. As a rule, they should be based on regionally salient policy issues. They do not offer recommendations, but they shall point to a specific direction of action for policymakers. In addition, TEN Report presents the current situation in a specific policy area. It can be developed as a policy monitoring report, in which case it is more comprehensive and can be based on diverse and complex methods and approaches. Last but not least, TEN proposes infographics, visual representations of data, of issues or of relevant information. It is made primarily for a broader public, in order to bring closer to the citizens of Western Balkan countries (but also the EU citizens) the often robust and complicated issues and findings of TEN research. I have also included podcasts since they are omnipresent on the websites and are at the crossroad between generating knowledge and enhancing TEN's communication.

8.2.2 Data-gathering and aim

The aim of the following analysis simple. To analyse the rate of co-production, of authorship while assessing the level of sponsoring that each organization performed for the network. As such, I collected every document labelled as a TEN production on each website (including TEN website) and consulted the authors and contributors. In the meantime, I assessed the spread of TEN knowledge production by checking every study against databases (SCOPUS, Google Scholar).

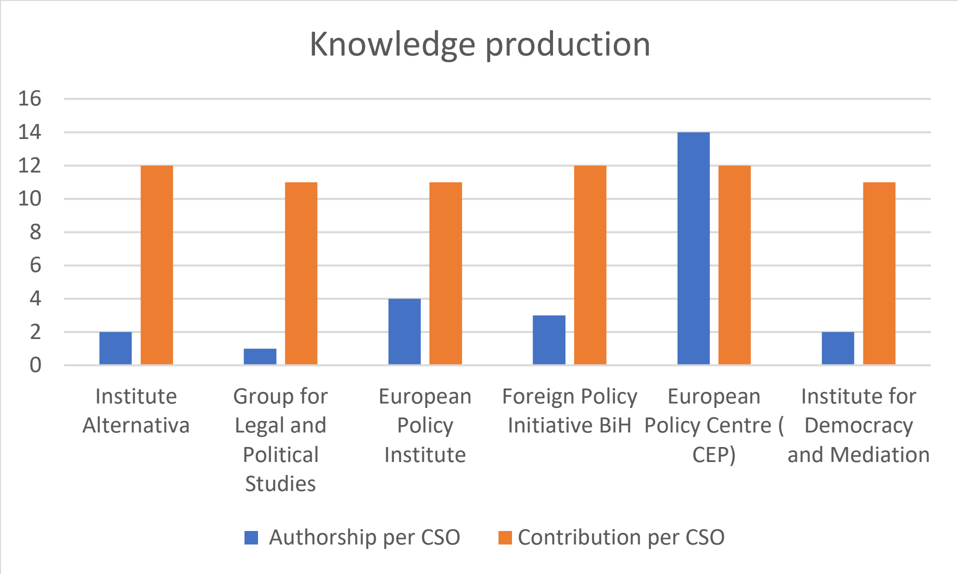

Figure 7 : Authorship/Contributions per CSO. Source : The author

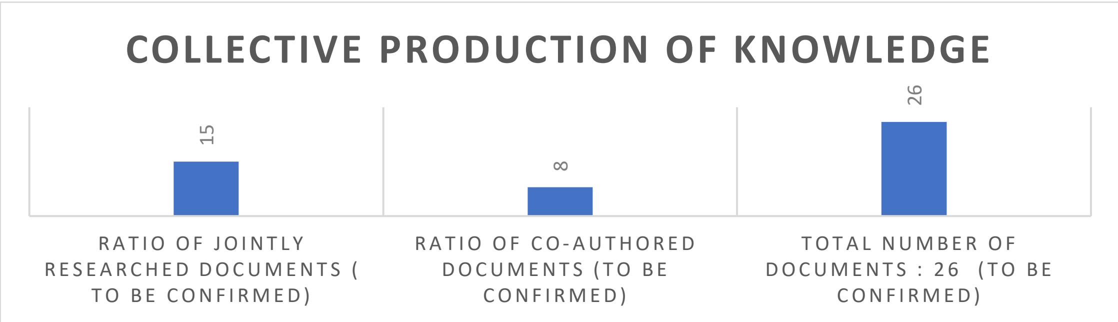

Figure 8 Conclusion on the distribution of knowledge production. Source : The Author

CEP & Podcasts

The large amount of self-authored documents produced by CEP is connected to the number of podcasts, since they are numerous (6+) and produced solely by CEP. CEP seems to have dedicated itself to a specific knowledge product, namely the podcasts. While being made on regional topics, sponsored by regionally relevant guests that concerns the entire network, the large majority of them are hosted by CEP. It seems that such output is related to the ability of this CSO to gather relevant guests due to previous working relationships, or institutional and individual reputation, while having the capacity to produce and advertise digital content dynamically.

CEP as major author / When contributions are made, they are from the whole network

CEP is indubitably the major knowledge producer, helped by the numerous podcasts. In terms of authorship, CEP is the frontrunner of the network probably due to its position as the Secretariat, thus prone to initiate projects. In terms of contributions, the whole network seems coherent. Last but not least, joint contribution seems to be widespread. Most of the contributions are made in concert with every member of the network. This is in line with the procedure, mentioned during interview n°3 , for knowledge products. Joint papers are usually produced by appointing 2 researchers from 2 organizations, in charge of designing a draft that will be completed by the ad hoc contribution of other members. Concerning large studies, the work is based on a complete research plan that is agreed upon by all members, which also allocates workload to each researcher involved. Most usually, researches are facilitated by focusing on comparing previously made country-based reports.

Low citation rate / recognition by search engines (Google Scholar, SCOPUS)

TEN's knowledge is numerous and takes various forms (Podcasts, Briefs, Researches, Blogposts…) but failed in being reused in academical publications, and in academical referencing as well. From all the documents assessed, none of them were referenced on academic databases, with several of them being inaccessible due to dead links.

Perhaps an increased attention at referencing documents might help in establishing the academical value of the networks' knowledge production.

8.3 Indicators of changes in communications practices

Communication practices are expected to evolve due to the need for a coordinated external representation of the network as a whole, coherent entity. In this regard, Network members have been promoting the findings of the network intermittently, most notably by using a tag "#TEN" on social media such as Twitter. In order to reach out to decision-makers, consultations are organised, and individual interviews performed, in majority by CEP thanks to its podcast program. The communication manager from CEP is actively engaged in TEN communication strategy while not devoted to it. In short, researchers are effectively bringing the communication professionals from their respective organizations to assist with output production and planning. As stated in the TEN 2020 strategy (Think for Europe Network, 2018,p.16) "The quality of […] products, described above in the previous section, is crucial in achieving efficient strategic communication to conveying key messages to the key target groups".

The established TEN 2020 Strategy enacted that the network will continuously update its communication/advocacy strategy: some of TEN members (e.g. CEP) already have developed strategic communication and advocacy documents, and corresponding action plans. The document hence specifically mentions that network members have to reinforce their coordination in terms of updating their existing strategy documents in their own organization, while adjusting their respective communication messages in order to make them mutually compatible, contributing to the general coherence and efficiency of each institution's communication. I do consider these statements as the incarnation of a will to develop an homogenous communication habit among network members. This process, that we can call 'collective communication ripeness' is one approach for manoeuvring the network toward a minimal requirement which is, in our case, a coherent external communication. This network manoeuvring is incarnated through the statements made in Network-level strategy documents. They might channel the will and interest of the lead organization into a collective document, thus influencing network members through collectively agreed statements.

In consequence of the development of a communication strategy, 'spin-off' products have been created. The Network produces several communication-oriented products, disseminated via the TEN website and social media accounts, e-mail, and other channels, based on possibilities available to the Network, such as briefs, podcasts, short videos, TV series, newsletter, and regular news on flagship projects.

Upcoming communication products are defined in the TEN strategy as follow.

1. TEN Short Videos – Produced either within TEN capacities or with an external expertise, up to 10 minutes long, short videos can either tell a story of a TEN project or initiative or they can serve as “explainer videos”, with the aim to unpack a certain topic/issue/problem for a wider public. They are essentially a communication product.

2. Think for Europe TV series – The first (pilot) episode of this communication product was produced as part of the flagship WeBER project. It is envisaged as a studio talk show, 24 minutes long, gathering 3 guests from three different WB countries. As a rule, two guests should be from the TEN Network and one should be a guest. The TV series focuses on regional cooperation in the EU integration context but contextualises and focuses on various issues tackled by the Network (good governance and PAR, rule of law, economic governance, EU funds, EU accession process, civil society development and participation in policymaking, etc.).

3. TEN Newsletter – TEN Newsletter is primarily a communication product, produced quarterly and disseminated to more than 2000 relevant stakeholders (via e-mail) in the Western Balkans and the EU. It is also published on the TEN websites. In the future, TEN will seek to broaden the network of stakeholders to whom the Newsletter will be disseminated.

4. TEN Podcast – “Fresh from the Balkan Oven” is going to be a short-form conversation that aims to untangle difficult questions on various topics related to WB’s relations with the EU and its member states, by talking to experts, diplomats, and other relevant actors. For development and streaming of the podcast, TEN will use the existing resources in the framework of CEP’s “European Talks” podcast.

As stated in the previous parts, the last 2 communication products are already being produced, showing the ability of the network to work on its agreed strategies. It also has to be stated that these 2 products are currently produced by CEP alone.

8.4 Indicators of changes in relationship

The network has a clear influence agenda, enforcing collectively agreed values with regards to the European integration process, thanks to a collectively agreed Communication and Advocacy strategy. It is interesting to notice that the knowledge and communications strategies developed by TEN are targeting decision-makers, with simple and straightforward messages. Messages are developed to support advocacy efforts with EU-based policy actors. Most importantly, TEN is dedicating a large swathe of its communication effort to inform and influence Regional and European public, and that specific type of communication can be a challenge for the network. As mentioned in the TEN strategy (Think for Europe Network, 2018, p.14) , these messages targeting EU public will be the only segment of the communication strategy that will " be developed on issues where the partners agree that there is a legitimate expectation of an interest by the EU public. They will be checked with partners think tanks from EU countries with which the network will collaborate in the future."

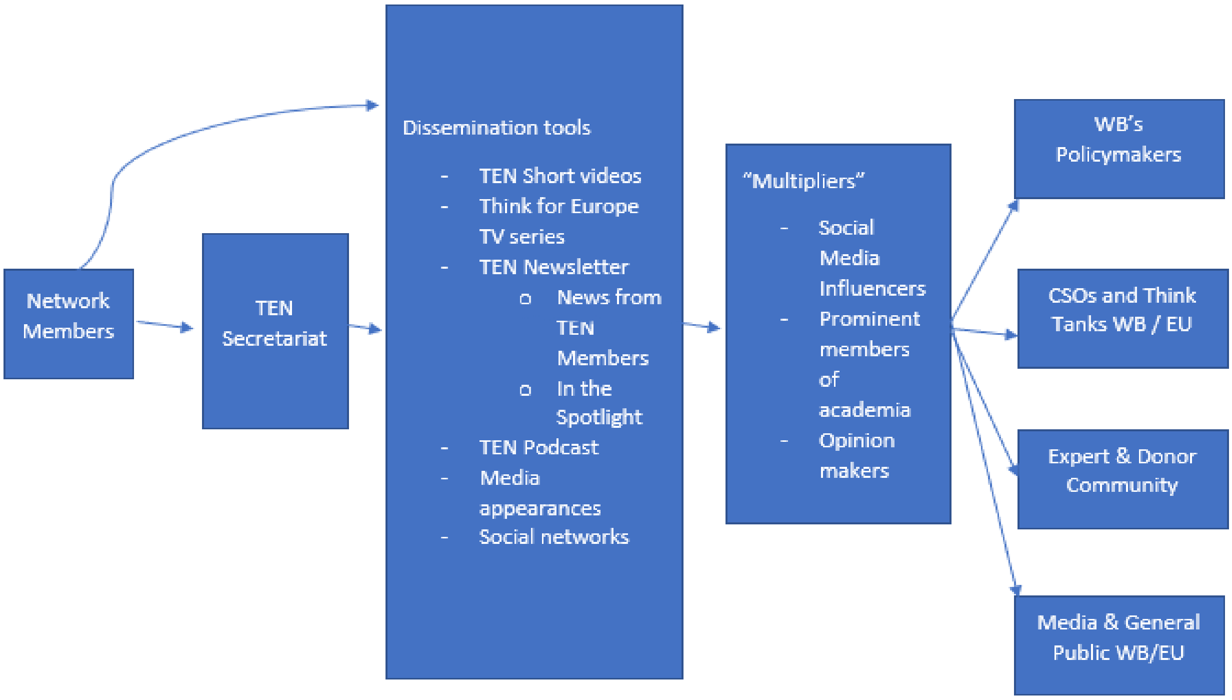

Figure 9 TEN Dissemination tools, multipliers & Target audience Source : TEN 2025 Strategy

8.5 Timely developments

According to the TEN 2025 Strategy documentation (TEN, 2018, p.16), the communication seems to be well planned, with defined product for specific target audience, but its implementation is not instantaneous and thus require a timely plan for implementation. Acknowledging issues in delivering on this strategy, TEN members agreed on an incremental approach. The network will start by developing communication products principally aimed at EU-based policy actors, in order to increase their reputation, notoriety and thus legitimacy on the global stage of Think Tanks networks. Secondly, the network will focus on targeting regional policy makers. In the last stage, products will be developed in order to connect with the public, both at the regional and European level. According to interviews 2 and 4, Communication outputs seems to not be yet consistently produced. Since the Secretariat does not enjoy an independent funding and autonomy, its production efforts are focusing on specifics products, such as the podcasts. I do explain this propensity to produce podcasts & interviews by the fact that CEP have the capacity and the culture of doing so, and as such, might continue to produce this communication product, now in the name of the network, aligned with its own priorities. In short, CEP seems to have converted parts of its own communication efforts in favour of the network.

Concerning the managerial approach, TEN follows on its consensual approach of coordination. The content of communication outputs shall be decided through a participative and consultative manner, at the initiative of the Secretariat. While being consultative, this approach is not a delegating strategy, heavily relying on centralized capacities on the Secretariat level. This seems to imply that the Secretariat is, in the future, deemed to be in charge of the production and diffusion of communication outputs of the network.

In the end, it seems that the communication strategy developed by TEN is in line with the network's objective in terms of reach and influence. Nonetheless the concrete implementation, limited by constraints of capacities, of financial freedom and of technical feasibility might impact the quality of its reach.

9.Efficiency

Applied to network governance , the efficiency of a network is a measure of “how efficiently it exchanges information across the whole network” (Latora, V., & Marchiori, M., 2001, p.1). This process can be hindered, and this is the focus of the analysis. In fact, transactional costs of collaboration can become a significant barrier to success. How a network mitigates these costs is an indication of how efficient the management of the network is. The ability to mitigate transactional costs is based on three type of interactions : The quality and intensity of internal communications, the level of institutional support (commitment of member institutions to the network, beyond the individual participants in the network), and the sophistication of implemented systems and procedures. These elements shall be assessed while considering the ability of network members to develop their own capacity to strengthen member’s ability to collaborate on research and communication’s objectives.

9.1 Internal communications and interaction among members

Internal communication relies heavily on the quality of the implemented tools that support collaboration, and with the ability of the members to use them. In this regard, internal communication, is, according to various interviews (2 and 4), handled in two ways. Indirect and official communications are channelled through emails, while direct and informal discussions are made though communication tools such as Viber, and WhatsApp. These applications were proposed since they are used by most of the members, due to their given advantage allowing cross-border text message discussions, while proposing the ‘seen feature’, and the chat groups. It seems that these tools are adapted to the level of comfort that network members can have with digital tools, since it is acknowledged that this approach is currently performing well. Meetings and conferences are held thanks to video devices, brought thanks to the WeBER IPA funding, that allows the networks members to work remotely, while occasional & exceptional meetings are held physically in TEN’s Secretariat (CEP) headquarters in Belgrade. In short, digital tools are adequately helping the network members in working remotely and timely, while conferences can be either physical or digital. The decentralized approach for cooperation, sustained by digital tools might prove to be critical in increasing the Network resiliency to the COVID-19 pandemic consequences on physical reunion and cross-border travelling.

9.2 Institutional support & Conflict of priorities

Analysing the magnitude of Individual researchers' involvement in the network's activities is not a viable way for safeguarding the tight link between the Network members and network-level institutions such as the Committee of the Liaison Officers or the Secretariat. In this regard this study shall investigate how much support network members provide to their researcher and personals involved in the network.

Recalling from interview 3, the participation in the network Is not restricted to one individual per organization but distributed. Each organization have its director involved in the Regional Network council, while communication professional works jointly on communication products (ad-hoc approach as for now) and research within the project branch.

Institutional support, i.e. the backing of one's institution with regards to the network membership, is correct, since the head of the organizations are bi-annually involved in the governance of the network, with little conflict of priorities. This is sustained by what emerged from network members' interview n°3: concerning the lack of swift answer and spontaneous high-level dedication to the network that was hypothetically linked to a divergence of priorities between the network and its members, it is esteemed that there no such difference. First, because an informal network might not dictate lines. Members have strong shared interest and do seek and need regional support to stabilise their own situation. In return, TEN is in dire need of "local implementors". The principal issue is the "activation" of these converging priorities at the network members' level. In short, priorities are aligned, but the sense of urgency, and the awareness of what shall be concretely achieved to sustain the network differs. While most of the difficulties concerns elements collectively agreed (communication, research, etc), the enforcement of routines and solutions remains up to the Secretariat, CEP.

9.3 Human resources

The representation of each organization within the network is in theory carried by Liaison Officers. As a matter of fact, the lack of network-level funding implies that these roles are ad hoc, related to the current project being implemented by the network. In consequence, the turnover in coordination roles is not exactly planned and relies on informal negotiations, and the setup of skills each project requires. One question thus arises : is coordination roles filled with the right set of skills and abilities ? The interview n°3 confirmed that for project-based network, there is “never enough” expertise. This is what, in essence, pushes the network forward. On the other hand, it is esteemed that the network’s members have a rather comfortable set of skills, at least large enough for producing decent and relevant expertise.

Network theory advises that turnover in representative roles is critical on the long term, on the short term, it actually reveal how well members were chosen and how committed individual members are to the network. Concerning the network level in itself, turnover in coordination is incarnated by the turning presidency. Currently, the network is being chaired by IDM. While it remains mostly theoretical as stated by several interviewees, the deployment of a rule for turning presidency allows for a better empowerment of each organization, while allowing them to develop capabilities in terms of network coordination.

9.4 Financial resources

In terms of financial resources, the network has sufficient resources in order to sustain its reach, activities and communication, mostly through direct project funding. In-kind contributions are not really present in the funding strategy, but some funds are earmarked for the purchase of tools and materials such as conference kits for each organization. In some ways, project funding helps developing the in-kind infrastructure and technologies the network needs for an enhanced communication and cooperation, monitored and facilitated through digital means.

The absence of funding for the network, outside its projects is a real limitation to the formalization of the structure. Without direct funding, the network has no resources to develop autonomous bodies and structures such as an independent Secretariat or pay wages to dedicated personnel such as the Liaison officers.

Financial resources seem to be somewhat sustainable since there is synergies in terms of funding. The original WeBER project was followed in early 2020 by WeBER 2.0 with renewed funding and an enhanced level of trust and coordination. In short, the original network funding was successful enough to leverage additional grants and contracts for the network as a whole. In consequence, the relevancy of the network as a pertinent regional actor is confirmed, since there is a market for the Networks’ research and communication outputs. Unfortunately, precise figures about funding’s schemes and contracts were not accessible, due to the sensible nature of these documents for the concerned organization, as mentioned in the limitation section of the research.

9.5 Lifecycle : Situating the network in its own timeline

Following up on the notion of time, one can ask how 'ripe' the network in comparison to other network that found themselves at a similar stage of development, based on the presence or absence of several key characteristics or even trends.

The framework proposed by Creech and Ramji (2001, p.11) help us to assess the 'age' and 'ripeness' of the network.

Drawing from the interviews and feedback received, TEN's features can be compared to Creech's Life-Cycle timetable. The network is technically 7 years old (2013) and should, according to the table, be in a phase of decline and renewal. However, it seems that several characters of each period are coexisting, most notably due to the informal nature of the network.

A great deal of individual contributions is still being carried, most notably by CEP, hence situating it in the formative period. These individual contributions can be understood as initiatives proposed by an '*avant-garde'* initiating content. In short, some work made by individual members may be aggregated into "network" successes, indiscriminating direct contributors and passive stakeholders, thus out of a predefined timeline. Time and money are still being invested in order to set up systems and procedures enhancing collaboration, as proven by the recent adaptation of the WeBER monitoring software. In the meantime, the network seems to be in a period of stagnation, since feedback from interviews tends to sustain the idea that the Informal current structure is actually a convenient deal for most of the members, thus preferring the current status quo than a proper formalization of the network. Meetings are organized regularly while being prone to postponements. Work plans are firmly established. The joint value of working together is actually dully recognised, since the collaboration provides numerous advantages to its network members (outreach, contacts, impact, capacity building …). But the step of recognizing that individual effectiveness is limited by the lack of involvement in the network is not yet passed. Perhaps this is a point that should be emphasised and discussed among the members, in order to strengthen collaboration. Non-performance and underperformance are about to be monitored thanks to the implementation of the online software, combined with annual reviews, yet to come. In short, the network seems to sustain itself thanks to divergent reasons, different from network's theoretical logics and might be still existing thanks to the acknowledged need for a network, overcoming the obvious need for performance. Ideas and long-term perspectives are presiding over practicalities.

If I was forced to situate the network within the theoretical timelines previously developed, I will situate it in the formative period. In fact, 'everything is still to be done' in terms of formalization, while cooperation is already well developed on an informal level but jeopardised by the absence of a clear convergence between informal conveniences and formal needs.

10 Conclusion

10.1 Confronting the research results to the theoretical framework

How a multilevel (Network and lead organization) analysis shall be performed and concluded was not subject of any prescription from the literature. As such, proposing an original summary of the research is as relevant as performing the analysis. In consequence, the conclusion will be focused on confronting the research results to the theoretical framework, thus answering the research question and the related sub questions. The discussion will then focus on proposing a renewed assessment framework, fitting the initial object, namely a lead organization governance manoeuvring a knowledge network, irrespective of the initial theories. This will be done by defining a Network leadership process and an assessment framework. This leadership process can be understood as the formalization process. This re-definition emerged from the study, and especially from the incompatibility of the current state of the network with the lifecycle template of Creech and Ramji(2004. P.11) assessment framework.

Relation with institutions

External factors such as the relation with political institutions seems to be critical in the initial phase of the network inception. The narrative of a 'divorce' between the Serbian Government and CEP led the organization to reconsider its role, rather as a 'honest broker' between the Civil society, the EU institutions and the national governments than a close collaborator of the government. This drastic change in how CSOs such as CEP are related to the state institutions presumably ignited the need for collaboration, translated in concrete terms by the establishment of TEN Network. In guise of a summary, most of the variables, in essence focused on the presence or absence of specific network features, are confirmed by the documentation and the interviews, thus supporting a theoretically successful lead governance thanks to the establishment of structures, and the development of outputs as prescribed by the literature and confirmed within the assessment framework.

Internal & external communication

External communication is rather sustainable, thanks to the establishment of a communication strategy, developed in the 2020-2025 Strategy document (Think for Europe Network, 2018), and coordinated by Communication Officers. A variety of products are expected, with some of them, such as the podcasts, already under production. On the other hand, the development of this communication remains very much centralised under the secretariat, mostly due to the capacities of the Lead organization.

Internal communication is under development since most of the tools being used have been implemented in order to increase the speediness of the communications and face delays in production. Communication tools such as WhatsApp and Viber, have a "seen" feature that, once for all, put the responsibility of a delay on the receiver, not the emitter. In consequence, communication technologies are used cleverly when it comes to internal communication since they are also used as tools to enhance coordination and accountability within the network.

The creation of a distinct and stable identity as prescribed in the literature (Koschmann and Kuhn, 2012), is definitely present within the TEN networks, whereas its outward manifestation is not forcibly strong. The narrative construction of the network is quite well established and backed by the initial political situation, since as stated in the *Raison d'être* of TEN, the network was constructed on collective challenges (rule of law, Government's capacitates to ensure the implementation of the EU acquis, etc.) and collective values, such as Good governance.

The Naming process, understood as the projection of an image of assumed internal unity, however, remains limited. Network members tends to project themselves as members of the network rather than the network itself. Several inputs from the interviews show that meetings that require an outward manifestation of the collective identity were troubled by the logic of differentiation of various network members that are still embedded in a logic of distinction.

This is supported by two opposite logics. First, the need for organizations to align the diversity of network members with the diversity of the network's outward manifestations. Second, the impact of a lack of 'political trust' between members.

In short, the network members seem to have quite a flexible relation with various identities. If this can bring some issues on the short run as mentioned previously, but it also allows the network to develop a collective identity without large contradictions at the network level, thus increasing the potential for collective agency, as prescribed by the Communication theory with the variable "flexibility with interests and identities".

Professional trust and Political trust : An applied interpretation of the Network governance 'trust' dimension

From the initial definition of Network-wide trust proposed by Provan & Kenis (2008, p.237), trust shall be reciprocal, evenly distributed, and stabilised over time. However, I came to the realization that this perception of trust was rather theoretical. My interpretation of the interviews, as mentioned earlier in the assessment section, tend to show that the concept of trust can, and shall be more precise. Within TEN, I considered that 'professional trust', namely the positive perception of each other's roles, acts and intents is high, while the 'political trust' is fluctuating, due to the heated historical relations between every single Western Balkans country. This 'political trust' is not much impacting the network since it is mitigated by the careful omission of sensible topics (optimal conclusions for the Kosovo-Serbia issue), and by the focus on regional issues that tend to elude politically acute issues. This trust is completed by its complementary dimension, defiance. In our context, defiance emerged when network members' discussion turned political, and as stated during the interviews connected to what was presented as the cleavage between 'small' and 'big' countries complex. In short the weight of Serbia in the region is important, and related historical altercation with neighbours as well. This defiance toward big countries was continued within the network since the 'big' organizations, such as CEP, are originating from 'big' countries, namely Serbia.

In short, rather than "stabilising" and "distributing" trust, I believe that a lead organization, and network members shall consider mitigation mechanisms with regards to the type of trust, that, in my opinion, shall be acknowledged early. In that regard, omission and avoidance seems to neutralise the "political trust" issue, in a pact, a status quo, that allows organizations to work on more relevant issues.

Homophily and territoriality

Homophily has been considered as a critical factor when it comes to the Network initiation, facilitating the development of network relationships thanks to a logic of similarity (Provan and Kenis, 2008,p.239). The analysis of TEN network supports that rationale, since each organization concerned share the same approach (research) on similar topics. Nonetheless, I would like to add that Homophily does not facilitate the process *per se*. Geographical location is extremely relevant since the geographical dispersion of the network's members preserve the network from overlapping territories of action and enhance the independency of each organization, having their own, well-defined territory. This was also stated by the network members during the interviews. This also impacts the process of formalization, since the network can be understood as an extension of the member's prerogatives and impacts, but not a critical one. As such, members retain the possibility to withdraw from the network without drastic consequences on their core prerogatives. As such, the fostering of formal structures might be related to the implementation of cross-border roles for each organization. This is currently being developed in the network thanks to the upcoming rotating presidency and the emergence of new project leaders among network members (IDM). In short, the theory concerning the concept of Homophily is aligned with our findings, while I would like to emphasize on the importance of the geographic co-location (physical proximity) parameter as mentioned by Provan and Kenis (2008,p.238), combined with distinguished territories, the output of the research.

Absence of conflict of priorities

Understanding how Network members' priorities are aligned with the Network needs cannot be grasped from the documentation, and is, in essence, one of the variables that is best grasped through interviews. It was explained that the risk for conflicts was mitigated by, in essence, external factors irrespective of the network's plans. The current environment for Think Tanks in the region is rather instable, and even hostile in some ways. In consequence, clearly established objectives are not in order. Instead, wide and vague perspectives of how the network shall be developed in the future are preferred, reducing the risk for failure while being prone to offer flexibility to the network with regards to external threats.

Network structures & competencies

Network structures and competencies are well defined in the Network documentation as part of the Secretariat's prerogatives. Network funding and external communication are supposedly shared amongst network members while being championed by the Secretariat. This pattern of 'theoretically shared but in reality centralized' network activities also concerns the network-wide outputs. This appeared clear when performing the Joint value creation analysis. As concluded in the concerned section, a large share of self-authored products emanates from CEP. Even if the co-authorship rate is high, most of the documents have CEP as one of the main authors, while the rate of contribution is also quite high for any network member. In addition, original communication products such as the podcasts are, for now, solely produced by CEP. The low citation rate of the Network products in academical reviews also shows the areas for improvement from the communication office of the Secretariat.

Membership selection diversity of criteria reveal itself to be quite irrelevant for the studied network. Rather than permanently inviting organizations to join the network based on selective criteria, the Network number of members is finite. One organization per country, that has to focus on areas related to the EU enlargement, while enforcing principles such as Good Governance seems to be the sole requirements.

Decision-making protocols are based on a consensual approach that concerns every level of the network, since conflicts are mitigated in private and strategic decisions on the top are requiring a unanimous agreement. In short Decision-making protocols are in line with the managerial approach and with the complexity of the required decision. Decision-making protocols, however, have to be deepened, and re-thought if the creation of an independent Secretariat is to be concretized, since it will drastically change accountability chains and the representativity of the decisions made.

Management culture

One of the main outputs of this study is the need for an alignment between the Management culture expressed within the network and the governance approach. In this regard, the management culture proposed by CEP is aligned with what the Communication literature prescribes, and, in my opinion, is relevant for variables related to the Leadership theory, such as the presence of a collaborative mindset and of a capacity building spirit. What emerged from the interviews is that the management culture fits the collaborative spirit of the

Network. In fact, a consensual, empowering ‘good people’ approach is being developed, probably originating from CEP’s own managerial culture, as defined in the descriptive part. This comprehensive management approach emphasises on allowing an informal conduction of the Network affairs, and of conflict resolution. This pragmatic approach differs from the conflict and coordination mechanisms formally agreed between network members, as stated in the TEN Statutes and the 2025 Strategy. In this regard, the management culture is definitely enhancing the presence of a meaningful participation, since exchanges are based on mutual acceptance of diverging opinions and of concerns while discussion’s outputs are, in fact, included in the decision-making process thanks to the informal attitude expressed in the Management approach. In addition, deliberation is a persistent feature of the network thus confirming that the management approach is actually opposed to the premature closure of discussion, a communication feature prescribed by the Network Literature.

Capacity building remains more a wish than a fact. While the Management culture and the network structure allows for the development of network’s members capacities (rotating presidency, etc) for network level outputs, it is for now hindered by limitations in the implementation of such project. The rotating presidency became a mere change of title without a drastic change of who is in charge. I can thus conclude that efforts have been made, but limitations persist, and shall be investigated.

10.2 Leadership practices : from conclusion to discussion

Drawing from the conclusion over the management culture and the communication structure deployed within the network, it is certain that CEP extensively focuses on deploying a collaborative mind-set, since collaboration is enabled thanks to the quality of the communication framework (opposition to the closure of discussion, integration of divergent opinion..). However, CEP seems to be focused on building what Morse (2010, p.243) calls "relationship capital", since the managerial approach seems to prefer good relationships over enhanced productivity and clear lines of accountability.

Bryson and Crosby (2006, p.49), as mentioned in the theoretical framework, invite to consider evidences that network's structures are influenced by timely developments, from informal connections to formally established networks. This is confirmed by the narrative and the current developments of TEN. From a simple partnership based on a single document, TEN is evolving, under the impetus of the lead organization, into a properly formalised network. As state by Church and others (2002, p.1), "The formal network has become the organizational form in international development". This is backed by the number of statements made in official documents (TEN Strategy, 2017) arguing in favour of permanently established formal structures. This does not go without frictions and reluctancies from all sides, since informal ways are safeguarding most of the Network members sovereignty. The discussion will aim at proposing ways to understand this duality of the formalization process, while presenting an assessment framework.

As such, the formalization process can be understood as one core variable in order to assess one lead organization's successful network governance. Moreover, this formalization process seems to be a priority of the lead organization, since coordinating the network is costly, in terms of financial investments, and of dedicated workforce. This echoes to what Ashman and Sugawara (2012,p.392) consider as the four variants of network structures : Coordination by informal relationships; lead organization model; a group or committee structure; and in the end a formal association generally governed by an elected executive committee, assisted by a hired staff. What this study shows is that those variants can be temporal, incremental formalization steps as well.

The lead organization, while being a *primus inter pares* does not aim for a control of the network members, as stated by the numerous attempts at delegating responsibilities and neutralising the coordinating institution (the Secretariat). The network documentation insists on the fact that “CEP will continue to serve as the TEN permanent secretariat, until the TEN Council agrees that the funding conditions for the establishment of a viable and sustainable separate Secretariat are met » (Think for Europe Network, 2018, p.3) . In short, it is claimed that the financial issues concerning the funding of the network are the main stumbling block preventing the network from developing an independent Secretariat, similar to a NAO (Network Administrative Organization), an alternative form of Network governance, presented by Provan (2008,p.236). With regards to the previous assessment of variables, it seems to me that financial restriction cannot be the sole limitation. As such, I do consider the formalization process is limited by funding as one parameter among others.

Duality between control and delegation

Is it now clearly established that there is a persistent gap between the formally established aims of the network, namely the creation of a NAO, and how informally the daily routine is performed.

One can ask, why CEP maintain its leadership and pushes for Formalization ? Emerging from the interviews, there is a feeling within CEP that their organization shoulder the burden of the network and that any decrease in their vigilance will impact network’s outputs and performance. The answer might be between a lack of ownership, of resources, and of gains form this collective endeavour. In addition, attitudes such as ‘clandestine passengers’ might not be sanctioned since its preserve the integrity of the network, whereas the sanctioning of such behaviour can degrade the level of trust among members, thus jeopardising the whole informal structure on the long term.

The complete formalization of the network seems to be difficult to attain for one major reason. Even if It proposed as a mean to enforce decentralization and empowerment, it is poorly justified for network members (loss of independence, only external benefits such as visibility and legitimacy), even if there are clear benefits such as enhanced coordination, increased production and reaching abilities. it seems that it is only justified in case of needed, and stabilised, consistent network-level outputs. In fact, CEP centralises most of the network-level competencies and initiatives, champion the joint value production and the changes in communication strategies and outputs. In addition, there is a gap between the stated interest of network members in sharing the network-level prerogatives and the actual commitment of the network members. This can be interpreted as a structural aim hindered by limited resources (financial, workforce…), and by the acknowledged gains of passiveness. The Clandestine passenger behaviour shall be grasped and tackled by network members, since it increases the dependency over the Lead organization, thus hindering the process of formalization. This differentiation in network members involvement can be understood as a differentiated membership commitment, mentioned by Creech in its Life-cycle analysis (Creech and Ramji,2004, p.12).

This study hence invites us to reconsider membership commitment as twofold. On one side, lead organization commitment, that can be defined as the willingness of the lead organization to accept a differentiated level of organizational commitment (commitment of entire organization rather than individuals) amid network members, with the lead organization carrying the largest share of it. On the other side, one can consider Network member commitment, as the willingness of network members, with the notable exception of the lead organization (lead organization appetite is based on difference rationales) to spontaneously act in favour of the network and get proactively involved in ensuring network level outcomes.

Those two new variables are interrelated. In short, a high Network member commitment is attained when networks' members participation does not require a systemic lead-organization stimulus. In consequence, one can extrapolate that the overall Membership commitment is related to how much the lead organization is supporting the network.

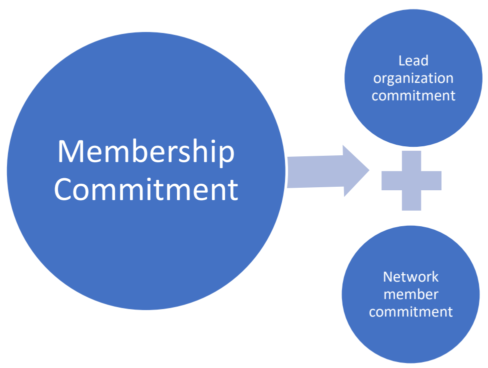

Figure 4 re-interpretation of Membership commitment. Source : the author

Continuing on this interrelation between Network members and lead organization commitment, a paradox emerges. The more involved the lead organization is, the less likely the formalization process will attain the step of establishing the NAO, since commitment is essential in achieving this.

The Lead organization ‘commitment’ is the most critical element of the transition in our opinion, since I am focusing on the Lead organization ability to steer the network from informal to formal. I have also noticed that the level of institutional & desired commitment is not homogenous, and as such, hinder the formalization process. CEP is carrying most of the activities and proposing most of the initiatives. However, these efforts are hindered by the absence of formal rules per se, that would force commitment of other members. Here I denote the presence of a vicious circle where the level of commitment of network members is also relying on the lead-organization ‘commitment’, with several network members having behaviour very close to what can be called ‘clandestine passengers’.

Perhaps the most important conclusion of this research is that the ‘lead organization commitment’ shall be modulated through time, considering the incremental steps previously proposed in the Network Formalization Assessment Framework. Modulating such commitment is open to propositions and interpretations, but I consider that a lead organization shall be able to acknowledge when unconditional support to the network is necessary, and when the organization shall refrain from extensively support the network, in order to bring network members to the realization that their commitment to the network is critical, while the lead organization patronage is temporary and directly linked to the network’s members performance and level of self-empowerment. As such I would like to invite lead organization to modulate their lead appetite as follows. Lead appetite shall be high in order to ensure the emergence of enabling conditions for a collective sense of ownership, as well as for a homogenous level of commitment. Nonetheless, it shall be going in hand with a progressively reduced commitment from the lead organization. A high level of interdependence, in our understanding, is incompatible with a high level of lead organization commitment, since interdependence is connected to the need for each member to collaborate actively with others in order to avoid failure. As such, lead organization commitment shall be low during specific phases. In the end, the complete formalization of the network will perhaps disconnect the lead organization commitment to the level of commitment of other organization. As such, the lead organization might consider an average support to the development of the network, in order to not under support network members nor over support them, since it might compromise the formal structure on the long run.

10.3 Proposing a Network formalization assessment framework

With regards to the research question : How does the leadership of NGOs involved in the Europeanization process answers the intricacies of network governance ? It seems clear that, when it come network's leadership, the network has to call a spade, a spade. If the formalization of the network is actually one of the long-term aims of the network lead organization -and thus a parameter of its successful leadership- ,then a proper framework pf how to conclude and achieve this formalization process can be relevant for the concerned organizations. This is what the following section will propose, while defining necessary steps.

The following proposition is based on the reasoning that the long-term success of the lead organization governance is also conditioned by the formalization of the network, as explicated earlier. I consider TEN as engaged in this transition, having a network level agency, but entirely managed by one organization, CEP, when this very lead organization does not aim to maintain centralised control over the network, thanks to collaborative values. This proposition is based on a mix between previously assessed variables. The transition is considered as incremental. Formalization is rather a process than a strictly defined construction. As such, several steps are proposed (Distinct & stable identity, homogenous level of organizational commitment, high level of interdependence) that are reachable when several elements are present.

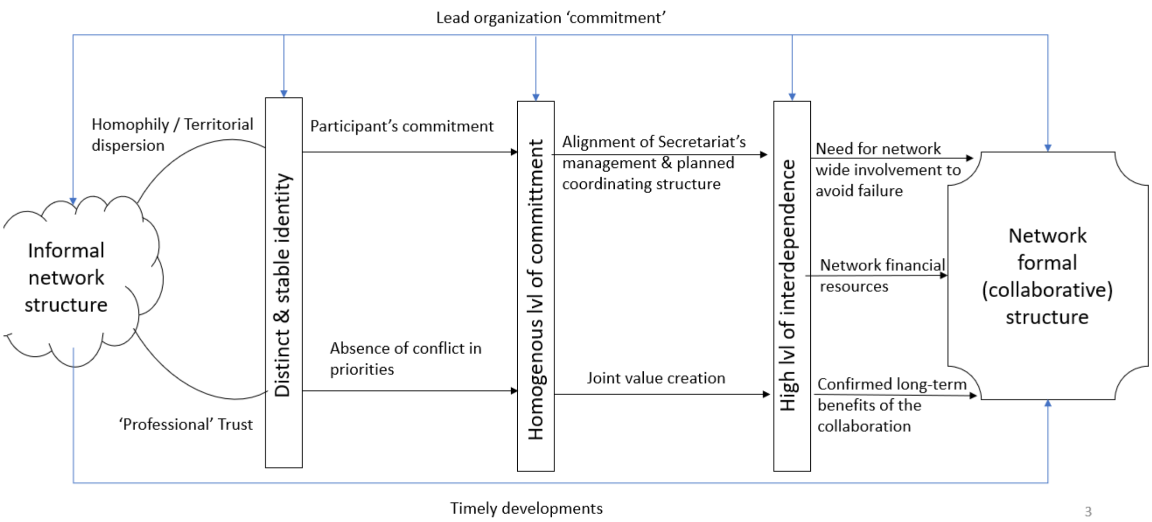

Figure 5: Proposition for a Network Formalization Assessment Framework Source : Own compilation

This proposition shows the relevance of several variables assessed during the study in order to reach arbitrarily defined steps on the way to a complete formalization. Aside this incremental approach, the importance of additional variables, such as the lead organization commitment, is emphasised, and have to be modulated through time, depending on the current step being completed. Last but not least, the timely developments of the collaboration, namely the simple fact that collaboration gets better with the time passing is also relevant, as prescribed by Bryson(2008, p.48).

In guide of a recommendation, Lead organization shall consider this formalization framework by identifying the current step they are embedded in and base their strategies on the requirements of such step. In addition, and referring to Müller-Seitz, G., & Sydow, J. (2012,p.106) Leaders should “makes things happen” thanks to the subtle interplay between High and low commitment, the completion of formalization’s prerequisite and the adoption various managerial approaches that are coherent with the desired ends.

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Appendix

Interview samples

Network Member

A. Initial terms of participation

What did you expect to attain through the network ?

- Increased knowledge on specific research areas
- Increased influence on national/regional policy agenda alongside an increase in reputation
- Increased connection with similar organization and with decision makers
- Increased access to experts

What was your contribution to the network based on ?

- Localised expertise
- Access to stakeholders

What did your participation in the network changed for your organization ?

- Quality of research
- Ability to interact with decision-makers
- Ability to interact with network members and NGOs
- The level of understanding particular issues tackled by the network

B. In terms of Efficiency :

- Have you noticed any practices that differs from usual mechanisms found in network ? Shall they be promoted or discontinued ?

- How internal and external communication have been handled ? Any consideration ?

- How is your institution is supporting your activity in the network ?

Lead organization

Intro

- What is the role of a liaison officer ?
- What can you tell about the Secretariat ?
- What are the main challenges to CEP's Network leadership ? (both internal and external)
- How large is the difference between formal agreements and informal conduction of the network ?
- What is the specialization/ area of expertise of each organization within the network ?
- What are the difficulties in establishing the Regional Council turning presidency ?
- If the Normalization of the relation between various member state a general prerequisite for EU accession, why is it not a priority of the Network ? (intraregional but transnational issue)
- How efficient is the use of Slack ? Can you describe the structure ?
- Any information on financial and fundraising strategy / issue ?
- Any information on management issues ?
- Do you think that networks members can identify a common/collective identity/goal ?

Structure and governance:

Is there structural and governance issue in the daily functioning of the network ?

- Resources and sustainability: Do the network have the required material and financial resources to operate?

- Who are the most common donors ?

Knowledge production

- Has the knowledge generated by the network been relevant to those outside of the network? Do they know more, do they understand better, can they make use of the network's contributions?

Protocols

- The lead organization is accountable to donors alone, or are the provision for members to be held accountable directly to the donors too ?

- Are commitments made by members at meetings transformed into an actionable work plan (i.e., not just the creation of a report of the meeting) against which performance can be monitored? In other words, do members understand and have they agreed to what is expected of them?

Communication Officer

Communication practices

According to you, are individual members promoting the work of the network (collective ownership) rather than relying on the secretariat to do this work ?

Is the communication handled by communication professionals ?

How effectively is the network using electronic media (Web sites, e-mail lists, etc.)?

- are individual member Web sites "pointing" to the network Web site and the research to be found there?

- Is there a public e-mail list promoting the work of the network, and do members contribute to it?

- Existence and use of an internal e-mail list: is it used only to distribute information from the coordinating group to members, or do members themselves use it proactively to circulate information or talk about their own work?

- Are members pooling their media contacts and assisting with the development and distribution of media releases; are they preparing editorials for mainstream papers?