THINK TANKS’ ROLE IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA
Acknowledgment: We would like to thank PERFORM for supporting this work.

We would like to express the high esteem and gratitude to all NGOs that answered the questionnaire, and especially for their input; we thank the think tank representatives that were part of our qualitative interviews.

Disclaimer

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About the authors:

**Prof. Asoc. Dr. Nevila Xhindi**
(Centre for Comparative and International Studies, Tirana, Albania)
Email: nevиласоколи@gmail.com
Nevila Xhindi holds a Ph.D. in Regional Development and Planning, University of Potsdam, Germany; Fulbright/Humphrey scholar: Professional graduated studies in Education Policy from the Pennsylvania State University in College of Education, USA. She has 25 years of experience on lecturing and conducting research at universities; experience working in projects for national and international agencies in strategic planning and development; desk study and field research; She worked for the Department of Strategies and Donor Coordination for the Government of Albania at the Prime Minister’s Office; She was the first Jean Monnet Professor in Albania and she is currently a COST Member of the Action CA 152007 “Professionalization and Social Impact of European Political Science”, supported by EU framework programme Horizon 2020. She has published many scientific articles in well-known scientific national and international journals.

**Prof. Adj. Renata Włoch** (Coordinator of the Digital Economy Lab, Deputy Director for Science and International Cooperation, Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, Poland).
Email: r.wloch@uw.edu.pl
Renata Włoch majored in Sociology and International Relations. She is Adjunct Professor in the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw, and Coordinator of Sociological Programme “Jobs and Skills for the Future” in Digital Economy Lab at the University of Warsaw (Google institutional grant). She was the principal researcher in several action research projects (EEA grant “Civic participation: a diagnosis of barriers and creation of tools upgrading good governance”; CEE grant “Social Action 2012”, EU Commission grant “The city ghettos of today”). Since 2008 she has carried numerous evaluations of public policies for public institutions and NGOs (Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Her recent academic interests focus on trends in digital society and digital skills, particularly in the aspect of supporting evidence-based public policy.
Executive summary

One of the manifestations of the development of democracy and civil society in Albania is the fact that for the last two decades Albania has been witnessing a rapid growth of think tanks. This research report aims at bridging think tanks as important players in the democracy development and policy environment, by providing preliminary results concerning the major characteristics of the organizations that may be recognized or identify themselves as think tanks, their role in the Albanian political system and the major challenges they face on the way to maturation.

Given that so far there are no empirically grounded scientific insights on the functioning of think tanks in Albania, this research is purely explorative and applies a qualitative research design approach with a strong analytical framework. The methodology of the research consisted of: (i) review of literature about think tanks (desk research); (ii) contextual analysis of the situation of think tanks at the background of the Albanian civil society; (iii) preliminary mapping of the Albanian think tank sector; (iv) qualitative interviews; and, (v) quantitative survey.

The research draws from the Kelstrup methodology (Kelstrup, 2016) in developing a list of NGOs that can be "used" as think tanks. Preliminary mapping resulted in the preparation of the list of 50 organizations (complete with contact information) that were identified as think tanks or could perform some think tank activities. To those organizations we sent the invitation to take part in the survey. We conducted 8 in-depth interviews and 23 online questionnaires.

The number of organizations that may be recognized as pure think tanks in Albania is quite limited. This is to say that no public register could be used to prepare the research sample of think tanks for the interviews and the questionnaire. As a result, we argue that the main constraints of the think tank activities mirror the main constraints the CSOs, in general, face. Some of the organizations included in the survey sample may identify as think tanks, but only for reasons of prestige, as in fact they do not perform the typical functions of a think tank. The organizations that may be recognized as think tanks are of hybrid character.

In terms of cooperation with the government, research finds that Albanian think tanks are quite unwilling to cooperate with the government. Most importantly, the power–knowledge nexus in Albania is deficient on the demand side and think tanks in Albania are thoroughly dependent on foreign funding. The large portion of the research agenda of Albanian think tanks reflects the priorities of the foreign donors. Nevertheless, think tanks constitute a friendly and supportive environment for young researchers, helping them to build their skills in applicable social science. Most importantly, think tanks offer the young researchers access to their "social capital", enabling them to build their professional careers.

Currently, Albanian think tanks are in the process of maturation. Some of the researched organizations have already reached a very high level of professionalization, reflected in the high quality of their outputs. This refers in particular to those organizations that function in close cooperation with international networks. The Albanian think tanks are staffed by well-educated people with wide local and international networks; judging by their intellectual and networking capabilities, they have valuable potential for serving as a key node in building evidence-based public policy in Albania. However, the role of the Albanian think tanks is severely constricted due to the inadequate demand on the side of the authorities on central and local level. Think tanks in Albania predominantly feel that their real impact on the shape and products of the public policy-making is modest or non-existent.

1 As per the Albanian Law no. 8788; date 07.05.2001, you cannot be registered as a Think Tank, you can register officially a NGO, a center, an association or a private foundation; what make the difference is what they do in their everyday activity.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACER</td>
<td>Albanian Center for Economic Research</td>
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<td>AIIS</td>
<td>Albanian Institute for International Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASCCA</td>
<td>Agency for the Support of Civil Society in Albania</td>
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<td>BCSDN</td>
<td>Balkan Civil Society Development Network</td>
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<td>CRCA</td>
<td>Children's Human Rights Centre of Albania</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>GoA</td>
<td>Government of Albania</td>
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<td>IDM</td>
<td>Institute for Democracy and Mediation</td>
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<td>IPS</td>
<td>Institute for Political Studies</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<td>OSFA</td>
<td>Open Society Foundation for Albania</td>
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<td>QKR</td>
<td>Business Registration Center</td>
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<td>REC</td>
<td>Regional Environment Center</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

In the past 27 years, since the fall of communism in 1990, Albanian civil society has made great steps ahead, reaching today’s moderately developed level (United States Agency for International Development, USAID, July 2017). Beginning with more idealistic initiatives and interactions with citizens in the early 1990s, Albanian civil society has become more pragmatic during the years. Even though public debate on the role of civil society has intensified in the recent years, there have been only a few studies which have provided a fragmented knowledge base. The establishment of a multi-party democratic regime restored guarantees for basic human rights, opening the path for new developments including that of the civil society sector. The development of the civil society in Albania has been shaped based on the country development and associated with legal initiatives and changes tending to create an enabling environment for the CSOs.

One of the manifestations of the development of democracy and civil society in Albania is the fact that for the last two decades Albania has been witnessing a rapid growth of think tanks. The diversification of the policy environment resulted in the raising numbers of actors that gain access to shaping the agenda and instruments of public policy. Yet, the existing research on the think tank sector in Albania is rather scarce. This research report aims at bridging this gap by providing the preliminary results concerning the major characteristics of the organizations that may be recognized or identify themselves as think tanks, their role in the Albanian political system and the major challenges they face on their way to maturation.

2. THINK TANKS IN MODERN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The growing literature on think tank definition, roles, functions and development offers multiple definitions of think tanks. According to one widely recognized approach, proposed in the Global Go to Think Tank Index Report (2014), think tanks can be defined as:

- public-policy research analysis and engagement organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues, thereby enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy. These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities and between states and civil society, serving in the public interest as independent voices that translate applied and basic research into a language that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public.
Another popular definition, offered by the Think Tank Initiative, specifies that a think tank is:

- an independent, non-governmental organization that conducts rigorous and impartial research; is not financially dependent on a single source of funds; is nonpartisan and politically neutral; is committed to publishing research findings in the public domain; and has the ability to set an independent research agenda.

Most of the researchers agree that there is a need to use a more broadening definition of a think tank to account for the existence of different types of suchlike organizations. For example, Stone (Stone, 2007) distinguishes five types of think tanks based on their primary institutional affiliation or linkage, namely:

- independent civil society think tanks established as non-profit organizations;
- policy research institutes located in or affiliated with a university;
- governmentally created or state-sponsored think tanks;
- corporate-created or business-affiliated think tanks;
- political party (or candidate) think tanks.

In a broader vein, existing analyses of think tanks have shown that it is rather impossible to indicate one best model or trajectory for think tank development (Kelstrup, 2016).

The review of the literature about think tanks offers some important insights that have been crucial for conceptualization of the scope of this study and methodology design.

Think tanks play an important role in politics nowadays. Policymakers need reliable, accessible, and useful information about the societies they govern. They also need to know how current policies are working, as well as possible alternatives and their likely costs and consequences. Although this need has long been an inherent dynamic of the policy-making process, the forces of globalization have accelerated the growth of independent think tanks, given their unique ability to strengthen the research-policy bridge and increase the quality and effectiveness of policy making. This expanding need has fostered the growth of independent public policy research organizations in the world. One of the more robust results found in literature concerns the positive association between political and media freedoms, democratic forms of governance, and the explosion of think tanks around the globe over the past 20 years. Even as the scope and impact of think tanks’ work have expanded, their potential to support and sustain democratic governments and civil societies is far from exhausted. The challenge worldwide for the new millennium is to harness the vast reservoir of knowledge, information, and associational energy that exist in public policy research organizations to support self-sustaining economic, social, and political progress (McGann, 2015).

In other words, the primary function of think tanks is to help the government understand and make informed choices about issues of domestic and international concern. Their other, no less critical, roles include:

- Playing a mediating function between the government and the public that helps build trust and confidence in public officials;
- Serving as an informed and independent voice in policy debates;
- Identifying, articulating, and evaluating current policy issues, proposals and programs;
- Transforming ideas and emerging problems into policy issues;
- Interpreting issues, events and policies for the electronic and print media, thus facilitating public understanding of domestic and international policy issues;
• Providing a constructive forum for the exchange of ideas and information between key stakeholders in the policy formulation process;
• Facilitating the construction of “issue networks”;
• Providing a supply of personnel for the legislative and executive branches of government;
• Challenging the conventional wisdom, standard operating procedures and business as usual of bureaucrats and elected officials (McGann G, 2005).

To perform these functions, a think tank needs to work out the balance between research, analysis and outreach. Traditionally, think tanks were viewed as bridges between knowledge and power. Think tanks not only seek to generate knowledge and transmit research to policy; they pursue policy change, try to enhance the level of public debate on important policy issues, and can also play a role in legitimizing policies (Kelstrup, 2016). In addition to being research organizations, think tanks also act as political actors; they may be treated as the manifestation of the knowledge/power nexus (Stone 2007). They routinely employ people coming from worlds, politics and academia. Guy Lodge and Will Paxton see the unique value of the think tanks in...

...that they exist at the intersection of evidence based research and policy making, and their multi-disciplinary audiences (governments, policy specialists and the wider society as whole) allow them to be potentially powerful force for ideas” (Lodge, Guy; Paxton, Will, 2017).

Think tanks use varying strategies to achieve their desired impact in the complex policy process, shaped by a multitude of interacting forces and actors. Think tanks are deemed as influential players in shaping development policy and practice. In this context, understanding the characteristics that are associated with their success in policy arenas is important for researchers, think tanks themselves, and donors who support capacity building for policy research. Some think tanks aim to achieve policy influence through behind-the-scenes engagement with high-profile policy makers; others actively engage with the media or seek to raise public awareness about policy issues by focusing on advocacy. To influence policy, official and semi-official think tanks dedicate considerable energy serving as advisors to authorities; periodically, they submit research reports, personally advise government officials on state matters and directly seek direct consulting opportunities on public projects. Yet, the most methodologically challenging endeavour concerns the measurement of efficiency of impact. While the impact of think tanks in the public policy process has received significant attention in literature, there appears to be no common and systematic method for monitoring and evaluating the impact of think tanks (Alcazar, Lorena; Balarin, Maria; Dushni, Weerakoon; and Eboh, Eric, 2012).

Think tanks are products of the political contexts they operate in (Brown, Elizabeth; Knox, Aprille; Tolmie, Courtney, 2014). Their internal characteristics and modes of operation are intricately related to how the key stakeholders of the policy making community perceive their role in the political system. The recent research on the role of think tanks in diverse political contexts suggests that think tanks in developing countries can make an important contribution to driving forward politically savvy reforms upon which effective development depends. Think tanks are embedded in their local politics and exercise a degree of legitimacy outsider’s lack, which means that they are well placed to influence change (Brown, Elizabeth; Knox, Aprille; Tolmie, Courtney, 2014). On the other hand, developing country think tanks face many challenges which naturally constrain the contribution they can make. In some contexts, particularly in the less developed countries, think tanks may not exist or may have limited potential to act. However, in most countries organizations such as think tanks either already exist or could be strengthened in several ways (Lodge, Guy; Paxton, Will, 2017).
The detailed objectives of the research were as follows: 1) to gain understanding of the current think tank landscape in Albania. Mapping of research institutions, think tanks and research-based organizations in Albania; 2) to analyse the relevance and impact of their work (examining the input and outcome of their involvement in policymaking processes, in areas such as adoption of legislation, strategies, action plans, reform implementation, etc.); 3) to identify the interaction of think tanks with academia: patterns and rules governing their collaboration, as well as drivers and implications for both sides; 4) to explore their channels of communication in place (Definition of target audiences: Who are they? Outreach practices; Dissemination of the research); 5) to explore potential paths for integrating the results of conducted research by the think tanks within the domestic policy-making system.

In order to achieve the objectives, the research project applied a **qualitative research design approach with a strong analytical framework.** The research is purely explorative, and its methodology focused on producing the most accurate - and conducive - results. However, **there are two specific limitations related to this research. Firstly, so far there are no empirically grounded scientific insights on the functioning of think tanks in Albania.** Secondly, due to the time limitation of the research, we focused on conducting qualitative interviews and designing a survey with only representatives of think tanks and selected NGOs. Consequently, the conclusions and recommendations reflect only the perspective of the respondents (their self-perception, perception of their relationship with the government, of their linkages to the political system, of the limitations they cope with, particularly in the area of their financial sustainability and impact).

*Figure 1: Research methodology (Xhindi & Wloch, 2017)*
Consequently, the methodology of the research consisted of: the review of literature about think tanks (desk research); the contextual analysis of the situation of think tanks at the background of the Albanian civil society; preliminary mapping of the Albanian think tank sector; qualitative interviews; and quantitative survey.

The research presented in this report serves as the essential first step to the comprehensive evaluation of the prerequisites to building the evidence-based policy ecosystem in Albania. The next steps should consist of exploring the perceptions, attitudes and activities of the other elements of this ecosystem, namely the government and the academia.

3.1. The analysis of the contextual factors regarding the operation of think tanks in Albania (i.e. legal and civil society condition)

At this stage of the research we focused on the identification of key contextual conditions of the operation of think tanks in Albania at the background of the development of the civil society in Albania (for more detailed account of the civil society condition see Annex 1 “The challenges and growth of CSOs in Albania”) This resulted in two general findings, which informed the sample of the target respondents and the design of the research tools:

- **The Albanian law does not differentiate between the registering of a CSO/NGO a think tank, a private foundation or a centre.** This is to say that no public register could be used to prepare the research sample for the interviews and the questionnaire.
- **The main constraints of the think tanks’ activity will probably mirror the main constraints the CSOs face in general, namely:**
  - **Legitimacy:** Many civil society organizations have failed to establish their legitimacy to engage with the government, largely because they have failed to effectively develop strong constituencies of citizens and because their weak internal governance undermines their credibility.
  - **Distrust:** Political leaders still perceive civil society organizations as a threat to the sustenance of power to govern. In addition, probably out of fear resulting from the experience of the one-party regime, people are not inclined to getting involved in controversial political and economic debates. This frustrates the efforts of CSOs in advocating for changes in policies.
  - **Weak Capacity:** Civil society organizations are characterized by weak institutional capacity, weak linkage to reliable and credible sources of information to inform programming, poorly qualified staff and weak financial management systems.
  - **Governance structure:** Most CSOs have governance systems and structures that clearly segregate organizational authority. In such CSOs upward accountability is enforced, in which the management of the CSOs’ account to their boards as well as to their donors both on the operations and activities of the CSOs as well as on finances. However, other CSOs lack an appropriate division of responsibilities between their boards of directors and staff members and are consequently lacking effective governance systems altogether. Many CSOs suffer from “founder syndrome”, as they have for
long been identified with their founders or directors. In fact, some of them still are. In the national context, this can be partly explained by the fact that over the past two decades, CSOs have mainly developed as a one-man-show, with a small and unstable team. Yet, shrinking donor funding in the recent years has raised the need to break away from this habit and many CSO leaders have seized this opportunity to the benefit of their organizations. However, changing the managerial culture is still “in the making” and this is particularly visible when we “talk about organizational development”.

- Financial stability: the third sector organizations in Albania are typically dependent on foreign sources for financing their statute goals and additional activities.

### 3.2. Preliminary mapping of the think tank sector in Albania

At this stage we aimed at identifying the think tanks operating in Albania along with their structures, functions, types and actual impact.

This endeavour was complicated by the fact that the Albanian law does not formally differentiate between an NGO, a think tank, or a private foundation. The number of actual think tanks and NGOs registered in Albania is high, and our methodology could not be based on the formal declaration in the state archives, Court registration or registration at the Business Registration Center (QKR).

Consequently, in developing a list of NGOs that can be “used” as think tanks for comparative research, we attempted to balance two approaches based on the Kelstrup methodology (Kelstrup, 2016). We combined the “minimalist” approach applying case studies to individual or a small number of think tanks that are well known and have been visible and important in public policy in Albania, and a “maximalist” approach: a list of a higher number of think tanks based on an inclusive understanding of the term, using official data and websites. Based on the above-mentioned methodology, we consulted the official list of NGOs from the Parliament of Albania, as per September 2017, the list of NGOs from the Agency for Supporting the Civil Society in Albania (ASCC), the list of OSCE presence in Albania and the list of NGOs collaborating/partnering with the well-known NGOs operating in Albania for many years, found on their websites (such as: CRCA; REC; IDM). We reviewed the current reports on civil society and particularly think tanks; conducted a review of the current legal framework on civil society, think tanks, lobbying and advocacy; conducted a review of other related reports on evidence-based policy making in the case of Albania, but also in the Western Balkans, where resources were scarce for Albania; mapping of donors, their strategies and current cooperation and initiatives with think tanks in Albania. Based on the “maximalist” approach and the information from the above sources, and on a cross reference with the activity reflected on their websites, we compiled a list of 50 NGOs to be part of our research survey.

The preliminary mapping methodology was based on two consecutive steps:

- Subjective identification of the major actors, based on the criteria allowing for differentiation of the think tanks from other non-think-tank NGOs in the field, performed by the experienced academic, based also on the criteria of visibility and perceived impact.
Consultation of the list of the identified think tanks, as well as the set of questions (qualitative and quantitative) with two of the well-known think tanks in Albania (ACER and Agenda Institute).

Preliminary mapping resulted in preparation of the list of organizations that were identified as think tanks or could perform some think tank activities. To those organizations we directed the invitation to take part in the survey. We also identified the limited number of the most widely recognized think tanks in Albania, whose representatives we carried the extended qualitative interviews with.

3.3. Qualitative interviews with the representatives of the Albanian think tanks

In accordance with the “minimalist” approach suggested by Kelstrup, we tried to cover the most relevant people for this topic of research, also checking if they would mention each other’s names as important contributors in the field of policy development in Albania, through the snowball technique mentioned above. To ensure that the interviewees would provide information on the relevant issues and to conduct a structured interview, we developed an interview guide based on the conceptual framework, which was sent to the interviewees via email before the actual interviews (Annex 2: Interview questions). The interviews lasted from 45 minutes up to approximately one hour. During the interviews we kept notes and recorded them (with the consent of the respondents). The interviewees were kindly asked to bring along any relevant information, reports, data, and presentations, suggestions of topics or questions to be discussed interactively during the interview.

The interviews collected background information on the think tanks’ missions, long-term goals, and steps towards meeting those goals. The interviewers’ questions additionally explored context, specifically views on the following topics (Annex 2: Interviews question):

- Think tank definition in the Albanian context;
- Knowledge of past and current research related to the effect of context on think tank outcomes in Albania;
- Underlying ideas about the relationship between context and think tank performance;
- Current efforts of organizations, policy makers, and experts to address context factors;
- The relative importance of individual context factors on the ability to influence policy.

As a result, we obtained:

- recognition of the internal context of think tank activities in Albania, together with identification of the field specificity;
- mapping of the think tank field in Albania, based on the perception of the informed actors; at this stage we engaged respondents in visual mapping of the field (using the Pierre Bourdieu notion and subsequent methodology of the field research - the limits of the field are defined by the actors within the field);
o snowballing identification of other think tanks was well included in the study;
o preliminary recognition of Albanian think tanks’ channels of political impact;
o identification of the major barriers in future development of the given think tank and in consolidating its political impact.

3.4. Quantitative survey with the identified sample of the Albanian think tanks

The survey was carried with the support of the Startquestion platform, which enables the control of the return rate while ensuring the anonymity of the collection process. The questionnaire included 15 closed obligatory questions and 4 open facultative questions, conceptualized based on the desk research and modified after the first three face-to-face interviews. The data was collected from December 11th, 2017 until January 3rd, 2018. 57 invitations were sent during the two consecutive rounds, 32 of which were opened and read by the recipients. 27 recipients displayed the questionnaire, of which 23 completed the survey. All in all, the return rate exceeded our expectations.

As a result, we obtained:

- a working map of the field of think tanks in Albania, together with their preliminary categorization;
- description of the functioning context of think tanks in Albania;
- analysis of the specificity of the functioning of think tanks in Albania;
- identification of the major development barriers.
4. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THINK TANKS IN ALBANIA

During the research process, we obtained valuable qualitative and quantitative materials. During the analysis process, we focused on extracting the threads most conducive to describing the situation, modes of operation, and particularly the challenges the think tanks in Albania face.

4.1. Analysis of the qualitative interviews

As a reminder, the interviews were carried with the representatives of the largest and most visible organizations, which were identified as those that perform the functions of think tanks in Albania. The interview scenario was flexibly adjusted to suit the specific contextual knowledge of the respondents. The views presented by the interviewees exhibited high level of concurrence, allowing for identification of several common patterns.

- The number of organizations in Albania that may be recognized as pure think tanks is quite limited.

The respondents were able to offer a precise, state-of-the art definition of a think tank. At the same time, quite unanimously, the respondents agreed that there are no “pure think tanks” in Albania.

Only one respondent was confident that his organization functions as a pure think tank. The rest of the respondents admitted that their organizations dedicate only a part of their everyday activities to the typical think-tank ing (research & impact).

Nevertheless, most of the respondents agreed that:

The think tank sector has grown in the last decade. There are some NGOs that shifted from community mobilization and advocacy organizations to think tanks. They still don’t work as think tank 100% of the time, as it is impossible to survive. There are many problems: firstly, the law on NGOs is against their growth, due to taxation problems and zero flexibility and secondly, the financial stability problems.

Most often the respondents indicated that the number of organizations that fully or partially function as think tanks, i.e. knowledge-producing organizations, does not exceed 7 to 10 organizations. This was largely corroborated by the views voiced by the respondents of the survey. Most of them indicated that the number of organizations in Albania that could be recognized as think tanks is quite restricted (“very few, [but] many pretend to be think tanks”, “there are very few of them and not much consolidated”). The majority of the respondents agreed that the number of think tanks in the country is something between 5 and 10 at the most. Only two of the respondents offered a much more optimistic estimation, with one stressing that “there are plenty of think tanks in Albania, one can hardly give a number”, and the other offering a number of “20-30 think tanks”. On the other
hand, two of the respondents stated that there are no organizations that could be recognized as pure think tanks in Albania.

When asked to point out the major think tanks in Albania, the respondents repeatedly indicated several organizations; the most often named think tanks included: IDM, EMA, AIIS, ACER, ISP, REC, CRCA, AGENDA.

- **Albanian think tanks are quite unwilling to cooperate with the government.**

  The respondents demonstrated good understanding of the role that think tanks play in the process of shaping the rational and evidence-based public policy, built both upon their personal experience as well as the operational knowledge of the political processes in other European countries. Worth noting, their comprehensive views were far from being idealistic: the respondents recognized the reality that the role and the level of maturity of think tanks is intricately linked to the maturity of the political system as a whole. In the Albanian context think tanks may contribute to the growth of civil society and democracy, but on the other hand they are at constant risk of being “hijacked” by the political interests of the interest groups or political parties. Consequently, the Albanian think tanks find themselves in quite a challenging situation in comparison to their counterparts from other European countries: they need to dramatize their “distanced” position from the authorities if they want to be recognized as legitimate producers of objective expertise in the eyes of other political and civil society actors in Albania, but at the same time they need close relationship with the government and municipalities if they want to warrant the impact of their expertise. The important intervening variable is constituted by the fact that the Albanian political field is comparatively small in numbers, which in practice means that the think tanks are often staffed by former political activists or even former important members of government. And vice versa, in the last years there is growing tendency for the think tank staff to employ themselves at the government. The more influential think tank leaders often join the government administration.

Quite often the respondents emphasized that they “never mix with the government” or take part in the public tendering. In two cases the respondents bluntly stated that they never take commissions from the government, because “it goes with a price”, implying the risk to lose their independent status or else their reputation. This seriously constrains the opportunity to fulfil the typical think tank role of inspiring and supporting the evidence-based public policy.

- **The power–knowledge nexus in Albania is deficient on the demand side.**

  Even those respondents, who did not rule out the possibility of taking commissions from the authorities in government and municipalities, emphasized that generally speaking the said authorities are not much interested in using the expertise produced by the think tanks. Admittedly, the government officials often attend the events organized by the organizations, but they do not use the expertise for shaping their decision-making process.

  The government lacks the culture to fund research. **The government and the politics in general are not open to digest knowledge and recommendations that comes from research**, they don’t buy it, and even when donors have paid for it, they don’t use it.

  In Albania it is hard to find a “buyer” for the research product, the government doesn’t need it, they will never ask for it, even if they show a kind of interest they don’t use it, while donors have their requirements and the
product reflects that. The government doesn't have any money for think tanks.

With no funding the think tank can’t survive. The government and the parliament have to change the mentality and the working culture, the research should be fundamental to their decision work and policy.

One of the respondents commented on the fact that the government uses the NGOs and think tanks in a purely instrumental way, just to uphold the façade of participatory decision-making process. Even though the third sector organizations take part in a consultation process, they are rarely given adequate time to offer informed expertise based on reliable studies.

Unfortunately, we can't produce only research, we would love to do assessments and impact assessment on law and amendments, but that is impossible. First, we lack money, donors are not interested, and the government doesn't care. They don't need assessments and impact assessments, because they pass the laws based on lobbing and frequently they will ask us just to click the box in “an emergency status”, not giving to us the needed to read and reflect and suggest in the material they sent.

We keep good relations with the government officials and invite them in our events and conferences. The main problem is that they show interest for the moment but never do a follow up. I would strongly recommend that government ask and pay for quality research, it will help this country, and it will help the leaders to make right decisions.

One of the respondents suggested that the government is not making adequate use of the intellectual resources it already has at hand.

The government doesn’t pay for the research. There are some government institutes that operates with public money, but their product has zero visibility, no one knows what they do and how much they can influence the policy through their work.

According to another respondent, this lack of demand on the side of the natural recipients of the expertise produced by the think tank sector seriously impinges on the quality of the research as “the motivation to produce quality is very low”.

In Albania we don’t have a consolidated market for research.

It is hard for them to survive due to funding. It is hard to survive if you produce a good study or research and nobody buys it.

• Think tanks in Albania are thoroughly dependent on the foreign funding.

Not only is the think tank expertise extremely rarely commissioned by the authorities, but it also does not attract the interest of the business sector in Albania.

The business community has little interest in research. They don’t feel the need; they don’t build knowledge within the organizations. Many of the business people don’t even know what is the research, because culturally is something new and the business climate doesn’t promote it.

All in all, this means that for the time being, there are virtually no other substitutes for the foreign donor financial
support and that foreign grants will have to act as a life-supporting system for the Albanian think tanks for the foreseeable future.

In Albania there are no think tanks, they are hybrid institutions depended on projects and donors. If the donors leave the country, it will be hard for the so-called think tanks to survive.

Undoubtedly, the engagement of foreign organizations has been the crucial factor in building civil society and democracy in Albania. In the first stage of the development of the Albanian third sector, the somewhat paternalistic guidance of the more experienced European and American institutions, including strong suggestions as to the direction and scope of research and activities, contributed to consolidation and professionalization of the Albanian organizations. Having said that, during the interviews most of the respondents suggested that currently the limitations imposed by the donors may hinder the maturation of the think tank. The respondents voiced opinions that "donors are not interested" in funding research as such, but only as a means supporting other specific activities and serving as a rationale for predesigned course of action.

As for the donors, they don't commission research per se, but it can part of a big project with the focus on community development, good governance, security issues etc. Donors do not want to fund only research, but they fund projects where only one or two activities might be pure research that serves the project going on. The donors in country and those internationals pay not much attention to research. They will be willing to pay for project that target a change, a social change, but with no research. The donors that fund research have their agenda, they will pay for the research, but they might not want to publish it, and the visibility of the institutions is low in that case.

Consequently, it is foreign donors, not the local actors that ultimately identify and indicate the research priorities, themes and scopes. It may be safely stated that most of our respondents came to see this situation as hindering the maturation of their organizations, as they are not allowed to define the strategic research priorities, according to their best knowledge and recognition of the development challenges in their country.

- Cooperating with think tanks stimulates the development of young social science researchers.

According to the respondents, a considerable number of the staff in their organizations is formed by either current or former academics. One of them suggested that the poor working conditions at the universities made think tanks an enviable environment for the researchers who want to earn some additional money and carry applicable, methodologically sound research.

The universities don't put money into research, and the studies produced there are only copy and paste and with no interest for any audience. The staff at the universities is not motivated to do research or to write projects, because of the bureaucracy. [Also] they don't get paid there. But they are very much interested to do research and studies and work part time for NGOs or thinks tanks.

To make the point stronger, “they [the academics] get paid for the work done and they produce quality”, although another respondent admitted that it is not easy to find scientists that “will work as quickly as we do, and will
know how to combine research and project”. Several times the respondents guardedly mentioned the “immaturity of the social sciences in Albania”, resulting in reluctant undertaking of new research agendas and trying more innovative methodologies.

The capacities are very limited too, it’s hard to find good researchers and pay them well to produce quality. Albania has a new generation growing that many studied abroad and are well educated, but they miss the connections, the network, they are not well accepted, because that requires a certain cultural level of the society and development. We try to work with researchers from universities, sometimes we ask for interns and afterward keep them as staff, but is hard because of the administrative and operation cost.

When asked about the cooperation with the young generation of the researchers, one of the respondents claimed that his organization feels more confident working with the old collaborators, “as they know our philosophy and we trust their product”, but they do not hesitate to look for new researchers “who do beautiful research”.

We work with old collaborators but also young ones if the references are good. We trust in young and well-educated generation that is growing. The government needs to introduce some policies to promote researcher and especially young researchers. This country needs them.

All in all, the respondents were confident that think tanks constitute friendly and supportive environment for young researchers, helping them to build their skills in carrying applicable social science. Most importantly, think tanks offer the young researchers access to their “social capital”, i.e. networks enabling future cooperation, crucial for building their professional portfolios and reaching for new opportunities.

4. 2. Analysis of the quantitative survey

It should be noted that, due to the specificity of the research sample and the restricted number of the respondents, the results of the survey cannot be treated as representative and that they do not allow for advanced statistical analysis. Nevertheless, they allow for valuable general description of the environment of knowledge-generating organizations in Albania, some of which identify themselves or are recognized as think tanks, for identification of the structure of their activities, attitudes concerning their role, linkages with the public institutions, as well as the challenges they routinely face.

• The respondents were consistent in their definition of the think tank
Answering the open-ended question, the respondents offered state-of-the art definitions of think tank. Two of the respondents stressed that in Albania think tanks are not considered trustworthy entities producing reliable knowledge (they have “reputation of being worthless”, “low level of capacities”, problems with “quality of work”, “lack of identity and goal-orientation”, “lack of specialization”). One of the respondents also mentioned the existence of “fake” think tanks.

• Most of the respondents identify their organizations as non-governmental organizations.
Unsurprisingly, most of the organizations in our sample declared to be non-governmental organizations (78%,
namely 18), 3 – university-based research institutes, and another 2 – foundations. What’s worth noticing, none has identified as a government-financed think tank.

- **The Albanian think tanks are age-mates of the Albanian democracy.**
  The oldest organization in our survey was established in 1990; the youngest – in 2007. Eight of the surveyed organizations were established in years 2006-2007.

- **The Albanian think tanks are moderately staffed.**
  The surveyed organizations are quite small, as they usually employ no more than 10 people on regular basis; only one organization in our sample employs 20 people. As a rule, they have a pool of part-time collaborators and volunteers. Every surveyed organization employed people who have worked or are currently working in academia.

- **The Albanian think tanks specialize in political governance, civil society and economy**
  When asked to specify the main areas of their expertise, the respondents most often indicated **general issues concerning the political governance and the public sphere**: “civil society and democracy” (61%), “good governance and legal issues” (52%) and “economy and development” (43%). More specific social issues such as economic exclusion, education, environment and local development were addressed much less often.

*Figure 2: Fields of expertise*

Question: Indicate the main areas of expertise of your organization (between 1 and 3); N=23. “Other” included open-ended answers such as: “culture”, “art, culture, cultural heritage”, “election, political parties, parliament”, “EU integration and management of EU funds”, “social services, human rights, child rights”, “women in business”.
The Albanian think tanks depend on external grants.

The distribution of the answers concerning the sources of the budget income plainly proves that the Albanian organizations are largely dependent on external donors. All of them receive grants from some international organization, 83% of them receives EU grants and 69%: US grants. For nearly half of the respondent organizations the EU funds (48%) constitute much of the income. The commissions from the government were declared to be the major source of income in only one case. Even more interestingly, most of the surveyed organizations never received any commissions from municipal authorities (87%), the government (61%) or businesses (70%).

Table 1: Sources of budget income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the main sources of your budget income?</th>
<th>We do not receive them</th>
<th>It provides the majority of our budget</th>
<th>It adds to our budget, but is of minor importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU grants</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US grants</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants from international organizations</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions from Albanian government</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions from municipal authorities</td>
<td><strong>87%</strong></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions from business in Albania</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions from other Albanian NGOs</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissions from academia</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants from other foreign donors</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What are the main sources of your budget income? N=23

During face-to-face interviews the respondents emphasized that this kind of dependency results in limited choice of research agenda on the side of the Albanian organizations: the research focuses on the problems and issues selected and indicated by the donors. However, most of the surveyed organizations (69%) declared that they would often initiate research even when lacking dedicated funding.
Nevertheless, the lack of financial sustainability ("the lack of funding", "very limited sources of funding") was the most frequent quoted challenge for the development of think tanks in Albania. Remarkably, some of the respondents underlined the lack of financial support from the state, while another stated that: “state policies, including taxation, pressure through controls, threatening of the members who have their ideas and publications, media control (not enough space for the NGOs, civil society and think tanks while the government intervenes). State control over NGOs and think tanks through the funding of policies and provision of particular support to some of them”.

- **Pure think tank activity constitutes only a portion of overall activity of the surveyed organizations.**

The surveyed organizations estimated that on average, they dedicate 40% of their time to research and publication preparation, and nearly third of their time to networking, impacting etc. Six organizations claimed that they dedicate more than 60% to the research and publication part of their activities, and one organization claimed to dedicate 70% of its activities to networking and maintaining public visibility.
Question: In your opinion, what is the amount of time in the everyday activity of your organization allocated to think tank activities such as: doing research, performing analysis, preparing reports and other publications; think tank activities such as: networking, organizing public events for representatives of public institutions and municipalities, and other forms of building impact of your publications; carrying other projects which you would not classify as think tank activities. Each answer can be assigned from 0 to 100 points. The sum of all answers must equal 100. N = 23.

- Some of the surveyed organizations, even though they identify as think tanks, did not manage to produce any emblematic think tank products in 2016.

The answers to the question concerning the actual output of the organization reveal that, in fact, a substantial number of the surveyed organizations didn’t produce not even one policy paper (26%) or policy brief (22%) during last year. Only two organizations in our sample claimed that they produced more than 10 research reports in 2016. With caution, it may be assumed that for the surveyed organizations the most popular activity was preparing press releases and articles, and, similarly, that writing white papers and academic articles is beyond the scope of interest of most surveyed organizations.
Table 2: Outputs for 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many of the following did your organization produce in 2016?</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-4</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>More than 10</th>
<th>I couldn’t say/I don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research reports</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White papers</td>
<td><strong>57%</strong></td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy papers</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy briefs</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press releases</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press articles</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td><strong>30%</strong></td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific articles (published in journals)</td>
<td><strong>39%</strong></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: How many of the following did your organization produce in 2016? N= 23.

- The Albanian think tanks use diverse channels for impacting public policy...

Although the prevalent view of the surveyed organizations was that the key to impacting public policy was knowing the right people in right places (with 43% strongly agreeing and 48 rather agreeing with the statement), most of the organizations in our sample had robust visibility on Facebook, which in Albania is far more popular than other social media channels.
Figure 5: Personal ties and impact on public policy

Personal ties (e.g. knowing people in public institutions) is the key element of impacting public policy

I strongly agree  I rather agree  I rather disagree

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? N=23

The surveyed organizations declared that they more or less routinely undertook the usual activities of a typical think tank: they engaged in public consultations and organized public events in order to present the results of their research for the authorities. However, what is worth noting, one in third admitted that the members of their staff never serve as experts to the authorities on local or government level, 65% never carried research commissioned by the authorities. Only one in five (22%) estimated that their output often serves as the basis for evidence-based policymaking, while nearly one in five (17%) felt that their research is falling on deaf ears.

Figure 6: Think tanks and public consultations

We engage in public consultations of the government projects

We organize public events presenting the results of our research to the members of government and municipalities

We carry research commissioned by the state or municipal authorities

Our research is used by the state or municipal authorities as the basis of public policymaking

Yes, very often  Yes, but sporadically  No

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? N=23
When asked to estimate the role of think tanks in Albania, the respondents fell into three categories. One group underlined the positive role that think tanks play in the Albanian public life and politics: “think tanks play a vital role in Albania, in informing and shaping the public policy of state and municipal authorities. Their function is unique as they provide public policy research, analysis and advice, are non-profit, and operate independently of the government and political parties”; “the role of think tanks is important, since most of the public policy outcome measurement or change is based on think tank work”. On the other hand, some of the respondents were uniformly negative, stating that the “think tanks don’t have any role; they write reports and do studies for donors, but the policy-makers don’t take them into account”; “in Albania they have no impact at all”. One of the respondents attributed the weak role of the think tanks to “the low level of engagement of communities that would support the policy recommendations of the think tanks”. Finally, some respondents had a more nuanced opinion, stating that the role of think tanks is “limited but on many occasions successful”, and supporting the statement with examples of such a successful impact of the research and policy advice in their case.

**…but they are quite uncertain of the real impact of their products and activities.**

Answers to the closed-ended questions confirmed that the surveyed organizations had mixed feelings as to the effectiveness of their impact on the public policy making in Albania. Admittedly, three in four (74%) saw some positive impact of their publications and 39% refuted the statement that research output of organizations such as theirs and suchlike has very small impact on public policy in Albania. On the other hand, nearly half of them (47%) agreed that usually the government makes no use of the research produced by NGOs and think tanks as a basis of evidence-based public policy. Interestingly, 39% questioned the indispensability of the role of think tanks in rational public policy making.

*Figure 7: Perceptions on think tanks output and impact*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>26%</th>
<th>26%</th>
<th>13%</th>
<th>4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is impossible to shape rational public policy without input from think tanks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some of the publications of our organization had positive impact on the public policy in Albania</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, the research output of organizations such as ours has very small impact on public policy in Albania</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a rule the government makes no use of the research produced by NGOs and think tanks to shape public policy</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: To what extent do you agree with following statements? N=23
Difficulties with reaching the attention and influencing the public policy were among the most often cited challenges to the development of the think tank sector in Albania in the open-ended question. The respondents emphasized “the lack of tradition of cooperation between governmental agencies and local think tanks”, “the close-minded way of working of most of the public institutions toward think tanks”, “lack of attention to the inputs” and “lack of structured dialogue with public institutions”, and even “autocratic mentality of the authorities”. One respondent remarked that to operate think tanks need “a policy environment that has the public good as its ultimate beneficiary”, and pointed that “the stronger the ties of think tanks/civil society and the public, the greater the guarantees of democracy”. The Albanian think tanks are supportive of young social sciences researchers.

All respondents unanimously declared that their organization constitutes supportive environment for the young social researchers, helping them build their skills in doing applicable social research. At the same time, more than half (52%) candidly admitted that their organization routinely place their trust in more experienced researchers when it comes to performing applicable research, and the reason being the lack of necessary experience in the case of the young researchers (56%).

Figure 8: Support for young social science researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Rather Agree</th>
<th>Rather Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Couldn't Say/Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our organization is a good place for a young researcher to build his/her skills in doing applicable social research</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a rule, our organization would rather hire senior researcher than young researcher to carry out applicable research</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We would cooperate with young researchers more often, but they lack necessary experience</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? N=23.
5. CONCLUSIONS

This study offers the first approximation to the analysis of the characteristics and the condition of the think tanks in Albania. It should be stressed that it offers the perspective of only one side of the ecosystem of policymaking in Albania; further research is needed to explore the perspective of the government and the academia, the obstacles and limitations on their side. Nevertheless, the collected data offer several important observations:

- **The number of Albanian organizations that may be recognized as think tanks is small.**

Most of the organizations included in the survey sample identified themselves as think tanks for prestige reasons, but in fact they do not perform the typical think tank functions. Most probably the number of the organizations that may objectively be recognized as think tanks is around 10.

- **The Albanian think tanks are of hybrid character.**

Most of the surveyed organizations in Albania do part-time think tanking rather than act as full-time think tanks, due to the lack of financial stability and dependency on foreign grants.

- **The Albanian think tanks are well-prepared to offer high quality expertise**

Several of the researched organizations already have reached a very high level of professionalization, reflected in high quality of their output. This refers particularly to those organizations that function in close cooperation with international networks and perform international standards in their work. The Albanian think tanks are staffed by well-educated people with wide internal and international networks; judging by their intellectual and networking capabilities, they have valuable potential for serving as in building evidence-based public policy in Albania.

- **The situation of the Albanian think tanks mirrors the situation of the other civil society organizations in Albania.**

The Albanian law is not supportive of the development of the think tank sector.

- **The weakness in cooperation between the government and think tanks is reinforced by mutual distrust.**

The common opinion of the representatives of the think tank sector is that their organizations’ role is limited due to the inadequate demand on the side of the authorities at central and local level.

Think tanks are convinced that they are well-equipped to deliver high-quality analyses, but the state does not commission research or use the research already produced by the think tanks. However, at the same time the think tanks themselves are wary of entering into cooperation with the government. Only one representative of a think tank had no objections to entering into cooperation with government. Predominantly, the think tank sector is convinced that in the Albanian political context the only way to maintain their independency and to guard the objectivity of their research is to keep their distance and do not enter the political sphere.
• Think tanks in Albania feel that their real impact on the shape and products of the public policymaking is modest or non-existent.

At present many think tanks are locked into a vicious circle in which they think that civil society is shut out of policy formulation, which creates a belief that politics is a closed process, which in turn promotes a practice of non-participation, which itself perpetuates and reinforces closed policy making.

• The Albanian think tanks are extremely dependent on foreign grants, and the situation will not change in the foreseeable future because of the lack of other viable sources of finance.

Domestic funding opportunities are scarce. Admittedly, state funding for think tanks includes contracting for service delivery and dispensing project grants through the line ministries and the Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS). ASCS provides grants to CSOs to fund projects focusing on fight against corruption, citizen participation, advocacy initiatives, domestic violence, employment, etc., but the third sector organizations generally feel that the rules and procedures for public funding are not transparent and just.

• The large portion of the research agenda of the Albanian think tanks reflects the priorities of the foreign donors. In other words, financial dependency breeds thematic dependency of the think tanks in Albania.

Deprived of funding for long term research, the Albanian think tanks do not feel free to define the research priorities, which would be consistent with their best knowledge of the local situation, and have limited resources for creating their own databases or developing high quality research products. Their work is over-dependent on projects that exclude long term planning; in principle, that means that they more than often reproduce the status quo. Unfortunately, this erodes the credibility of think tanks in the academic community, and discourages some of the best researchers from working in policy institutes.

• The role of the universities with their research centers or institutes in the market of policy advice is negligible.

During the transition years, the role of academic community and universities in the process of policymaking was marginal due to: The policy-interested researchers either entered politics or joined think tanks. Presently, universities do not compete with think tanks as knowledge brokers, but serve as a resource pool for the think tank sector. Think tanks are becoming more and more attractive career destinations especially for young researchers, who are well-educated and speak fluent English, as they are more and more discouraged by the rigidity of working for the administration, the lack of opportunities for development and the low incomes offered by universities.

• Social sciences in Albania are quite restricted to the academic field and typically do not offer applicable research.

This cannot be fully attributed to the relative immaturity of social sciences in Albania (it is, however, quite telling that the respondents, during the face-to-face interviews, often emphasized the ivory-tower quality of the academic output in Albania). The equally important reason seems to be the lack of demand for this kind of research on the side of political, economic and social actors in Albania.
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the empirical evidence produced during the short but intensive research we would like to offer several specific recommendations for enhancing the role of think tanks in the Albanian political system.

The most important challenges concern:

- How to enhance the awareness of the decision makers regarding the necessity of using evidence from scientific research for shaping public policy?
- How to build passable channels of cooperation and communication between the decision makers and think tanks in the context of maturing democracy, facing numerous challenges (such as corruption, lack of institutional structures for cooperation between authorities and the civil society)?
- How to ensure the stable development of think tanks in the situation of one viable source of financing?
- How to strengthen the evolution of universities towards flexible research and teaching institutions, capable of producing social scientists skilled in performing applicable research, and acting as important providers of such research?

Specific recommendations include the following:

- **Come to terms with the present specific challenges in the knowledge-power nexus, i.e. relations between think tanks and governments in Albania.**

  The shape of relations between the government and think tanks in Albania restricts the usage of applicable social research. But there is no easy way out of this deadlock: smoothing it out requires organic, long term work with all potentially interested actors.

  - **Strengthen the understanding of the role of think tanks in evidence-based policy on the side of the decision makers.**
  - **Support normalization of the relations between the government and think tanks**

  Think tank input should be integrated into government policy making as there is widespread recognition that it will bring multiple political, legal and social benefits (they help to broaden the range of policy alternatives; provide data for informed decision making at little cost; verify the results of the government’s own analyses; increase transparency; give policy makers a better understanding of the activities that they are regulating and the problems to be solved; increase the likelihood of public acceptance and compliance; enable the government to be more responsive to the need of the public; increase the protection for citizens and inhibit corruption by encouraging decision makers to consider the interests of different groups in societies rather than be captive to narrow sectorial interests; increase public confidence in the system of the government).
• Emphasize the importance of government-led consultations as the major channel of impacting for think tanks

Because the main means by which think tanks in Albania provide their input to government policy is through government-led consultations with a restricted group of key stakeholders, it is important to consider the main mechanisms and the problems that consultation encounters. This contains useful lessons that can be applied to the involvement of think tanks in strategic government thinking. When consulting a restricted group of interest, a ministry usually seeks the views of a small group of people and organizations outside the government who will be affected by an issue or proposal. This can either be done in writing or by calling them to a meeting. This is a quick and easy means of consultation, which requires little by way of resources, but has a meaningful impact on the policy.

It is important to understand that any attempt to bring think tanks into the policy making process is likely to run up against arguments and obstruction. Think tanks must be prepared to argue the case for their involvement and, if the government accepts it, to remain vigilant that ministries abide by the government’s decision and do not undermine it by perfunctory and meaningless consultation services. Certain mechanism can be introduced to entrench consultation, but mechanism alone will not be sufficient to overcome entrenched habit. It is possible to change attitudes, but it will be a long and a gradual process.

• Support the process of professionalization of think tanks

As this study reveals, success is more likely to be achieved when think tanks focus their activity in so called “one portfolio”. Think tanks can build a natural constituency for their ideas around one direction issues, especially when these are related to better and simpler rules of the game and more accountability in public sector.

• Engage think tanks in joint project performed by international organizations and the Albanian authorities

With regard to strengthening analytical capacities of the think tanks, the government and the international organizations should be encouraged to undertake jointly sponsored projects with the government to facilitate this institutionalization. For example, the government and donors could provide parliament with funds for policy research that could be commissioned by parliamentary committees. A parliament research center with a consolidated team of young and experienced researchers, closely cooperating with the think tanks in Albania, could significantly increase quality decision making in the parliament.

• Strengthen the financial stability of think tanks

Ideally, think tanks should preserve their independence from government, domestic interest groups and preferably from any single major donor by way of diversifying their resources of revenues can achieve this. Reliance on a single international donor makes think tanks depended on the life cycle of that donor’s programs, and the activity becomes donor driven.

Having said that, in Albania the donor’s financial support will remain the main source of income for the think tank sector. International assistance agencies should stay engaged in Albania, and region and it should incorporate
some basic principles into their strategy targeting the local think tanks. International organizations need to be aware of the medium term impact of their funding scheme, particularly where the functions and services provided by think tanks may affect the role and capacities of government.

- **Strengthen the role of universities as the resource-pool for think tanks generating the young researchers.**

Think tanks draw a small number of their skilled staff from the academia. On the other hand, they can share their experience in performing applicable social science. Ideally, some departments at the universities could initiate their own internal research programs, offering their students some practical experience, possibly in cooperation (ex. internship programs) with think tanks.
Government

- Appreciate the value of research in high-quality public decision making;
- Learn how to use expertise produced by think tanks in decision making (particularly the expertise commissioned by other actors, i.e. foreign donors);
- Diversify the sources of evidence for policymaking by building casual channels of cooperation with many different think tanks in order to dispel their distrust and pacify their fears of losing their independency.

Foreign donor organizations

- Accept and perpetuate their crucial role in supporting the functioning of the budding think tank sector in Albania for the foreseeable future;
- Distribute more resources for autonomic research (not only research connected to specific activities;
- Allow for more freedom in defining the research priorities by the grant beneficiaries;
- Build long-term financing schemes, allowing for flexible changes when deemed necessary by the grant beneficiaries;
- Accept the fact that the so-called grant ROI might be removed in time and adjust the impact measures accordingly. In other words, prepare for long-term fundamental work with the effects removed in time.

Academia

- Observe closely the trends in other European countries: focus more on research, less on massive teaching;
- Develop social sciences with emphasis on practical/applicable social sciences;
- Invest time and resources into building working networks with the environment outside the academia (business, authorities, NGOs) in order to build the demand for the research produced at the academia;
- Invest in structural reform in order to lower the barriers of cooperation with the external actors (inflexible and slow procedures, bureaucracy).

Think tanks

- Continue to build their expertise, but focus more on specific issues;
- Patiently work on breaking down the apparent deadlock in cooperating with the authorities;
- Invest in young researchers, both in their skills in performing applicable social research and in presenting the practical value of their research to the external actors. Include them in professional networks.
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Annex 1. The challenges and growth of CSOs in Albania

It is worthwhile taking a closer look at the legal challenges and growth of CSOs in Albania, and the some of the reasons for the heterogeneity of types and fields they operate in Albania.

**Legal basis**

The legal and regulatory framework on basic legal guarantees the freedom for civil society organization (CSOs) and is generally harmonized and in line with international standards. It guarantees the right of individual and entities to establish, register, join and participate freely without any discrimination in formal/ informal, online and offline organizations, regulated by the law no. 8788 dated 07.05.2001 “On Non-profit Organizations”.

The CSOs enjoy the right to organize and/or participate in peaceful assemblies and enjoy freedom of expression. In general, the legal framework governing establishment and functioning of CSOs is regulated in most of its aspects.

The registration process for CSOs continues to be centralized at the Tirana Court of First Instance, a great burden for CSOs outside the capital. CSOs need to travel to the capital not only to register, but also to make any changes to their statutes, including their addresses. The process is expensive and lengthy, and involves judges that are not specialized in CSO legal issues (United States Agency for International Development, USAID, July 2017).

An important development in 2015 with regards to financial reporting and accounting rules was the approval of the National Accounting Standard for Non Profit Organizations by the Ministry of Finance. The Standard stipulates specifications on financial statements and reporting formats of CSOs, taking into account the specific nature of the CSOs and presents different reporting requirements. Referring to financial viability and sustainability, the available public funding is considered insufficient for the operation and sustainability of CSOs.

Transparency, accountability, application and selection procedures on the distribution of the public funds from the public institutions, including the Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCC), needs to be improved to address the needs of CSOs (Partners Albania For Change and development, 2016). The legal framework and its practical implementation with regards to CSOs involvement in GOAs service provision is not supportive, resulting in very few public service contracts through CSOs.

The 2015 marked some positive development in the legal aspects related to State - CSOs cooperation and CSOs development. In May 2015, the Government of Albania (GoA) approved the Road Map for Drafting Policy and Measures for Enabling Environment to Civil Society , a document that includes nine priority areas of actions aiming to enable (GoA) to undertake an efficient decision-making process with respect to establishment new or improving existing mechanisms for cooperation with civil society in order to contribute to the promotion of participatory governance, inclusive policy making and stronger democracy within the country.

The “Guideline to the Government Policy on the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development” was commissioned by the Civil Society Unit of the Ministry of European Integration, under the assistance of TACSO and the Swedish Institute for Public Administration. This strategic document proposes a set of actions with the scope of enhancing the role of CSOs for nine priority areas, namely: National Environment of strategic policies for the development of Civil Society, Institutions that support the cooperation between the government and CSOs, Inclusion of CSOs in the decision-making process, Public Financing Framework for CSO programs, legislative framework for the registration of the work of CSOs, Financial and accounting reporting of CSOs, Gathering of Data for the development of Civil Society, Development of good practice in volunteering and last; Contribution of CSOs in the European Integration of Albania. (Agency for Support of Civil Society, 2017)
Civil society growth

As per the Albanian Law, registering of a CSO/NGO or a think tank, or a private foundation or a centre is the same. In this context in Albania there is no namely think tank registered, what makes the difference is what they do in their everyday activity.

The registered CSOs in Albania, including think tanks are diverse in their types of activities and services. They provide goods and services in various areas for different type of beneficiaries. They continue to engage in a wide range of activities, including advocacy and lobbying, human rights, democracy and governance, capacity building, gender and development, and media development.

Data on the size of the civil society sector is still not publicly available. There are around 12,000 CSOs - including associations, foundations, and centres - registered in the Tirana Court of First Instance. However, the total number of active CSOs registered with the tax authorities is just 3,724 (United States Agency for International Development, USAID, July 2017).

The number of CSOs was increased with 489 new organizations registered at the Court of First Instance in Tirana in 2015 (respectively 282 associations, 95 centres and 112 foundations), out of which 368 are registered within the General Directorate of Taxation (Partners Albania For Change and development, 2016).

In a recent study of Partners Albania For Change and development commissioned by Balkan Society Development Network (BCSDN) the working force within the sector is 7,505 employees representing 0.72% of the total employment in Albania (Partners Albania For Change and development, 2016). Despite the barriers and challenges faced by CSOs, presented further in the above mentioned report, the size of civil society is increasing not only in members, but also in the influence and impact in society, reflected in legal changes and activism of CSOs in the country.

Civil society development

CSOs play a critical role in the consolidation of democracy in Albania, but have not often been the initiator of policies. There is a perception that CSOs have been rather "reactive" instead of "proactive". Nevertheless, CSOs have been crucial participants in the democratization processes in the country. They created connection between the national and international communities; contributed to democratic consolidation as watchdogs in the political system, articulated demands from the grassroots to the authorities and political elites. By mobilizing on issues and concerns among the population, CSOs are also pursuing change and reform in the political system. Many organizations are involved in civic education, elections monitoring, legal aid, policy formulation and advocacy and mediation. Service providing CSOs continue to have effective communication and collaboration with the government. District and national-level organisations collaborate and interact with both central and local government structures. For instance, they participate in local government development meetings and consultations on development policy framework.

There is little literature to review on the history of the NGO/Think Tanks in Albania and even less on the concept itself. Defining civil society and Think tanks as part of it, it is a difficult task in countries like Albania, because it is a relatively new concept in the scholarly discourse. Terms such as civil society, non-governmental organizations,
and not-for-profit organizations have been added to the Albanian discourse only after the fall of communism.

While previous research on NGOs in Albania has included different levels of analyses, focusing on the activity of the NGOs, this research has focused on different types of NGOs, Think Tanks but we could not develop a typology that can be used for comparative research of NGO/Think Tanks types. One of the reasons for the lack of the comparative studies of NGO/Think Tank types in Albania is first the Albanian Law and second that Albanian scholars have not, so far, reached a consensus on the definition of the Think Tanks or an agreement over the drivers of Think tanks in Albania.

At the national level, CSOs have several opportunities to engage in policy making by participating in different government-initiated mechanisms, including Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), Sector Working Groups (SWGs) and Albania Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) reviews. Parliamentary committees are fairly easily accessible and are utilized by the organizations focused on health, education, mining and energy, security, finance, and economic policy. CSOs most often interact with parliamentary committees during the annual parliamentary budget hearings.

In some cases, however, CSO participation is only cosmetic and the government does not reflect the issues raised by civil society in its final policy documents. In addition, CSO involvement is often driven by donor pressure on the government to engage with civil society.

CSOs deliver also a wide range of services in agriculture and food security, capacity building, construction and infrastructure development, counselling, disability, disaster management, drug and substance abuse, education, energy, environment, land and natural resources management, gender and development, health, HIV/AIDS, media development, microcredit and finance, orphan care and children’s affairs, social rehabilitation, water and sanitation, and youth empowerment.

Few CSOs sell goods or services. Some CSOs do charge for services, such as health or education, in order to cover administrative costs. However, CSOs rarely charge their clients the actual costs of delivering their services, as they are subsidized by the government and development partners.

The government generally appreciates CSOs’ role in basic service delivery and cooperates with them. The government awards contracts to CSOs to provide services in areas like health and education. CSOs engaged in human rights and political governance advocacy generally do not get government funding for their work. However, government officials are less receptive of CSOs monitoring government service delivery. Many government officials are reluctant to receive feedback on their services and therefore do not create feedback mechanisms. There are also no incentives for business or private persons to support civil society financially, which hamper the efforts to ensure financial sustainability of the organizations.

Furthermore, many local CSOs suffer from “founder syndrome”. CSOs in the Albania have for long been identified with their founders or directors. In fact, some of them still are. In the national context, this can be partly explained by the fact that over the past two decades CSOs have developed mainly as a one-man-show, with a small and unstable team. Yet, shrinking donor funding in the recent years has raised the need to break away from this habit and many CSO leaders have seized this opportunity to the benefit of their organizations. However, changing the managerial culture is still “in the making” and this is particularly visible when we “talk about organizational
development”.

In Albania’s place of ideas, think tanks need to develop national, regional and global partnerships while creating new and innovative platforms to deliver their products and services to an ever-expanding audience of citizens, policymakers, and businesses around the Balkan region.
Annex 2: Interview questions (explorative)

Applicability and impact

• In your opinion, what is the most important social/economic or political problem Albanian society is facing at the moment?
• Are you addressing this problem in your expert activity?
• If yes, name specific examples of: publications, engagement with public institutions, engagement in public debate
• If no, specify why.
• Which of your products had the biggest impact when it comes to informing public decision-making?
• Which of your products had the biggest impact when it comes to informing public debate?
• Can you provide specific examples of sustainable impact of your products?
• Do you measure your impact? How? (what are the metrics)
• What do you think should be done to extend impact of your production?

Thematic scope

• Why do you focus on these specific thematic areas?
• Which actor (foreign donor, government/public institutions) influences your thematic focus most?
• To what extent the present thematic focus of your publications reflects your perception of actual importance of the themes (e.g. when it comes to resolution of important social issues)

Internal policy shaping

• In your opinion, what is the role of think tanks in shaping the internal policy in Albania?
• And what is the role of your think tank?
• How do you get commissions for your products?
• Do you have formal cooperation with a public institution? (With signed contract, agreement, etc.)
• How often do you meet representatives of public institutions to talk about important issues, present your perspective on a problem etc.? In what occasions?

External linkages

• Is there any other foreign think tank that inspires you (is a kind of role model for you when it comes to think tank activities?)
• Are you involved in projects with other foreign think tanks (or research institutions?)
• If yes, what have you learnt? What are the major challenges in this cooperation?
• If not, why not?
• Do you prepare publications/research for foreign institutions/NGOs etc.?
• What is the procedure?

Internal linkages

• Do you feel that you have personal linkages with representatives of public institutions allowing you to
present your perspective on important societal problems?

• Challenges
• What is the biggest problem you face in your everyday activities?
• Are you sustainable financially? Do you have “business model”?

Support

• In which areas of your activities you feel you would welcome some support? What kind of support?
• In which areas you feel you would like to professionalize more? Are there any skills you feel your think tank lacks?
Annex 3: The questionnaire

1. In which category would you locate your organization?
   You can give only one answer.
   
   - NGO
   - Government-financed research institute
   - University-based research institute
   - Foundation
   - Other, please specify

2. Please indicate the year of establishment of your organization

3. Indicate the main areas of expertise of your organization
   You may indicate up to three
   You need to select at least 1 answer and no more than 3 answers.
   
   - foreign policy
   - economy and development
   - poverty and exclusion
   - immigrant issues
   - regional development
   - ecology and environment
   - civil society and democracy
   - education
   - local development
   - sustainable development
   - good governance and legal issues
   - other, please specify
4. In your opinion, what is the amount of time in everyday activity of your organization given to...?
Each answer can be assigned from 0 to 100 points. The sum of all answers must equal 100.

- [ ] Think tank activities such as: doing research, performing analysis, preparing reports and other publications
- [ ] Think tank activities such as: networking, organizing public events for representatives of public institutions and municipalities, and other forms of building impact of your publications
- [ ] Carrying other projects which you would not classify as think tank activities

5. What are the main sources of your budget income? *
You can give only one answer in a row.
We do not receive them/It provides the majority of our budget/It adds to our budget, but is of minor importance

- [ ] EU grants
- [ ] US grants
- [ ] Grants from international organizations
- [ ] Commissions from Albanian government
- [ ] Commissions from municipal authorities
- [ ] Commissions from business in Albania
- [ ] Commissions from other Albanian NGOs
- [ ] Commissions from academia
- [ ] Grants from other foreign donors
- [ ] Other, please specify

6. How many people work in your organization?
All people working in your organization on full-time, half-time and voluntary basis

7. How many people work full-time in your organization?
We mean the total number of full-time salaried staff

8. How many people work in your organization on voluntary basis?

9. How many of your staff worked in the past or is currently working at the university?
10. How many of the following did your organization produce in 2016? *
Try to classify each product to one category
- Research reports
- White papers
- Policy papers
- Policy briefs
- Press releases
- Press articles
- Scientific articles (published in journals)

11. How many followers do you have on FB?
Indicate either the institutional FB or the personal FB of your president/CEO.
If you don't have a FB page, just omit this question.

12. How many unique visitors a month visits your website? *
If you don't have a website, just omit this question.

13. Please specify what is the engagement of your organization in shaping the public policy *
You can give only one answer in a row.
Yes, very often/Yes, but sporadically/None
We engage in public consultations of the government projects
Members of our staff serve as experts to the government or municipal authorities
We organize public events presenting the results of our research to the members of government and municipalities
We carry research commissioned by the state or municipal authorities
Our research is used by the state or municipal authorities as the basis of public policymaking

14. To what extent do you agree with following statements *
You can give only one answer in a row.
I strongly agree/I rather agree/I rather disagree/I strongly disagree/I couldn't say/I don't know
Some of the publications of our organization had positive impact on the public policy in Albania
Personal ties (e.g. knowing people in public institutions) is the key element of impacting public policy
In general, the research output of organizations such as ours has very small impact on public policy in Albania
It is impossible to shape rational public policy without input from think tanks
We often initiate research concerning the current political, economic or social problems in Albania even if we don’t have a separate funding for this purpose
As a rule the government makes no use of the research produced by NGOs and think tanks to shape public policy.

15. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? *
You can give only one answer in a row.
I strongly agree/I rather agree/I rather disagree/I strongly disagree/I couldn’t say/I don’t know
As a rule, our organization would rather hire senior researcher than young researcher to carry out applicable research.
Our organization is a good place for a young researcher to build his/her skills in doing applicable social research.
We would cooperate with young researchers more often, but they lack necessary experience.

Finally, we ask you to answer several open questions. They are not obligatory, but we would greatly appreciate if you could provide us with some answers.

16. How would you define think tank?

17. In your opinion, how many organizations perform the think tank activities or may be classified as think tanks in Albania? Can you name the most active ones?

18. In your opinion, what is the role of think tanks in Albania in informing and shaping the public policy of state and municipal authorities?

19. What are the major challenges to development of think tanks in Albania?