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CULTURE, ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND THE BOUNDED MORALITY IN THE HUNGARIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Culture, organizational change and the bounded morality in the Hungarian public administration

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Introduction

This paper deals with the analysis of ethnographic data on public administration cases in Hungary. The main focus is on the perception that public administrators have of integrity challenges, how far these influence their daily tasks, the most relevant changes introduced at the government and policy level, as well as the socio-cultural explanations that are most commonly given in relation with the issue of corruption in the country. I have chosen to deal with the public administration in general because of three reasons. First, understanding the everyday work of public administration in a country is a complex task which, departing from the study of the organisational structure and its dynamics and expanding to the changes introduced at the policy level, it needs a nuanced and interdisciplinary approach. Nonetheless, I believe that through the innovative lens of the anthropological approach, it is possible to investigate some of these features through a bottom-up perspective that looks at ways how administrators perceive the main challenges, strengths and their changes in the field of integrity. Second, since corruption is a phenomenon that affects longitudinally all levels of the public service in a country (although to different extents), I consider that information gathered from different sectors in the public administration and analysed comparatively may provide a multifaceted and dynamic picture of the phenomenon. Finally, and due to the overarching nature of corruption that covers any field in which the public sphere meets the private, it can be useful to understand what are the common risks and the diverse challenges that any of the sectors under investigation are determined by, in the exercise of the public office.

Methodology and structure of the paper

Methodology of this research has followed two approaches. The first has been interviews conducted with 15 public administrators, from different levels, but all of them located in the district of Budapest. The interviewed personnel belong to six administrative sectors: Land Office, Health Control and Public Procurement, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of the Interior, Patent Office and Labour Safety Office. The average age of the interviewed is considerably low, in the range of 32-38, and seven of them are women. Three of them are directly involved with integrity management, and one has worked to draft the integrity measures described below. With exception due for one

respondent, who did not concede permission, all interviews have been audio-recorded; their average length is about 72 minutes. According to the preference expressed by the interviewed, potential questions have been circulated beforehand or shown at the moment of the interview, even though the questions were more or less guidelines for addressing the key topics, the preferred option being in all cases to lead semi-structured interviews that left open space for discussion and deepening of particular topics that could be of interest.

The second research method has consisted of a focus group organised in November 2013. At this event, held in Budapest, eight persons have participated, five of which have been business executives, and three public administrators. In spite of the clear difficulties to organise this event, it has constituted an important venue in which the private and the public sector have confronted more or less freely. The data on which this paper is based are all, save those on the legislative framework, first-hand data collected in the course of ANTICORRP funded research in the period 2012-2014.

This paper is structured as follows. The first section deals with the institutional and policy context. In this section are sketched the most recent developments concerning the application of integrity measures applied to the public administration in Hungary. The second section introduces the functional causations of corruption in diverse public administration sectors. The third section deals with the aspect of morality, as it is introduced in the literature by anthropological works. The fourth section focusses on socio-cultural explanations that are given for the failure to establish successful integrity measures in the country. Finally, the discoursive role of corruption will be introduced, with attention to the role of media, as well as to the impact that these have on the institutional trust of citizens and on education to integrity.

Legal and policy frameworks on integrity in Hungary

The following is official material which has been introduced on the webpages of the Hungarian government. On 18 November 2011, a declaration on a joint and efficient government action against corruption was signed by Tibor Navracsics, Minister of Public Administration and Justice, László Domokos, President of the State Audit Office, András Baka, President of the Supreme Court and Péter Polt, Prosecutor General.

Signatories to the declaration have made a personal moral commitment to strengthen the ability to resist corruption of the state organisations of which they are in charge and to boost such resistance with the most sophisticated instruments available. The declarants agreed that, without prejudice to the independence of judicial institutions, they would make concerted efforts to prevent and curb corruption, and towards this end, they would hold discussions and strive to establish a

network for co-operation involving partner organisations and other state organs. The declaration is unprecedented both in Hungary and worldwide.

In the spring of 2012, the government passed government resolution no. 1104/2012. (IV. 6.) on government actions against corruption and on the adoption of Public Administration's Corruption Prevention Programme. The implementation of this resolution is supported mainly through a 1.5-year project, which, besides facilitating implementation and reviewing the operation of the government, also serves to improve efficiency-based performance in certain policy areas in a manner that Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) experts review the current state of policy areas and, based on that, put forward proposals.

The total cost of the key project is HUF 680 million (approx. 2.3 million euros). The project will be implemented by the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice and the National University of Public Service as a consortium partner between May 2012 and April 2014.

The central idea of the project is to strengthen the integrity of public administration organs and government officials, i.e. operation and behaviour that correspond to the adopted principles, and to strengthen their ability to resist corruption. It relies heavily on the results of key project no. SROP-1.2.4-09-2009-0002 entitled 'Mapping corruption risks – advocating an integrity-based culture of public administration' (better known as the 'Integrity Project') implemented by the State Audit Office and successfully completed in March 2012.

As part of the Public Administration's Corruption Prevention Programme, a Green Book comprising the occupational code of ethics for public service as well as the ethical guidelines to be adopted by state organs has been compiled by the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice. The recommendations identified in the Book protect government officials, improve organisational transparency and serve as a point of reference in resolving any ethical dilemmas that may emerge.

In the interest of promoting coordinated ethical regulations, public service agencies and centrally financed institutions will be able to create their own customised occupational and organisational codes of ethics on the basis of the guidelines laid down in the Green Book. In addition to the existing legal rules, the Green Book (hence afterwards 'The Book') provides useful guidelines related to office work for public servants which are worded in an easy-to-understand manner that is comprehensible to all. These guidelines protect officials and also help prevent the development of corruption scenarios, while they additionally also contain useful information for citizens, for instance, for the purpose of preventing misunderstandings resulting from gifts given in good faith that may lead to inconvenience for both parties.

The Book lays down sixteen occupational ethical requirements, each of which is equally binding on everyone. These fundamental requirements state, for instance, that public servants must

perform their duties in compliance with the Fundamental Law and with dedication. They must fulfil their tasks in a responsible, professional and unbiased manner, thereby maintaining a high degree of transparency. Senior executives must meet further important criteria, such as setting an example, providing support for the staff, maintaining consistent accountability and enforcing the relevant professional considerations.

Moreover, the Book describes the conduct that individuals in senior positions in public administration are expected to manifest. It defines as a rule of thumb that individuals working in the public sector may not accept gifts in the interest of the preservation of their professional independence. It also determines how public service workers are required to proceed against anyone that may wish to offer unlawful advantages or bribes.

Finally, the Book makes a recommendation as to how long individuals who previously worked in the public sector and subsequently found employment outside thereof may not enter into contact with state agencies in connection with issues that are closely related to the duties they performed in their former employment. This is done in order to prevent anyone from abusing their existing relations in the course of the administration of their affairs. In addition to making recommendations concerning the governing ethical norms in the public sector, the government also intends to support the practical implementation of these norms by launching training courses.

The handling of corruption risks within the organisations requires not only awareness and planning, but also a clear structure of accountability within the individual organisations. The integrity management system compels organs of public administration to face risks, identify the actions to be taken against these risks and to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions, which strengthens their ability to resist corruption.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the government passed government decree no. 50/2013. (II. 25.) on the integrity management system of organs of public administration and on the procedural rules applicable to dealing with lobbyists, which is the first statutory regulation expressly aimed at strengthening integrity in Hungary.

On 5 December 2012, the first anniversary of the signature of the declaration, the leaders of public bodies jointly evaluated their work and results achieved to that time point. Following this, the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, relying on the funds earmarked for the State Reform Operational Programme (SROP), launched a key project entitled 'Prevention of Corruption and a Review of the Development of Public Administration' in order to reduce the level of bureaucratic corruption perceived by the population.

The integrity management system in public organisations

According to the new integrity management system for public organisations, independent state organs must appoint integrity advisors, who are responsible for the management of integrity as full-time or part-time staff depending on the size and level of corruption risks of the particular organisation. Integrity advisors report directly to the head of the organisation and, in certain cases, also to the supervisory authority.

Each organisation must set up strategic and annual integrity objectives, as well as an indicator system measuring their achievement. State organs (also) need to regularly assess the corruption risks that may affect them and evaluate the prevailing state of the internal control system intended for the elimination of these risks. Based on this, they have to make an annual action plan in order to remedy the deficiencies revealed. The results of the action plans must be monitored and communicated both inside and outside the organisation.

Based on the risks revealed, the action plans and the actions adopted, state organs must prepare an annual integrity report to be disclosed to the public.

The Minister of Public Administration and Justice is responsible for the development of a government level integrity management system and for the central coordination of local integrity management systems.

One of the main obstacles to curbing corruption is perceived to be its very low visibility (latency), which is partly due to potential whistleblowers' concerns about retaliation. In order to address such worries, the Government's Corruption Prevention Programme offers enhanced protection for whistle-blowing. The essence of this protection is to provide an appropriate forum and protection for those pointing out instances of misconduct and deficiencies in the operation of an organisation. According to the programme, whistle-blowers should be perceived as acting in the interest of the public rather than of their own. Based on the Public Administration's Corruption Prevention Programme, procedural rules and institutions for receiving and verifying reports from whistle-blowers and for protecting whistle-blowers should be laid down and established at state, branch and organisational levels.

The preparation of a new regulation regarding whistle-blowing reports scheduled for submission to the Parliament in May 2013 actually began in the autumn of 2012 with the involvement of civil partners and organs of public administration. During the implementation of the programme, training comprising targeted and differentiated components has been provided for most state organs. Besides transferring knowledge, the training mainly aims to raise the ethics-related awareness of officials and, focussing on practice, prepare them for handling corruption risks.

As a first step regarding the central Public Administration's anti-corruption training, the young persons included in the Hungarian Public Administration Scholarship Programme have

already been attending corruption prevention training since August 2012. The new National Curriculum which took effect in the autumn of 2013 also includes information on anti-corruption actions, as a result of which the issue of corruption at the level of communities and the society as a whole is to become a component of ethics classes for 9 to 12 grade students.

Moreover, the government has also involved the National University of Public Service in its corruption prevention project. On 22 February 2013 further training leading to a diploma entitling the holder to work as an integrity advisor was launched. The objective was to train experts on public administration who – by adopting a strategic approach and becoming familiar with the operational and management system of the organs of public administration, acquiring organisational development technologies, HR management and the applicable legal, sociological and psychological aspects, and by coordination of any types of regulatory compliance tasks occurring in operation of public administration organisations – will be suitable to fulfil integrity advisory duties. The tasks of the participants included support for the strengthening of the integrity management system within the particular public administration organisation, assistance with the establishment of processes supporting the development of the organisation in conformity with its strategic goals, adopted principles and values in accordance with the applicable regulations, support for the spread of a work culture based on the principles of professional ethics and, as a result, reduction in and prevention of the risks of corruption and misconduct. Approximately 100 integrity advisors have been absorbed by the public administration in May 2014. In addition to the above, their responsibilities will include the investigation of whistle-blower reports. The theory and practice of integrity advising have broad applicability in public administration, and may contribute to curbing corruption and, ultimately, to a fair, ethical and customer-focussed public administration.

Concerning the training, the strengthening of the personal integrity of public servants is the subject-matter of 1-day and 2-and-a-half day courses focussing on situational exercises and case studies, thereby facilitating familiarity with the tools capable of the proper management of corruption risk situations and deepening theoretical knowledge of corruption as a phenomenon.

Within the framework of the Public Administration Corruption Prevention Programme, dissemination campaigns based on unified principles but differentiated for each target group will be launched in order to improve public awareness and knowledge in connection with corruption phenomena and the attitudes and counter-measures that may be employed to effectively fight them.

Besides advocating the values that curb corruption, dissemination campaigns will be developed with the aim to seek to boost trust in the public service and promote an organisational culture that can detect and identify corruption, one that condemns and eliminates it. Furthermore, dissemination campaigns will help familiarise the broader public with the individual components of

the corruption-prevention programme, promoting positive attitudes in the relationships between citizens and public servants.

In the interest of the implementation of the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, a briefing programme for Hungarian businesses will also be launched. The objective of the programme is to help businesses avoid unfair market conduct, especially bribery, also in their dealings abroad. It is the government's responsibility to inform businesses on potential legal ramifications and related consequences so that businesses can allocate their resources to increasing their competitiveness.

Finally, a number of civil society organisations were involved in the drafting process of the commitments to be made in the framework of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and later the final Action Plan was subjected to broad public consultations prior to its approval.

The Open Government Expert Working Group, which comprises both civil and governmental organisations, held its first meeting in September 2012, though prior to this time, the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice had provided opportunity to civil stakeholders to make their suggestions regarding the possible OGP commitments. The active and broad participation of civil organisations and citizens was assured by several Working Group sessions, the consultation with civil organisations prior to it and the general public consultation on the Action Plan before its final approval.

Inner functional and organisational causations of corruption

In spite of the rich and sophisticated new system for the implementation of integrity control in the public administration, in Hungary corruption remains a widespread problem.

The number of corruption cases in politics and the public administration has not decreased over the years. On 10 March 2014, several thousands of citizens marched through the capital centre against corruption and its spread at ministerial levels. When considering the extremely high incidence of corruption scandals on the coverage of national and local media, the picture that citizens get is rather bleak. However, in spite of departing from the often over-politicised role of media to depict lacks of integrity, this paper aims to start from within the administration, mapping those factors which to public officers constitute the main breed for corruption.

Low wages is above all the most quoted endogenous factor that accounts for corruption in the public administration in Hungary. All informants, save those working within ministries, have pointed out this major problem. T., the manager of one of the Land Offices located in the capital, indicates that:

'How to motivate young personnel to integrity? First by raising their salaries. If a young trained lawyer has to work at 110-120 thousands forints (less than 400 euro) a month, why do you think should be committed to act on integrity?'

M., who has worked for years as financial head of two hospitals, one in the capital and another in a smaller town, had this remark:

'Corruption is strong in the health sector. After all, doctors who have delicate jobs are poorly paid for EU standards. The gratuities come in from all sort of sources, how should doctors respond to all these opportunities, some of them very obviously belonging to their role?'

The weight of poor wages is very strong in the personal assessment of how a public officer is supposed to react to a perceived lack of integrity. Another element which is related to the individual context and not to the organisational one is the personality of the officers. It has come out from the interviews that a lack of integrity may be perceived as a result of a particular character of a person who should be less inclined to behave honestly or ethically.

G., working for the Interior Ministy, outlines this issue in the following manner:

'It mostly depends on the personality of public officers. Weaker characters are more prone to corruption. For instance, I come from a family with a military background, and I received a firm education. […] I think it is a good practice at our Ministry, solidly financial and family background is important for not falling into corruption. Most of them [the people working at the Ministry] are coming from lawyer-dynasties, their name is impeccable and it's their moral obligation to keep the family reputation clean'.

This citation underlines two aspects. The first is that integrity is directly connected with the firmness of an individual's character. The second is that moral obligations may become attributed to the family of origin, hence tightening the individual in a sort of inherited morality which is not exactly controllable from the self, and hence 'less corruptible'. A second aspect of the incidence of the personal character is provided by a generational explanation. One of the common points of the positions taken by the participants to the focus group concerning the possible social transformations that leads to the refusal of corruption is the idea that old-generation leaders are more resistant to trainings and indoctrination on integrity.

L., senior manager of a real estate company operating in Hungary, said:

'If the generation gap will not cease to exist it will be difficult to convince business people to do things cleanly. Many CEOs of today have been raised under socialism, and started to do business just after it. Imagine what does it mean. Everybody's hand washes each other'.

M. (quoted above) indicated that:

'people from the previous generation work with old reflexes. Things have started slowly changing, the PA (Public Administration) got changed, people changed. There is a substantial rejuvenation of the PA administrations, the young generation is taking over and these are those who do not share the habits of old generation. [...] But it takes at least two generations to change'.

In spite of this optimistic approach, some informants were less ready to admit that generational changes in the composition of the PA have increased integrity. One point which is not outspoken in the interviews, but is readable below the lines of the explanations to the persistency of corruption, is that the new generation does not occupy positions of power in the PA, or not yet. Even recognising the importance of the role of young personnel (all the interviewed integrity advisors were below 40 years of age), trained and indoctrinated on integrity, some informants concluded that a leadership which, for generational reasons, is not committed with integrity will never do good to the organisation, be that a public or a private entity.

The second order of explanations about the possible inner (i.e. within the organisation) causations of corruption concerns the organisational structure of the PAs. This topic is more complex and needs to be contextualised within a panorama of structural and organisational change that in Hungary has affected, and still is affecting, these organisations. Again as a choral voice among the interviewed, the idea that major and frequent government-level changes in the structure of the PA may bring potential challenges, among which is the risk of corruption, has been detected. None of the respondents wanted to comment on the reasons of these transformations, and some of them they clearly have seen as unwelcome or unnecessary, but they all agreed on the potential risks which transformations may be bringing about. For instance, in the case of the Land Office which manages estates and housed-properties, Z., who occupies a high managerial position, lamented about the recent downsising of the organisation. He warned that, because of the lack of personnel, a longer time for processing each request of purchase or building will be expected. 'As everyone knows' – he commented – 'long processing times of services bring in corruption. When we expect more than six months for each cases it may happen, as it was in the past, that intermediaries who offer quicker services in exchange for fees will mushroom'.

The speed of service delivery has been individuated by many respondents as one of the positive factors for achieving integrity. This has been saluted as a positive development by some of them who indicate that 'a managerial and efficient functioning of the organisation will improve the relationship with customers', as it seemingly has, according to three respondents, thanks to a number of innovations. The first concerns the introduction of online documentation, and of what some of the informants call e-administration. 'It is important to realise that when everything will be available online there will be little space to murky practices. The point is still, however, that a large part of Hungarian population is not knowledgeable on these new technologies' (T., mentioned above).

The second positive development concerns the changes in the office space and in particular in the administrator-customer relation. The planned avoidance of face-to-face interaction within a

close office space seems as one of the solutions for avoiding falling into 'old habits'. P., a successful leader of a Land Office who has resisted reorganisation following the new government electoral success in 2010, pointed out that avoiding having a customer in direct contact with one administrator is a key integrity strategy. Re-designing the office space has, as a matter of fact, been considered as one of the possible solutions to avoid the temptation of corruption. Also, J., labour safety officer, has indicated that it would be preferable to have two inspectors instead of one as 'two bribes are more expensive than one', unless this is not allowed by the number of personnel available. In general, the assumption that long processing times were one of the vexation points for the PA since the socialist period is a commonly shared one. Hence, fastness and transparency (here intended as avoidance of face-to-face interactions in close offices) are among the most quoted positive development concerning the interaction with customers.

The moralities of public work

The issue of an alleged lack of morality in those public officers who seek their own interest through bribes, gifts, favours and the like is another point of wide debate in the ethnographic approaches to corruption. As in the case of law, morality is not accepted as a homogenous underlining explanation of corruption by most anthropologists. Pardo's book (2004) is an exception: he insists on the importance of treating corruption through the analysis of different, often conflicting moralities that reflect the hierarchies and constellations of power through which corruption is deployed. Morality is, however, always used in plural by him and the other anthropologists who emphasise, theoretically or methodologically, the relevance of the ethical approach. This stems out of the idea that there is not a single morality on the confutation of which corruption is constructed, because moral stances are in continuous transformation and very much context-specific.

This perspective seems to contradict the classical approach of western political science and political philosophy which, drawing on Aristotelian traditions, has attempted to explain how and why certain societies are able to produce accountable, 'rational' and transparent forms of government whereas others cannot (see also Rothstein and Eek 2009). Morality is of course not the only answer, but it plays a major role in building what some have called social contract, others trust, cooperation, modernity and so forth, seen at the core of democratic government. Moral claims are, however, undeniably important for the study of corruption.

Anthropology's downplaying this aspect is not to be seen as intentional, but rather an expression of the methodological approaches of ethnographic studies. On the one hand, the simplistic relationships that some of the Northern American scholarship has through the years

drawn between morality and development, social trust, social capital and civil society (Banfield 1958; Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1995, 2000) has been the theatre of long debates in anthropology, sociology and even political science (Silverman 1965; Miller 1974; Muraskin 1974; Tarrow 1996; Meloni 1997). If the ethos, in Banfieldian terms, becomes *the* answer to socio-economic problematic phenomena, among which are clientelism and corruption, then there would be little need of ethnographic and empirical works on these issues. It would be sufficient to establish some measurement scales for morals and values and to apply them in different regional contexts to detect variation patterns of corruption. However, one of the most problematic aspects of corruption is that it is a highly social-specific notion, and it is almost impossible to draw generalisations about its moral undertones. Although tempted to do so, there is not a single way a scholar could fruitfully apply the amoral familism paradigm to contexts as different as Latin America, Eastern Europe or Africa, and within them to different regions all affected similarly by this phenomenon. This is not to support the well-known anthropological claim for particularism, but it is to underline that methodologically the ethos approach does not work. The role of the state, the local tradition of social movements, the role of identity building ties, of informal networks and practices of exchange all have different meanings which, as Yang underlines for the Chinese case (2002), spring out of different cultural backgrounds at different strategic time points.

On the other hand, if morality plays a central part in ethnographic investigations of corruption, the problem is that it is a polysemic notion. Anthropological accounts of corruption have tended, sometimes even uncritically, to draw on the opposition between rational legalism and moral connectivism. Rational legalism is the framework in which bureaucratic, anti-corruption informed views of the social order should impose an efficient reality in which illegal practices, informality and shadow zones should be completely absent. Although none of the reviewed works explicitly makes use of this dichotomy for methodological purposes, it is present in many of these studies. This makes also a point about the distinction between grand and petty corruption, as below, but here it is necessary to understand the different social fields to which this distinction is applied.

Rivkin-Fish (2005), in a study of corruption in the Russian health care system, shows that one of the functions of corrupt practices in postsocialist Russia is, unlike under socialism, not to work side-effectively to fill the gaps of the central planned economy, but to provide venues for generating mutual trust. Market economy, in her ethnography, has brought about what people feared the most: a lack of or a diminished space for social interaction, and corruption is used to fill this gap. In the study of a rural village in Slovakia, Torsello (2003) noticed a high degree of ambivalence between people practices and discourses of trust, particularly in institutions. In

several cases people who had vehemently reacted against the municipal administration and the agricultural cooperative denouncing absolute mistrust in them, actually turned to these institutions for services and goods. This ambivalence was part of a set of strategies that he termed the need to 'invest in social relationships', which is a slightly different claim than Putnam's recent distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. The morality of actions was at issue there, not the constriction of social arrangements: one could feel morally irreprehensible even if he said and did different things because the need not to lose contact with personal networks was generally to be hoped, desired and hence deemed as a value. Similarly, Rivkin-Fish describes how the gift and bribe system working in the health care sector in Russia (and common to all postsocialist Europe) has been strongly affected by the introduction of money in these transactions in recent years. Money can actually endanger the morality of corruption or, as it has been observed in several other mainly African contexts, radically change it.

Oliver de Sardan (1999), in one of the most theory-oriented anthropological contributions to corruption, makes use of the notion of 'moral economy' to refer to the African case. To him the key for understanding the widespread diffusion of corruption in the African continent is to look at its 'banalisation and generalisation' in everyday practices and discourses. He sees corruption as a realm of rumour and gossip, where the political and the social become intermingled and semantically determined for the single actors. Thanks to a number of culturally constructed practices (gift giving, brokerage, solidarity networks, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation), corruption becomes banalised as a commonly accepted and esteemed practice. In these contexts, according to him, actions which refuse openly and decisively compliance with such practices are amoral because they provide space for egoism and lack of care for the others.

A similar point is made by Hasty, in an insightful study of anti-corruption officers in Ghana (Hasty 2005). Hasty had the privilege of being a journalist in addition to being trained as anthropologist and this disclosed to him access to a number of documents and personalities which for 'common ethnographers' would have been easily out of reach. He describes the personal character and actions of an official working in an anti-corruption public office who strived to maintain an image of integrity in spite of the many forms of desire that shape corruption as inherently social practices. Self-discipline is used as a counter-morality (my term) to the indulgement in these desires: the official Hasty described refused to take food and drink gifts (except for soft drinks) that are extremely common in several African contexts, at the expense of being seen as a bashful, asocial person who lives a retired life, and thus morally suspicious in his social environment. This behaviour is in open contradiction with the morality of corruption, in western Africa called 'to chop', or 'eat', where conviviality and participation in large and lavish

banquets is seen as an almost natural consequence of the flow of material (money and wealth) and immaterial (power) desires.

From these approaches it emerges that corruption is often grounded in different, if not conflicting, moralities. Not only is the polarisation between public versus private good extremely problematic to most anthropologists (Torsello 2012). Also, the very idea that corruption should be deemed as amoral in an a priors perspective is to be rejected. The concurrence of a number of culturally determined, as well as historical (fruits of the profound institutional transformation of, for instance, postsocialist societies and postcolonial states) factors and variables, is to be taken into account when attempting to map these moralities and the ways they acquire public meaning.

The Hungarian case is exemplary of what I call 'bounded morality'. Bounded morality is a condition of a moral standpoint which is, in principle, incompatible with corruption and other legal transgressions. All respondents agreed on the point that, in order to improve its performance, to gain public 'face' and to increase citizens' trust, the PA in Hungary needs to act with integrity. In the eyes of E., who works at the Ministry of Justice, 'the more I study the complex mechanism of the Hungarian public administration, the more I realise that managing its organisational structure means lustrating its integrity'. There is a profound commitment towards showing integrity to the public 'to provide an example' or to 'gain back trust that was undermined in the past', or 'to provide the right price to a country made up by competent and highly promising people'.

Morality in the exercise of the public role, however, is imperfect. There is a point, which appears clear in some of the interviews, and even more in the focus group discussion, up to which the morality cannot ascend. It is like the awareness that above a certain (power) level there can be no control; there morality does not apply any longer. D. (who works in the health sector) indicated that '[in public procurement] from the top management level of public organisations clear instructions are given on who should be made the winner of these tenders'.

Another explanation addresses the strong hierarchical system that characterised Hungarian PA, hence mid to low level managers and administrators are 'defenceless'. The kind of resignation that administrators encounter due to this bounded morality is readable in their admittance that no one has ever been convicted because of this (corruption) crime in their working sphere. F. (Labour Safety Office) indicates that 'fines are not particularly high: starting with 30 thousand huf- up to 5-10 milion (which is extremely rare). Usually the lowest fine is identified if anything at all. The practice is that the first occasion is overlooked, the employer is usually given a notice. Only the second time a fine is imposed'. M. (see above) declares not to have ever seen anyone convicted because of corruption. On the other hand, M. admits that in some occasions in past cases people

who opposed the system were all relocated or some even lost their jobs. This is explained as a level to which moral standards and ethical codes do not apply, and this is a level on which no control can be achieved, if not from the top.

In the business-government relationship a ping-pong game is constantly played by the former denouncing the latter of lack of ethical standards, and vice versa. In the course of the focus group, the business executives all, diplomatically due to the presence of public administrators at the same table, came to the final point that, were not for the 'political factor', business would be cleaner and more thriving in the region (meaning Central Eastern Europe). It is worth underlining that the 'political factor' is rarely applied to local governments and other forms of the decentralised PA. To the business people in the room, politics was an untouchable arena which cannot be accessed without 'being ready to follow different rules'.

Cultural explanations

The bounded morality which undermines citizens' trust and provides a negative, substantially unchanging, picture of the PA in Hungary, in spite of the concrete positive developments, has its own cultural explanations. The particular questions which asked informants to pinpoint a number of cultural features of corruption in Hungarian public administration (and in politics at large) were some of the favoured ones. I expected this reaction as I thought about what De Sardan and Blundo call 'the banalisation of corruption (De Sardan and Blundo 2006 and also see the contribution on Italy in WP4 D. 4.2). However, resorting to a cultural explanation was in this case not used for finding some sort of abstract or exotic pretext: it was a genuine argument constructed on different scales.

First, the excessive hierarchy and rigidity of the PA organisational cultures was one of the factors that accounted or the slowness to change. T., working in the Ministry of Interior, indicated that 'a change of culture is difficult when the organisation is too rigid, and rigidity is part of the things that need to be changed'; in other words, this is an inherited factor from the past. The same applies to other aspects that are explained as 'reflexes of past practices'. One of them is the idea that leadership should set the example, and that grassroots initiatives are short-living. In this explanation one can probably find a touch of what some commentators have called the 'post-totalitarian culture' as one common characteristic of the structure of organisations (and I would put also business here) in postsocialist Europe which still have strong verticalism.

Second, another type of cultural explanation refers to petty corruption practices, such as those of gift giving. It is commonly recognised, by the respondents belonging to the PA, that gift practices are part of Hungarian culture, in particular with reference to reciprocating favours

received. This practice seems to be still widespread, according to examples given by the interviews. One tone in which the issue was presented was of annoyance. P. (Land Office) indicated that

'it is a cultural habit which is difficult today, for example in the case of Christmas gifts. It is clear that we cannot accept them, still for the customers they express a degree of assurance, that they can continue to be taken care of properly by our office'.

In other cases there has been reference to ethic guidelines within the organisation that allow only small gifts, such as those with a value of up to 5.000 forints (17 euro), whereas for higher values the officer should ask permission by a superior. The proposed solution, in the case of accepting gifts, has been indicated that they 'ought to be shared by the office', since this practice seems hard to die. Particularly problematic is this issue in the health sector. Not only are bribes and gratuity payments a widespread practice in the patient-doctor interaction, but the morality of gift providing is very strong and still unchallengeable. For instance, I have recorded several stories of women who before or after giving birth were puzzled by the safe ways to provide their gynecologists and nurses with 'tokens of gratitude'. The issue was not simple: they approached state doctors who diverted them to their private consultation hours. In this case, even though the treatment and care during the delivery was expectedly provided by a doctor enrolled in a public hospital, the care during pregnancy was done privately, and subject to fees. What is more, in order to secure the presence of the doctor during the delivery, women were 'morally' forced to provide a further sign of gratitude to their doctors, since it might have easily happened that the doctor was not on duty on that day. This is a particularly sensitive issue, since cases in which the patients did not understand the system (for instance because they were foreigners) ended up with a worse quality of care and a sort of indifference, sometimes culminating with the absence of the doctor at the crucial moment.

Gift exchange is seen by the respondents as a product of Hungarian culture, whose origin dates back to different time époques. It is worth noticing that a number of historical explanations have been given to the resistance of cultural practices underlying corruption, such as gifts, favours or informal relations. One respondent went as far back as to the Turkish domination (XVI century), stating that at the time Hungary was divided among three ruling parties (Hungary, the Ottoman domination and the Habsburg king) and the only way out was to jiggle among them, satisfying at turns the requests of one or another through 'informal channels' (Z., see above).

Another informant, N. from the Ministry of Justice, indicated the double rule under the Habsburg Kingdom as the origin of cultural practices that today support corruption. In his view, having an administrative centre in Budapest which depended on the decisions taken in Vienna corrupted the public morale of local administrators. This 'culture of corruption' (his words) was

consolidated further during the socialist period, as the role of Vienna was taken by Moscow. Hence, these explanations point out that exogenous factors, according to the informants, have accounted for the crystallisation of practices and beliefs that may give rise to corrupt behaviour. The indication that culture is responsible for these practices is utterly expressed and shows awareness, on the side of the public officers, that these may be difficult issues to be tackled since culture is resistant to institutional and organisational changes. On the other hand, such as in the case of the health sector, one finds, along with the suggestions of ethnographic data on other countries and according to the 'historical explanations' provided above, that cultural interpretations of corruption may easily fall into the trap of becoming wrapping paper to conceal the thorough nature of the phenomenon and the reasons for its resistance to change. A final insight into this problem can derive from the analysis of the role of the media in disclosing corruption scandals.

Public discourses on corruption: The role of the media

The final topic of this paper concerns the role of the media in dealing with corruption scandals and the perceived importance that PA officers attribute to this. Over the last six years national media in Hungary have been very active in denouncing corruption cases. In a study conducted on two of the major newspapers (Népszabadság and Magyar Nemzet) in 2012, we have found that the number of articles dealing with corruption (at both business and politics levels) outnumbered those of two major Italian newspapers (La Repubblica and Il Giornale) by 20%. This is not, as can be guessed, because in that year cases were few in Italy (a country with six times the population of Hungary), but simply because there seemed to be more treatment. How is this interpreted by those working in the PA?

The interviews highlighted two points relative to the role of the media in constructing public discourses on corruption. The first concerns the images that the media render to the population of the country's political and bureaucratic machinery. The second has to do with the educational role of information and knowledge sharing about corruption with the citizenry.

As for the first point, although a common view was that media has the duty to expose corruption scandals, even though many of them are only at the level of allegations, since this is a sign of democratic rule. Here, the emphasis on freedom of speech is particularly strong, also due to the former experiences of this country with a totalitarian regime. On the other hand, some respondents pinpointed the counterproductive role of the media in exposing this phenomenon. 'Media spread the dirt everyday, how can one expect citizens to be trustworthy of the administrative organisations of our country?' (Z.) was one answer. Another described the situation in a more complex manner:

'Commercial media is driven by financial interests, it goes after loud stories, therefore the image they try to project is necessarily distorted. Public media is also not reflecting the "truth", they are distorted by the political interests of certain party or parties, they act as a voice of the ruling party. This is also a form of corruption. [...] But I understand the role of the journalists, they have to be able to write to get paid' (M.).

'Media play a negative role in this story too, they rived out certain parts from the original context and presented them as pathetic, empty words. This approach is typical of the media and some civil organisations nowadays. Therefore what is needed in this situation is some trust in the society, between PA and civil society, media, no one wants to give a little bit of credit to the other party in this respect' (J.).

'Although the controlling role of media is undoubted, they often operate on the basis of fear, threatening. I don't like their negativity. It should be more positive, constructing, showing good things of the world, educating and transforming people' (N.).

The corollary to the strong role of the media in Hungary to build public discourses on corruption appears to be that their excessive negativity, conspicuous number of cases presented, complete absence of good stories or best practices and known alignment with the dominant political coalitions all contribute to undermine social trust in the PA. In order to shed further light onto this argument, the second point needs to be tackled, i.e. whether the public discourses introduced by the media can have a role in educating to corruption.

From the interviews it has unequivocally emerged that a better general education to integrity is one of the key ingredients for fighting corruption. Educating the citizens is a task which has different aspects and different challenges. One surely concerns the type of education. Almost all the interviewed have undertaken some form of training on integrity in the PA during their carrier stages. These trainings are becoming more frequent according to the new legal provisions and the ethical guidelines introduced above, calling for the need of having specialised trainers and instructors, who seem to be still too few in the country. Education to corruption may help, but on the conditions how this should be performed the opinions were in disagreement. Some pointed out that this is one of the roles of public media, which should be able to make the population aware of these cases, but also to show them different, more virtuous ways to deal with this phenomenon. Other respondents were skeptical about the role of media in educating the population, and eventually indicated that trainings and more detailed knowledge about corruption will not be of help for adult or working people, since they are not 'receptive' to these issues. More extreme is the position of Z., who warned against the possible mistaken application of increased knowledge of the issue:

'Education of citizens is required, but not with direct methods, as it may only make things worse: more attention will be given to corruption, more people will get an idea to become corrupt'.

In his view, 'news reporting is too often driven by sensationalism', which is counterproductive in the case of educating to integrity. On the other hand, integrity should be presented in more popular forms by the mass media, such as in soap operas or other forms of public entertainment. This idea is shared by two other respondents who pointed out that, in order to have a positive pedagogical output, public discourses on corruption and integrity should be mainly directed to the young population, from the school level, involving as much as possible in an interactive manner, and getting out of the negative spiral of mistrust in which the media has tended to trap the reader.

Conclusions and recommendations

Analysis of the data collected through ethnographic research in Hungary has produced a number of outcomes which will be delineated schematically below. Here I would like to stress that in general all interviewed were very concerned about the importance of increasing integrity in their daily tasks. This importance is by them attributed not only to their responsibilities as administrators or business executives, but clearly to their commitment with the societal good in general. The strong message which I find relevant from these interviews is that corruption is perceived to be a negative practice which undermines the prosperity of a nation, not only in economic (this issue was never mentioned) terms, but mostly for what concerns good governance practices and the public morality of the country itself. Positive trends have been individuated in the course of this research: better legislative measures, resorting to e-governance, improving working conditions and office space, decreasing cases of face-to-face interaction between officers and customers, having more nuanced ethical codes of conduct, making positive morality a personal commitment. Other less positive trends that may bring issues of risks to integrity of the public work include: excessive and frequent re-structuring of public organisations, lack of personnel, poor wages, a still weak commitment to integrity from the leadership, the negative role of media to spread news about corruption and insufficient education at the school level.

Functional and organisational causations

In this field, corruption has been seen in relation with a number of factors that affect the performance of PA in the country. These factors are of two types: personal and individual, functional and structural. Concerning individual factors, the personality of the administrator, his/her family background, solidity of economic position, educational and training level and in general a predisposition to positive working morals have all been indicated as influencing the ethics of his/her work.

Functional and structural causations are those that pertain to the working of the organisation and its culture. The indicated factors are: the level of wages, time to process services, availability of dedicated personnel, open office spaces that avoid face-to-face interactions with customers, well-written codes of conduct and clear integrity policies, commitment from leadership.

Morality

The relevance of the moral attitude to the public work is an important issue that needs more careful exploration. Although all respondents were clear about the crucial implications that a sound positive morality towards integrity and transparency may have for the PA as a whole, there emerged a complex picture. The concept of 'bounded morality' can be the explanation which accounts for the gap felt by some of the respondents between the urge to a more rigid attention to the ethical conducts of public officers, and awareness that, above a certain level of the organisation it is difficult to intervene. The imperfection of this bounded morality is not only ascribed to the perceived misaligned commitment of different levels of the PA machinery, but it is seen in relationship with a rigidity and excessive hierarchical type of bureaucracy which seems to be still dominant. This explanation has fallen into a cultural type of causation.

Cultural causations

Among the cultural causations the strong weight of hierarchical structures within the organisations has been explained in terms of inner response to external forces, such as the requirement to improve integrity and anti-corruption measures from the EU. This is a sort of endogenous response to institutional transformation that is, inevitably, informed by culture (both the organisational and the national).

Other cultural explanations dealt with the practice of gift giving, reciprocity, the exchange of favours and informality practices. These, well documented in the anthropological literature, are perceived as resistant forms of social interaction and exchange (see my contribution on corruption as social exchange in WP1) and as such are not overtly condemned. In general, there is a positive expectation that a generational change will affect positively the cultural perception of integrity. On the other hand, culture can become an explanation to corruption when it assumes a historical significance, and it is used to explain why the country has developed some particular reactions ('reflexes', as they are termed) to conditions of lack of integrity.

Public discourses and the role of media

Concerning the public discourses of corruption in Hungary, respondents have individuated two main fields: the impact of the media product on generalised trust towards the PA, and the educational role of these discourses. In the first case, most of the respondents view in negative terms the role of the media in exposing corruption. Corruption scandals are widely exposed by national and local media, and in spite of the recognition that this is an index of democracy, many answers pointed out the relative politicisation of media and the excessive 'sensationalisation'.

On a second field, media are perceived to be offering not much to the general education on integrity in the country. The preferred solutions seem to provide more accurate debates at the school level, or other forms of public cultural entertainment that problematise corruption at a large societal level.

To conclude, the ethnographic study of corruption practices and ideas in Hungary has produced a number of results, some of which are in line with those of the emerging literature in the field of anthropology, some original. These results have the strength of originating from the direct interaction between the ethnographer and the interviewed, in this case the public administrator. Since this interaction does not take place in all the common research methods of the other social science disciplines, this constitutes an added value to the study of such a complex phenomenon. The ethnographic data needs to be, therefore, read and interpreted within the socio-cultural environment to which they pertain, and it is for this reason that they tend to be detailed and nuanced. These details can eventually be contextualised in a larger picture through the result of Deliverable D4.1 of this Working Package, in which survey results have been collected, as well as through comparison of the nine country cases which have been the objects of research in this WP.

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