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RESEARCHING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA IN CURBING CORRUPTION: A NEED FOR A MORE INDEPTH INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In last decades we have faced a growing number of national and cross-national surveys gathering data on all three concepts that we are dealing with – civil society, media systems and corruption. In addition to quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence concerning each individual concept also a number of theoretical conclusions and insights have grown immensely. What is also needed is to explore and reflect on the available data (and where necessary produce new one) with an objective to build a theoretical framework for analysis of the impact of civil society and media systems in fighting corruption and focus not just on one individual concept but on the vibrant interplay among them and how they function in different cultural, social or political settings. The aim of this article is to reflect on the concepts of corruption, civil society and media and their peer relations, provide a short review and reflection of the state of the art in the field and outline possible future agenda that would enable us to better understand interconnectedness of these concepts.

Key words: corruption, media, civil society

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a significant nuisance that affects us all. It weakens democratic institutions, inhibits the rule of law, undermines public trust and negatively affects economic performance. As it is closely knit with the abuse of power it fosters inequalities and injustices and can lead to discrimination between different groups in society. Therefore it is a severe obstacle to political stability and to social and economic advancements.

While reading the minutes and reports of many conferences on corruption organized by major international organisations, which take lead in organising of global action against corruption it is commonly stated that citizen participation is a basis for the fight against corruption (Russian, 2004: 18). Citizens should be able to monitor the activities of public entities (Hors, 2003: 26) and engage in collective action in fighting the corruption (Abdallah, 2014; Smith, 2009; Ackerman, 2014 etc.). Civil society plays a key role in fighting corruption. Today, this statement seems to be unchallenged: it has become a leitmotiv of anti-corruption discourses (Hors, 2003: 7). It is argued, that citizens and civic organisation that they form should be involved in the promotion of values such as transparency and integrity and the reporting of corruption. However, the collective action against corruption should be an informed one. Every citizen should have access to the necessary information in order to be able to evaluate the activities of institutions and act upon them. Therefore, citizens should have access to clear and truthful information about the use and administration of the public resources in those areas that are most relevant to them. Public institutions have a duty to explain to the citizens what and why they are doing, and how they are doing it (Norris, 2003, 1999; Bennett and Eutman, 2001; Vreg, 2004; Cornwall and Schattan, 2007). In contemporary societies a majority of information provided by public institutions are mediated or to say communicated to the public through the means of mass media. The aim of this article is to reflect on the concepts of corruption, civil society and media and their peer relations, provide a short review and reflection of the state of the art in the field and outline possible future agenda that would enable us to better understand interconnectedness of these concepts.

REVEALING, COMMUNICATING AND DEBATING ISSUES ON CORRUPTION

Communication is the active side of transparency, while transparency can be seen as one of the cornerstones of the fight against, as well as the prevention of corruption and fiscal mismanagement (Larmont, 2006). But, mass media don't just simply transmit the information but carry the capacity to communicate on their own account. The great reach and efficiency of the mass media as a means of public communication have also attracted high expectations concerning their informative role in society. They are expected to provide a constant flow of factual information, analysis and comment on essential matters. In so doing they serve commerce as well as other social institutions and ordinary citizens (McQuail, 2010). Mass media also play a crucial role in the social construction of reality because knowledge of many social phenomena, including corruption, is obtained mainly through the media rather than through direct experience (Meyrowitz, 1985; Fiske, 2005; Košir, 2003), and social institutions must rely on the mass media to distribute their reality-moulding information. On the one hand, dominant social values, perceptions and ideas generate the mode and the content mass media offer to the audiences. On the other hand, media are not just passive mediators of the content, but actively influence the process and thus play an active role in constructing and deconstructing reality. The mass media has evolved in present-day to become the dominant player in the symbolic reality realm and also in the subjective reality construction process – including the perception of corruption in a society influencing the underlying value system – and it is assumed that as such, they can contribute to combating corruption.

International organizations, such as the World Bank, Transparency International, TRACE, Global Organisation against Corruption (GOPAC), European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) etc., regard media as one of the important solutions to curb corruption (see for example Stapenhurst, 2000). They call for plurality of media, media freedom and competition. Nonetheless, the scientific knowledge as to how effective mass media (in all its technological variety and diversity as a consequence of functioning in very diverse social, political and economic settings in very different societies around the globe) actually perform to combat corruption is still very limited, albeit growing. Mass media should not only have the power to raise public awareness about corruption, its causes, consequences and possible remedies but also investigate and report on incidences of corruption. The effectiveness of the media in fighting the corrupt habits, in turn, depends on access to information and freedom of expression (Brunetti and Weder, 2003; Ahrend, 2002; Camaj, 2012; Lindstedt and Navrin, 2010), media ownership patterns (Djankov et. al,

2001) as well as a professional development of investigative journalism and the embracement of journalistic standard and ethics (Stepenhurst, 2000).

A complementary scheme, focusing on knowledge and data as a prerequisite for anti-corruption strategies, has been proposed by Kaufmann (in Staphenurst, 2000), who states that AC (Anti-corruption Efforts) = *KI* (Knowledge and Information) + *LE* (Leadership) + *CA* (Collective Action). However, such possible solutions that have become a slogans of current combat against corruption, have rarely been more holistically empirically tested (an example is a study done by Camaj in 2012) nor have been more broadly conceptualized and reflected interdisciplinary in the framework of current scientific research on civil society and media studies and other areas of research. Minkov for instance, a well-known scholar of cross-cultural analysis presented evidence that contrary to a widespread myth, there is no evidence that corruption suppresses macro-economic growth. The relationship between two variables is actually weakly positive. Namely, some very corrupt economies (such as China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam and Russia) are growing much faster than those most transparent economies (Minkov, 2013: 389). He also points out that corruption may not be the prerogative of sleazy politicians but it is often initiated by ordinary citizens (Minkov, 2013: 44) – the same citizens who construct the civil society and the same citizens who may work in media.

COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUES

In recent years we have faced growing number of national and cross-national surveys concerning all three concepts that we are dealing with – civil society, media systems and corruption. In addition to empirical evidence concerning each individual concept also theory has grown immensely in last decade. However, what is also needed is to explore and reflect the available data (and where necessary produce new data) with an objective to build a theoretical framework for analysis of the impact of civil society and media systems in unveiling corruption and focus not just on one individual concept but on the vibrant interplay among them and how they function in different cultural, social or political settings.

A short overview of the state of the art in corruption research shows that over the last few years, the issue of corruption - the abuse of public office for private gain—has attracted large interest, both among academics and policy-makers. An important body of knowledge was acquired through theoretical research done in the 1970s by Jagdish Bhagwati (1982, 1988), Anne Krueger (1974, 1990) and Susan Rose-

Ackerman (2008a, 2008b) among others. A key principle is that corruption can occur where rents exist— typically, as a result of government regulation—and public officials have discretion in allocating them. The classic example of a government restriction resulting in rents and rent-seeking behaviour is that of an import quota and the associated licenses that civil servants give to those entrepreneurs willing to pay bribes (Mauro, 1998). More recently, researchers of corruption, typically using the replies to standardized questionnaires have begun to test some of these long-established theoretical hypotheses using new cross-country data. The surveys that have much of the attention are especially the corruption perception index and global corruption barometer, developed by Transparency International, GRECO country evaluations and the Working Party on the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention (and their criteria of functional equivalence). Additional data can be gathered from World Values Survey, while specific data for the EU states can be obtained from Special Barometers on Attitudes of Europeans towards Corruption and to some extent also from European Values Survey. These surveys represent an attempt to produce country specific analysis of problems related to corruption and bribery, while operating within a broader template concerning the conditions under which corruption and bribery occur. Although there is a certain amount of emphasis on legal instruments, some attempt is also made to assess their implementation. The importance of placing such surveys in a more comparative frame is to help identify which aspects of that society and culture are distinctive and which are more widely shared with other societies with different paths (Langseth, 2006; Philp, 2006). For the purpose of comparing societies, social phenomenon can be broken down to basic components that are expressed as single numerical variables with national scores. Then, these variables can be analysed at the societal level. Even though the opportunities for more in-depth country analysis is quite limited, these surveys enable us to identify issues which may be particular to specific societies, and can undertake further research to assess the character of the political culture and the extent to which there is wide endorsement or condemnation of certain practices and to identify the issues which are central to different participants in the political processes, including civil society and the media.

Similarly the corpus of empirical data available as well as theoretical considerations has grown extensively in the field of civil society and media system in last decades. We can derive the data on various elements of civil society (for instance characteristics of the engagement of those active in civil society as well in political domain, the quantity and quality of participation in civil society organisations (CSOs), organisational infrastructure of civil society in particular state, data on

leadership and levels of professionalization, data on values attached to the civil society sphere etc.) from following cross-national, longitudinal surveys: European Values Survey (EVS), World Values Survey (WVS), European Social Survey (ESS), Eurobarometer, CIVICUS, John Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project Data, Union of International Associations (UIA) etc. Cross-national data on media systems can be obtained from following surveys: Freedom of the Press Index (by Freedom House), Survey of Media Laws Worldwide and International Directory of Constitutional Provisions of the Media (provided by International Journalists' Network), Media Sustainability Index (USAID), Country Reports on Media Pluralism (EU's Task Force for Co-ordination of Media Affairs), Special Eurobarometers, European Values Survey, World Values Survey, European Social Survey etc. These surveys provide data on legal, political, economic, social and cultural environment of media systems in a particular state as well as data on varied ways in which pressure can be placed upon the flow of information and the ability to print, broadcast and operate freely and without fear of repercussions. Important is also the information on the diversity of the available contents given to the public.

A number of scientists have used, discussed and reflected on these data and consequences of their use (see for instance Alberg et. al, 2010; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Livingstone, 2003; Adam, 2014). In all cases – in the case of data on corruption, civil society as well as media systems – we should consider the quality of the data we use to describe these phenomena. Are the data and conclusions drawn upon reliable and credible? Is the cross-national surveys methodologically correct and sufficient source of empirical evidence? What are their advantages and shortcomings? A number of cross-national researches seem to have serious problems with the provision of credible data (see Jowel, 1998, Adam, 2007). Haller (2002) believes that one of the main weaknesses of cross-national research projects is that the questionnaires are produced without a design and are not based on (preliminary) theoretical grounds. In this sense, he speaks of inductive post hoc generalisation appearing in the stage of interpreting the data. This in turn raises doubts about the generalisation of findings and theoretical conclusions. The prevailing stand is to treat the empirical data as taken-for-granted. Thus, to be able to do credible further research on interconnectedness between the concepts of corruption, civil society and media, we need to reflect on the quality (or, in other words, validity and reliability) of input data. In this regard, following Adam (2007, 2010) we can distinguish between three aspects. The first concerns the question whether the data from cross-national studies reflects the situation and trends in individual countries included in comparative research. This aspect could be called

correspondence. It is possible to check this by comparing the data from several international researches or – which is more appropriate – by comparing cross-national findings with the findings of national case studies. If there are no major deviations, we can speak of satisfactory correspondence. The second aspect of data quality is mutual comparability; the question is whether the results obtained in one country are comparable (equivalent) to the results obtained in other countries. The third aspect is the theoretical relevance of data. The question is whether these data form an appropriate basis for the creation of indicators and whether it is based on theoretical starting points. Here, we can reiterate. Instead of quick measurements and routine statistical analyses in the sense of hit and run' research, greater attention should be paid to more reflexive approach when dealing with existing (secondary) data as well as to considerations about the provision of better quality input data. Method of triangulation with a view to double (or triple) checking results should be used. Additionally, we should note that data that is available will change over time, and the durability of data will affect the extent to which it can be relied upon. We should also be aware of the risk that there are an unconscious weighting towards indicators that do offer a more solid means of verification, at the expense of those which may be equally important but less measurable. So, the methodological »calculation« of the data available in cross-national studies should not be blindfolded. We must in all cases – in the case of data on corruption, civil society as well as media – consider the quality of data. Are the findings and indicators reliable and credible? Is the cross-national surveys methodologically correct and sufficient source of empirical evidence? What are their advantages and shortcomings? As already mentioned, it is widely argued, that a well-informed civic participation is a basis for the fight against corruption. This is a very general statement that needs further exploration and above all, it has to be placed in a context. Both civil society and media are, even though they are in contemporary modern societies very much interrelated, theoretically very complex, diverse and heterogeneous concepts. Both are structurally fragmented and pluralistic. It may be legitimate to ask: What kind of civil society is a basis for the fight against corruption? And, what kind of media environment is a basis for the fight against corruption?

However, when forming a broader theoretical framework for analysis of the impact of civil society and media systems in unveiling corruption we can't rely merely on empirical cross-national studies. Let's take an example of the EU. In recent years a large body of literature was published indicating new developments in the context of civil society and media, that hasn't been incorporated in the large-scale cross-national

surveys much, but necessities further exploration and is very relevant to the research. In the context of the EU it has been shown that civic organisations are becoming increasingly influential as sources of policy advice: actors in the European Commission, the European Parliament and national governments are frequently willing to listen to the perspective of civic organisations when drafting or deciding upon legislation. It is often assumed that EU citizens can gain new power and voice through the mobilization in local and national civic organisations as well as transnational ones. In this theoretical framework organized civil society is seen as a lever for a higher degree of participative democracy in the EU (Magnette, 2003; Friedrich, 2006; Cichowski, 2007). Civic organisations are seen as a way of allowing everyday citizens to have greater influence in the decision-making process. Following an old tradition – from early days of the EU, the European Commission has been keen to establish links with at least certain interest groups in order to secure policy advice and ensure expert support for its policies – the EU is now looking increasingly to civic organisations as a lay link to the public. Formal consultation with civic organisations and experts as a part of the policy process is becoming common, albeit not as fast or as thorough as many in the civic community might want. The capacity of civic organisations to promote citizenship practice and influence policymaking requires investigation, however. It is possible that civic organisations are no more than nominally citizen-friendly since they can be more accountable to particular wealthy donors than their general membership or the public (Fisher, 1997). A number of researchers have shown (see for instance Warleight, 2003; Maloney et. al., 2010; van Deth et. al, 2008; Kohler-Koch et. al, 2008) that they can be imperfect representatives of the citizen; they can simply fail to mobilize on important issues, limited by resources or following their own priorities. More-over, civic organisations can be elite-driven rather than membership-led (Maloney, 2008; Adam, 2008; van Deth and Maloney, 2008). In many cases, they lack strong connections to the societal groups they claim to represent because they may not be active membership organizations and their staff and administration can be social and political elites (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1998). Additionally, inclusion into policy debate (including policy on corruption) necessitates sophisticated understanding which can lead to professionalization of civic organisations and elaboration of expert knowledge, that doesn't necessary relate to the activities and perceptions of their members. Civic organisations operating in the field of corruption in the EU may thus more often be seen as providers of expert knowledge/advice on policy issues concerning the corruption rather than being primarily seen and understood as a bridge between citizens and the political institutions.

Many civic organisations try to influence policy makers and gain public support by presenting analysis and arguments on seminars, offering expert advice upon request or publicizing their research in the mass media, specialized publications and conferences (see for instance the activities performed by Transparency International – the Global Coalition against Corruption). These activities may help in socially constructing a common framework to improve communication among diverse actors involved in policy debates, to inform the general public and broad scientific communities and to enhance governmental transparency and accountability (Weaver and McGann, 2000). Some civil organisations also contribute to broadening the public debate on policy issues and communicating the views of diverse and underrepresented social groups. Nevertheless, these organisations do not always enhance social democracy. They can even restrict civil society pressures, participation and access to the public debate. Despite our limited knowledge of the internal life 'of civic organisations, especially the relations between their leadership and members, the available empirical findings do confirm the trend of professionalization which is appearing in many forms. On the one hand, the leadership of civic organisations is taken over by people who, during their studies, had specialised in PR or law. On the other side, for lobbying purposes civic organisations engage professional firms (Saurugger, 2006). In the EU we are witnessing a similar situation as in the USA, namely the prevalence of so-called advocacy groups (Skocpol and Morris, 1999). These organisations also embrace scientists and other experts or the organisational leadership co-operates with them in common projects. The question arises how to evaluate this trend, respectively what will be (or already are) the implications for membership, participation and inclusion into decision-making processes. In the context of societal complexity and the growing demand for expertise and professionalism, civic organisations are forced to act as advocacy groups in which managerial, lobbyist, communication and cognitive competencies are more important than grass-root activism and promises of direct democracy. To sum up, according to latest research, civic organisations in the EU are undergoing the process of rapid professionalization and transformation into providers of expertise and knowledge (Saurugger, 2006; Greenwood, 2008; Ruzza, 2008), whereby the importance of membership is decreasing and leadership is becoming ever more autonomous and elitist (Finke, 2007). Similar goes for other International NGOs. It must be considered that in a knowledge-based society and in the framework of deliberative democracy, the role of civic organisations is changing and facing new challenges. How do these processes influence the civil society's role in unveiling and fighting the corruption?

There is a growing body of literature stating, that the structure of public is changing rapidly and these changes impact the deliberations processes in contemporary societies (see for instance Blumler and Kavanaugh, 1999; Dahlgren, 2005; Blumler and Coleman, 2010; Koopmans and Statham, 2010). Especially scientists concerned with political communication and marketing are arguing, that the new public consists of very divers set of actors, who don't have equal access to the market of opinions and their opinions don't have equal weight. The media institutions which are of most significance for the majority of citizens are to a great extent beyond the reach of citizen practices and interventions (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Dahlgren, 1995). The new public is being controlled and guided by professional experts on marketing, public relations, advertising etc. (Vreg, 2004). In such circumstances communication professionals become mediators between the political system (policy decisions) and civil society. The dominance of professional institutions in the public communication leads to a changed rhetoric and influence in public life, where expert knowledge has a priority over active participation of citizens. Possible outcomes of these shifts may be the decline in public confidence in governmental institutions, feeling of alienation, growing political cynicism that may lead to a decline in citizen participation in politics and society.

DISCUSSION

The most obvious way in which the media contribute to fighting corruption is by exposing the corrupt individuals. The second way in which the media can combat corruption is by legitimizing other anticorruption agencies including civic organisations fighting corruption. The third way in which media fights corruption is by conducting its own investigations into corrupt practices. This form of reporting has come to be popularly known as investigative reporting (Walulya, 2008). Given two assumptions:

a.) the —new public is being controlled and guided by professional experts on marketing, public relations, advertising, journalism, media owners;

b.) an important number of civic organisations which are active in the field of corruption act as advocacy groups in which managerial, lobbyist, communication and cognitive competencies (specialized expert knowledge) may be more comprehensive than grass-root activism;

it would make sense to expand the research on interconnectedness between civil society, media and levels of corruption by focusing on such expert civic organisations and the media reporting. The agenda-setting theory (McCombs et. al, 1972, 1997) could be used in this framework. By doing so, we could explore how media reporting affects the prevailing discourse on corruption and also how it is connected to the legitimization

of expert knowledge provided by civic organisations fighting the corruption in a broader public and whether and how they influence the perceptions of key stakeholders that the existence, activities and impacts of civic organisations are justifiable and appropriate in terms of central social values and institutions. A positive public image, formed by the media reporting on particular civic organisation may be becoming more important compared to traditional indicators of legitimacy, including representation and active participation of members in civic organisations.

Our argument is, that civic organisations working in the field of corruption seek to convince the public of the legitimacy of their actions through the appropriation and dissemination of information through mass media (and less so through mobilisation of their membership base). The communication and interpretation of corruption to the general public is achieved through a variety of media, the most important of which are the traditional print media, television, radio, and, now, electronic channels such as the internet. As the mass media are perceived collectively as a powerful tool for influencing public opinion, it is understandable that civic organisations will want to maximise the exposure of issues supporting their agenda. The distortion of information that occurs as expert knowledge is translated into the language of the popular media has led to accusations of press sensationalism. The topic of corruption is a fruitful ground for such developments. However, it has also been argued that sensationalism is acceptable if it brings a message to the attention of the public and polity. In order to understand the processes by which the expert knowledge on corruption is transformed into news, including how different political and social groups seek to influence this conversion we have to review the flow, translation and transformation of information from an expert report (for instance delivered by GRECO) or data set (for instance indexes provided by Transparency International) into a media story. And vice-versa: how does the media coverage influence the legitimacy of the activities guided by the civic organisations fighting corruption. And vice-versa: how does the media coverage influence the legitimacy of the activities guided by the civic organisations fighting corruption.

By looking at these concepts and their peer relations interdisciplinary, by contextualising the findings and constantly reflecting on them in terms of their correspondence, validity and theoretical and applicable relevance etc. a very complex and multilevel research agenda emerges. So an important issue becomes not just the research agenda, but how to organize and manage such research, so that comprehensive results will be also available in reasonable time frames and be able to reflect very

dynamically changing contemporary societies. Managing teamwork in diverse networks, where researchers from various social disciplines are globally connected however also “locally grounded” seem to be a good solution. The amount of data, information and knowledge has simply become much too large for an individual to be able to embrace it all. On the other hand disciplinary specialisation and contextual differences are so diverse that by working individually (not being connected to a wider network) or in secluded research groups lacking global, regional or international interconnectedness, we risk missing on a wide and vibrant range of scientific discussion. ICT and other tools for such interconnectedness are available and have already severely impacted the global connectedness of researchers and availability of their findings in past decade. Times, when it took us couple of weeks to get a newest book on specific topics delivered are long gone as a mass of articles is constantly waiting for us just a click away. Organising, categorizing, synthesizing are new challenges in dealing with recurring data and knowledge, while coordinated global organising and managing scientific human and other resources should continue and be even more pronounced in the future.

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