Foreword

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Back to the Future: why national integrity frameworks should be evidence-based
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The attempt of the present issue is to reflect on the need and present the evidence of what are the effective elements of a public integrity framework. The origins of this concept are to be found in the original paper by Langseth, Stapenhurst and Pope,¹ where a ‘national integrity system’ was proposed as a comprehensive method of fighting corruption. They proposed eight independent pillars needed to fight corruption. Those were public awareness, public anti-corruption strategies, public participation, ‘watchdog’ agencies, the judiciary, the media, the private sector, and international cooperation. This amounted to a mixture of agency from three main areas: domestic civil society including the media and the private sector, domestic horizontal accountability agencies such as watchdogs and the judiciary, and international pressure. It was proposed that even the anti-corruption strategies should be ‘public’, in order to put some constraints on government as it was rightly understood that in a corrupt country the government is the main beneficiary of the status quo of the power establishment, so it can hardly be expected to be the sole or the even the principal actor in anticorruption reforms, at least not if such reforms are to be effective. Langseth, Stapenhurst and Pope’s mixture of agents had a sound logic of accountability, drawing as it did on three sources of agency, *all different from government*, so in principle able to exercise the constraints essential for control of corruption. Because the main question the anticorruption fighter addresses is not what does control of corruption consist in, but what brings it about.

However, that essential distinction was gradually lost in later versions of Transparency International’s efforts (Pope 2000; Doig and McIvar 2003) which

¹Langseth, P., Stapenhurst, R., & Pope, J. (1999). National integrity systems. Curbing Corruption: Toward a Model for Building National Integrity. in R. Stapenhurst & SJ Kpundeh (eds). Washington DC, Economic Development Institute, World Bank, 127–148.

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by 2016 had come to read rather more like an inventory. It included both the legislative and executive branches of government, the judiciary, the public sector, the police, the electoral management body, the Ombudsman, the audit institution, anti-corruption agencies, political parties, the media, civil society and the business sector. This is no longer a mixture of agents, even of potential agents, but rather a conflation of the problem with the solution with no guiding thread. In other words, the original ‘assessment’ instrument has become so broad that the relevance of each element is difficult to grasp and there is now frequent confusion of means with ends, or of instruments with goals. Transparency International presently states that ‘The NIS assessment provides a comprehensive overview of the functioning of the main governance institutions in a country. It is particularly useful to obtain a first holistic picture of the entire governance system’ (Transparency International). The system is intended to be used for advocacy, monitoring and a variety of other goals, but no theory of change is advanced. In the special issue ‘National Integrity Systems – An evolving approach to anti-corruption policy evaluation’ from *Crime Law & Social Change*, A J Brown and Finn Heinrich² argue that a holistic approach, based in the general concept of accountability with its different branches (vertical, horizontal) works, and allows a comparison across countries as well as an actionable tool.

What we advance in this issue is the reality test. We tried to reduce the infinite universe of what should be improved in governance to a narrower, specific, evidence based actionable framework that can help structure a strategy for national integrity-building in a spirit closer to that of the original TI manifesto. In doing so, we were guided by a theory closer to the original spirit, one which argues that societies can find in themselves the force to constrain their states to become more rational, more inclusive and more transparent, to reduce the difference between formal and informal institutions in the quest for a public policy which is truly the expression of the greatest social welfare possible and not of more or less disguised private interest. But to do so they need a holistic but significant approach, and not one which proposes once more the usual fallacy of development, to solve a problem by another problem. To push the right buttons, strategize and prioritize, which is the way to go in each and every context, we need the evidence of what worked and what did not in the past twenty years. After all, there are reasons why, compared to the previous twenty years, these two decades of unprecedented fight against corruption had so meagre results. The fear of testing and evaluating anticorruption work, the need to continuously expand the market for consultancy in this area, the reluctance to learn from successes (so very few), but also from failures, has to be left behind if we are to offer, as an academic community, something to the practitioners.

Our theory presents control of corruption as the equilibrium between opportunities for spoiling and constraints limiting them because this is what statistical evidence speaks for. The essential elements of this equilibrium, transparency, administrative discretion, anticorruption regulation are in turn tested, and interacted with societal

² Brown, A.J., & Heinrich, F. (2017) National Integrity Systems – An evolving approach to anti-corruption policy evaluation. *Crime, Law and Social Change*

participation to arrive at a state-society model of corruption control. In the end, what we identify from all the cases in the world and data for more than two decades is indeed that control of corruption is a holistic equilibrium in every society, but also that one cannot fix a balance without being aware of its existence.

To a profane, all pillars of a house are the same. The structure architect knows, however, that some are the ones creating resistance in case of an earthquake, and the others play lesser roles. Public integrity is a vast roof indeed, but to put it up some pillars are essential, and only by awareness of our results in the past twenty years can we establish which are they and become better builders.

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