

# **CORRUPTION AS A SYMPTOM**<sup>\*</sup>

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“Reality is largely ruled by the fundamental principle of imperfection”. Javier Gomá.

**C**orruption as a phenomenon is arguably better known for its effects rather than for its nature. For corruption displays something similar to the force of gravity: although we feel its presence daily, we cannot say for certain what it is about. But while gravity effects are appealing, we are shamed and repelled by those of corruption.

The environment does not seem particularly comfortable, since we want to fight a practice that triggers rejection, indeed, but also bewilderment since there is no unanimous consent on its nature. What do we mean by corruption and how should we combat such scourge?

These are the two key issues addressed by the collective work coordinated by Víctor Lapuente, senior lecturer and researcher at The Quality of Government Institute (University of Goteborg). A work that, having been published some months ago, has gone virtually unnoticed, what strikes me for two main reasons: in the first place, because this book, as I intend to underline throughout this review, constitutes a well-grounded contribution to the Spanish bibliography on the phenomenon of corruption. And also, because, since its publication in June 2016, corruption has been reaching unprecedented soaring levels in Spain. Against this backdrop, one would expect leaders and experts to pay heed of such intelligence gathered in this book, yet that does not seem to be the case.

I believe this is a text, whose coordinator, I hasten to add, has proven successful in handling and tempering the unavoidable imbalances in form and content of any collective work. Eight authors from different fields –economy, sociology, political sciences, engineering and law- who voice their opinion and proposals on these two queries: What corruption is about and how to combat it, two key pillars upon which I have built this essay.

In the first of its two sections, I reflect on the frame for interpretation within which corruption is supposedly shaped: is it the only possible frame? I also ponder what would happen if, instead of understanding corruption as the cause of a mounting social malaise, we were to assume the opposite premise: corruption as the symptom of a problem. To all this, another fundamental question should be added: how is reality

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\* This work was originally published in Nueva Revista de Política, Cultura y Arte de la Universidad Internacional de la Rioja, Number 160, April 2017, entitled “Luces y sombras de la corrupción en España” (Light and shade of corruption in Spain) (<http://bit.ly/2osVye3>). It was subsequently published in a new format by the Association for Democratic Quality and Culture (<http://bit.ly/2prNYDu>)

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scrutinized with a view to determine how much and what kind of corruption takes place in societies such as the Spanish one? Three concerns, all three encompassing the same concern: how authors envisage corruption and whether there is any room for manoeuvre so as to enrich their viewpoints.

In the second section, I collect several considerations about the suggested measures for fighting corruption. Coming from a qualified “comprehensive” strategy, authors advance a number of actions on various fields, from transparency to management modernization, both for public administration in general and the local one, in particular. As in the first part, I will also delve into considerations and enquire into the likelihood of some room for improvement of their proposals, and if so how.

**T**he book conveys the most widespread notion of corruption among the pundits: “corruption is the abuse of entrusted or public power for private gain”<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup>. This is how corruption is outlined all through the work. Corruption is understood as an “extractive” phenomenon, that diverts common or public resources to the domain of private or particular interests. To put it simply, corruption is placed on the public-private axis.

Where do these doubts on the nature of corruption come from? It is quite obvious that “*there is no corruption without corrupters*”<sup>5</sup> but, regardless of the legal personality and the function of whoever is offering and the identity of who is accepting, how comes that the “corrupt” label is typically granted to civil servants, while voters, for instance, are presumed to “benefit from corruption”?<sup>6, 7</sup>.

This doubt is not dispelled when the following types of corruption, by reason of the involved subjects, are ascertained<sup>8</sup>: On the one hand, discussions allude to corruption in the public domain, and on the other, as a second category, corruption in the private sphere is weighed as a corruption in which “only private actors come to play”. Such a sharp distinction between public and private domains fades away when, the first of these two groups –corruption in the public domain– is, in its turn, folded into two sorts of corruption, that is: political corruption perpetrated by the high-ranking public offices, with the usual intervention of private actors! (sic) and the administrative corruption, “in which low or medium rank civil servants are involved”.

All this not only fails to solve the raised doubts on the true nature of this phenomenon, at least in terms of its qualifier (public, private?); moreover, it happens to be the source of other concerns. Let us take a look at this.

It is apparent that the countless episodes of the so-called political corruption have caused citizen’s upheaval, disaffection and anger towards the main political institutions. However, the question arises as to whether the fact of having placed corruption on the public-private axis actually accounts for an incitement, a troublesome lavish source of estrangement just towards the bad ones: politics and politicians.

Allow me answering this issue with a new question: why, in addition to setting corruption within the battle field between common and particular interests, is not also deemed to be positioned in the “strong-weak” axe, that is, the rich and powerful over the weak and vulnerable, regardless of the public or private nature of the participating agents?

For, in any of the criminal forms that corruption may take, in any of them, there is always someone who holds power so to take advantage of it and someone who, as a consequence, is harmed. And this is true disregarding the nature of the damaged resources (public or private), the participant agents’ legal personality (public administration or private enterprise) and the assignment of the agents who are committing offences (that is, performing a public job or a private activity). And, on the other hand, this is true whether these are capital or concomitant offences, medial, resultant ones or others; bribery, be it improper or active; illicit association, fraud or maladministration; property distortion or inside information. In any of these criminal forms, I reiterate, there is a corrupter and a corrupt one and also there is unquestionably someone resulting benefited and someone resulting damaged.

As for the problems ensuing from such a conspicuous fact as “in Spanish law and in most of the European legal systems there are no specific criminal definitions of corruption”<sup>9</sup>, it is safe to say that a second axis or “frame” proposal (the powerful against the weak) does not add nor subtract any kind of difficulty.

If we were to consider corruption at the crossroads of both axis (public-private and powerful-weak), we, citizens, would not only envisage corruption as a “politicians’ issue” nor would we view them as strangers, from the outer space, instead of what they really are: elected people by us and amongst us. And incidentally we would help to increasing citizen participation in caring for the common good (“*res publica*”), of what is of all of us and of nobody in particular, while at the same time, we would encourage people to behave in an exemplary manner, forestalling any kind of involvement in any sort of corrupt practices, no matter how private they may be, and regardless of their quality and quantity.

What is the provenance of that avoidance to utter and broadcast the pivotal principle that political corruption is not conceivable in a healthy society? Is an untainted, virtuous society possible? If not, why “political” is the most usual qualifier of corruption?

In my opinion and to sum up, the phenomenon of corruption would be more acutely enlightened by placing it at the crossroads of both axis, rather than going about it on a one-dimension basis. Another way to collaborate to this end is by looking straight forward at the vicious circle in which one feels sometimes to be trapped: is corruption the cause of our most apparent evils, or on the contrary, is it a symptom of our deep-rooted problems?

Authors are touching a raw nerve when they make out that “the endeavour of detecting whether the causal arrow goes from corruption to the negative effect or the opposite way is complicated”. Despite of this, the book includes a great deal of mentions to corruption as origin of our evils<sup>11, 12, 13, 14</sup>, what leads us to believe that, although the difficulty to ascertain “cause-effect” relationships is quite acknowledged, corruption is nevertheless largely envisaged as a fundamental problem.

Is corruption the cause of our most apparent evils or, on the contrary, is it a symptom of our deep-rooted problems?

Furthermore, the authors assume, as a general trend in the book, that “individuals respond to surrounding incentives and therefore the mushrooming of corruption is favoured or restrained depending on the institutional environment in which they perform their activities”<sup>15</sup>. This renders

imperative the analysis so to pinpoint which areas of the individual’s environment are the ones fuelling the fire of corruption.

This is surely how, in the midst of this sort of vicious circle (corruption deteriorates institutions – we should look into the institutions fostering corruption), readers can certainly feel trapped, not knowing exactly where is the exit of such conundrum.

Problem-symptom, means-ends, cause-effect, motivations-objectives, are all pairs sited at the heart of a great number of debates of all kinds, condition and time. And no, allow me to add, this is no minor point. It is not, not only with respect to the current matter (corruption, symptom or problem?) but neither, for instance, regarding a topical and transcendental issue such as economic inequality (is it a question of redistribution or *pre-distribution*<sup>16</sup>?). Because, among other reasons, embracing one or another point of view (origin or consequence) will determine to a great extent the type of strategy and measures to be undertaken.

Yet strategies and measures are also defined and undertaken respectively according to the collected data about the situation, what is conducive to the third and last of the selected questions in order to illustrate the doubts that encloses the concept of corruption in many different ways: how should we measure this extremely complex, multi-faceted phenomenon named corruption?

The book puts forward a strong empirical foundation on the situation in Spain, and what is most interesting and important, it provides with a great many analysis of “comparative anatomy” between the state of affairs in our country and that of other countries from all five continents. It is a priceless contribution to leave behind the annoying and frequently used by politicians and business leaders catch phrase, calling upon to “our neighbouring countries” so as to pay lip service to their arguments since no evidence is provided.

Nevertheless, the amassed subject of study reality data is, in fact, a set of answers to questions through which researchers attempt to comprehend reality. Thereby, citizens

are asked, for instance, about the “voting popularity of mayors” but not about the basic beliefs typifying the daily work in a city hall, although this could be perfectly asked in these or similar terms: “Do you think that focus on continuous improvement in work proceedings and processes takes part in the organizational culture of your town hall?”

In the initial chapter of the work, entitled “Where do we come from and where are we going to in terms of corruption”, a loop is devised in which everything is trapped, exemplifying all what has been said until here: assuming that corruption is “the abuse of entrusted or public power for private gain”, gives rise to maintaining that “corruption is inherent to public policy (*res publica*)”

The parable of an ictiologist who explored the ocean with a 2 inches’ mesh netting is attributed to Sir Arthur Eddington, renowned British astrophysicist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Based on his catch, the ocean researcher came to the conclusion that there are no fishes of inferior size than those 2 inches. This is quite the feeling that readers could get from a conceptualization of corruption grounded on some empirical data that, such as the propounded ones, are inevitably conditioned by how reality is dissected.

Therefore, I believe we should read the suggested listed measures taking this mentioned precaution. A menu of proposals that of course I esteem by all means of incalculable value in itself. And especially if we compare it with the current hasty recipes, blooming everywhere and in all directions. All and each one of those measures presented by the authors of this collective work spark the imagination and encourage us to think up how to improve them. To this end, the second part of this review discloses some criticisms and suggestions about them: How to combat corruption?

**A**uthors, as I already mentioned at the beginning of the text, have “striven for drawing the cornerstones of a comprehensive strategy for the battle against corruption, by going through the existing comparative studies from different angles: public administration in general, local administration in particular, financing of political parties, transparency, punishing measures, mass media and voting system”<sup>17</sup>.

Yet, such strategy, albeit comprehensive, overarching and global, is –in my view– a superficial and shallow strategy. Since breadth and depth are indeed two different dimensions.

Thanks to the conducted empirical studies, we currently have a rough notion about how corruption is perceived, accepted and experienced by citizens of different countries<sup>18</sup>. But how does corruption originate? Where are the ultimate reasons shedding light on corrupt behaviours? I insist: whose basic dysfunctions is corruption a symptom? In this collective work coordinated by Víctor Lapuente, the target to beat is the problem of corruption. But the place where authors look for the ultimate origin of corruption is the surface of actors, both corrupters and corrupt ones. And the fact of not daring to go further and deeper is what leaves that sense of superficial print, which is traceable in several passages of the book.

About individuals, it is argued that they “respond to the surrounding incentives” and about the organizational culture, it is defined as “the set of rules moderating the members’ behaviour of an institution”<sup>19</sup>. To my understanding, this implies to forgo the pursuit of more substantial, in-depth explanations, with regards to both individuals and institutions.

For individuals are far more than agents driven by incentives. Individuals act and behave guided by a set of motivations, from external to intrinsic ones, without forgetting the transcendental ones<sup>20</sup>, just to mention one of the numberless theories developed on human behaviour within formal organizations. And also, because his/her dishonest behaviour in his/her own profit (self-serving dishonesty), causing as a result a damaged third, is not continual but variable depending upon the opportunities<sup>21</sup>. Thus, in essence, the image or idea the reader may create of a person as corrupt is outstandingly simple. Something closely akin to an intangible bystander, only keeping a watchful eye to money or to power or favours, always reacting in the same vein, regardless of the time variable, similarly at the beginning and at the equator of his/her career, whatever may be the set of his/her motivational variables, his/her personality profile or his/her character traits.

And as to the institutional issues tackled by the book as explanation to corruption (rules, regulations, behaviours, organizational structures, plans, work processes, strategies, goals, activities, etc.) they are nothing but “superficial expressions” of what the organizational theory regards as the real linchpin of any organizational culture<sup>22</sup>, that is, that ensemble of basic presumptions from which, in Edgar Schein’s own words, “stem declared and adopted artefacts and values”, some of them having been swiftly mentioned above into brackets.

Much like individuals are not only driven by incentives, nor are institutions only governed by norms, structures or strategies.

Just because the set of individuals’ motivations (over and above “the incentives”) as well as their character and personality are hard to quantify does not necessarily mean that none of them exist nor that they have no decisive influence on human behaviour.

Likewise, the difficulty related to assessing (owing to the invisibility and pre-conscience of such endeavour) the deepest level of the organizational culture of institutions (basic beliefs and not only “rules”) does not justify its absence when devising and fine-tuning measures against corrupt behaviours.

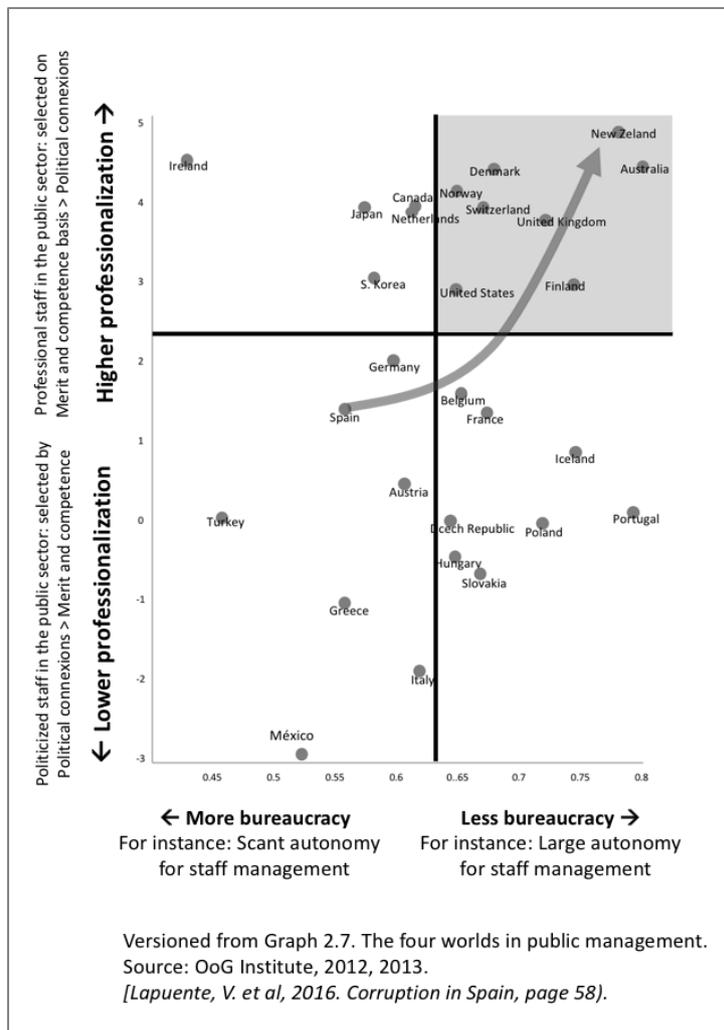
The comprehensive strategy is one of the major and most precious contributions of this book. My proposal in terms of how to improve it consists, ultimately, in gaining greater depth in these two fronts. Elusive as these two ventures may seem, there are ways to grapple with them.

The comprehensive and concurrently superficial strategy has left its imprint throughout several passages of the collective work: from financing of political parties<sup>23</sup> through transparency (envisaged from the rear-view mirror) to the preventive (deterrent to a

certain point) character of the proposed measures, or (moderate) modernization of public management. I suggest to take a close look at this and other connected issues.

From the “public management” stance, the book brings forward well aimed nods to what can be named, by contrast, “private management”, on which several reflections are to be emphasized.

Administration, regarded as social science, explores human organizations, and considered as set of techniques, facilitates efficient and effective resources management for goods manufacturing and services provision. And this is true irrespective of the institutional architecture that draws a distinction between organizations, in other words, regardless of the vision, mission, values and goals each one may pursue. Unless otherwise agreed, the crossbreeding of knowledge, wisdoms and techniques between the public and private spheres could and should go, in my view, far beyond than what the book advocates, not only for the Public Administration domain (chapter 2) but also for the Local Administration one (chapter 3).



As for the first one of those, it is reasoned that “in order to combat corruption and to pursue good governance, we should change tack and, on the one hand, provide our Administration with more professionalism (“keeping apart politicians from civil servants in their careers”, that is to say, admitting less politicians in public office), and on the other, bring in a boosted flexibility, or if you will, a reduced bureaucratization, by increasing the degree of the staffing management autonomy, as is the case with New Zealand<sup>24</sup>.

In my view, such approach is as optimal as illustrative is the outstanding Graphic 2.7 “The four worlds of public management”<sup>25</sup> representing a very educational summary of the proposal. However, it is worth wondering how this

graphic would have resulted had the x-axis not only represented the delegation degree in human resources management but also appraised, for instance, the existence or

absence of Quality Circles in Administrations of the evaluated different countries, or the practice of any other of many habits, customs and conventions, daily coined and used in the private management area.

Bridging the divide between these two worlds strikes me undeniably as an imperative and urgent task. For the private practice has a need for categories from political and social sciences, just as the latter has a need for practices and concepts developed in the private organizations domain (both for and non-profit). The same could be rightly claimed when stepping down a rung so as to go down from Public Administration to the chapter devoted to corruption and local administrations. Here too, all those pointed issues can be easily tracked down.

The analysis and classification that are introduced in “Other sorts of municipal administrators/agents”<sup>26</sup>, namely, strong mayor, council manager and committee leader are, by all means, remarkable. But the closing political conclusion of the chapter does not rise above the mere surface. For the “fundamental frame of reference so as to understand why corruption *could* take place (at the time of the real-estate bubble)” entails the following angles: 1. Monocracy (local governance ruled by one single party), 2. Lack of check and balances, and 3. Lack of uncoupling of incentives between elected officials and technical staff. Issues in overall that, albeit true, solid and decisive, belong to what Schein calls “artefacts” in the organizational culture of town halls (as formal institutions) as well as the comprised territories, physical and cultural spaces. And as far as private agents are concerned, they are caricaturized as the ones in charge of putting the money on (or under) the table since “they were predisposed or inclined to get corrupted”.

Having been the erstwhile President W. Wilson or the philosopher Max Weber the first ones to “uphold what is anathema for many: the separation between the political and administrative spheres”, now is the right time to overcome another gap: the one detaching the business organizational underlying cause and the political-administrative thinking and practice.

The book does not echo the necessity for both worlds to intermingling with each other, two logics that should set aside their traditional mutual distrust in their interactions. An environment of suspicion, if not resentment, that is palpable not only in the university arena but also in the campus’ outdoors. For it is evident the prevailing distrust between professors of Faculties and schools, as well as between private sector professionals and those devoted to political action and public office.

Overcoming such environment of mutual mistrust, by means of building longing bridges between those two banks, excluding their natural differences in their respective visions and missions (public service and profit-oriented), is an endeavour that should be undertaken regardless of whether other more advanced countries are also or not engaged on dealing with it.

Because regarding organizational modernization of public administrations –from the political pinnacle to the civil service baseline–, in order to make a U-turn and lead Spain

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towards the quadrant where countries such as Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland or Finland are placed, we should, at the very least, avoid two hurdles: 1. Ignoring those countries who are in the lead, way ahead of us, and 2. Dampening our aspirations by only finding inspiration in them. The

book wins giftedly over the first one<sup>27</sup>, but fails resoundingly to outdo the second.

In section “Corruption: from combat to prevention” advocating for the need to bear in mind achieved improvements in other countries, a firm commitment is declared in favour of the “same philosophy as in medicine: prevention is better than cure”. Against this background, I find missing some genuine preventive measures, in particular, two.

I place the first one standing at the threshold of institutions, both public and private ones. It is about staff selection processes. The authors of the previously quoted work<sup>21</sup> on how human brain adapts to dishonest actions for its own benefit, conclude that their scientific findings “may have implications for policy makers in designing deterrents to halt deceit”. For in order to apply for a job, not only knowledge, but also other issues – as much or more important ones– should be acknowledged, taken into account and held in high regard<sup>28</sup>. How does it happen that, while corruption remains one of our most worrying issues, when it comes to deciding recruitment within an organization, little or none attention is paid to this matter?

As for the second measure, I place it not at the threshold but at the very inside of institutions. For corruption envisioned as symptom is, among other things, a fallout of organizational malpractices, those being –as I have been repeatedly stressing - tokens of the basic presumptions located at the core itself of the organizational culture. In order to get the grips with corruption at its root, it is critical to set foot in the decision-making level that is prior to actions, namely, where the potential offender prepares his/her crime. And once there, to apply the ABC of administration principles and techniques, ranging from collaborative itemizing of targets and objectives, to the agreed assignment of activities to be performed, going through the setting of quantitative and qualitative indicators, that will allow and ensure the monitoring and control of the suggested plans. Again, this is the ABC; something that seems like coming from a different world since it is not habitually practiced in our world. They are, after all, fundamental principles so as to, on the one hand, manage effectively and efficiently resources and achieve the set goals, and on the other, to turn words into action in terms of the ongoing modernization of institutions.

Both measures (improvement of staff selection processes, in particular, and bettering of participation and decision making processes, in general) are substantially preventive, since they grapple with corruption at its roots by considering it (in this case) as a symptom of organizational dysfunctions, and overall of cultural ones. Along with them, I wholeheartedly endorse the preventive philosophy of the book. A collective work positioned at the exact opposite of those who focus on “fever instead of infection”, and

hence prescribe analgesics instead of antibiotics, confining themselves to catching the culprits without any prospect of fighting the battle at the offices where those are forged<sup>29</sup>.

As the title itself reveals, “Transparency and corruption prevention”, chapter 6 follows the same path –prevention is better than cure- and therefore, it grants transparency a corresponding “instrumental nature”<sup>30</sup>, in words of professor Jiménez Asensio.

The call for a “transparency culture”<sup>31</sup>, the unbiased briefing (both positive and to be improved items) on legal regulation as well as on the Transparency Portal<sup>32</sup>, together with the outlined empirical results<sup>33</sup> are some of the clear successes enclosed in this chapter. Yet, moving further, the usual and shared concept of transparency that echoes this collective work deserves, I believe, the following unfavourable remark.

Transparency should have been introduced within its context, conditions or limitations since, by not doing it, it is hard for the reader to imagine it upright or in standing position. Much like the kite remaining up in the air thanks to –and not in spite of– the thread that holds it to ground, so is the concept of limitless transparency, that ends up tumbling down, since such limitless nature is neither possible, nor credible or desirable.

Besides, transparency as antidote to corruption is neither the best remedy<sup>34</sup> nor a help on solving problems arising from its conceptualization, given the fact that this chapter plainly embraces the notion of a unidimensional corruption, exclusively placed at the public-private axis.

The concept and practice of transparency vindicated in this book only takes into account half of the problem, one of the two faces of god Janus: the one that is solely looking at accomplished facts or on their way to be committed. This raises the unavoidable question: where is the transparency of intentions, of the ongoing improvement plans, of public commitment to innovate and enhance institutions permanently? In a nutshell, where is the future? Transparency is required, but when confined to satisfying citizens’ curiosity or to embarrassing institutions for what they do or they did in the dark, then and paradoxically transparency conceals the root of problems<sup>35</sup>.

When society blatantly deviates from the balance zone, future becomes highly unpredictable. And as true is such uncertainty as is this other truth: future is the fruits of our actions and, in turn, our actions are the fruits of our purposes. Why do we hide them? Why don’t we make them public? Why don’t we commit ourselves to systematically and periodically reveal our intentions and purposes for betterment of our institutions, to explain the areas and the extent of what we aim to achieve?

Some features stand out in the transparency discourse, and in particular, in the one referred to political parties’ transparency<sup>36</sup>, features that I deem relevant so to be mentioned. In short, we are facing a primarily normativist and auditing discourse.

Normativism or the far-fetched tendency to set rules and regulations is the ubiquitous and inescapable spirit permeating the entire discourse of transparency. Expressions

such as “to ban donations/gifts, to typify crimes or offences, to publish mandatorily or to control severely”, instead of to ensure a more transparent future, cast down our hopes and prospects of transparency. Because, I would like to bring to the fore once again, although rules, laws, regulations are imperative and indispensable, in the absence of measures stemming from the underlying culture of institutions, they are nothing but bread for today, hunger for tomorrow. For, as authors themselves exhort us, “a taintless regulation from the technical standpoint does not secure the adjustment of parties and donors’ real behaviour to principles of an ethic financing policy. Whatever the applicable law may be, parties and donors can always find alternative channels so to bypass it with complete disregard”<sup>37, 38</sup>.

Likewise, it is noticeable the emphasis on measures that extensively reckon on the existence of external authorities to organizations whose behaviour is subject to control. External authorities which are holding different level of formalization, from regulatory agencies to initiatives derived from civil society. These external authorities are devoted to auditing the behaviour of institutions, either upon legal mandate, such as the Audit Court, or on their own decision, as is the case, for example, of Transparency International. The first ones evaluate outcomes, mainly economical, having been published by organizations, while the second ones carry out research, interviews, opinion polls and surveys so as to find out the opinion that organizations have about themselves on different topics. They both apply canons, guidelines and standards, either official or internally developed ones, and depending on the correlation between such standards and the data provided or obtained by the audited organizations, these latter will turn up more or less favoured in the resulting photograph.

Transparency is only confined to past and current issues, not future matters, and it is performed according to a normativist and auditing stance.

All this is required; yet, only this, without further action, is just a mechanism that ends up overriding, or at least, not encouraging the “vital spur” to organizations so as to ensure, sovereignly, on their own initiative, the voluntary and unfaltering commitment towards citizens to unabatedly evolve and steadily

improve<sup>39</sup>. Having all this in mind, it is worth pondering if prevailing assessments on, for instance, the level of transparency or electoral pledges against corruption<sup>40</sup> are something more than a mere prescription so as to thwart changes in the organizational culture of the concerned institutions.

In sum, this is a chiefly normativist and auditing line of thinking based upon two pillars that, in turn, deserve to be -even if only briefly- mentioned, because, albeit self-evident, they are of no lesser importance. I refer to credibility of auditing authorities and the “massive will of citizens” on these issues. Whoever audits transparency must be unrelentingly transparent and self-critical to the point of exhaustion<sup>41</sup>, must lead by example and show interest in and inquire on the opinion that organizations subject to its monitoring may have about its working methods and processes. And all this while

bearing in mind that its initiatives should be also underpinned by public opinion<sup>42,43</sup>, but not exclusively.

In all this, mass media play a vital and pivotal role. This is obvious but not as much as it could be inferred from the chief force-idea, essentially described in chapters 7 and 8, namely: the greater the quantity of information that media address to citizens is, the better the latter will assess (that is, they will reward or punish) the parties on grounds of their negligible or highly corrupt practices. For simply accepting this cause-effect relationship implies muddling up information (provided by media) and education, ultimately culture, serving citizens to interpret it<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, it is worth recalling at this point that there is no shortage of information. Actually, not only on the internet, but also in the physical world, we are increasingly in need of assistance of information experts acting as “Sherpas, making us available the preselection, analysis and interpretation guidelines against the overwhelming, unceasing information avalanche that is flooding us”<sup>45</sup>.

The closing remarks<sup>46</sup> at the end of the chapter entitled “Politics, money and corruption” gives me a good opportunity for summarizing all said until here in the following terms. To a greater or lesser extent, the collected points by the authors indicate a transparency of facts, primarily in economic terms, rather than a transparency of future plans with regard to an ongoing institutional innovation; they refer more to supervision measures from external agents rather than voluntary initiatives on public commitment; they speak too much about sanctions or punishment of perpetrated crimes and too little about how to thwart them at source, and all this eventually shrouded by a rather normativist spirit instead of one entrenched in a painstaking dissection of the wide assortment of human motivations as well as the organizational culture of our institutions. An approach, in sum, likely to lead us to presume or conclude that such hegemonic line of thinking on transparency may well be pandering to the status quo maintenance.

Spain is a country that, in its process to leave our time of transition behind, is genuinely striving to develop and consolidate its institutions and democratic practices. This is our current challenge: how to make progress through the path towards the club of countries with ‘old democratic and quite well founded governments’<sup>47</sup> not as an end, but as a means to continue pursuing the ultimate aim, which is no other than a greater social equality. What is the role played by political institutions in this challenge? And by bureaucratic institutions? How does the phenomenon of corruption impinge on both domains?

The collective work, whose review is nearing to completion, sets forth valuable proposals for both spheres, as a result of a comprehensive, intelligent, yet shallow strategy. The recommendations that I have dared to bring forward are mainly intended to the bureaucratic machinery, knowing for a fact that, as authors wisely recollect, “there is no word in the political dictionary less sultry than bureaucracy. Just naming it bores everyone to death”.

In any event, I believe that countries founder due to, not only, and even not mainly, the failure of their political institutions, but also and chiefly, owing to the failure of their

bureaucratic institutions<sup>48</sup>. Such opinion, that enjoys the growing support from academics as well as from women and men of action<sup>49, 50</sup>, and that I reckon in line with the authors of *Corruption in Spain*, should not remain as empty phrases.

The proposals included in this book are actually an excellent plan of action. And I overtly support them, while at the same time I highlight the need for refraining ourselves from our old and proverbial evils: as a case in point, entrusting everything to inaugurations, wiping the slate clean, starting all over from scratch. For it is far better to enduringly improve the intelligence of our bureaucratic systems, rather than to dedicate ourselves to devising new radical systems, however intelligent these might be. We know how and what for to take action. And also, why: for all that, because “reality is largely ruled by the fundamental principle of imperfection”<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Lapuente, V. (coord.), 2016. *La corrupción en España. Un paseo por el lado oscuro de la democracia y el gobierno* (Corruption in Spain. A stroll through the dark side of democracy and government). Alianza Editorial, Madrid, page. 16. <http://amzn.to/2e8rjlo>.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., page 111, “The EU report on corruption outlines corruption as “abuse of power in order to obtain private gains”.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., page 115, “Corruption consists in the denaturalization of institutional aims in order to serve individuals’ particular interests (...) a pathological way to fulfil public service powers”.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., page 148, “use of public office for private benefit”

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., page 108.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., page 168, “tolerance of this sort of scandals at the ballot boxes (could possibly) occur because citizens have a liking for them or at the very least they don’t mind much about politicians’ corruption, (...) especially when it comes to situations in which corruption gives rise, at least in the short run, to benefits not only for the politician but also for a share of voters”.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., page 193, “...in those cases in which citizens could somehow benefit from corrupt practices, mayors suffered no voting punishment”.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., page 115 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., page 108.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit., page 16.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit., page 15 “Corruption acts as a cancer that hampers the well-functioning of institutions”.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., page 16, “Corruption tarnishes public institutions in many ways”.

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., graph 1.1, page 17, “Pernicious results tied to corruption”: Bad economy; Social problems; Poorer health; Unhappiness and discontent”.

<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., graph 1.10, page 34, “In your eyes, what is the chief problem currently prevailing in Spain?”

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., page 62.

<sup>16</sup> Estefanía, J., 2016. *Henceforth, what is to be done*. “Pre-distribution is the set of policies that, rather than focusing on mitigating inequality, strives for producing less inequality in advance: it is about how to tackle the underlying causes of individual inequity and not only to intend to curb its consequences”. *El País*, Monday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2oLATET>

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit., pages 201-203.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit., page 26-32.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., page 204.

<sup>20</sup> Pérez López, J.A., 1985, Human motivations, IESE. Technical note FHN-161. Last ed. Feb 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Garret, N. et al, 2016, pages 1727-1735, *The brain adapts to dishonesty*. *Nature Neuroscience*, Vol 19, Number 12, December 2016. Online: October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 <http://go.nature.com/2o3EDmi>. Research work, resulted from a collaborative effort between the Department of Experimental Psychology of UCL (University College of London) and the Fukua School of Business (Duke University, NC, USA) whose motto is *Rethinking the boundaries of business school*.

<sup>22</sup> Schein, E.H, 1986, *Organizational culture and leadership*. Jossey-Bass <http://bit.ly/18xwWYC>, San Francisco. Edition in Spanish: Plaza y Janés <http://bit.ly/2pgmqSE>. First edition, January 1988, Barcelona. "I shall term "culture" to a basic assumptions model –invented, discovered, or developed ones by a given group as they learn how to confront their problems of external adaptation and internal integration-, that have brought to bear enough influence so as to be considered as valid ones, and consequently, to be taught to the new members as the right way to perceive, think and feel those problems" (pages 25-26; in the original edition, pages 8-9). The interested reader in graphic depiction of such definition may find of particular value the "Illustration 1. Levels of culture and their interaction": Level 1, artefacts and creations; Level 2, Values; Level 3, underlying basic assumptions (page 30; page 14 in its original edition)

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., page 94. "the conscience parties might have developed" is the only reference made to organizational culture of political parties.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., pages 57-58. In this country, there are no public employees with an equivalent civil servant status to the Spanish one, most of them being "mostly workforce and subject to the same safeguards and uncertainties than their private sector counterparts".

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., page 58.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., page 66 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit., page 202, "Only by comparing ourselves with those countries (with a virtually negligible corruption), we can understand the nature of our corruption problem and how to get to grips with it".

<sup>28</sup> López-Medel, J., 2017. Critical reflection on judges' selection process. Spanish Lawyers Web, January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2pCf2y3>.

<sup>29</sup> Gómez-Pallete, F., 2015. A vindication for political action. Prologue of Víctor Sampedro. Epilogue of José Luis González Quirós. Ed. Association for the Democratic Quality and Culture. Charleston, SC, USA. <http://amzn.to/2oOMgdy>.

<sup>30</sup> Jiménez Asensio, R. 2016, *Introduction: Integrity and transparency, imperatives of a good governance*. Blog The institutional outlook, August 2016 <http://bit.ly/2pCe9W7>.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit., page 149. "Citizens education becomes central when it comes to the culture of transparency, so they can learn from childhood to adequately value the importance of transparency and how perverse, not just negative, corruption is".

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit., page 154-157.

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., Table 6.1. Evaluation of the transparency level of political parties (page 159) and Table 6.2 Evaluation of the electoral commitment level against corruption (summary) (page 160).

<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., "Transparency is the best antidote against corruption", page 148. Apart from the fact that the proverbial alert "my subject is the most important one of the degree"- hardly ever comes as a good teaching statement, predicating it as such is barely reconcilable with a comprehensive strategy, as is indeed the case of the strategy characterizing the entire work.

<sup>35</sup> Association for the Democratic Quality and Culture, 2013. "Quality, rightly understood (4). Blog of the Association, August 23<sup>rd</sup> <http://bit.ly/1aikttP>.

<sup>36</sup> Op. cit., page 157-163.

<sup>37</sup> Op. cit., page 104.

<sup>38</sup> Op. cit., page 203. "Corrupt entrepreneurs, both from the private and public sector, swiftly adapt to new game rules".

<sup>39</sup> BBC Corporate Press Office Release. Headline: "*BBC launches an ambitious new diversity and inclusion strategy*". The content of the note reveals why, how and what for the BBC, the United Kingdom public radio, television and internet service, has voluntarily and publicly committed to improve the presence (within the overall staff, leadership positions and amongst radio and television hosts) of different collectives and social groups (women, handicapped, black and Asiatic people, and LGTB) to which degree (%), and according to which deadlines (2017 and 2018 goals). This is probably one of the best and most recent cases of institutional improvement in the bureaucratic sphere of a public body. A case however that has gone practically ignored in Spain. BBC.com, Media Centre, Latest News, Last updated: April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016. <http://bbc.in/1UiLQaJ>. Last query on Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 12:29.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit., Tables 6.1. and 6.2., page 159-160.

<sup>41</sup> Sabadell City Council has been even awarded on two occasions for its "transparency". ABC, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012 <http://bit.ly/1vIODsf>.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit., page 161

<sup>43</sup> Lizcano Álvarez, J., 2017. *Pending issues on corruption*. "Parties are blatantly ignoring the undisputable people determination to have them devoted to combat abusive behaviours on a consensual basis". El País, Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017 <http://bit.ly/2jp6Z4u>.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit., page 185, *Information on corruption matters to voting results*. Out of the six factors weighing for a corruption scandal to have an electoral impact, only the first one of them is related to the information availability: (i) that citizens have full knowledge of facts, (ii) that citizens negatively assess those facts, (iii) that citizens are able to assign responsibilities, (iv) that they perceive scandal as something of utmost importance, (v) that they envisage an alternative and (vi) that their attitudes and behavior are coherent.

<sup>45</sup> Amiguet, L., 2017. Interview to Moisés Naïm. Back cover. La Vanguardia, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 <http://bit.ly/2jMdRrU>.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit., pages 102-104.

<sup>47</sup> Dahl, R.A., 2012. *On Democracy*. Prologue of Fernando Vallespín. Planeta, Barcelona. Page 2. <http://bit.ly/2pCgrob>.

<sup>48</sup> Jiménez, D., 2015. The ingenuous (and pending) revolution of politics. Noticias Positivas, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. Interview replicated in the blog "The 4<sup>th</sup> power in the net", Publico.es, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

<http://bit.ly/2osjFbX>.

<sup>49</sup> Innerarity, D., 2017. *Outlasting bad governing class*. El País, Wednesday January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017 <http://bit.ly/2iAS3Ad>.

<sup>50</sup> Jiménez Asensio, R. 2016. *The curbs of power*. Marcial Pons. Madrid <http://bit.ly/2aXSFAO>.

<sup>51</sup> Gomá, J. 2016. "Utopia" let justice be rendered, let the world cave in. ABC cultural supplement, November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016 <http://bit.ly/2gBPwnJ>.