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Crime

& Culture

Crime as a Cultural Problem

The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention. A Comparative Cultural Study in the EU-Accession States Bulgaria and Romania, the EU-Candidate States Turkey and Croatia and the EU-States Germany, Greece and United Kingdom

Alexander Stulhofer, Kresimir Kufrin, Ognjen Caldarovic,
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**Corruption as a Cultural Phenomenon:
Expert Perceptions in Croatia**



Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission
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SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION



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1. Introduction

This paper emerged as a result of the authors' work on the project *Crime as a Cultural Problem: The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention*, which was simultaneously conducted in Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, Germany, Greece, and the United Kingdom. The aim of this cross-national research was to provide a comparative study of culture-specific perceptions of corruption and to explore corruption as a cultural phenomenon, rather than only a socioeconomic, political or legislative one.

In the last 12 months, the Croatian media reported a number of major corruption scandals in which political dignitaries and high-ranking state officials were implicated. Many more were alleged and discussed on local levels.¹ Although Croatia has somewhat improved its ranking on the Transparency International *Corruption Perception Index* in 2007², the European Commission repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with the current state of the affairs regarding fighting corruption in Croatia.³ In December 2007 the European Commission announced that the Chapter 23 on judiciary and fundamental rights would not be opened for the EU accession negotiations with Croatia until the national anti-corruption program is substantially revised.⁴

In this paper we aim to *re-construct the dominant expert language(s) of corruption* (Shore & Haller, 2005.) using data collected in interviews with high-positioned representatives of the six target groups (the media, legal system, the police, politics, economy, and civil sector). The paper is divided into three main sections. The first deals with methodological issues and presents the Grounded Theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990.) to studying the perception of corruption, as applied in this cross-national research study. The second part presents our findings regarding expert definitions of corruption, assessments of its seriousness and dynamics, identification of the most affected areas, etc. Finally, the third part of the paper discusses the findings and introduces several ideal-type models of understanding corruption that facilitate a systematic assessment of the dominant expert perceptions.

¹ In the second half of 2007 USKOK (the State Attorney's Office for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime) continued its high-profile activity with four spectacular anti-corruption cases.

² The present index value (4.1) positions Croatia close to the bottom of the European states (<http://www.transparency.hr/index.php?id=171>).

³ On September 21, 2007 the European Commission mailed an official proposal to the member states, which warned Croatia that it needs to implement tougher anti-corruption measures, carry out a thorough reform of the legal system (judiciary), and improve its record on the rights of national minorities and refugees.

⁴ See *business.hr*: <http://business.hr/Default2.aspx?ArticleID=b94a938b-9131-46e7-ac9d-b5fe0a305f3b&open=sec> (10/01/08).



2. Methodology

2.1 General Outline of the Research Methodology

Public opinion research on corruption conducted in Croatia has provided some general but fragmentary insights into public sentiments, feelings and attitudes regarding corruption. Although the opinion polls offered some insight into the perceived dynamics of corruption, detected groups that are perceived to be especially prone to corruption, and provided some indication about the levels of petty corruption, some important questions remain unaddressed:

- Why are some types of behavior (but not others) perceived as corrupt?
- Is there any change in the social context of understanding corruption?
- Is there a general, common, socially agreed upon definition of corruption or do different social groups promote specific (and often conflicting) definitions?
- How are various patterns of understanding corruption embedded in societal and group norms and values?
- Is a success in combating corruption dependent on building a common perspective of corruption? Etc.

It could be argued that answers to such questions are, to a significant extent, out of the reach of public opinion polls and other similar quantitative approaches, because they are mainly focused on testing some pre-established ideas and hypotheses, which may be blind to some (unexpected!) aspects of the phenomenon under study. For this reasons, this project – interested primarily in discovering various patterns of perceiving corruption among the most influential social actors – has adopted a qualitative research agenda.

The general methodological outline of the project is based upon the main canons of the Grounded Theory Methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), such as: theoretical sampling; interrelatedness of data collection and analysis; development of concepts that become basic units of analysis; development of categories through the comparison that establishes similarities and differences among concepts; development and verification of the hypotheses regarding the relationship among categories; consideration of the broader structural conditions relevant to the analyzed phenomenon; and development of the theory through the above mentioned procedures.

Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) is a highly developed and satisfactorily verified approach suitable for the analysis of "cultural artefacts". It was expected that the TM would



enable the discovery and description of various patterns of corruption perception and help in analyzing their consequences on the existing anti-corruption measures.

Although all senior researchers in the project team had qualitative research experience, none had previously utilized GTM.⁵ Therefore, the preparations for the study included: (a) extensive study of the "classical" GTM literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as well as the more recent GT approaches (Stern, 1980; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Pandit, 1996; 1995, Kelle, 1997); (b) a review of the examples of the GT research applied to various social problems (Blase, 1982; Kylmä et al., 2001; Ricketts & Macaskill, 2004); and (c) training in the ATLAS.ti software use⁶.

2.2 Materials and Procedures

Two types of research materials were collected during various stages of the project. In the first phase, the materials collected during the March-May 2006 period included various documents related to two case studies⁷. Wide range of documents were collected, including newspaper articles, the parliamentary and a municipal assembly proceedings, strategic analyses, annual reports of various state offices, the text of the new National Anti-Corruption Program, public speeches made by the PM, Minister of Justice and the leader of the largest labour union, NGO publications and reports, etc. In the second phase of the project, which this article reports on, empirical data had been acquired through semi-structured interviews with the representatives of the following target groups: police, economy, legal system, politics, the media, and civic sector (Table 1).

Selection of interviewees was based on two main criteria: (1) high position within institutional hierarchy, and (2) professional experience with combating corruption. Sixteen individuals have been interviewed in the period between December 2006 and April 2007. Prior to interviews, all the interviewees have been personally contacted by the national project coordinator and given necessary information about the project and the forthcoming interview. All the interviewed persons have agreed to electronic recording of the interview.

⁵ We are not aware that GTM has been applied in social science research in Croatia.

⁶ ATLAS.ti is one of the software packages suitable for GTM.

⁷ In the first phase, the project design required two case studies to be selected, one representing low-level corruption and the other high-level corruption. The following case studies were selected for the analysis: (a) financial issues related to the last presidential campaign and (b) a case of corruption in homes for the elderly in the city of Zagreb.

Table 1: The Sample

Target group	Interviewed person was a representative of:
<i>Police</i>	Ministry of Interior
	City of Zagreb police
<i>Economy</i>	The largest Croatian labour union
	Business (a medium-size company)
	Croatian Chamber of Commerce
<i>Legal System</i>	Ministry of Justice
	State Attorney's Office for Combating Corruption
	Ombudsman's Office
<i>Politics</i>	The ruling party (high-positioned member and MP)
	The strongest opposition party (high-positioned member and MP)
	Local government (City of Zagreb; high-positioned official)
<i>Media</i>	The largest state radio
	National weekly with the highest circulation
	Croatian Journalists' Association
<i>Civic Sector</i>	Transparency International
	The Partnership for Social Development

The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that most of the topics to be discussed were pre-determined. Some of the topics were related to the main axes of the ideal-type models of corruption that have emerged in the first phase of the project (Štulhofer et al., 2007). Some others were introduced with the idea of extending the models with new elements that were not present in the data analyzed in the first stage. Finally, a number of topics had no clear and immediate relevance for the models, but were judged important regarding the project subject and related policy issues. The following topics were included in the interview:

- Interviewee's personal definition of corruption;
- Assessment of corruption in Croatia (significance, extent, types, dynamics);
- Assessment of the new national anti-corruption strategy;
- The role of the EU in combating corruption in Croatia;
- The role of NGOs/civil society in combating corruption;



- Treatment of corruption in the media;
- Assessment of the public perception of corruption;
- The role of cultural/political heritage in the dynamics of corruption;
- Description of the dominant understanding of corruption in the interviewee's profession/institution/professional environment;
- Existing anti-corruption mechanisms in the interviewee's institution/organization.

Although the interviews were aided by an interview protocol in which the above mentioned topics were further elaborated, the protocol was intended mainly as a checklist. Interviewers were instructed to follow interviewee's line of argumentation and to adjust the formulation of questions to the situation and/or the interviewed person.⁸ Also, they had to be responsive to any relevant topics that could emerge during the conversation.

Before the interview, interviewees were given a two-page description of the project, as well as the written statement of anonymity and confidentiality of data collection and use. It was clearly stated that the collected data will not be publicly available in a form that could reveal interviewee's identity.

The interviewed person was reminded that they should express their personal impressions, assessments and opinions, and not those of their institution/organization. It was explicitly emphasized that the interviewee is not considered to be a representative of their institution, and that their words would not be taken as institutional opinion. However, interviewers have noted that not all of the persons interviewed have been fully able to discard their "institutional role". Some of them remained very conscious of the interests and general position of the institution they belong to.

The duration of the interviews was between 22 and 84 minutes, 40 minutes on average. All the interviews were conducted in interviewee's office, except the two that were carried out in a cafeteria and interviewee's home, respectively. In only one case a third person was present during the final part of the interview (the respondent's spouse joined in at the final stage of the interview). All the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible, in most cases by the

⁸ All authors of this paper served as interviewers.



interviewer. Full transcript of every interview was made to ensure that no relevant information would be left out in the analysis

2.3 Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were raw data for the analysis performed with the ATLAS.ti software package. For the initial coding, every interview was treated as a separate hermeneutic unit. First-level analysis of the documents was performed using open coding, and carried out by the interviewer together with another team member. Such a coding procedure was established to improve the validity of the applied codes, since all the codes attached to the documents had to be jointly agreed upon. In the event that an agreement was not reached, the difference of opinion between team members was recorded in a memo and discussed later during the team meetings or resolved during the final coding of the document.

Since the possibility of comparing the documents (i.e. transcribed interviews) was crucial for higher-level analysis and theory building, the assurance was needed that all the documents were coded following the same general procedure and applying a common concept regarding the level and extensiveness of the codes. To ensure this, the first three coded documents were extensively discussed, code-by-code, during several meetings. As a result, the codes were revised and jointly agreed upon. The general coding rules were applied in the analysis of the rest of the interview transcripts.

When all the documents from the same target group have been coded, they were joined in a single hermeneutical unit. When necessary, the codes were revised to avoid purely linguistic differences between the essentially identical codes. Although it was possible to join all the documents in a single hermeneutical unit, this was not attempted. It was judged that such a procedure would make the analysis more difficult by making the differences between the six target groups less clear. Comparisons between the target groups were, thus, carried out using six hermeneutical units.

After a hermeneutical unit was completed, the analysis proceeded to axial coding and the formulation of categories and subcategories. The following categories were applied at this

final step: (a) definition of corruption, (b) seriousness of corruption in Croatia; (c) main *loci* of corruption; (d) dynamics of corruption; (e) roots/causes of corruption; (f) consequences of corruption; (g) public perception of corruption; (h) corruption and trust in institutions; (i) the role of the media; (j) the role of NGOs; (k) measures for combating the corruption; (l) the Role of EU; and (m) internal anti-corruption mechanisms. Some of these categories were directly related to the models of corruption (definition of corruption, consequences, measures for combating, seriousness of corruption...) outlined in the first phase of the research study. It should be noted that in the GTM tradition "(...) *merely grouping concepts under a more abstract heading does not constitute a category. To achieve that status (...) a more abstract concept must be developed in terms of its properties and dimensions of the phenomenon it represents, conditions which give rise to it, (...) and the consequences it produces*" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990: 7-8). In that sense, not all of the categories mentioned above should be considered fully developed categories in the strict sense. Obstacles for rigorous development of categories were numerous, but were most often caused by unclear, ambivalent or simply insufficiently detailed interview data.

3. Results

3.1 Defining Corruption

Definitions of corruption given by the members of six target groups⁹ varied, but in most cases not profoundly. For example, corruption was defined as "*the state of non-transparent business which does not proceed according to legal procedures*", but also as something that "*rewards someone for the work (s)he did not do*" (EC1: 005)¹⁰. In most cases, corruption was defined as the abuse of power that allows individuals and groups to accomplish their goals by avoiding or breaking the law, regular procedures, and, finally, the social order (NGO2: 005; P2: 005): "[...] *corruption is any misuse of power and authority of a public function to ensure private benefits*" (LS2: 006).

⁹ The respective groups are Economy (EC), Legal system (LS), Media (MED), Non-governmental organisations (NGO), Police (P), Politics (POL). In the text we refer to the groups using acronyms.

¹⁰ References to the quotes contain the title of hermeneutical unit (economy; EC), the number of primary document (interview 1) and the paragraph number (005).



Sometimes, corruption was defined overly widely (as “*anything that does not follow the regular rules and procedures*”; EC3: 151) or encompassing all forms of criminal activity: “[Corruption is] *any illegal and illegitimate accumulation of wealth by breaking the rules*” (MED2: 005).

In defining corruption most interviewees referred to personal gains obtained by avoiding or breaking the law, misuse of power, and sidestepping legal procedures. Not all respondents perceived gifts and/or small favors for medical doctors as corruption. But “*when someone arranges a job for somebody without open competition*” (MED1: 077), was clearly perceived as corruption. Several participants suggested the distinction between “bribing”, as illegal exchange of small favors, and “corruption”, which was perceived as more important and grave: “*where the system is corrupt, politics are corrupt, the legal system is corrupt, and everybody else*” (EC2: 010). For others, the distinction was misleading and potentially dangerous (LS3: 021): “*all forms of corruption are, to my mind, fatal - there is no difference*” (EC3: 021).

On the societal level, corruption was sometimes conceptualized as “a kind of evil”, a systematic misuse of power that has anthropological foundations: “[It] *is a certain kind of evil men possess, to misuse their rights and authority in a certain way, or exercise them in exchange for personal satisfaction...*” (LS1: 010). Systemic corruption is characteristic of a society, “*in which things are settled by favors and counter-favors*” (MED3: 021).

Corruption as an abuse of power was often directly associated with state officials and politicians (NGO): “[Corruption is] *a criminal activity of obtaining a certain favor, merchandise, or anything else, by bribing the exponents of social power*” (POL3: 005). In this context, a politician noted that offering and taking bribes remains the central corrupt activity (POL3). An interviewee suggested that many in the economy sector believe that corruption is “normalized” in high politics through a system of donations which are later to be exchanged for favors (POL1). He also stated that the acceptance of certain “gifts of appreciation” (expressing gratitude) is not corruption - as opposed to accepting money beforehand.

3.2 Seriousness and Topology of Corruption

Another important interview topic was how serious the problem of corruption is in Croatian society, which areas are particularly affected by corrupt activities, and what is the typical public perception of the level of seriousness of corruption. Most respondents claimed that corruption is a grave problem. Corruption was viewed as “*a very serious problem because it destroys the value system*” (EC1: 013) and “*because it affects how citizens feel about their country*” (POL2: 013). Overall, there was a consensus that corruption remains one of the biggest social problems (EC3: 013): “[...] *it's at the very top, corruption is a huge problem*” (LS2: 015); “[it is] *extremely dangerous even at the lowest levels*” (MED2: 025). As one NGO official suggested: “... *I am aware that there are countries where corruption is much more developed, but I don't see it as any excuse for what we have*” (NGO1: 013). Interestingly, a participant from the media target group, who viewed corruption as one of the most serious problems, judged it a lesser problem in comparison to organized crime, which “*works throughout social spheres and therefore it is a hundred times more dangerous than these corruptive phenomena that are not harmless themselves*” (MED3: 050).

Only a few interviewees did not regard corruption a serious problem, mostly pointing out the unrealistic public perception: “*The perception of corruption is exaggerated... political parties have inflated it in order to get some political points on the issue*” (MED1: 013). However, for most of the interviewees the perception of corruption remained an important social fact that should be taken seriously. Predictably, in several interviews it was emphasized that corruption is not a country-specific problem.

Most participants, though not all, expressed the view that Croatia is “*a highly corrupt society*” (POL3: 013). Typically, they suggested that corruption is “*everywhere*” and that it exists in many areas where the citizens cannot see it – on local, national and international levels (NGO). It was emphasized that corruption exists “[...] *everywhere where the state does not provide the service it should, the way it should*” (POL3: 021). According to a journalist: “*Corruption covers all spheres, including the media*” (MED3: 040).

The omnipresence of corruption was occasionally linked to state ownership: “*Corruption is present anywhere where the state is still the owner*” (EC1: 029) and the inability of the



system to efficiently fight corrupt state officials. For another participant, corruption is mostly associated with the state services: *“Corruption is most wide-spread where there is an intense interaction between the citizens and the state”* (NGO2: 023). Some areas were identified as more corrupt than others: low-level public administration (*“[public servants] are often these who generate corruption, and not their supervisors”* /MED2: 101/), health services, construction industry, politics (*“a lot of money goes missing there”* /MED1: 077/), judiciary (*“the legal system is absolutely intangible”* /MED1: 021/), the system of public procurement, and local government. Overall, politics and legal system were considered to be the areas where corruption is most dangerous. The politics are closely linked to the state apparatus, which makes corruption especially hard to root out: *“...where big business is decided upon, and that is where the state comes in, that’s where the biggest corruption usually takes place”* (MED2: 021). Similarly, the existence of corruption within the legal system automatically rules out the efficient fight against corruption and, as such, is a gross violation of human rights (LS2).

Low-level corruption seemed to be mostly associated with the health care system (*“we all need health services”*; MED1: 021), but some participants warned against taking the most “visible” areas as the most corrupt ones (LS2).

3.3 Causes and Dynamics of Corruption

Major causes of corruption mentioned in the interviews were cultural insensitivity to unfairness and immorality, lack of professionalism among state administration and civil servants, uninformed and often poorly educated public opinion, but also the recent history. The 1991-1995 war, for example, was stated as one of the central generators of corruption, both structurally (*“The war is a condition in which of course war-profiteering groups flourish, which are later hard to dismantle /MED2: 121/; The state opened itself to organized crime in order to acquire weapons for the defense of the country. In the process, the organized criminal took over the state and later, after it grabbed control, it captured everything else”* /NGO2: 083/) and culturally. The war provided a strong “support” for corrupt activities because it changed the value system. Also, *“People started to believe that they can do anything and get away with it, because the state had more important things than to deal*

with them” (MED3: 025), and because the state itself was heavily involved in breaking the rules.

In a broader and more historical sense, we encountered the belief that corruption in Croatia is strongly associated with a cultural legacy of (traditional) reciprocation, that is characteristic of South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans: “*Cultural and political legacy is here partially... or in all respects negative*” (EC3: 109). This tradition of tolerating corruption was described by a participant as having almost the rational choice background: “*Society as a whole has a habit of solving many things either through bribe or corruption and that is deeply embedded in the system*” (EC2: 019); “[...] *we are still governed by that mentality... ‘Don’t worry, I know him well, we’ll work it out’*” (LS1: 218). “*‘A culture of corruption’ has always existed here*” (MED3: 081).

Some participants mentioned the socialist heritage: “[...] *back then (in socialism) corruption was even legalized. There were categories within the population that had a certain advantage. I’m not even sure if it can be called ‘corruption’ if it was legal*” (LS3: 117). But, corruption was something normal under socialism because “*everybody had low wages*” (MED1: 110). Growing social insecurity that had replaced the egalitarian socialist system was also identified as one of the causes of contemporary corruption. Although corruption in Croatia has its roots in the socialist legacy, the transition process had added new dimensions: “*... one of the causes of the destruction of trust is precisely that enormous injustice which happened during the transition*” (NGO1: 101). It should be noted that the opinions about the socialist legacy differed significantly. One participant stated that “[...] *in the socialist regime, there was a minimal amount of corruption, incomparably less than today*” (POL1: 091). Yet another posited that “[...] *the period of socialism was a period of corruption, but people were not allowed to discuss it*” (POL2: 103).

The majority of respondents saw structural and institutional characteristics as more important generators of corruption than the cultural factors. Inadequate salaries and the negative selection of cadres were mentioned, especially in regard to the state-owned companies and offices (EC2: 175): “[Corruption today] *is de facto generated by financial and political structures... the state controls almost two thirds of the capital*” (MED2: 013). So, it is the state bureaucracy that is the “*source of political and economic corruption*” (MED2: 013).



Corruption is stimulated by the lack of awareness that an action does not have to be criminal in order to be corrupt, as in the case of conflict of interest (MED3). Also, inefficiency and incompetence of the state institutions “creates” corruption by obstructing regular procedures (MED3; EC3). Structurally speaking, an “*unordered and non-transparent state*”, with its *ad hoc* rules that regularly weaken norms and regulations, breeds corruption (EC2).

What are the dynamics of corruption in Croatia? For most participants, corruption is not a fixed “quantity”, but a fluid phenomenon, with changing features and severity. In the words of an interviewee: “*Definitely there are changes... - it [corruption] is a process.*” (EC1: 029). One of the most important changes mentioned in the interviews was that several important corruption cases have been processed recently and that the media started paying closer attention to corrupt behaviors. For some interviewees, corruption was more prevalent in the past, “*...at the time when transition begun in this country*” (EC1: 029). For others, the amount of corruption did not change substantially. What did change was the treatment of corruption in the society (MED1). Another view shared by some interviewees was that the real change is marginal and that the handling of corruption changed only superficially (MED2): “*Interventions within the system are not equal to the change of system. The system remained basically the same*” (MED3: 027).

The participants who argued that corruption increased pointed out two factors: (a) the rising popularity of professional political career (people become members of political parties “*...to become rich. Through politics they use their positions of power to obtain personal benefits*”/EC2: 035/), and (b) greater gains enabled by market economy (corruption is escalating because of greater opportunities for huge benefits; LS1). During the socialism corruption was alive mostly through “blue envelopes” and the favor-for-favor system of exchange. The Socialist Party privileges were limited by the absence of private ownership (EC2: 085). “*The ways corruption was practiced before was different due to a different model of ownership*” (P1: 017). With the collapse of the socialist system the number of contenders for power positions increased and privatization and market economy provided a radically new framework. All this served as a powerful generator of contemporary corruption.

To briefly summarize, we found all three possible views regarding the dynamics of corruption. The increase was associated with structural changes related mainly to the



transition processes. The decrease was explained by the more extensive media coverage of corruption cases (“[...] *I see that there is much more talk on corruption as a problem today than before. In some ways the public is becoming more sensitive to corruption*” /LS2: 048/) and, though less frequently, the more active role of USKOK (*State Attorney’s Office for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime*). The stagnation was suggested by those who argued that anti-corruption measures undertaken so far were only partially efficient. Importantly, interviewees often expressed difficulties in assessing the dynamics of corruption. However, there seemed to be a consensus that the mechanisms of corruption, as well as its characteristics, changed significantly.

3.4 Consequences of Corruption

One of the major effects of corruption reported in the interviews was an erosion of social norms: the values of social justice, solidarity and morality are being replaced by self-centered ruthlessness and opportunism. Another effect of corruption mentioned was the suboptimal performance of the whole system, especially its economic and social efficiency. Also, increasing mistrust in institutions, as well as increasing poverty, distorted social priorities, inefficient investments, and wasted resources were pointed out. Corruption clearly impedes development (“*only knowledge, education and work can bring results*”; EC1: 013) and creates widespread discontent, insecurity and mistrust in the state institutions. The link between economic and political corruption is dangerous because it promotes the belief that everything is available to those who are politically connected. Finally, corruption in all its forms “*decreases the availability of certain services*” (EC3: 009). All this leads to “*social insecurity that creates a negative socio-cultural climate*” (MED1: 009).

The effects of corruption include increasing inequality (corruption negatively effects “*the poorest and the weakest*”, but can be convenient “*for the strongest*” /LS3: 009/; “[A] *person feels abused, [...] if (s)he is not able to bribe somebody as others are doing*” /LS1: 034/), legal insecurity and a wide-spread sense of helplessness (there is a “*deeply rooted awareness that nothing can be done without bribe*” /P1: 021/) and pessimism (POL2: 009). Furthermore, corruption also affects the society by obstructing “*the real market competition*” (MED2: 017). Important economic consequences of corruption such as the reluctance of foreign investors to

invest in Croatia, the slowing down of economic development, and a growing sense that everything and everyone can be bought for the right price (LS2), were also mentioned. This view was perceived as devastating for the legal system: “[I]t means that there are alternative ways to get something, a favor, a good, a service, even a certain level of social recognition. This way corruption destroys the legal system and its norms” (POL3: 009).

As the existing research convincingly shows, lack of trust is inextricably linked to corruption (Uslaner, 2004). Most of our interviewees expressed the opinion that regaining citizens' trust in institutions, lost through experiences with corruption, will be a long and painful process. Citizen's trust can not be restored without the establishment of the system with transparent and well-monitored rules and regulations. Building such a system requires efficient and systematic sanctioning of corruption on all levels: “[...] if we could efficiently punish all those who are corrupt, not only at low and middle level, but also those at the top level... there should be no "untouchables" (LS2: 137). “The more we strengthen the bodies responsible for prosecution ... the bigger the capacities for fighting corruption... All this would have an impact on the public opinion” (P2: 093). Citizens will trust a government that is prepared to penalize corruption, not the one that only declares its readiness to do it and then does nothing (MED1): “[W]e should start from the foundations and slowly rebuild the system, not just change something that's only the tip of an iceberg...” (POL1: 079).

3.5 Combating Corruption

We were interested to learn about the expert opinions on how the Croatian society could organize itself against corruption and, furthermore, what would be the best course of combating corruption. Almost all interviewees argued that combating corruption is a long and costly process. Some respondents emphasized that most people do not have the courage to report corruption, and those individuals who do report it do not receive appropriate support (*Those who investigate corruption and organized crime, criminal activities in the system, have no partners in the institutions of the system, in the civil society, in the public, or in the media*” /MED3: 030/). Both representatives of the target group police emphasized the importance of citizens' cooperation. The major problems in reporting corruption, according to the two participants, were personal risks of disclosing corrupt activities and the fact that they



are often hard to prove. The importance of citizen participation and civic pressure was also stressed by one NGO representative: “[...] *I believe that because of the increasing awareness of citizens... thanks to that, the existing general readiness to fight corruption will transform into the true readiness*“ (NGO1: 021).

The central problem of the current anti-corruption efforts was described as following: “*It should not happen that one case gets processed and the other one does not – they should all be treated equally*” (EC1: 174). This partiality was primarily associated with the lack of genuine political interest in combating corruption: “*There is no political will for solving this problem in general; there is a political will for saying ‘we are working on it’... That’s the whole story*” (EC3: 141). “*The bad thing is that no political authority, not a single political structure has the strength or willingness to put an end to corruption*” (MED1: 037). In addition to the lack of political decisiveness, a number of participants pointed to insufficient legislation, inefficient courts, and various political pressures of the police investigators, prosecutors and judges (“*The problem in fighting corruption is the inexistence of a system, any system capable of investigating corruption and prosecuting it*” /MED3: 040/). The problem of political and financial control was particularly emphasized in the case of the media. Some respondents argued that these pressures cripple the anti-corruption potential of the media by obstructing independent and objective reporting. Instead of informing, raising sensitivity and exerting pressure on the state institutions, the media reports on corruption are insufficiently professional, non-systematic and sensationalist (LS1).

Within institutions and organizations corruption is sometimes a way of “doing business” that enables certain individuals to reap personal benefits. To prevent this, internal anti-corruption mechanisms are usually developed and incorporated in all relevant activities. In the final part of the interview, we asked the representatives of the six target groups to identify and describe the mechanism(s) established in their own organizations/institutions. According to the findings, the situation varied substantially. Anti-corruption measures were present in some organizations, but not in others. For example, in the target group Economy all participants reported the absence of internal mechanisms, sometimes offering a justification: “*I have to admit that I do not see the possibility for corrupt activities because we are... a non-profit organization*” (EC1: 182). Another respondent stated that although corruption is not only possible, but probably present in his organization (“*There is space [for corruption],*

unfortunately, and some cases could be proven... The fact is that in the trade unions a lot of money flows around” (EC2: 148/), nobody seems to be concerned enough to push for the introduction of anti-corruption measures. Furthermore, it was argued that one should not expect much from such mechanisms: “Sometimes, the problem is indeed in inadequate regulation legislation, but the biggest problem is the regulatory practice and its monitoring” (EC3: 129). Simply put, the mechanisms of internal control are sometimes perceived as complicated, expensive and inefficient.

The internal anti-corruption mechanisms in the legal system are mostly non-existing, too. The most important improvement, it was suggested by a participant, would be to strictly monitor adherence to deadlines and procedures: “[T]he thing we want to influence the most is the presence and respect of the procedures and of legal deadlines, which would mean that everybody is treated equally” (LS3: 125). Among measures that would increase institutional integrity, the interviewees have listed vertical supervision and control, as well as security checks, institution of property cards, and fully transparent proceedings. Obligatory supervision, it was proposed, should be extended to all state prosecutors and judges (LS1) and a much greater attention should be paid to the professional code of conduct (LS2).

All respondents from the Media target group agreed that corruption in the media is a substantial problem, partially because no efficient control mechanisms were ever introduced. One respondent claimed that there is a number of highly corrupt journalists who are all able to get away with it: “Absolutely nothing happened to any one of them. There are audits, some ethical committee will analyze the work those journalists did, but not the possibility that some are corrupt” (MED1: 182). Even when some regulation exists, nobody observes it: “In our agencies the new rules need to be established. (...) There are some rules prescribed by the law, but nobody respects them” (MED2: 125).

The respondents from the target group NGO focused on the general situation in the civil sector. No relevant control mechanisms were reported, but there was a consensus among participants from this target groups that the *modus operandi* of most NGOs is insufficiently transparent: “[T]he level of transparency in the civil sector must be increased. Civil society, which sounds all too good and opened to the public, isn't like that at all - it is a secret society, instead. NGO work reports are unavailable. It is different with the state institutions. Their

reports can be incomplete or badly written, but if I need them for an analysis, I can get them. If I need a report from an NGO, usually I am not able to find it“ (NGO2: 091).

Both respondents from the target group Police agreed that the mechanisms of internal control are quite efficient in monitoring police personnel: *“We are all under their [officers of the Department of Internal Control] control” (P2: 109).* Policemen are well-informed about their rights and duties, and about the fact that their work is systematically monitored. This has increased awareness and, in some cases, created intolerance toward corrupt colleagues: *“Simply, there is certain awareness present among policemen; we had cases where an officer would blow a whistle on another colleague who would be later discharged” (P1: 113).* The respondents pointed out that during the last year (2006) a number of officers were reported for criminal activities and subjected to disciplinary proceedings, which, in their opinion, confirms the efficiency of the present system of internal control.

In the Politics target group, the interviewees expressed different notions about the internal control mechanisms. One respondent stated that there were no serious talks about the internal control in his institution, but that everything is kept in order by speeding up the procedures and decision making (POL 1)¹¹. Another respondent stated that standard measures usually suffice: *“Everything must be transparently registered in the books, expenses must be clearly reported, and reports must be regularly sent to the relevant party office... I believe that 90% [of the political party officials] are very, very correct” (POL2: 119).* The third interviewee expressed a similar opinion arguing that the “control mechanism” he prefers is a careful choice of assistants. He added that he had never encountered corruption in his working environment (POL3).

4. Discussion

In a previous paper (Štulhofer et al., 2007), we analyzed available documentation regarding two case studies of alleged corruption in Croatia and suggested the usefulness of six ideal-type models of understanding corruption among Croatian expert elites. Although the fit

¹¹ Although an internal control position was recently created in his institution, the participant did not consider it of any real importance (POL1).



between the data and the models was far from perfect, the proposed models proved instrumental in systematic comparison of the expert groups' positions. In brief, the ideal-type models were described as following:

(1) The Public Relations model (**PR**) is characterized by simplified, often populist and one-dimensional definitions of corruption. Corruption is perceived primarily as damaging for public image of the institution/actors in question: Measures for fighting corruption are evaluated according to the PR efficiency criteria and the focus is primarily on low-level corruption.

(2) The Expert model (**E**) entails complex and comprehensive definitions of corruption. Corruption is viewed as damaging to the social fabric of society and is economically wasteful. Measures for fighting corruption are based on best international practice(s) and the focus is on high-level corruption that inevitably involves politics.

(3) The Nuisance model (**N**) is characterized by the lack of clear definition. Corruption is a minor and omnipresent issue that has been exaggerated. Measures for fighting corruption are short-term and mostly inadequate, without a clear focus.

(4) The Human Rights model (**HR**) offers a comprehensive definition of corruption that emphasizes human rights abuse. Corruption is perceived as a moral, socio-cultural and economic evil. Proposed measures for fighting corruption are systematic, rigorous, and transparent. The focus is on both low and high-level corruption, and on the role of civil society in combating corruption.

(5) The Pragmatic model (**P**) is based on comprehensive legal-political definitions. Corruption is viewed as a major social problem; proposed measures for fighting corruption are systematic and well coordinated, and the focus is primarily on low-level corruption.

(6) The Ignoring model (**I**) relies on *ad hoc*, often rather narrow and confusing definitions. Corruption is perceived problematic only when it severely impedes governance and everyday business; the measures for fighting corruption are not discussed.

The logic of model fitting in this second research phase proceeded in the following manner. Firstly, the authors identified crucial dimensions of perceiving and understanding corruption among expert elites. These aspects (*categories*) represented empirical indicators of the main structural dimensions of the proposed models. After several discussions among the team members, a consensus was reached that the following four categories should be analyzed for model fitting: (a) definition of corruption, (b) assessment of the dynamics of corruption and general evaluation of the problem, (c) suggestions for combating corruption, and (c) discussion about internal anti-corruption mechanisms. In contrast to asking questions about general (society-level) anti-corruption measures, which might have resulted in responses biased by social desirability and presumed expectations, inquiring about internal measures (or, for that matter, their absence) seemed less prone to biases and therefore more valid and revealing. Also, the information on internal measures was easier to verify. Partially supporting our methodological rationale, the answers regarding internal mechanism were substantially more varied than those on general or society-level anti-corruption measures.

As in the first project phase, dissonant “voices” encountered within each expert group presented a noteworthy problem for the model fitting analysis. With the exception of the target group police, where a high degree of similarity in opinions between the two interviewees was found, the other groups were characterized by different degrees of heterogeneity. This difficulty could not always be resolved by searching for the dominant or *representative* “voice”. This is certainly a limitation of our model fitting analysis, which needs to be taken into consideration. Empirically, this suggests that expert group perceptions of corruption could be best described as multi-model composites. Keeping in mind that the models were originally introduced as ideal-types - informed by empirical insights, but not intended to fully explain or even describe them (Štulhofer et al., 2007) - this should not be surprising.

4.1 Expert groups and the corresponding models of understanding/perceiving corruption

The expert group *police* was characterized by the Pragmatic (P) and Expert model (E) approach to defining corruption. The E approach was reflected in the statement that relevant state institutions use different definitions of corruption, which has negative consequences for



combating corruption. Suggestions regarding the fight against corruption were systematic, comprehensive and informed by international practice (the E model), but focused primarily on low-level corruption (the P model). Well-established internal control mechanisms were discussed along the lines of the P model, emphasizing the measures taken against corruption in everyday situations.

The definition of corruption given by the representatives of the expert group *politics* generally followed the E model. However, their views on combating corruption mostly reflected the P model by stressing the need for more efficient repression of low-level corruption. In addition, some elements of the Nuisance model (N) were found, primarily in the insistence on the universality of corruption, which was used as a justification for low personal expectations regarding the outcomes of anti-corruption campaigns. The lack of dedicated internal control and specific anti-corruption measures (the prevailing opinion among the participants from this target group was that the existing half-measures are sufficient) suggested the predominance of the Ignoring (I) model in understanding internal corruption.

The definition of corruption from the expert group *non-governmental organizations* followed the E and Human Rights (HR) model, with the latter being expressed through suggestions that corruption constitutes a discriminatory (or even exclusionary) system. As expected, when discussing efficient anti-corruption measures the participants closely followed the E model. The importance of importing the best international practices was pointed out, as well as the imperative of citizens' mobilization through anti-corruption sensitization and awareness-raising. However, the lack of internal control was not critically assessed, in spite of the fact that both interviewees acknowledged the lack of transparency in the civil sector.

Definition of corruption associated with the expert group *legal system* fitted the E and Public Relations (PR) model. This corresponded to the fact that this group was one of the more disparate ones, with often contrasting "voices". Thus, the definitions offered ranged from a comprehensive and legally well-founded one to one that described corruption as "*a certain kind of evil that men possess*". In contrast, in discussing the steps required for efficient fight against corruption a relatively high level of homogeneity was achieved. However, suggestions provided by the interviewees often seemed to echo the official (institutional) position. The discussion about internal anti-corruption mechanisms was brief and lacking in substance (the I



model). Only the representative of USKOK provided a critical and systematic account of the need for internal control in the legal system (the E model).

In another heterogeneous group, the expert group *economy*, corruption was defined either according to the E model or PR model. The elements of the latter were found in over-generalizations equating corruption with the overall system of exchanging favors (involving primarily political decision-makers and business people) and describing it as “*anything that doesn't follow regular rules and procedures*”. The PR model also fitted the suggestions regarding anti-corruption activities, which were mostly vague (“[all corruption cases] *have to be treated equally*”), non-specific (appointing experts to important administrative position) or ideological (the importance of political will for combating corruption). No internal control or corruption prevention mechanisms were reported in this target group. This lack of inward attention to the problem of corruption was justified by (a) denying the possibility that corrupt activities could take place in participant's institution/organization, (b) lack of in-house support, or (c) skepticism expressed through the assertion that all anti-corruption measures are costly and inefficient. All the three arguments pointed to the N model.

Finally, *the media* expert group was characterized by a set of definitions mostly associated with the E and HR model. As in the case of the NGO expert group, the latter model was represented by claims that corruption constitutes a system of discrimination in which those who are connected can exchange favors and prosper at the expense of (the unconnected) others. The P model dominated the discussion on combating corruption, which focused on what is a feasible strategy in the situation characterized by the lack of genuine political motivation to tackle corruption (“*...no political authority, not a single political structure has the strength or willingness to end corruption*”). Citizens' education and public pressure were pointed out as the most promising long-term strategy. Although the media representatives agreed that corruption is a significant problem in their working environment, they seemed highly distrustful of the existing internal safeguards. The mechanisms that have been introduced were judged insufficient and inefficient, at best. Overall, a sense of pessimism permeated the accounts on internal control.



5. Conclusions

A recent longitudinal cross-cultural analysis based on the World Values Survey dataset demonstrated that the level of tolerance toward corruption varies substantially, both between and within the countries (Moreno, 2002). Noteworthy, the reported data pointed to an increase in the permissiveness toward corruption in the post-socialist European countries in the period 1990-1995 (Moreno, 2002: 504), suggesting the importance of transition costs and related socio-cultural and psychosocial adaptations. If perception(s) of corruption are conceptualized not only as moral statements but also as social adaptations¹², understanding the “language of corruption” becomes crucial for identifying cultural obstacles to corruption prevention (Shore & Haller, 2005). As Uslaner’s research suggests, the perception of corruption might be affected more by cultural than institutional factors, primarily through low or eroding trust (Uslaner, 2004). Clearly, mistrust in institutions is problematic not only in terms of individual action, which is guided by the imperative of dealing with heightened uncertainty and insecurity (due to the untrustworthy or dysfunctional state institutions), but also as a long-term socio-cultural obstacle to any systematic anti-corruption campaign.¹³

In this report we analyzed expert scripts of corruption. Collected individual opinions and statements should be “read” as highly personalized and, at the same time, institutionally embedded accounts of corruption. These accounts were treated in this study as systems of meanings, not necessarily fully coherent, that were re-constructed or assembled through personal experiences and perspectives (anchored in professional identity and moral sense), perceived institutional rules, and dominant public discourse(s). Using the Grounded Theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) and a set of ideal-typical models of understanding corruption (Štulhofer et al., 2007), we attempted to reconstruct these systems of meanings and document their multiple, overlapping, and often dissonant “voices”.

The main findings should be briefly summarized. The expert (E) and pragmatic (P) model were found predominant in defining corruption and discussions regarding society-level anti-

¹² Here we refer to *operative self-positioning* or actor’s behavioural strategies that are intentionally “optimized” for operating in an environment characterized by wide-spread corruption.

¹³ The social impact of widespread perception of corruption in Croatia was recently assessed in a research paper, which found the perception of corruption the strongest predictor of the lack of generalized trust and trust in institutions (Štulhofer, 2004.).

corruption activities. This is an encouraging finding suggesting high levels of understanding and awareness of corruption among the interviewees. These were further confirmed in the analysis of the perceived consequences of corruption. Less encouraging is the fact that the ignoring (I) model was the most frequently encountered model in the discussion about internal control and in-house anti-corruption mechanisms. Participants were highly critical of the lack of proper anti-corruption measures in the society, but seemed less observant when considering their own institutions/organizations.¹⁴

Noteworthy is the fact that the role of NGOs in combating corruption was rather marginalized. In a few cases where the topic was not raised by the interviewer, interviewees failed to mention it altogether. In contrast, we found an explicit consensus regarding the role of the EU. Although not without some critical observations, the majority of participants assessed the role of the EU in combating corruption in Croatia as important and positive. Primarily, it was associated with institutional reforms, legislative initiatives (“*[W]ith its legislation, the EU simply forces us to do things we otherwise wouldn't*” /NGO1: 049/), and political pressure.

What are the ramifications of our findings for the understanding of social embeddedness of corruption in Croatia?¹⁵ According to the data, the understanding of the mechanisms that facilitate corruption in Croatia is rather high among the interviewed members of expert groups. Different mechanism and facilitating factors were pointed out, most notably political clientelism and state ownership, socio-cultural norms (social networks and traditional obligations), and insufficiently professional and underpaid public administration. Paradoxically, the picture emerging from our interviews is that corruption is as pervasive and ubiquitous as its condemnation. If so, how can corruption persist?

According to Miller et al. (2001), wide-spread corruption can be based either on a culture of corruption, as vividly described by Olivier de Sardan (1999.), or on a system where most people remain victims of circumstances. The first explanation relies heavily on sub-optimal

¹⁴ Good intentions and informal checks were usually considered sufficient.

¹⁵ In his social constructionist approach to understanding corruption, Granovetter (2007:2) defined social embeddedness of corruption through social arrangements responsible for shaping the incentives for corrupt activities and the way “they come to be endowed with the value and the meaning that they ultimately have for actors.”



social norms and traditional legitimation of corruption – or, in Granovetter’s (2007) terms, on habitual “neutralization” principles and strategies which aim to justify corruption. The second explanation argues that pervasive corruption could persist in spite of general discontent due to structural factors and specific strategies of social elites. Although most of interviewees claimed that corruption in Croatia has not morphed into a cultural system, the lack of attention to internal anti-corruption measures encountered in the study suggests a third possibility. Corruption could also persist in a socio-cultural system where most actors disapprove of and even condemn it, but are unable or unwilling to recognize it in their immediate surrounding. This could be called the *hyperopic (mis)perception of corruption*. Such perceptual “farsightedness” may be based on inadequate understanding of what constitutes corruption and/or certain cultural norms (such as that one should protect his/her reputation by covering up immoral behavior of one’s close associates). Whether a culturally constructed hyperopic view is an element of the dominant perception of corruption among Croatian expert elites is unclear at this stage. Collected data are insufficiently detailed, but do suggest that the analysis of social embeddedness of corruption should take into account the possibility of differential perception based upon social proximity with the involved actors. Hyperopia may not necessarily be a neutralizing strategy, but could simply reflect the way personal and professional reputation is culturally defined in a given society.

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**SIXTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
PRIORITY 7, FP6-2004-CITIZENS-5**



SPECIFIC TARGETED RESEARCH PROJECT: CRIME AND CULTURE

**Crime as a Cultural Problem. The Relevance of Perceptions of Corruption to Crime Prevention.
A Comparative Cultural Study in the EU-Accession States Bulgaria and Romania, the EU-
Candidate States Turkey and Croatia and the EU-States Germany, Greece and United Kingdom**

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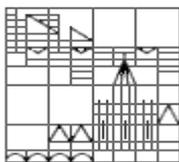
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