



The evolving nature of evidence as used within the international anti-corruption community

Sofia Wickberg, Giulia Mugellini

► To cite this version:

Sofia Wickberg, Giulia Mugellini. The evolving nature of evidence as used within the international anti-corruption community. 2020. hal-03389169

HAL Id: hal-03389169

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-03389169>

Preprint submitted on 20 Oct 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

**December 2020, n°17**

WICKBERG, Sofia and Giulia MUGELLINI, **The evolving nature of evidence as used within the international anti-corruption community**, *Sciences Po LIEPP Working Paper* n°117, 2020-12-17.

The evolving nature of *evidence* as used within the international anti-corruption community

Sofia Wickberg (Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE) and Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies (LIEPP))

Giulia Mugellini (Università della Svizzera Italiana)

Abstract

Since the 1990s, many international institutions have gotten involved in the “fight against corruption” and sought to harmonise national legislations. While a number of international conventions against corruption have been adopted they rely on governments’ political will to comply, especially in the Global North. In the absence of coercive power, international institutions have used knowledge production and the rhetoric of evidence-based policy-making to influence domestic policy-making. This paper is interested in international institutions’ use of knowledge and evidence to set the anti-corruption agenda. It questions and deconstruct what they present as evidence, showing that the meaning of the term has evolved overtime. Based on document analysis and interviews with international civil servants and NGO employees, this paper firstly comes back on the value attributed to knowledge in this policy field. It then presents what international institutions meant by evidence since the emergence of the anti-corruption agenda in the 1990s. Lastly, it critically discusses the use of knowledge and evidence, the function it plays and its effects on anti-corruption policy-making.

There is a lot of talk about evidence-based [policymaking], about what works and why, but actually we have little evidence of what works, and this relates to how do we measure, over the whole logic, the whole theory of change.¹

Since the 1990s, many international institutions have gotten involved in the “fight against corruption” and made anti-corruption a policy field with a global ambition and international outreach, as a reaction inter alia to the end of the Cold War, the birth of new states, changes in development/governance theory and aid disbursement and changing practices within the media industry or the judiciary.² In their study of the interactions among International institutions in this field in 2010, Nathaniel Gest and Alexandru Grigorescu identify seventeen intergovernmental organisations involved in anti-corruption work³ and Grigorescu puts the number to 40 in a later publication.⁴ He finds that the topic of anti-corruption has attracted an extraordinary high number of intergovernmental organisations, compared to other policy areas.⁵ The United Nations, the OECD, the Organisation of American States, the African Union and the Council of Europe adopted international conventions against corruption and other international organisations and financial institutions developed programmes specifically on corruption, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Group of 20 (G20) or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The international anti-corruption community rapidly blurred the lines between public and private actors, with the foundation of a non-governmental organisation dedicated to fighting corruption, Transparency International (TI), in 1993 by the former World Bank country director for Kenya Peter Eigen, together with a number of influential people.⁶ TI is widely recognised as a key player of the global fight against corruption and is regularly invited to the table of negotiations.⁷ While the ambition of international institutions involved in anti-corruption work initially concerned the fight against *transnational* corruption, which requires international cooperation, the global anti-corruption agenda gradually sought to harmonise national legislations and extended its reach into domestic policy-making.

¹ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017.

² KRASTEV, Ivan. *Shifting Obsessions. Three Essays on the Politics of Anticorruption*. CEU Press. 2004; WEDEL, Janine R. *Rethinking Corruption in an Age of Ambiguity*. The Annual Review of Law and Social Science. 2012; HOUGH, Dan. *Corruption, Anti-Corruption and Governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2013; KATZAROVA, Elitza. *The Social Construction of Global Corruption From Utopia to Neoliberalism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2019.

³ GEST, Nathaniel and GRIGORESCU, Alexandru. Interactions among intergovernmental organizations in the anti-corruption realm. *Review of International Organizations*, Vol. 5, 2010, pp. 53-72.

⁴ GRIGORESCU, Alexandru. IGO Relations in the Anti-corruption Realm and in Promoting Integrity in Public Procurement. In KOOPS, Joachim and BIERMANN, Rafael. *Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relations in World Politics*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. 2016.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 628.

⁶ Including Kamal Hossein, a former Minister of Bangladesh; John Githongo, head of a Kenyan accountancy firm who later became Permanent Secretary for Ethics and Governance in the office of the President of Kenya; Frank Vogl, a former information Director at the World Bank; Hansjörg Elshorst, the former managing director of the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Fritz Heimann, from General Electric; and Michael Herschman, a US-based intelligence and security specialist.

⁷ WANG, Hongying and ROSENAU, James N. Transparency International and Corruption as an Issue of Global Governance. *Global Governance*, Vol. 7, n°1, 2001, pp. 25-49

Since Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's seminal work on transnational advocacy networks,⁸ there is a growing consensus among political scientists that non-state actors such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and other transnational actors (professional networks, philanthropic foundations, think tanks etc.) make a difference in world politics, notably through the creation of international norms and policy ideas, and can have a substantial impact on domestic policies, through the diffusion of these norms into domestic politics.⁹ While it goes without saying that private advocacy organisations like TI seek to influence the global and national agendas, this paper considers that the same holds true for international public administrations. Beyond their delegated authority, international institutions dispose of other sources of power that they derive from their expertise and moral authority.¹⁰ If one studies them not only as mediators of interstate rivalries but also as an actor of transnational policy-making, then one should focus on the role of their secretariat and the civil servants that compose them, along the lines of Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore's argument about the bureaucratization of world politics.¹¹ As Pallavi Kishore notes, most international organisations have "a secretariat that plays an important role in the functioning of the entire regime".¹² Seeing international institutions as bureaucracies grants them a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis member-states to exercise power in world politics.¹³ Constructivist International Relations (IR) theories consider that international institutions have an existence outside of their member-states and that the power they can exert on them derives from their ability to present themselves as neutral and from their very functions, principally their ability to mobilize information and to develop technical expertise.¹⁴

Indeed, besides international conventions, knowledge and expertise are the main assets available to international institutions seeking to influence national anti-corruption policies in advanced democracies. The idea that knowledge and information are central to bureaucracies' influence is nothing new; Max Weber made that point already in the 1920s. But the role of knowledge, understood as data, information and practical experience as well as institutional/ordinary knowledge,¹⁵ has been taken up more recently to explain the influence of

⁸ KECK, Margaret E. and SIKKINK, Kathryn. *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, 1998; KECK, Margaret E. and SIKKINK, Kathryn. Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics. *International Social Science Journal*. Vol. 51, n°159, 1999, pp. 89-101

⁹ RISSE, Thomas. Transnational Actors and World Politics. In CARLSNEAS, Walter, RISSE, Thomas and SIMMONS Beth A. *Handbook of International Relations*. London: SAGE Publications, 2002, p. 263-264.

¹⁰ SKOGSTAD, Grace. Global Public Policy and the Constitution of Political Authority. In STONE, Diane and MOLONEY, Kim. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Policy and Transnational Administration*. Oxford University Press, 2019

¹¹ BARNETT, Michael and FINNEMORE, Martha. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004.

¹² KISHORE, Pallavi. A comparative Analysis of Secretariats Created under Select Treaty Regimes. *International Lawyer*, vol. 45, n°4, 2009, p. 1051, cited by PIIPARINEN, Touko. Secretariats. In KATZ COGAN, Jacob, HURD, Ian and JONSTONE, Ian. *The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

¹³ BARNETT, Michael and FINNEMORE, Martha. *Op. cit.* 2004

¹⁴ PIIPARINEN, Touko. Secretariats. In KATZ COGAN, Jacob, HURD, Ian and JONSTONE, Ian. *The Oxford Handbook of International Organizations*. Oxford University Press, 2016; MATHIASON, John. *Invisible Governance: International Secretariats in Global Politics*. Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2007

¹⁵ I borrow Olivier Nay's definition of information and knowledge, that he uses to refer to "sophisticated ideas, norms, policy standards, assumptions, options and representations, but also to simple data and known facts. They

transnational actors, such as the secretariats of international organisations or advocacy networks, on world politics and global policy,¹⁶ often through the rhetoric of evidence-based policymaking.

With the growing popularity of evidence-based policymaking since the 1990s, knowledge products and indicators have become important technologies of governance. Knowledge production has indeed become a vehicle of policy transfer for international institutions. To say that “knowledge is power” in transnational governance because the production and brokering of policy-relevant knowledge is context-shaping, as Colin Hay puts it, where international institutions “redefine the parameters of what is socially, politically and economically possible”¹⁷ for domestic actors. In the framework of this paper, they define how corruption should be understood and what are the appropriate approaches to tackle it. By producing indicators, reports, best practice compendiums or handbooks, international institutions control “what bodies of knowledge become accepted, or what counts, in Pierre Bourdieu’s words, as ‘the legitimate vision of the world’”.¹⁸

This paper is interested in international institutions’ use of knowledge and evidence to set the anti-corruption agenda. It questions and deconstructs what they present as *evidence*, showing that the meaning of the term has evolved overtime. Based on document analysis and interviews with international civil servants and NGO employees, this paper firstly comes back on the value attributed to *knowledge* in this policy field. It then presents what international institutions meant by evidence since the emergence of the anti-corruption agenda in the 1990s. Lastly, it critically discusses the use of the knowledge, the function it plays and its effects on anti-corruption policy-making.

I. Knowledge as influence in the global anti-corruption community

While a number of international conventions against corruption have been adopted, international institutions’ influence on domestic policy-making remains relatively limited, especially on the Global North. In the absence of coercive power, international institutions have invested in building their cognitive authority on the issue of corruption, making knowledge a source of political influence. Scholars recognize that knowledge and indicators represent a form

are associated with policy development, but also with practical and ordinary information used in interactions among actors. Thus they do not only comprise ‘scientific information’ or “expert knowledge” but also ‘institutional knowledge’ with an influence on the daily life of public organisations (norms, ideas, representations, patterns of behaviour and routines)” (NAY, Olivier. How do policy ideas spread among international administrations? Policy entrepreneurs and bureaucratic influence in the UN response to AIDS. *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 32, n°1, p. 74).

¹⁶ STONE, Diane. *Knowledge Actors and Transnational Governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013; BAR-NETT, Michael and FINNEMORE, Martha. *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2004 ; MATHIASON, John. *Invisible Governance: International Secretariats in Global Politics*. Sterling (VI): Kumarian Press, 2007; KECK, Margaret E. and SIKKINK, Kathryn. *Activists beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, 1998.

¹⁷ HAY, Colin. *Political Analysis A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002, p. 186.

¹⁸ BROOME, André, HOMOLAR, Alexandra and KRANKE, Matthias. *Op. cit.* 2018, p. 518; BOURDIEU, Pierre. Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, n°1, 1989, p. 20.

of power, a “weapon of the weak” when coercive power is lacking.¹⁹ Using their reputation and credibility, international institutions use knowledge to shape world politics and to frame the policy agenda according to their interpretation of a problem and policy preferences in a given policy domain.²⁰

Regarding corruption, knowledge production was all the more valued due to the complexity and uncertainty that characterise the topic in early years and arguably still today.²¹ Policy-makers, bureaucrats and experts, at the national and international level, have spent much time trying to understand “what works” to reduce corruption, as suggesting in the introductory quote. To do so, international institutions involved in anti-corruption work produce indicators, research reports, handbooks, guidelines, toolkits or best practice compendiums; what Transparency International (TI), the leading international anti-corruption NGO, calls *knowledge products*.²² The first documents produced by international institutions in the 1990s refer both to the need to build anti-corruption strategies on evidence and assessments and to existing *anecdotal* and *empirical* evidence.²³ The UN Guide for Anti-Corruption Policies, issued in 2003, establishes that anti-corruption strategies should be “*inclusive, comprehensive, integrated, evidence-based, non-partisan, transparent and impact-oriented*”.²⁴ The OECD similarly developed a *Public Sector Integrity Framework for Assessment*, in 2005, on the basis that “good governance requires proper assessment” and that “*governments are (...) responsible for providing evidence-based information on the results of their policies*”.²⁵ The UK DfID-funded Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence (GI-ACE) research programme, initially launched in 2015, is one of the latest examples of public actors’ efforts to fund research to inform anti-corruption policy. This programme, operated by the NGO Global Integrity, supports researchers “in generating new evidence that policymakers, practitioners, and advocates can use to design and implement more effective anti-corruption programmes”.²⁶

¹⁹ ABBOTT, Kenneth, GREEN JF and KEOHANE, Robert O. Organizational Ecology and Institutional Change in Global Governance. *International Organizations*, Vol. 70, n° 2, 2016, pp. 247-277; SENDING, Ole Jacob. Knowledge Networks, Scientific Communities, and Evidence-Informed Policy. In STONE, Diane and MOLONEY Kim. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Policy and Transnational Administration*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

²⁰ BROOME, André, HOMOLAR, Alexandra and KRANKE, Matthias. Bad science: International organizations and the indirect power of global benchmarking. *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 24, n°3, 2018, p. 516.

²¹ HAAS, Peter M. *When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations*. Berkeley (CA): University of California Press, 1990; HAAS, Peter M. Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination. *International Organizations*, Vol. 46, n°1, 1992, pp. 1-35; HEYWOOD, Paul. *Routledge Handbook on Political Corruption*. Abingdon: Routledge. 2012.

²² The term “knowledge product” has principally been used by Transparency International since the 2010s and the creation of its Anti-Corruption Solutions and Knowledge programme.

²³ POPE, Jeremy. *TI Source Book Confronting Corruption: The Elements Of A National Integrity System*. Berlin: Transparency International. 2000

²⁴ United Nations. UN Guide for Anti-Corruption Policies. 2003, p. 39

²⁵ OECD. *Public Sector Integrity Framework for Assessment*. 2005, p. 10

²⁶ Global Integrity. Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence (GI-ACE) Research Programme. Online, available at: <https://www.globalintegrity.org/ace/> (accessed on August 30th 2019)

Many of these organisations see producing knowledge and exchanging information as part of their mandate and identity. The Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)’s description of its own activities is telling in this regard:

It helps to identify deficiencies in national anti-corruption policies, prompting the necessary legislative, institutional and practical reforms. GRECO also provides a platform for the sharing of best practice in the prevention and detection of corruption.²⁷

Similarly, the OECD, an organisation known for its role in constructing and disseminating transnational research and policy ideas,²⁸ defines its mission as an organisation as follows:

Together with governments, policy-makers and citizens, we work on establishing international norms and finding evidence-based solutions to a range of (...) challenges (...) we provide a unique forum and knowledge hub for data and analysis, exchange of experiences, best-practice sharing and advice of public policies and global standard-setting.²⁹

While most international institution in the field share the same core beliefs and policy recommendations, they are in competition for cognitive authority over the issue. They also build their legitimacy through showcasing their expertise and networks, suggesting that knowledge products have a dual role to play for International institutions: influencing policy-making in target countries and constructing the cognitive authority of organisations. Interestingly, the two organisations that seem to be competing for cognitive leadership in the policy field are not of the same nature and enjoy different forms of legitimacy and resources: the OECD being an intergovernmental organisation, with significant delegated authority, and Transparency International, being a transnational coalition of civil society organisations, benefitting from its specialisation on the issue and its independence from governments.

The OECD has indeed published several toolkits, assessment frameworks and reports on anti-corruption, public ethics and integrity, and it has increasingly sought to position itself as a knowledge broker. Since 2013, the OECD holds an annual Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum where policy-makers, international organisations, corporate representatives, civil society and academia meet “on an equal footing”³⁰ to discuss policy and new trends in the field of anti-corruption and public integrity, in view to “shaping (...) and influencing the global debate”.³¹ To prolong its work and influence as a knowledge broker and with the ambition to become a

²⁷ GRECO. About GRECO. Online, available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/greco/about-greco> (accessed on July 2d 2018)

²⁸ MAHON, Rianne and MCBRIDE, Stephen. Standardizing and disseminating knowledge: the role of the OECD in global governance. *European Political Science Review*, Vol. 1, n°1, 2009, p. 84.

²⁹ OECD. Who we are. Official website. Online, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/about/> (accessed on August 29th 2019)

³⁰ OECD Official 3. Interview with author. 23 May 2018.

³¹ *Ibid.*

“virtual platform for the global anti-corruption and integrity community”³², the OECD is developing an Anti-corruption and Integrity Hub to “facilitate engagement with the global anti-corruption and integrity community” while promoting the organisation’s own work on the matter. The multiplication of knowledge-related initiatives and the resources mobilised to that end suggest the interest of this intergovernmental organisation in diversifying its modes of influence through the generation and brokering of knowledge.

Civil society organisations have also increasingly played the role of knowledge brokers in the field of anti-corruption and share similarities with intergovernmental organisations in terms of strategies and policy message. Transparency International (TI) is the most illuminating example of a CSO as knowledge broker, given its international presence and its influence in the policy community. From the very beginning, Transparency International promoted its knowledge products as a response to “the challenge (...) to ensure that this knowledge of what has worked – or has not – is shared within and outside our movement”.³³ As the young organisation had hired its first employees, the new managing director, Jeremy Pope, initiated the organisation’s research work, with the ambition to, in the words of Frank Vogl, a founding member and the first Vice Chairman of TI, “build a body of knowledge about what actions are effective in different countries in fighting corruption”.³⁴

Research and knowledge production have remained at the heart of the identity of the organisation, TI’s international secretariat “frequently [being] thought of as a ‘think-tank’ rather than an NGO”³⁵. The expansion of TI’s knowledge work led to the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Solutions and Knowledge programme in 2011, a “strategic knowledge exchange and learning initiative aimed at facilitating the creation, adaptation and dissemination of leading anti-corruption knowledge, experience and expertise across the global anti-corruption community”,³⁶ to provide on-demand research and knowledge services to internal and external stakeholders, promote systematic learning from research and practice and the use of knowledge for advocacy, develop a knowledge base on what works in the fight against corruption and incubate innovative anti-corruption pilot interventions.³⁷

This observation concerning anti-corruption policy-making is far from unique and reflects a broader trend of international organisations producing knowledge and investing in scientific activities. Mike Zapp published a study of the scientization of the world polity and found that

³² OECD. The Anti-Corruption and Integrity Hub. Online, available at <http://www.oecd.org/corruption/integrity-forum/hub/> (accessed on June 25th 2018)

³³ Transparency International. Knowledge Products : sharing ideas about what works. Online, accessible at https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/activity/knowledge_products_sharing_ideas_that_work (accessed on the April 9 2018) The webpage was created in 2013, according to Wayback Machine Internet Archive, online, accessible at https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/activity/knowledge_products_sharing_ideas_that_work (accessed on April 9 2018)

³⁴ VOGL, Frank. *Waging War on Corruption*. Plymouth (UK): Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2012, p. 66

³⁵ NORAD. Evaluation of Transparency International. Report 8/2010. 2011, p. xv

³⁶ Transparency International. Network of Experts. Online, available at: https://www.transparency.org/experts_network (accessed on June 27th 2018).

³⁷ Transparency International. Implementation Plan 2015. Berlin: Transparency International, 2011, p. 17

the number of scientific publications issued by International institutions³⁸ had skyrocketed in the last decades, noting an upward trend in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁹ This supports the argument of constructivist IR scholars that International institutions exercise power independently from their member-states notably through *soft* mechanisms, such as knowledge production. It thus inscribes the trend observed with regards to anti-corruption policy-making in a more general tendency of international institutions to use knowledge to exercise power on world politics by shaping the cognitive context of policy-making. The focus on making anti-corruption evidence-based has thus turned international organisations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental, into knowledge brokers, competing for “cognitive authority”⁴⁰ over the global anti-corruption agenda.

Having identified the actors involved in the production of evidence on (anti-)corruption, we now turn to what they actually mean by *evidence* and the function it played for these international institutions.

II. Deconstructing the meaning and role of *evidence*

Evidence-based policymaking is a powerful concept which gains its appeal partly through being vague and superficially unobjectionable. As Paul Cairney rhetorically asks: “EBPM [evidence-based policy-making] has become one of many ‘valence’ terms that seem difficult to oppose because they are so vague: who would not want policy to be evidence based?”⁴¹ The question that is posed here is what evidence actually means for international organisations promoting anti-corruption instruments.

Evidence-based policymaking, in the field of anti-corruption and beyond, legitimizes certain policy ideas and instruments through the recourse to the rhetoric of science and scientific methods. Evidence-based policymaking stems from evidence-based medicine, which emerged in the early 1990s, with the objective to “generate the best evidence of the best interventions and exhort clinicians to use it”⁴² and “to assess the strength of evidence relating to the risks and benefits of particular courses of treatment”.⁴³ Stating that policymaking is informed – even

³⁸ It should be noted that Mike Zapp’s analysis includes a wider range of knowledge products than this dissertation, since he looks at international institutions publication in academic journals while I limit the analysis to publicly available documents aimed at providing policy advice.

³⁹ ZAPP, Mike. The scientization of the world polity: International organizations and the production of scientific knowledge, 1950–2015. *International Sociology*, Vol. 33, n°1, pp. 3-26.

⁴⁰ BROOME, André and SEABROOKE, Leonard. Seeing like an International Organisation, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 17, n°1, 2012, p. 9.

⁴¹ CAIRNEY, Paul. The Politics of Evidence-based Policymaking in 2500 words. *Paul Cairney: Politics & Public Policy*. Online, available at: <https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2016/08/10/the-politics-of-evidence-based-policy-making-in-2500-words/> (accessed on November 8th 2019)

⁴² CAIRNEY, Paul. *Op. cit.* 2017, p. 3

⁴³ BOAZ, Annette, GRAYSON, Lesley, LEVITT, Ruth and SOLESBURY, William. Does evidence-based policy work? Learning from the UK experience. *Evidence and policy*, Vol. 4, n°2, 2008, pp. 233- 253, cited in COURTENAY BOTTERILLA, Linda and HINDMOOR, Andrew. Turtles all the way down: bounded rationality in an evidence-based age. *Policy Studies*, Vol. 33, n° 5, 2012, p. 369.

based – on evidence provides it with a new form of legitimacy, based on rationality and scientific knowledge.

Scholars interested in evidence-based policymaking agree on the fact that using knowledge and facts to inform policymaking is nothing new, but they also recognize an upsurge of attention and reference to evidence in the policy process in the last two decades, as a way to render policymaking more rational and efficient.⁴⁴ This observation holds true for the subfield of anti-corruption at the international level. Ever since corruption was defined as a global problem, international institutions have tried to quantify it to provide *evidence* of the extent of the problem and to identify good – even *best* – practices to inspire governments to adopt their preferred anti-corruption policy instruments.

The question that is posed here is what *evidence* actually means for international organisations promoting anti-corruption instruments. An OECD official asked about their understanding and use of evidence describe the evolution of what was meant by *evidence* within the organisation like this:

Twenty years ago, evidence was more about the input and processes, and implementation, and, in some cases like academia, focussing on the impact of corruption, documenting [this in] developing nations and [now we are] bringing new perspectives like the human perspective, behavioural... The impact of integrity, the business case for integrity. We are still at the beginning of this process, how to document and substantiate assessment in prevention, integrity building, transparency, open discussion and debate.⁴⁵

Looking at the knowledge produced by international institutions indeed suggests that evidence collection has evolved from gauging the level of corruption as well as its costs and consequences to seeking to measure the quality of the solutions. In addition to documenting the evolution of what was referred to as *evidence*, I argue that it served different purposes, in its different manifestations. This section presents (i) evidence of the problem as a means to put it on the agenda, and (ii) evidence of “what works” as a tool to legitimize policy preferences.

III. Using *evidence* to put corruption on the map

Corruption rankings and measurements played a particularly important role in putting corruption on the global and national agendas.⁴⁶ The politics of numbers indeed proved

⁴⁴ STONE, Diane. Global Governance Depoliticized. In FAWCETT, Paul, FLINDERS, Matthew, HAY, Colin and WOOD, Matthew (ed.) *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization and Governance*. Oxford University Press. 2017; CAIRNEY, Paul. *Op. cit.* 2017; COURTENAY BOTTERILL, Linda. Evidence-Based Policy. In THOMSON, William R. (ed.) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford University Press. 2017.

⁴⁵ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. May 23d 2018

⁴⁶ HEYWOOD, Paul M and ROSE, Jonathan. “Close but no cigar”: the measurement of corruption. *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 34, n°3, 2014, pp. 507-529; WANG, Hongying and ROSENAU, James N. *Op. cit.* 2001; BUKOVANSKY, Mlada. Corruption rankings Constructing and contesting the global anti-corruption agenda. In COOLEY, Alexander and SNYDER, Jack. *Ranking the world: Grading States as a Tool of Global Governance*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

essential in raising awareness about corruption, as is still visible in contemporary reference to estimates of costs and *level* of corruption. As Peter Andreas and Kelly M. Greenhill, argue “to measure something – or at least to claim to do so – is to announce its existence and signal its importance and policy relevance”.⁴⁷ The possibility offered by indicators to visualize corruption, through ranks and maps proved particularly powerful to put corruption on the global agenda.⁴⁸ It is thus worthwhile to explore this type of policy-relevant knowledge in more detail to understand how it contributed to shape corruption as a global problem and how indicators became a tool of influence fuelling competition for *measurement leadership* among scholars and International institutions. With Kevin E. Davis, Benedict Kingsbury and Sally Engle Merry, we argue that indicators are not only a form of knowledge, providing information in a simplified numerical way, but has become a technology of global governance. We borrow their definition of indicators:

An indicator is a named collection of rank-ordered data that purports to represent the past or projected performance of different units. The data are generated through a process that simplified raw data about a complex social phenomenon. The data, in this simplified and processed form, are capable of being used to compare particular units of analysis (such as countries or institutions or corporations), synchronically or over time, and to evaluate their performance by reference to one or more standards.⁴⁹

Quantifying corruption implies selecting, categorizing and analysing measurable information to make it countable, comparable and often to allow for visualisation. In that sense quantification can be said to make corruption visible by *ranking* and *mapping* it. A growing scholarship now argues that quantification – referred to alternatively as ranking, indicators, counting or measurement – is fundamentally political, both because it influences state behaviour and global governance⁵⁰ but also because producing measurement tools is itself a political process.⁵¹ Corruption indicators have multiplied since the first publication of Transparency International’s famous Corruption Perceptions Index in 1995, and corruption measurement has become a competitive market, providing the developers of successful tools with a place under the (anti-corruption) sun. Corruption measurements have been extensively analysed and criticized, and this chapter does not seek to contribute to this already rich body of work. Instead it builds on a statement made by Paul Heywood and Jonathan Rose in a paper on corruption measurements: “in practice, specific indicators inevitably (even if implicitly) reflect particular definitions”.⁵² Let’s look at the existing measurements to get a sense of how the battle

⁴⁷ ANDREAS, Peter and GREENHILL, Kelly M. *Sex, drugs, and body counts: the politics of numbers in global crime and conflict*. Cornell University Press. 2010, p. 1.

⁴⁸ HELLMAN, Olli. The visual politics of corruption. *Third World Quarterly*, 2019.

⁴⁹ DAVIS, Kevin E., KINGSBURY, Benedict and ENGLE MERRY, Sally (ed.) *The Quiet Power of Indicators Measuring Governance, Corruption and Rule of Law*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 4.

⁵⁰ COOLEY, Alexander and SNYDER, Jack (ed.) *Ranking the World: Grading States as a Tool of Global Governance*. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

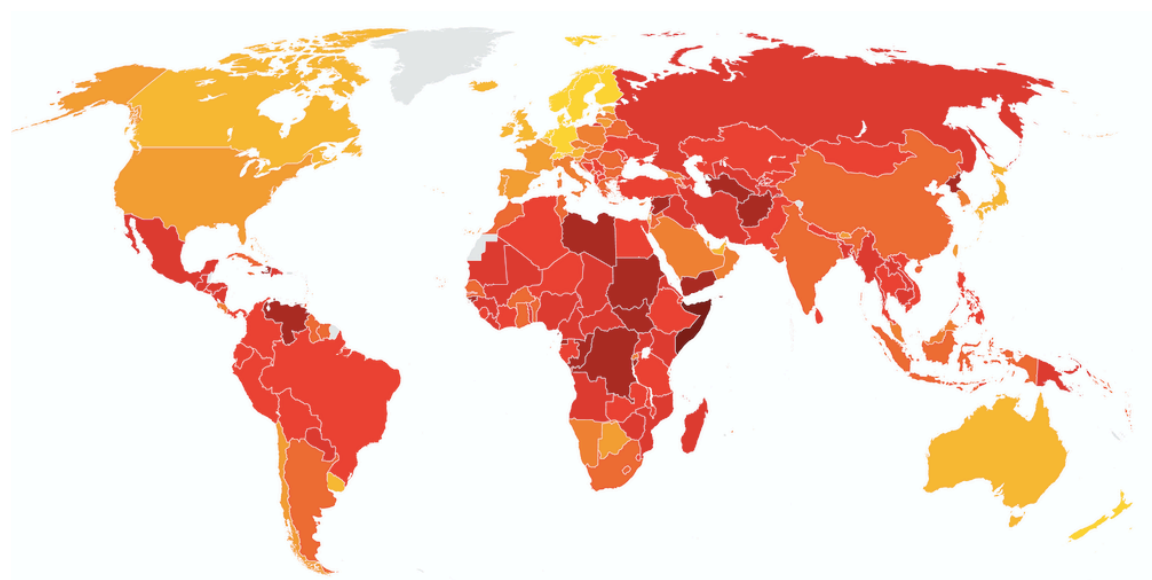
⁵¹ DAVIS, Kevin E., KINGSBURY, Benedict and ENGLE MERRY, Sally. *Op. cit.* 2012.

⁵² HEYWOOD, Paul M. and ROSE, Jonathan. *Op. cit.* 2015, p. 509, citing HAWKEN, Angela and MUNCH Geraldo L. Do You Know Your Data? Measurement Validity in Corruption Research, working paper, School of Public Policy, Pepperdine University, Malibu (CA), 2009.

of the numbers framed the problem, contributing to make corruption *understandable* on the global stage.

In a time where modernization theory was falling out of fashion, research on the economics of corruption made it necessary to develop an operational definition that caters to the needs of measurement and comparison. Rose-Ackerman, one of the leading figures of this field research, provides a clear explanation of the need for “essentially equat[ing] corruption with bribery”.⁵³ She justifies narrowing the concept of corruption to bribery using a “wide range of productive research” that focus on “the piece of the broader concept most susceptible to economic analysis – monetary payments to agents”.⁵⁴ The need to quantify and measure corruption certainly played an important role in the narrowing down of corruption to becoming a synonym of bribery. In the mid-1990s, international organisations, governmental or not, also started to quantify corruption for the purpose of measurement and comparison. As the conceptual architects of corruption within the policy community, Transparency International and the World Bank were the first ones to develop corruption indicators. It is widely recognized that Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) was an important factor of the organisation’s visibility and influence on the international stage, notably through the media attention that it receives each year.⁵⁵ To operationalise its governance turn, the World Bank turned to quantification with the development of its Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) in 1996, which includes an indicator on the *control of corruption*.

Figure 1: Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2019 results



Source: Transparency International. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2019*. Online, available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi> (accessed on December 10th 2020)

⁵³ ROSE-ACKERMAN, Susan. *The Economics of Corruption: a study in political economy*. New York: Academic Press. 1978, p. 7.

⁵⁴ ROSE-ACKERMAN, Susan (ed.) *International Handbook on the Economics of Corruption*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. 2006, p. xiv.

⁵⁵ WANG, Hongying and ROSENAU, James N. *Op. cit.* 2001; BUKOVANSKY, Mlada. *Op. cit.* 2015.

Both measurement tools are composite indexes, merging indicators on the level of corruption and on existing mechanisms to prevent it. This suggests a vague definition of corruption, based on the *office-centred* definition presented above, which combines a broad concept of corruption with specific offenses as well as the notion of corruption *risk* – further analysed in the following section, contained in the measurement of preventive measures. TI rapidly became a *mass-producer* of corruption indicators, progressively diversifying its methods – turning to public opinion surveys with the GCB – and focus – looking at the practices of exporting firms with the BPI. These corruption measurements developed by the World Bank and Transparency International clearly serve the process of *normalising* the organisations’ respective definition of corruption, focussing on the practices of individual holding specific offices, with Transparency International also providing a measurement of the practices of corporate actors.

Other organisations joined the bandwagon of corruption measurement as the topic became increasingly popular. The Index of Public Integrity (IPI), produced by the European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building from the Hertie School of Governance and the European Quality of Government Index (EQI), produced by the Quality of Government Institute of the University of Gothenburg, are interesting cases. Contrary to the first indicators, these measurements were developed by academic institutions who became known for criticizing the principal-agent approach to anti-corruption (developed below) and/or the public-office definition of corruption, as well as existing indicators.⁵⁶ These measurements do not fundamentally differ from Transparency International and the World Bank’s measurement in terms of conceptualisation of corruption, but they add a level of sophistication to the measurements, allowing for subnational ranking in the case of the EQI, and interpret *control* of corruption differently, as detailed in table 3.2.2.

What the IPI and the EQI demonstrate is rather that a number of new actors are willing to invest time and resources in developing indicators to measure corruption, which supports Diane Stone’s claim that global governance is increasingly structured around interactions between state and non-state actors, with knowledge organisations playing an increasing role.⁵⁷ This also suggests that measurement tools have become a tool of cognitive authority, necessary to gain visibility in the anti-corruption community and to promote one’s conception of corruption. Interestingly, both the IPI and the EQI were funded by the European Commission – chapter 6 comes back to the role of the European Commission as a knowledge broker, which implies that building corruption measurement tools has become a way for scholars to access resources and to bridge the academic and policy communities.

⁵⁶ PERSSON, Anna, ROTHSTEIN, Bo and TEORELL, Jan. Why Anticorruption Reforms Fail-Systemic Corruption as a Collective Action Problem. *Governance*, Vol. 26, n° 3, 2013, pp. 449–471; ROTHSTEIN, Bo and VAR-RAICH, Aiysha. *Op. cit.* 2017; MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, Alina. *The Quest for Good Governance. How Societies Develop Control of Corruption*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

⁵⁷ STONE, Diane. *Knowledge Actors and Transnational Governance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Table 1: Selected corruption and governance indicators

	Corruption Perceptions Index	Bribe Payers Index	Worldwide Governance Indicators	Index of Public Integrity	European Quality of Government Index
Type of indicator	Composite	Expert survey	Composite	Composite	Public opinion survey
Definition of corruption	<p>The CPI draws upon data sources which capture the assessment of experts and business executives on a number of corrupt behaviours in the public sector, including: Bribery, Diversion of public funds, Use of public office for private gain, Nepotism in the civil service, State capture.</p> <p>Some of the sources also look at the mechanisms available to prevent corruption in a country, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The government's ability to enforce integrity mechanisms -The effective prosecution of corrupt officials -Red tape and excessive bureaucratic burden -Laws on financial disclosure, conflict of interest prevention and access to information 	<p>The BPI uses a survey questionnaire that asks business executives about their perception of the frequency of bribery to civil servants or other firms as well as improper contributions to high-ranking politicians or political parties.</p>	<p>The Control of Corruption indicator captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests.</p> <p>The data sources measure diversion of public funds, irregular payments/unofficial to government agencies, bribery as well as corruption. It also measures transparency and accountability.</p>	<p>The Index of Public Integrity aims to give an objective and comprehensive picture of the state of control of corruption.</p> <p>It consists of six components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Judicial independence -Administrative burden -Trade openness -Budget transparency -e-citizenship -freedom of the press 	<p>The European Quality of Government Index is based on survey data on the perceptions and experiences with public sector corruption and citizens' belief in the impartiality and quality of public services.</p> <p>The questionnaire defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted public power for private gain, by a public employee or a politician for money, gifts or other benefits.</p> <p>It asks specific questions about special advantages and bribery, as well as quality of public services and equal treatment.</p>
Author	Transparency International	Transparency International	World Bank	ERCAS	Quality of Government Institute (Uni Gothenburg)
Year of creation	1995	1999	1996	2017	2008

Quantification has been used by Transparency International and the World Bank to normalise the concept of corruption in global policy circles. Measurement tools not only drew attention to the problem of corruption but also contributed to impose a certain conception of corruption. Interestingly, a number of corruption measurements are composite indices. Given the measurement difficulties and the lack of available data on corruption, composite indicators remain the most widely used measurement tools to provide information on the level of corruption allowing cross-country comparisons.⁵⁸ Organisations producing composite indicators do not collect their own data but rely on other data sources that they aggregate to put forward a synthetised measurement. Beyond allowing for wider coverage, the main advantage of composite indexes is that the multitude of sources used should contribute to curtailing any significant measurement error that could stem from single-source methods.⁵⁹ Composite indices also present some methodological problems. The data sources used might not all be independent from each other. Firstly, the prominence of certain composite indices and the media attention they receive might influence the assessment of experts or citizens surveyed in public opinion polls that are themselves part of the composite indices' data sources.⁶⁰ Moreover, despite the multiplication of corruption measurements, the number of reliable data sources is still relatively limited, leading the organisations constructing composite indices to use each other's data to produce their measurements. The methods used to measure corruption thus contribute to reinforce the dominant conceptions of corruption put forward by influential actors in the field, such as Transparency International and the World Bank.

It might be instructive to analyse the correlation between the above mentioned main corruption indicators in order to establish what they measure and whether they measure the same thing, thus reinforcing the same message on corruption evidence.

Ahamad (2001) demonstrates how rankings of businesses' perception of corruption (i.e., Business International; World Competitiveness Report; Political and Economic Risk Consultancy; Bribe Payers Index) are consistent over time. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2005) find that the behaviour of the index does change when compared over time. Standaert (2015) assumes that for each country year-to-year correlation of perceived corruption is somehow constant, but this can differ across countries. Table 1 below reports the correlation (Spearman's ρ) between selected corruption indicators across European Union Member States and the United Kingdom.

⁵⁸ UNDP. *A Users' guide to measuring corruption*. Oslo: UNDP Oslo Governance Centre, 2008.

⁵⁹ ROTHSTEIN Bo, CHARRON Nicholas and LAPUENTE Victor. *Quality of Government and Corruption from a European Perspective: A Comparative Study on the Quality of Government in EU Regions*, Cheltenham (UK):Edward Elgar, 2013, p. 42.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Table 1: Correlations selected corruption indicators. 27 EU Member States and UK. Most updated year. Spearman's ρ

	CPI_2019	WGI_2019	IPI_2019	BCI_2016	EQI_2017
CPI_2019	1	0.986**	0.925**	0.843**	0.964**
WGI_2019	0.986**	1	0.923**	0.851**	0.960**
IPI_2019	0.925**	0.923**	1	0.824**	0.924**
BCI_2016	0.843**	0.851**	0.824**	1	0.875**
EQI_2017	0.964**	0.960**	0.924**	0.875**	1.000

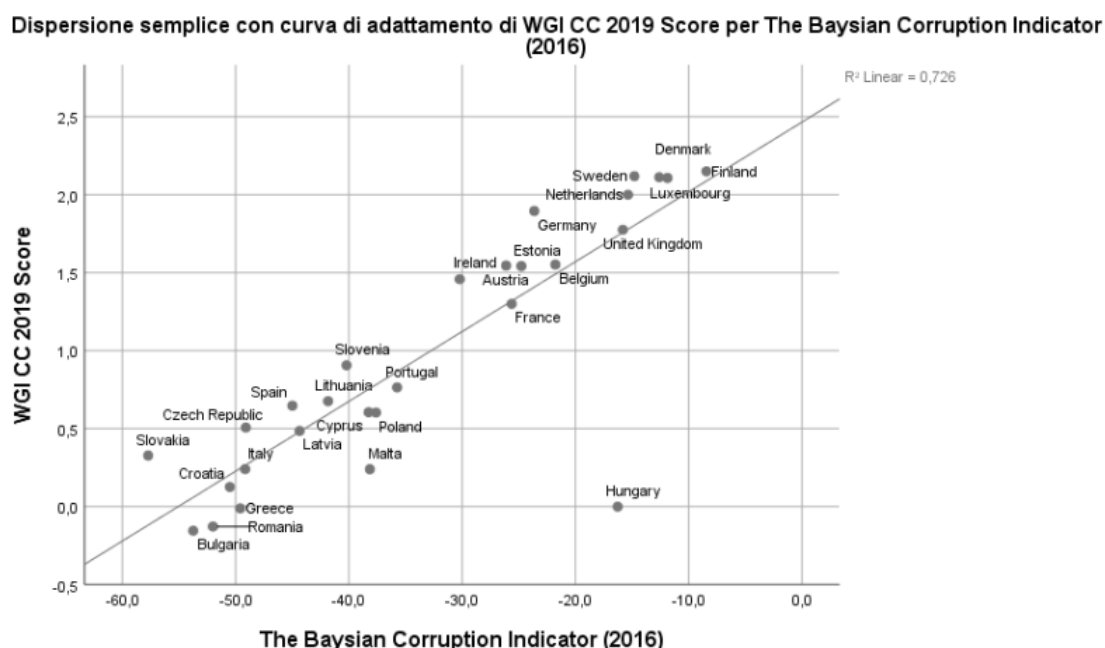
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: authors' elaboration of various corruption indicators

The correlation matrix produces some interesting results. The correlations between the WGI, CPI, BCI, IPI, EQI across European countries are positive, strong and significant. The most strongly correlated indicators are the CPI, WGI and EQI. These indicators share more or less the same data sources and this influences their level of correlation. The IPI is more weakly correlated with the abovementioned indexes. This might be due to the fact that the IPI doesn't measure perception of corruption, but mainly corruption risk factors related to the institutional framework of each country (i.e., public administration, media, justice). The BCI shows the weakest correlations with the other corruption indexes. This might be due to the fact that this indicator is the only one considering a "time" component while aggregating the different data sources. Indeed, it includes values of different years for the selected data sources. By taking the past and future values of corruption into account "more information is used to discern between random measurement errors and actual changes in the level of corruption" (Standaert 2015: 11). It is a more stable indicator with respect to the other ones.

As a consequence, Standaert (2015: 13) warns that "even if the between-correlations (the correlation between the mean values for each country) between these indexes is high and significant, the within correlation (between the demeaned values) on the other hand is significantly lower. In other words, while the choice of indicator might not have a large effect on the results in a cross-country study, this will change in time-series or panel studies". These differences should be acknowledged and carefully considered when using different indicators either for advocacy or policy purposes.

Figure 2: Scatter plot WGI_2019 and BCI_2016. 27 EU Member States and UK

Table 2: Correlations selected corruption indicators. 117 countries⁶¹. Most updated year. Spearman's ρ

	CPI_2019	WGI_2019	IPI_2019	BCI_2016
CPI_2019	1	0.987**	0.830**	0.851**
WGI_2019	0.987**	1	0.831**	0.836**
IPI_2019	0.830**	0.831**	1	0.712**
BCI_2016	0.851**	0.836**	0.712**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: authors' elaboration of various corruption indicators

When considering other countries than only European ones (Table 2), slightly different results in the correlation between the selected indicators emerge. While the level of correlation between the CPI, WGI and BCI remains stable, the correlations of the IPI with the other indicators significantly decrease (0.830 with CPI, 0.831 with WGI, and 0.712 with BCI). This demonstrates that, even if the IPI is still significantly correlated with perceptual corruption measures, it clearly measures something different than experts' perception of corruption. Indeed, it is more focused on institutional and environmental risk factors that might foster or reduce corruption by increasing integrity.

Figures 2-5 further highlight the findings of the correlation matrix.

⁶¹ For which values are available for all corruption indicators.

Figure 3: Scatter plot CPI_2019 and WGI_2019. 117 countries⁶²

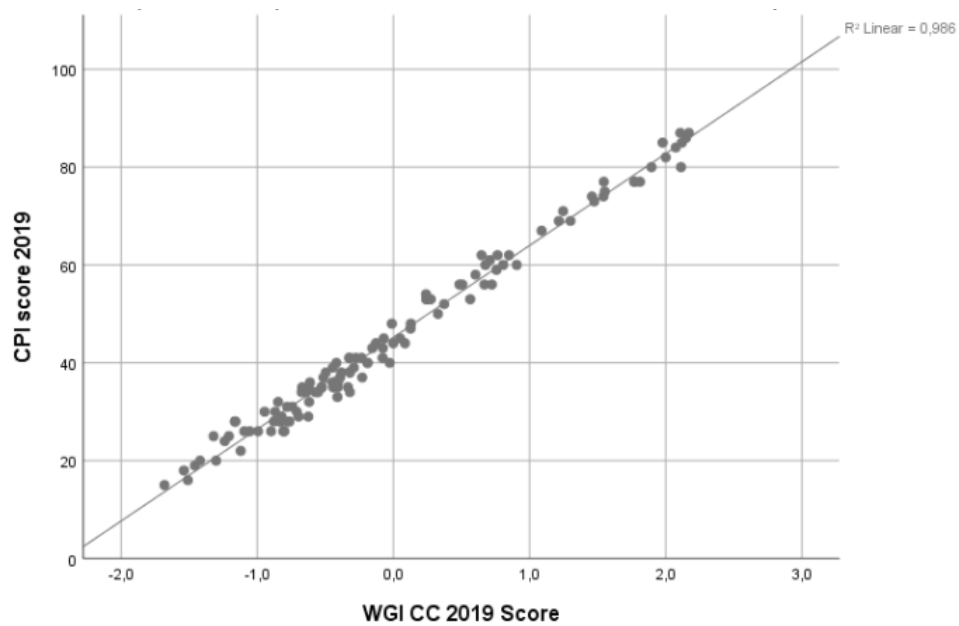
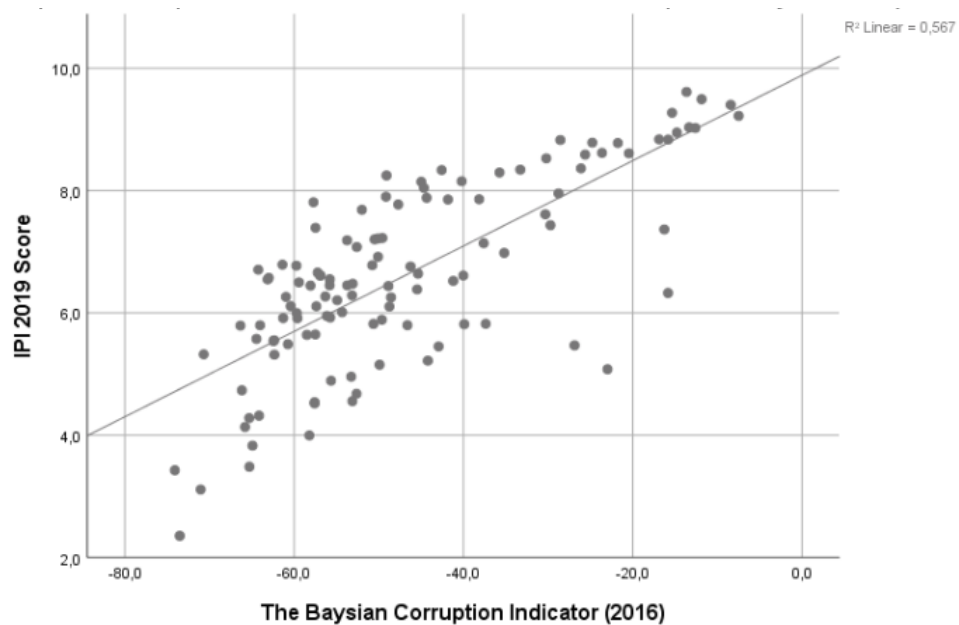
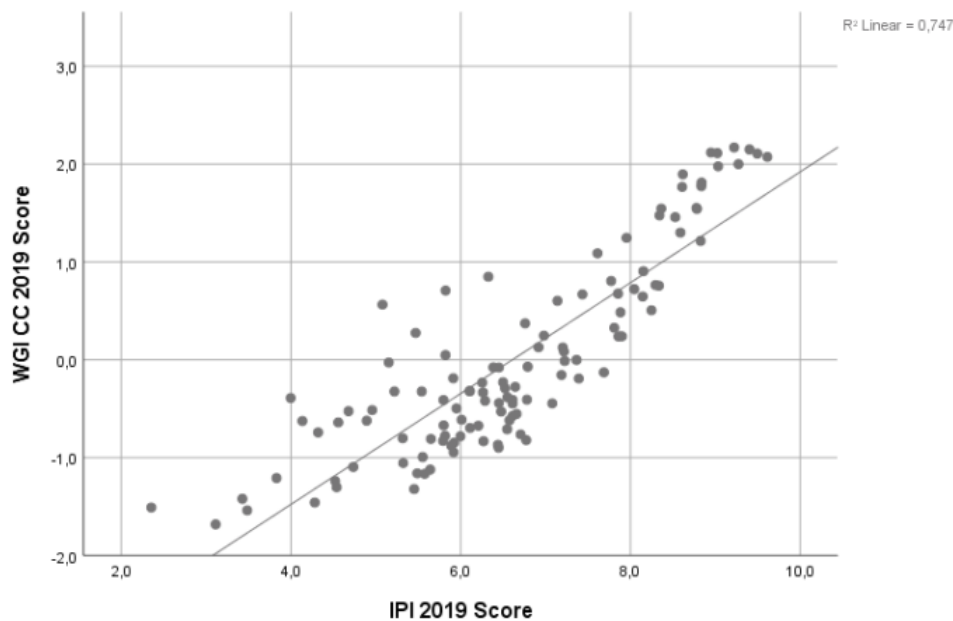
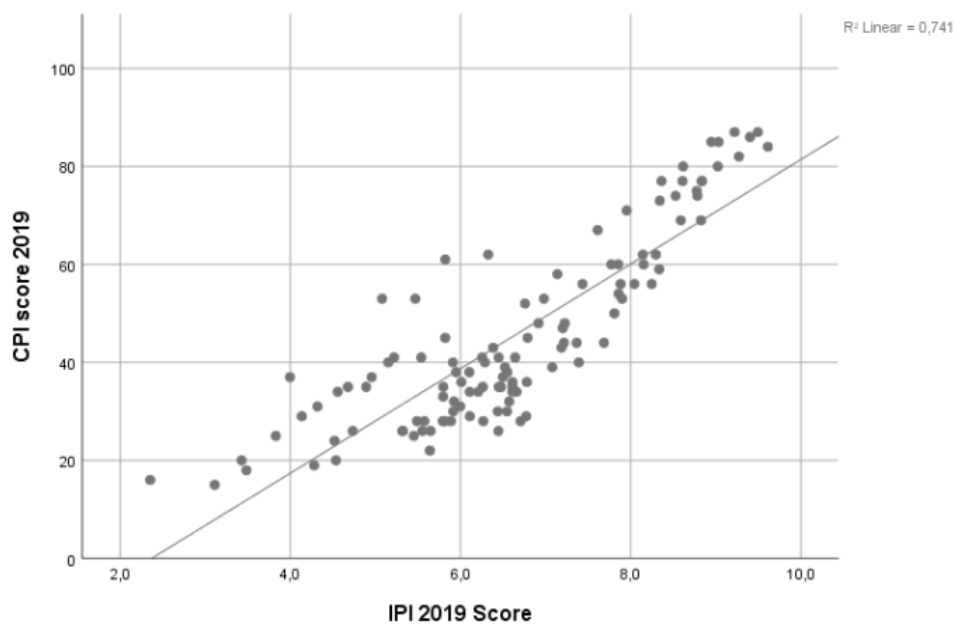


Figure 4: Scatter plot IPI_2019 and BCI_2016. 117 countries⁶³



⁶² For which values are available for all corruption indicators.

⁶³ For which values are available for all corruption indicators.

Figure 5: Scatter plot IPI_2019 and WGI_2019. 117 countries⁶⁴Figure 6: Scatter plot IPI_2019 and CPI_2019. 117 countries⁶⁵

In addition to attempted measurements of corruption itself, international institutions involved in anti-corruption work have produced *evidence* of the consequences and costs of corruption.⁶⁶ A World Bank publication on anti-corruption in transition countries published in 2000 cites

⁶⁴ For which values are available for all corruption indicators.

⁶⁵ For which values are available for all corruption indicators.

⁶⁶ A number of literature reviews have been published by INGOs and development agencies on the costs and consequences of corruption. See for instance: JENNETT, Victoria. Summaries of Literature on Costs of Corruption. Berlin: Transparency International. 2007; WICKBERG, Sofia. Literature review on costs of corruption for the poor. Berlin: Transparency International. 2013; ROCHA MENOCAL, Alina and TAXELL, Nils. Why corruption matters: understanding causes, effects and how to address them. Evidence paper on corruption. London: Department for International Development UK Government. 2015.

numerous academic publications, often from the discipline of economics, providing empirical *evidence* of the costs of corruption. In recent years, many studies have presented powerful empirical evidence on “investment (both domestic and foreign), (...) growth, (...) trade, (...) government expenditure, (...) the financial system, and (...) the underground economy (...) and poverty and income inequality”.⁶⁷ Many numbers representing the costs of corruption pepper public declarations of international institutions: 120 billion€ per year in the EU, according to the European Commission,⁶⁸ 5% of the global GDP according to the United Nations, the OECD and others.⁶⁹

Producing evidence of the costs and consequences of corruption is part of a strategy to frame the problem as a threat. This has been a common rhetorical instrument to highlight the importance of the problem and give it visibility. The threat frame can be seen as playing on Joseph Gusfield’s moral dimension of public problems⁷⁰ or be identified a rhetorical frame, as theorised by Donald A. Schön and Martin Rein to define policy frames that enable us to gauge a problem as worthy of attention, as something problematic, immoral or dramatic.⁷¹ The argument here is not that these numbers are not real but rather that international institutions thought it important to establish the costs of corruption with *evidence* to raise the issue on the global agenda. As Deborah A. Stone argues, issues can be portrayed “in certain ways so as to win the allegiance of large numbers of people”.⁷² While *evidence* was first conceived of by international institutions as evidence of the problem and its consequences, as a strategy to put corruption on policy-makers’ radar, it progressively came to be understood as *evidence* of policy effectiveness, which moved from a mere synonym of ‘good practices’ to refer to efforts to evaluate policy performance.

IV. *Evidence as existing practices*

Having raised global awareness on the negative consequences of corruption, international institutions sought to assist reform-minded governments in finding solutions to the problem. The rhetoric of evidence-based policy-making in the discourse of these organisations then moved from referring to the problem to addressing the quality of policies and instruments.

Knowledge products have indeed become a normal instrument used by international institutions to disseminate their policy preferences. Having defined corruption as a global problem, they have, since the 2000s, increasingly used best practices, benchmarking or handbooks to overcome the limitations of global governance in a context of fragmentation and

⁶⁷ World Bank. *Anticorruption in Transition: A Contribution to the Policy Debate*. Washington (DC): World Bank Publications. 2000, p. 18.

⁶⁸ European Commission. *Anti-Corruption report*. Online, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/organized-crime-and-human-trafficking/corruption/anti-corruption-report_en (accessed on November 8th 2019)

⁶⁹ UN News. *The costs of corruption: values, economic development under assault, trillions lost, says Guterres*. December 9th 2018. Online, available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027971> (accessed on November 8th 2019); OECD. *The rationale for fighting corruption*. Paris: OECD Publications. 2013.

⁷⁰ GUSFIELD, Joseph. *The Culture of Public Problems Drinking-Driving and The Symbolic Order*. University of Chicago Press, 1981

⁷¹ SCHÖN, Donald A. and REIN, Martin. *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

⁷² STONE, Deborah A. *Policy, Paradox and Political Reason*. Glenview (Ill.): Scott Foresman, 1988, p. 171.

dispersion of authority and attempt to progressively harmonise policies and practices through soft incentives-based mechanisms.⁷³ They often use practical examples from various countries to inform transnational knowledge on anti-corruption policy. This section looks at the national experiences elevated to become *good* or *best practices* and serve as a model for other countries. As André Broome and Leonard Seabrooke put it, international institutions' activities "construct both the policy problem and policy solutions in their interactions with member states", and with other actors as we have seen above, leading to the "menu of alternative solutions offered by an IO in a particular policy area [to be] neither comprehensive nor objectively determined".⁷⁴ Knowledge products are not neutral and do reflect an organisation's interpretation of the problem at hand and what it sees as the most appropriate solutions, creating "'ideal' and 'pathological' models of state policy and performance".⁷⁵ It is thus reasonable to explore potential factors that lead to the selection of certain national examples over others, especially given that, as we will see in next section, identifying *what works* to prevent corruption is far from clear.

While best practices in the earliest publications from the 1990s are largely taken from the experience of Anglo-American countries, they become more diversified as time goes by, with new countries adopting anti-corruption policies and promoting them to the international community. Nevertheless, it is still possible to observe a trend presenting policies and procedures from Anglo-American countries as best practices. The first two reports to refer to concrete examples or best practices – TI's Source Book and the UN Anti-Corruption Toolkit – both rely heavily on examples from countries with an Anglo-American political tradition. Indeed, out of the 23 national practices presented by TI's Source Book, 18 are Commonwealth nations or countries that were once dominated by the United Kingdom or the United States. The UN Anti-Corruption Toolkit is an even more striking example since it illustrates its Tool #8 with the Australian, South African and English examples.

The rhetoric of evidence-based policymaking having emerged in parallel of the international anti-corruption community itself and the use of the term *evidence*, when referring to existing practices presented as *good* or *best*, in the early publications is not systematically substantiated by examples or sources. In the absence of actual policy evaluations at such an early stage, evidence often consists of existing practices and international standards and instruments.⁷⁶ As an OECD official bluntly put it, when asked about the alleged lack of evidence regarding the efficiency of policy instruments promoted by the international organisations: "*often the policies just come from the good practices toolkits that are all-around and so due to time-constraints or laziness, we just copy and paste things that worked in other places*".⁷⁷ The idea that actors know *what worked* is questioned later in the interview. The same official explained

⁷³ BERNSTEIN, Steven and VAN DER VEN, Hamish. Best practices in global governance. *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 43, n°3, 2017, 534-556; RUGGIE, John Gerard. Global governance and "new governance theory"; Lessons from business and human rights. *Global Governance*, Vol. 20, n°1, 2014, pp. 5-17.

⁷⁴ BROOME, André and SEABROOKE, Leonard. *Op. cit.* 2012, p. 10.

⁷⁵ BROOME, André, HOMOLAR, Alexandra and KRANKE, Matthias. *Op. cit.* 2017, p. 516.

⁷⁶ POPE, Jeremy (ed.) *Combating corruption: are lasting solutions emerging?* Annual Report. Berlin: Transparency International, 1998; POPE, Jeremy. *Op. cit.* 2000, pp. 305-336; Conference of States Parties to the UNCAC. Good practices and initiatives in the prevention of corruption: The public sector and prevention of corruption ; codes of conduct (article 8 of the Convention) and public reporting (article 10 of the Convention) Background paper prepared by the Secretariat. CAC/COSP/WG4/2011/3. 2011.

⁷⁷ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017

this tendency of copy-pasting country experiences or international standards with the difficulty to find appropriate methodologies and indicators to measure impact and change:

There is a lot of talk about evidence-based [policymaking], about what works and why, but actually we have little evidence of what works, and this relates to how do we measure, over the whole logic, the whole theory of change. How do we measure input, OK that is more or less easy. But then it becomes more and more difficult, output, intermediate output, not to talk about the outcome. If we really want to see change and measure change and impact, we would need good indicators for all these steps which we usually do not have and in addition you would need to ask for a counterfactual, what would have happened with another integrity policy or without this policy, to really say this policy has affected change. And we have very little evidence actually.⁷⁸

The challenge posed by evaluating policies and policy instruments was similarly phrased by another OECD official who, when asked about the meaning of evidence for the organisation, pointed to the difficulty of measuring the success of an *anti-policy*, whose success means the absence of a public bad⁷⁹: “*It is a very complicated issue. How do you measure something that never happened?*”⁸⁰

Building transnational knowledge and *evidence* on existing practices might seem pragmatic as it is assumed that these country cases have been tested, which make it easier to defend them for policy entrepreneurs at the global and national level.⁸¹ As Steven Bernstein and Hamish ven der Ven argue, the legitimacy of governance through best practices relies on existing experiences and “best practices are often perceived as legitimate because they are already in-practice”. As I argued here, *evidence* has sometimes referred merely to the existence of a programme, without its effectiveness necessarily being empirically supported. In addition, understanding *evidence* as ‘best practices’ might however hamper new ideas. Bernstein and ven der Ven continue their critical assessment of ‘best practices’ saying that they might reinforce “a problem-solving mentality instead of a system-transforming one”.⁸² The tendency of EBPM rhetoric to build on existing practices indeed reinforces the circular flow of ideas and information and risks eventually crowding out more prospective and innovative policy developments.

The rhetoric of EBPM has thus been used by international institutions to promote and justify their policy preferences – or those of its influential members – and individuals working within these institutions sometimes themselves look at this tendency with a critical eye as the quotes above suggest. While the policy field institutionalised at the international level, the impression

⁷⁸ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017.

⁷⁹ STONE, Diane. Global Governance Depoliticized. In FAWCETT, Paul, FLINDERS, Matthew, HAY, Colin and WOOD, Matthew (ed.) *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization and Governance*. Oxford University Press. 2017, p. 105 ; HANSEN, Hans Krause. Managing corruption risks. *Review of International Political Economy*, 2011, Vol 18 N°2, p 251-275

⁸⁰ OECD Official 2. Interview with author. May 23d 2018.

⁸¹ Council of Europe GRECO Official. Interview with author. June 28th 2018; French parliamentary clerk. Interview with author. April 5th 2019.

⁸² BERNSTEIN, Steven and VEN DER VEN, Hamish. *Op. cit.* 2017, p. 555.

grew that anti-corruption efforts had little to show for themselves and that most policies promoted to reduce corruption had so far failed. Against this backdrop, *evidence* progressively referred to the results of anti-corruption policy evaluations, international institutions having started to invest in building indicators of policy performance.

V. Evidence as impact assessment

After three decades of anti-corruption efforts and a global financial and economic crisis, policy actors realised that fighting corruption could be costly for governments, whilst the results of anti-corruption policies were slow to materialise.⁸³ Many academic publications started to point to what was increasingly seen as a case of global policy failure.⁸⁴ To safeguard the policy field and programmes within international institutions, the language of cost-benefit analysis became increasingly popular in the 2000s and came with the idea that anti-corruption efforts should be focussed on high-risk areas, organisations and sectors, and, what is more important for this paper, that international institutions should invest in tools to evaluate what actually *works* against corruption. *Evidence* became a consideration for the costs of *anti-corruption*, moving beyond the traditional discourse on the costs of corruption.⁸⁵ We will focus on two organisations that have been particularly dynamic in searching for measurable *evidence* of anti-corruption policy performance, namely the OECD and the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre.

The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (U4) is a permanent centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway, a non-profit research institute on development studies, which builds since 2002 on a partnership established at the end of the 1990s by four international development ministers (from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK) seeking to improve anti-corruption initiatives of development interventions. The U4 is funded by development “partner” agencies to whom it provides various knowledge services. The U4’s mission statement to “*share research and evidence to help international development actors get sustainable results*”⁸⁶ reflects the result-oriented philosophy of its knowledge activities. This results-based approach stems from development projects, with the objective to ensure “*value for money*”. The U4 has a dedicated topic on measurement and evaluation that aims to provide information on “*how to measure corruption and evaluate anti-corruption work*”.⁸⁷ Since the late 2000s, it has published sixteen reports and papers on indicators and tools of success/failure of anti-corruption initiatives and ‘integrity’,⁸⁸ slightly shifting its focus away from measuring corruption to gauging the impact of anti-corruption – although the former

⁸³ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017; OECD Official 2. Interview with author. May 23d 2018.

⁸⁴ See for instance PERSSON, Anna, ROTHSTEIN, Bo and TEORELL, Jan. Why Anticorruption Reforms Fail—Systemic Corruption as a Collective Action Problem. *Governance*, Vol. 26, n°3, 2013, pp. 449-471; QUAH, Jon S.T. Curbing Corruption in India: An Impossible Dream?, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.16, n°3, 2008, pp. 240-259

⁸⁵ WICKBERG, Sofia. Focusing efforts and blurring lines: the OECD’s shift from ethics to integrity. *Public Administration Review, Corruption: A Bully Pulpit Symposium*. 2018.

⁸⁶ U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre. About U4. n.d. Online, available at: www.u4.no/about-U4 (accessed on November 9th 2019)

⁸⁷ U4 Anti-Corruption Resources Center. Measurement and Evaluation. n.d. Online, available at: <https://www.u4.no/topics/measurement-and-evaluation> (accessed on November 9th 2019)

⁸⁸ The list of publications is available on the U4’s website, at: <https://www.u4.no/search?filters=topic-type-Measurement%20and%20evaluation&search=&searchPageNum=5&sort=year-asc> (accessed on November 9th 2019)

remains relevant to the institution. The mission of the U4 to assist development agencies explains this interest in searching for *evidence* of ‘what works’ to reduce corruption and ensure that development aid is put to good use.

The need to generalise policy evaluations and to find *evidence* of the *impact* of integrity and anti-corruption has become a concern beyond development projects, as illustrated by the OECD’s investment in the development of new indicators to assess the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies, to make the *business case* for integrity.⁸⁹ Indeed, the international institution understands the lack of political commitment to implement anti-corruption obligations as a result of the lack of evidence showing the impact of the promoted policies:

There is a similar gap when it comes to the availability of reliable performance measurement data on anti-corruption policies and their impact. Without effective indicators for measuring the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies, it is difficult to determine their progress and to properly assess resource needs for these measures. As a result, OECD experience shows that concerted efforts to combat corruption can be seen as too onerous and resource-heavy by many governments and firms.⁹⁰

This evolution is confirmed by an OECD official interviewed in the framework of my doctoral research who also talks about the growing awareness within the organisation that collecting evidence was part of their role assisting governments. They indicate that the OECD now advised governments not only on policy options but also on how to collect data about the impact of policies they implement, taking them onboard the EBPM train:

That is something that came between the 1998 and 2017 recommendation, the evidence is now one of the principles that we have within the recommendation, is making sure that when governments are thinking about what kind of integrity path to put in place they are also thinking about how they are going to measure the impact and see the outcome and these sorts of things.⁹¹

This investment in the collection of evidence was triggered by the adoption of a new set of recommendations on public integrity in 2017 that replaces the 1998 recommendation on public ethics. The new recommendations, although not radically different, have a stronger emphasis on risk management and a broader scope that goes beyond the “whole-of-government” to include the business sector and civil society in what the organisation conceptualised as its “whole-of-society” approach. Member-states’ representatives within the Senior Public Integrity Officials group (SPIO) strongly encouraged this investment in the search for *evidence* of success. An OECD official involved in the development of these indicators describes the process of developing these new indicators as follows:

⁸⁹ OECD Official 3. Interview with author. May 23d 2018.

⁹⁰ OECD. OECD Strategic Approach to Combating Corruption and Promoting Integrity. Paris: OECD Publications, 2018, p. 18.

⁹¹ OECD Official 2. Interview with author. May 23d 2018.

By itself it is already a form of consensus about what countries should do to improve integrity but you cannot do everything you need to set some priorities. So the idea would be to come up with some basic goals and operationalise these goals (...) say... changing behaviour in an organisation, the integrity culture in an organisation. What kind of tools do we usually need, for instance a code of ethics. The second phase would be to ask what are the good practices relating to this tool: participative development, blablabla. So you have a set of characteristics that make up in theory a good code, so you have a product, a code which is easy to measure. Then you could ask about the use of the code, how it is applied, and then for instance through a survey, there are integrity surveys, they could be applied at the organisational level to measure impact or actual change, in the perception of integrity in the organisation. And this could be done for all principles but this is a lot of work (...)⁹²

They acknowledge the difficulty to move from a collecting evidence of the problem to collecting evidence of the success of integrity policies. They suggest that, while there is a form of consensus – at least among international institutions – on existing corruption measurements, described above, there is as of today no agreement on how to measure integrity – or the success of anti-corruption policies – or even on the fact that integrity is possible to measure. The difficult search for evidence and the need to justify the costs of anti-corruption have thus moved the focus of the OECD from the promotion of anti-corruption instruments to the promotion of assessment tools. The last quote illustrates that the quest for evidence of the impact of anti-corruption or integrity policies, through the development of universal indicators, is perceived as an uphill battle by international institutions themselves. They are conscious about the value-laden nature of the construction of evidence, recognising that research and evaluation methodologies are based on choices and compromise.⁹³ Indeed, actors, especially those invested in improving the quality of measurements, are sometimes quite candid in their assessment of the quality of evidence and the current rhetoric use of knowledge, as this quote suggests:

Then you have the political aspect. Do we want to know what works and what... It is perhaps even easier to just keep on with the rhetoric that ‘we need transparency’ because it is politically much easier than to ask the honest question ‘does it really work’.⁹⁴

Research and knowledge production have become a strategic tool for international institutions involved on anti-corruption work. *Evidence* is now literally posited as a means to advance an organisation’s policy agenda, as this excerpt from a 2018 OECD publication on strategic approaches to fight corruption, funded by the UK government, states:

[The development of indicators] could and should be undertaken in partnership with external stakeholders, including in academia, to develop synergies and relevant partnerships to help identify and shape research in new areas that could be of

⁹² OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017.

⁹³ COURTENAY BOTTERILL, Linda. *Op. cit.* 2017

⁹⁴ OECD Official 1. Interview with author. April 3rd 2017.

specific interest for the OECD, its members and stakeholders. Having concrete evidence of the benefits of anti-corruption efforts provides also incentives to advance meaningful agendas, including in developing and emerging countries.⁹⁵

This quote sheds light on that fact that *evidence* is, on the one hand, used to improve policy recommendations, but also that it has gained political valence, and thus that rhetoric of evidence-based policymaking is used to strengthen international institutions' cognitive authority and legitimize their policy preferences.

Conclusion: Depoliticization of anti-corruption through *technicisation and scientization*

Within the international anti-corruption community, knowledge and *evidence* have become important tools of governance in which international institutions have invested time and resources, and increasingly do so. What international institutions mean by evidence is however not straightforward. It has evolved from information regarding the extent and impact of the problem, which served to raise awareness about the importance of fighting corruption, to knowledge about effective policies and *what works* to reduce corruption. The evolution of the meaning of evidence reflects the evolution of the policy field itself, from commonly defining the problem to promoting policy solutions and evaluating their efficiency, almost reflecting a textbook description of the policy cycle. *Evidence* has always been a tool of power for international institutions seeking to influence the global and domestic agendas.

Evidence is political in two other ways, which contradict each other in appearance. Firstly because it is a powerful rhetorical tool that legitimizes policy recommendations as rooted in expertise and backed by numbers. Secondly, despite this gloss of neutrality, international institutions' policy message are based on existing practices implemented in (powerful) member states, reflecting institutional ideals, and carry value-laden conception of good and bad in society.⁹⁶ Using the rhetoric of evidence-based policy-making has been an effective way of *normalising* a particular conception on corruption and erasing the political dimension of anti-corruption policy-making through "technocratic distancing tactics".⁹⁷ As Walter argues, "anti-policy involves a will to technologise and transform an otherwise controversial subject into a domain of numbers and facts."

Using the language and philosophy of evidence-based medicine, evidence-based policymaking is based on *diagnosing* problems and finding the best treatment, turning political problems – such as corruption – into technical problems. Medical rhetoric has been common for talking about corruption ever since James Wolfensohn famous speech on the

⁹⁵ OECD. *OECD Strategic Approach to Combating Corruption and Promoting Integrity*. Paris: OECD Publications, 2018, p. 18.

⁹⁶ NAY, Olivier. International Organisations and the Production of Hegemonic Knowledge: how the World Bank and the OECD helped invent the Fragile State Concept. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 35, n°2, 2014, pp. 210-231; BROOME, André, HOMOLAR, Alexandra and KRANKE, Matthias. *Op. cit.* 2018, p. 516; STONE, Diane. Global Governance Depoliticized. In FAWCETT, Paul, FLINDERS, Matthew, HAY, Colin and WOOD, Matthew (ed.) *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization and Governance*. Oxford University Press. 2017.

⁹⁷ STONE, Diane. *Op. cit.* 2017, p. 92.

“*cancer of corruption*” in 1996,⁹⁸ leading to a further *scientization* of anti-corruption. International institutions indeed suggest medical solutions to corruption as a disease through semantic loans are the “integrity scans” recommended by the OECD to “identify priority reforms to reinforce healthy systems of governance”⁹⁹ or the *diagnostic tools* promoted by Transparency International, the World Bank and the U4 Anti-Corruption Research Centre. These semantic choices suggest that, despite international institutions acknowledgement that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, there is a model of *healthy* governance system to which all should aspire. As Paul Heywood puts it: “*we are now developing a more sophisticated understanding of corruption, but there is still an overwhelming tendency to see it as a pathology that is susceptible to treatment*”,¹⁰⁰ resulting in interpretive naivety in the face of a complex and fundamentally political problem.

Despite the motto that there is no *one-size-fits-all* solution to corruption, the scientization of policymaking and the focus on *what works and what doesn't* tend to deny the political dimension of policymaking and the importance of the local institutional, social and political context in which anti-corruption policies are implemented. As this paper shows, individuals within international institutions are well aware of this difficulty. There is indeed a tension between, on the one hand, the acknowledged need for more research about the problem itself, which requires new methodologies such as thick descriptions of local contexts, and, on the other hand, international institutions' limited resources and need to provide generic tools and information that could be used by their member-states and beyond.

This paper is by no means an argument against evidence-based policy-making. Facts and science are important for the development of appropriate anti-corruption measures. It is rather a critical assessment of how *evidence* is understood and of the function it has played and continues to play for international institutions. Rather than producing additional indicators, there is the need to clarify for what purposes existing indicators might (and especially might not) be used. Indicators produced for advocacy purposes, for example, should not be used for policymaking. It is an encouragement for the continuation and deepening of the growing interest of international institutions for academic research. There is indeed a growing research community interested in corruption and anti-corruption policy, that has been increasingly supported by international institutions, such as the EU-funded ANTICORRP¹⁰¹ and DIGIWHIST¹⁰² projects or the OECD's research edge competition¹⁰³ and knowledge

⁹⁸ In the comment section of Paul Heywood's blog entry cited below, Frank Vogl provides a background story to the cancer analogy used by the President of the World Bank, referring to a meeting prior to the speech to which a number of TI founders were invited and where they used the expression « cancer of corruption », and suggesting a “garbage can” narrative of the analogy.

⁹⁹ OECD CleanGovBiz. Integrity scans. Paris: OECD publications, 2014. Online, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/cleangovbiz/50085676.pdf> (accessed on August 29th 2019)

¹⁰⁰ HEYWOOD, Paul. *Why We Need to Kill the 'Corruption is Cancer' Analogy*. CDA Perspectives Blog. September 19th 2017. Online, accessible at: <http://cdacollaborative.org/blog/need-kill-corruption-cancer-analogy/> (accessed on November 12th 2019).

¹⁰¹ ANTICORRP Anticorruption Policies Revisited Global Trends and European Responses to the Challenge of Corruption. Overview. Online, available at: <http://anticorrrp.eu/project/overview/> (accessed on November 12th 2019).

¹⁰² DIGIWHIST Fiscal Transparency, Risk Assessment and Impact of Good Governance Policies Assessed. Online, available at: <https://digiwhist.eu/> (accessed on November 12th 2019).

¹⁰³ OECD Global Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum. Youth ResearchEdge Competition. Online, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/integrity-forum/academic-papers/> (accessed on November 12th 2019).

partnerships.¹⁰⁴ While many international institutions want to *bridge the gap* between research and policy, it is worthwhile to reconsider *evidence* beyond costs and benefits, to consider – if not support – research that seeks to understand the mechanisms of corruption, also beyond the national level, and the functions it plays within societies, a research approach promoted by Heather Marquette, Caryn Peiffer¹⁰⁵ and Paul Heywood.¹⁰⁶ The OECD inviting Pr. Marquette and Pr. Heywood to close the 2019 Global Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum is an encouraging step in that direction.

¹⁰⁴ OECD Global Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum. Partnerships. Online, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/corruption/integrity-forum/partnerships/> (accessed on November 12th 2019).

¹⁰⁵ MARQUETTE, Heather and PEIFFER, Caryn. Grappling with the ‘real politics’ of systematic corruption: Theoretical debates versus ‘real-world’ functions. *Governance*, Vol. 31, 2018, pp. 499-514.

¹⁰⁶ HEYWOOD, Paul. Rethinking Corruption: Hocus-Pocus, Locus and Focus. *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 95, n° 1, 2017, pp. 21-48.



Le LIEPP (Laboratoire interdisciplinaire d'évaluation des politiques publiques) est une plateforme de recherche de Sciences Po financée dans le cadre du programme "Investissements d'avenir" de l'Agence Nationale de la Recherche. Il bénéficie du soutien apporté par l'ANR et l'État au titre du programme d'Investissements d'avenir dans le cadre du LabEx LIEPP (ANR-11-LABX-0091, ANR-11-IDEX-0005-02) et de l'IdEx Université de Paris (ANR-18-IDEX-0001).

www.sciencespo.fr/liepp

A propos de la publication

Procédure de soumission :

Rédigé par un ou plusieurs chercheurs sur un projet en cours, le *Working paper* vise à susciter la discussion scientifique et à faire progresser la connaissance sur le sujet étudié. Il est destiné à être publié dans des revues à comité de lecture (peer review) et à ce titre répond aux exigences académiques. Les textes proposés peuvent être en français ou en anglais. En début de texte doivent figurer : les auteurs et leur affiliation institutionnelle, un résumé et des mots clefs.

Le manuscrit sera adressé à : liepp@sciencespo.fr

Les opinions exprimées dans les articles ou reproduites dans les analyses n'engagent que leurs auteurs.

Directrice de publication :

Anne Revillard

Comité de rédaction :

Sofia Cerda Aparicio, Andreana Khristova

Sciences Po - LIEPP
27 rue Saint Guillaume
75007 Paris - France
+33(0)1.45.49.83.61
liepp@sciencespo.fr

